

Members' letters

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From Ron Dawes – Purley, Surrey.

I am writing to *Swiss Express* to give fellow members an insight into the problems that I have had when attempting to order some items from the Rhätische Bahn.

In early October 2008 I set out to order some 2009 RhB calendars through their website. Twice I reached their payment page and inserted my card details when their web page collapsed. Contacting my card company later they advised me that two debit requests had reached them from the RhB but nothing could be done until my account was actually debited. I went back on to the RhB web page and left a note saying that I only wanted one set of calendars. In early December I left another message on RhB's web page reminding them I only wanted one set of calendars and that if they had not despatched them by before Christmas I wished to cancel the order.

Late in January 2009 two debits from the RhB appeared on my card statement. When I spoke to my card company and advised them that I had not received the goods they immediately reversed one item

on the basis that it was an obvious duplication. I then completed a form to confirm non-receipt of the goods and to inform them of any action I had taken to resolve the situation myself. The card company could not understand why it had taken the RhB three months to process an internet sale then, early in February, the credit card company reversed the second debit closing down the problem. Unfortunately since last October the RhB have made no effort to contact me.

From David Robinson by Email.

Whilst in Filisur during this January's very heavy snow I noticed that the RhB were operating the Filisur to Davos shuttle in a different way from when I visited the previous June. The train with a Ge 4/4 II (or III), two newish coaches and a 1750-series driving-trailer operates with the loco at the Filisur end of the train. Reaching Davos Platz three or four more coaches are added to the loco end of the train and it then proceeds, driven from the driving trailer with the loco in the middle of the train, to Klosters and then on to Landquart. At Lanquart the extra coaches are taken off and put onto the driving-trailer end of the

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train which then runs loco-first back through Klosters and on to Davos Platz, where the extra coaches are removed and on to Filisur. It does mean that a greater variety of locos are used, both Ge 4/4 IIs and the latest Ge 4/4 IIIs.

I would also like to comment on the letter from Andy McMillan in the December issue. Personally I believe the RhB Management are fully aware of their responsibilities both to preserving the unique Albula/Bernina line and to serving their customers. Andy seems to assume that most of the passengers that use the line are railway enthusiasts who want to see things stay as they are at present. This I would dispute as during my two recent visits the passengers were a mix of local people and of tourists who wanted to get from A to B. Few of the tourists gave the impression of being railway enthusiasts – most simply appeared to want to see the countryside from the comfort of a modern, up-to-date rail service as they proceeded to their ultimate destination. In January a high percentage of the users on the Albula Line were using the railway to get to winter sport areas which were not accessible in any other way.

One journey in January on the Bernina Line took place during a heavy snow storm that lasted two full days. Our train had a snow plough attached to the front for most of the journey between Pontresina and Poschiavo where it terminated due to the December 2008 rock fall further south. I'm sure most of the passengers were more concerned that the transport system worked rather than that the Bernina Line uses wooden poles instead of the steel versions used on the rest of the RhB network. I suspect that I know what their reaction would be if the line was closed because some wooden poles had broken and the overhead

wires were down!

I think Filisur Station is a classic example of the RhB Management being sympathetic to the line's "outstanding technical, architectural and environmental ensemble" as stated in the UNESCO World Heritage Status. The original timber station, built in 1904, still exists and has been restored and maintained in the major revamp of the station in 2003/2004. New island platforms have been created with underpasses as necessary to access these platforms. This is of course much safer for the passengers than walking across the tracks and standing in-between the trains as they pass. A new canopy has been built to provide cover for the island platforms and this is clad almost completely in timber. When I first saw the plans on display in the station I was a little concerned that it might ruin the overall effect of the place but it has not. It is still a great place to catch, watch and photograph trains. The Swiss seem to have the ability to build new structures that, because they are of a good design standard, fit in well with the older structures.

The RhB Management do seem to know what the majority of the paying customers want, which is a safe, efficient and modern railway service which meets their needs either as passengers or when forwarding freight. They are not in the business of running a 'Heritage' railway although obviously they do still provide special services using their historic stock. It is an efficient transportation operator and long may it remain so.

From Derek Cate – Norwich.

As with most of my fellow SRS members I have had a long-standing love of Switzerland, not just its trains and transport systems, although admiring these prompted me to join the Society some 3 years ago.

Although having a "real" job in the hydraulics industry over the past 35 years I had combined my admiration of the country with taking pleasure in organising trips for both our friends and for larger groups. These trips seem to have been appreciated as from my original group of eight people at one time I finished up with a party of 145 people! At seventy I have now given up the role of tour organiser although I still give help and advice to others on how to make the most of their trips to Switzerland, plus I still travel there as I wish to see as much of the country as I can whilst time is still on my side.

I know that many readers of *Swiss Express* will be familiar with the savings that can be made using the wonderful Swiss Pass, and locally issued passes such as those for the Bernese Oberland area. From my own experience

there are some amazing bargains to be had. The price of a 15 day Bernese Oberland regional pass can easily be recovered in two days of carefully planned travelling on the BOB and WAB (plus the linking cable cars, funiculars, buses, etc) lines south of Interlaken. I still take an interest in helping people to map out their best travel options and if any member would like to contact me to get some ideas for making the best use of these passes I would be happy to hear from them. I would also be pleased to hear from any SRS members who live in the Norwich and the Norfolk/Suffolk areas to see if there is any interest in trying to form a further branch of the Society (or perhaps something more of an informal Swiss discussion group) in this part of the world. I can be reached by Email on derek.cate@ntlworld.com or by 'phone on 01603 419582 .

MEMBERS' ADVERTS

For sale: Six Typenskizzen books with about 700 side elevation drawings of RhB rolling stock from 1889 to 1980. Published at CHF30 each; available for £40 the lot, to include £7 contribution to postage.

Contact: Michael Farr, 01579 383482 or pandmfarr@talktalk.net.

For sale: A large number of Swiss HOm models (mostly MOB) including Bemo, Friho and Fulgurex all in good condition in boxes plus a large number of unused boxed and unboxed Peco HOm points and some new track. For full list Tel: 01276 856051 or Email: montbovon@btinternet.com.



TOP RIGHT: A Voralpen Express runs into Arth-Goldau.

ABOVE: Over one weekend in July 2008 each Voralpen Express was strengthened by three old green coaches and a banking loco was added to the rear for the run up the hill.

RIGHT: Voralpen Express Poster.

