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GREAT WESTERN IN SWITZERLAND



ALL PHOTOS: *Graham Drew - Great Western Society.*

The Great Western Society based at Didcot is in the process of reconstructing a vertical boiler Railmotor that once operated on the GWR. In September 2009 they sent four members of their footplate crews to Switzerland to learn how to operate such a machine under sustained steaming conditions. This is an edited extract from an account of the trip that was published in the "Great Western Echo". Our thanks are due to author Graham Drew and editor Leslie Summers for permission to reproduce it.

Uerikon-Bauma-Bahn (UeBB) Dampftriebwagen CZ 1/2 No.31 is a 1902 built wooden bodied railcar now owned by the Swiss National Museum and operated by volunteers from the Verein Dampfgruppe in Zürich (VDZ). This was made available to

The four GWS members pose in front of the railcar.



us, and expert instruction was provided, to enable experience to be gained in both operation and maintenance. We received instruction from crews with long experience operating the railcar on the Swiss main line and branch networks.

Our first trip took us from Zürich to Glarus where No.31 took part in a day-long steam festival. It operated shuttle services to Schwanden before running to the line terminus at Linthal at the end of the day – a long one with a 05.30 start from Zürich's main terminus, not returning until nearly midnight. Unforgettable moments were mixing it in with Zürich's dense commuter traffic, and when No. 31 was driven into the Linthal pub car park at the end of the day's operations so all could get a bite to eat and appropriate refreshments. Try doing that in the UK!

A second day was spent on a photo charter on the branch between Bauma and Hinwil where No. 31 had originally operated between 1902 and its withdrawal in 1936. Working in conjunction with locally based Ed 3/3 No. 401 "Bauma", and an assortment of departmental vehicles and coaches, this gave us the opportunity to test our skills on a line that has steeply curved rising gradients. A day spent doing photo stops, run pasts, static sessions and shunting operations for the photographers, gave a lot of experience in firing techniques. The day was completed with a main line run alongside international expresses and commuter traffic, ending at

Zürich's main terminus.

The third day was also spent on the main line with a return trip from Zürich to Baden where other main line steam stock in the custody of VDZ is kept. A lot of valuable operating experience was gained managing No. 31's boiler on this day with running at maximum authorised speed for extended periods proving interesting. The relaxed but professional attitude of the Swiss railways staff to a 107-year-old wood-bodied, four-wheel steam railcar with a maximum service speed of 45kph, mixing it under the wires with TGVs, ICEs and double-deck commuter trains was a refreshing experience. Flexibility was the order of the day with only a phone call to control required to revise the programme and retime and repath our progress back to Zürich during the afternoon rush hour so that we could organise a celebratory meal at a reasonable time in the evening. It reminded me of how things used to be in the UK. We were overwhelmed by the hospitality and time given by the Swiss team, along with their commitment to providing a professional service and instruction.



The four GWS members pose with their Swiss compatriots, the visitors being 1st 2nd 4th & 5th from the left.



A Sunny Day at Luzern HBf. PHOTO: David Carter.

Peter and Rosemary Newton have a grand day out.

Having travelled to Switzerland on several times in the last 25 years to enjoy holidays focussing on rail travel, walking and bird watching, the use of the Swiss Pass has proved immensely valuable in giving maximum enjoyment of these objectives through the flexibility it allows.

On one occasion we decided to visit a bird reserve near Laupen from our base at Interlaken, travelling via Thun, Belp and Bern and taking refreshments with us, as we intended to spend the best part of the day there. The reserve at Auried, on the west bank of the River Saane, was 1.5 miles from Laupen, and by the time we had covered this, walked round the Reserve and eaten our lunch, it had become unbearably hot – certainly too hot for us. Having trudged back to Laupen we made a snap decision to spend the rest of the day making further use of our Swiss Pass, taking a train to Berne, then on to Luzern via Zofingen. As usual we had our Kursbuch with us.

As we walked out of Luzern station, with no real plan, we simply followed others who were heading to a boat, the *Berner Oberland*, and decided to join them. What better way to spend a hot afternoon! Consulting the Kursbuch whilst on the boat, we ascertained that we could sail as far as Vitznau and have dinner there, before heading back. Disembarking at Luzern there was just time for a brisk walk down towards the Kapellbrücke to see and hear the alpine swifts which nest in the water tower there, before travelling back via the Emmental line