

# Book reviews

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In the December 2009 magazine we reviewed *Le grand livre du/Das grosse Buch der MOB*. SRS member Brian Cowen attempted to contact the publishers to obtain a copy but could not get through on the website address quoted. Thanks to Mike Farr, and Eddy Schmid at the Blonay-Chamby Museum, he has been able to obtain a copy through Minirex in Lucerne. Their email contact is [verkauf@minirex.ch](mailto:verkauf@minirex.ch) and they can supply the book by mail order.

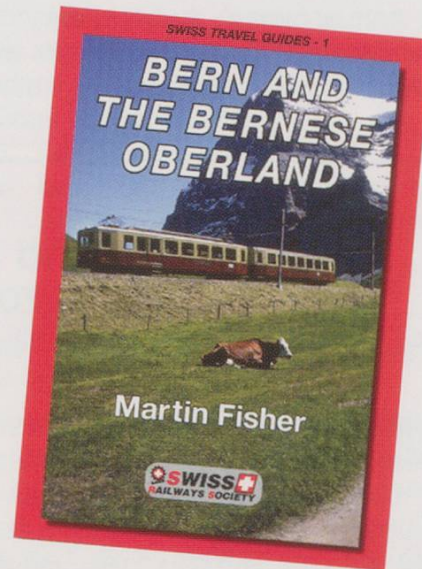
## Why Switzerland?

Jonathan Steinberg. ISBN 978-0-521-48453-4. Published by Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 8RU. Paperback 225mm x 150mm. 300 pages with B & W illustrations. Price: No RRP. The Amazon website sells new and used copies at various prices.

Why Switzerland? The title of a book but also a question that anyone interested in the way that country works should be asking, as Switzerland may have lessons for us all. Forget William Tell – the conventional story probably owes more to the imagination of the 18thc German playwright Schiller than to historic fact. Did Switzerland spring from a meeting of local elders in a meadow at Rütli in 1291? Possibly - although it is probable that any such meeting was somewhere else, and indoors. Indeed 1848 is probably a more significant date in the country's history, but it is not one most of us would be aware of. Professor Steinberg's book sets out to explain how Switzerland came to be what it is today – a difficult task that he (as the former Reader in Modern History at Cambridge) easily succeeds with. However, this is more than a history – it is a readable story of how one of the world's most unique states came into being and how it is changing with the modern world. The book has lessons for us all, as the author points out that the bottom-up Swiss political process is probably the only true democracy around. By default it also highlights the faults that the governing systems in other countries, including ours, actually have. It is suggested that if Switzerland did not exist we would have to invent it as an object lesson, in how a nation of some 7million people, comprising 26 sovereign mini-states, with two historically separate Christian worship systems, and four national languages, can exist and prosper in a world that is being driven by a global economy to be more homogenous each year. The book was first published in 1976 when I first came across it. Having been

subsequently updated – my current 2008 copy is from its ninth printing – its longevity indicates that this is the seminal English-language work on Switzerland.

*I recommend that you buy it, read it, and realise what you are missing – not just the railways – by not being Swiss. Editor.*



## Swiss Travel Guides No. 1 – Bern and the Bernese Oberland

Written by our Membership Secretary Martin Fisher: ISBN 978-0-9563436-1-1: Published by the Swiss Railways Society. Paperback A5 size. 48 pages with numerous colour illustrations. Price: £7.00 by mail order from Society Sales or £6.00 from our stand at exhibitions.

It is hoped that this will be the first in a series of pocket sized booklets that will cover all of Switzerland. This very popular area is a good choice for the first volume. The book starts by defining the region and the various ways of travelling there from the U.K. and goes on to describe the alternative tickets and travel passes that are available. There follows a detailed description of each of the principal towns and areas with recommendations for places to see and excursions to take. This is very informative, and even those who know the region well will find something to interest them. The book concludes with some general information about Switzerland and its railways, a bibliography of recommended further reading and a list of suggested hotels and restaurants. The book is illustrated throughout with colour photographs taken either by the author or David Stevenson. Everyone interested in Switzerland, and the Bernese Oberland in particular, should have a copy of this handy little guide. I hope that the future volumes will be as informative. Brienzersee