

Sidetracks... a miscellany of items

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● Whoops again!

Whilst editors need to be literate there is no requirement for them to be numerate! It is entirely my fault that in creating a title to Colin Jarman's excellent article on the 80th anniversary of *ps Stadt Luzern* my brain somehow managed to get me to write seventy. Sorry Colin – and thanks to Brian Elvidge and others for picking it up.

● Cab Rides on the RhB.

Following-on from my item in September about the chance cab ride that I was fortunate enough to have on the RhB one of our members has pointed out that over last summer the Rhätische Bahn was offering footplate rides in a catalogue of "Railway Experiences" on their system. The "experience" was either a ride in a cab from Chur to St Moritz or from St Moritz to Tirano (or the reverse on both runs) with an expert guide. Each participant also received a detailed guide book and a commemorative certificate plus two first class day tickets on the RhB system. The cost in summer 2008 was CHF850. I now realise how lucky I was having a free trip – although only over part of the distance.

Information from Michael Jackson.

● Works in progress.

Pontresina station on the Bernina line was being rebuilt last summer with new canopies over platforms 3 & 4 plus ramps and new stairs down from platform level to the subway. Also a new canopy was being constructed to the south of the existing booking office. All train services were running normally as the work proceeded and it was due for completion last October. At Zürich HB platforms 12 & 13 were out of service during the summer and platform 3 was also shortened for other engineering work. The Ardez end of the Tasna tunnel on the RhB in the Lower Engadine had a temporary speed limit during the summer whilst engineering work was being undertaken. This needed a temporary vehicle access from lower down the valley side.

Platform 4 at Interlaken Ost is out of use due to Civil Engineering work - probably an extension at the Brunig end - and whilst also in the Bernese Oberland a 2nd track is being laid on steel sleepers at Brandegg on WAB between Grindelwald Grund and Kleine Scheidegg. On the MOB a new platform is being built at Gstaad. It will be an island, thus making 3 tracks. Platform heights are being raised as well. The engineering bar

chart in the station building shows a completion date of October 2009. This was on full view to the general public. Perhaps Network Rail should take a few lessons!! A new passing loop is being installed at Saanenmöser, so some westbound services are being delayed waiting for eastbound trains at Oeschseite. *Information from John Eve.*

● SBB and PLA from A to Z

There may be members who remember the BR PLA (Passenger Luggage in Advance) service, where your holiday suitcases were sent by passenger train to your destination, to be waiting for you when you arrived. The SBB still do this, with their "Fast baggage" service. A total of 46 destinations, from Adelboden to Zweisimmen (A to Z) are covered, plus Zurich and Geneva airport stations. Generally, luggage handed in before 09.00 is available for collection by 18.00 at the destination station on the same day. There are some exceptions, for instance between Lauterbrunnen and Pontresina it is available for collection the next day. If you are travelling in a group of ten or more people, almost any destination is available. The cost is a flat CHF20 per item for individuals, and this reduces to CHF15 for groups or families. For more information, the SBB have a "Fast baggage" leaflet available, and you can find details on www.rail.ch/baggage. Having used this recently, forwarding my suitcases from Luzern to Interlaken, and then Interlaken to Gstaad, I can confirm that it works impeccably, and that these locations were ones where the service operates later than 09.00 and is available for collection earlier, so it is worth checking for your individual destinations. *Item by Ron Smith.*

● A Swiss line to close?

Canton Bern is seriously considering the possible closure of the 13km long metre gauge MOB line from Zweisimmern to Lenk that was totally rebuilt at some considerable cost in 1978. Apparently the accountants at the Cantonal Government - it heavily subsidises the line - have worked out that savings of CHF1m per annum could be saved by "bustitution", although to make this work an uncosted (but potentially considerable) sum would have to be spent on improving the parallel road. The other option they are considering is re-building the line to standard gauge at a cost of CHF2.5m, allowing a Bern – Lenk through service which could generate additional usage. I have to admit that

when we rode the line a few summers ago we were almost alone on the train, both out and back, so perhaps the review may be necessary.

● Green Signals.

The Swiss Federal Transport Office has announced that after one year in operation the second level of ETCS - which involves signals being read from the driver's cab - would be gradually introduced across the normal network of tracks in a simplified form by 2017. The cost is estimated at CHF370 million. ETCS was introduced in 2006 on the high-speed stretch of track between Mattstetten and Rothrist on the busy Bern to Zurich, Basel and Lucerne routes. In 2007 it was also introduced in the new Lötschberg rail tunnel. At a news conference in Bern, the operators of the ETCS track (SBB and BLS) said the system had proved its value in terms of capacity and stability over more than ten million kilometres travelled. Switzerland has been a pioneer in the ETCS, which is considered essential for future pan-European rail connections.

● Lotschberg base tunnel wins award.

On 30th September 2008, the BLS Alptransit SA was awarded the Brunel prize for the exceptional architecture of the visible parts of the works. The Brunel prize was created ten years ago by the Watford Group, and is awarded after an

international, independent and specialist jury consider works of merit for design and architecture in railway infrastructure projects. The tunnel won the first prize in the award category "Technical and environmental infrastructure construction". The award crowns their success in bringing the project in on time, on budget, and seeing trains running. The visible parts of the construction are the portals at Frutigen and Raron, and the bridges over the Rhône. These works were judged to harmonise with the high-speed train dynamics, and the European vocation of the line. The sustainability of the construction, and the way that the open air sections have been carefully designed to blend in with the environment and allow "renaturations", or rehabilitation of the landscape, helped the BLS gain the award.

Photos of the award-winning works are available at www.blsalptransit.ch under the heading "medias".

● OC no more.

The Orbe-Chavornay railway ceased to exist as a separate company in June 2008. It had been part of the TRAVYS management and operating organisation for some 5-years but it now has been completely folded into that organisation. There is now the distinct possibility that the passenger service on this very short standard gauge branch will be replaced by a bus service.

MEMBERS' LETTERS

From Michael Feaver – Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

Serendipity. My wife and I had stayed at the Hotel Bellevue, Wengen, back in 1963 and this year we thought it was time to go back there. While I cannot say that I remembered the Hotel, the 'Vue' was as 'Belle' as ever – right up the Lauterbrunnen Valley to the lovely Breithorn at its head. What was totally unexpected was that the Hotel boasts a superb outdoor model railway. Running on Tuesday afternoon and Thursday evening it is largely based on the Rhätian Railway with all the loops between Filisur, Bergun and Preda, and going down from Poschiavo. Two very realistic Bernina Expresses, together with three trains from two German lines unknown to me, make their way around this amazing circuit. I would highly recommend it to all other members.

P.S. Many thanks to John Morgan for his tip about changing at Thun for Zürich – it worked perfectly!

From Peter Rothschild – Walmer, Kent

It will surely be a pleasure for the editor of *Swiss Express* to learn that the advertisement for the Hotel de la Paix in Interlaken resulted in what was an enjoyable stay for my wife and myself.

The weather which, as we understand was miserable in Kent, was absolutely glorious in Switzerland. That was supplemented by really excellent service from the hotel, run by the Etterli family, and, as some members may know, Gillian Etterli is English. Nothing was too much trouble, and my vegetarian "peculiarities" were catered for in every way. Several other SRS members were also staying at the hotel at the same time and I trust that they enjoyed it as much as we did.