

Weiacher Kies : Don Gatehouse looks at these gravel wagons

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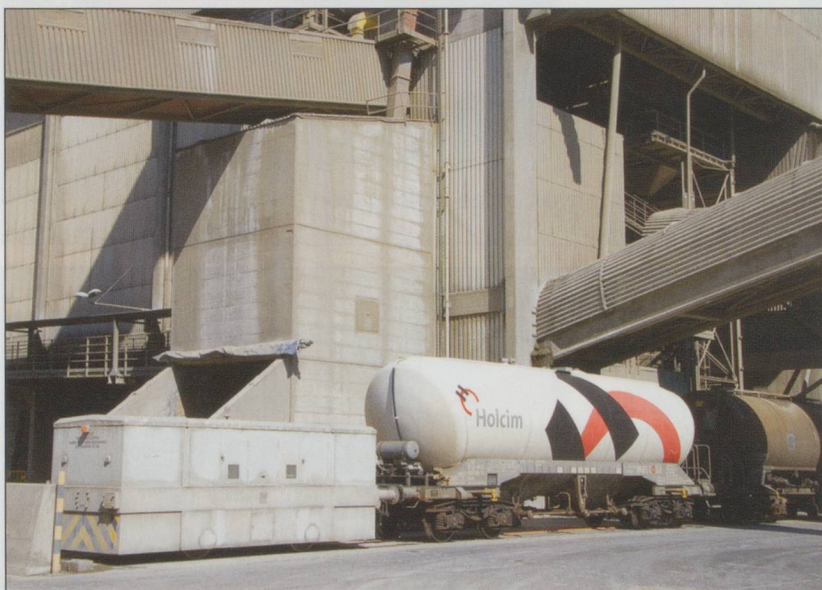
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TOP & MIDDLE: Scenes at the Holcim works at Untervaz.
BOTTOM: Holcim cement tank on RhBat Samedan.

massive Untervaz complex, there are also slave locos in operation. These anonymous block machines suddenly burst into life and start moving wagons, all by remote control.


With operations all over the world, economic downturns in one area can be offset with growth in other countries. Holcim are a very socially responsible company, and believe in sustainability, so plan to use rail more and more. Their bright liveried bogie tanks and open hopper wagons are a familiar sight throughout Switzerland. 2012 was their centennial year and they have produced a very good history of the company (in English and German) at www.holcim.com. The accompanying photos were taken at Untervaz, which, being on the boundary of the RhB, has metre gauge as well as standard gauge tracks. 

WEIACHER KIES

Don Gatehouse looks at these gravel wagons

Anyone travelling in Switzerland in the last 50 years has seen them. In May 1962 the first 80-tonne bogie hopper wagons for gravel, left the shops of Schindler in Pratteln. Within 3 years seven block trains of 15 wagons had been delivered, plus a small number of reserves, and all were running a 24/7 operation. The retreat of the ice age glaciers was responsible for depositing large gravel reserves along the Rhein valley. The concrete makers, faced with a building boom, and with the 1960s programme to build the new motorway network, were happy to take delivery at strategic rail-served unloading points, as their contracts required. As for the SBB, they faced a challenge for this huge heavy-haul task; the solution was the Be 6/8 II Crocodiles. Although reaching the end of their useful life they were worked-over and enjoyed an Indian summer hauling 1,200t gravel trains until they could run no more, and were withdrawn in the 1970s. The first sets were painted red-brown, and lettered 'Weiacher Kies' from the first pit at Weiach-Kaiserstuhl on the line from Zurzach to Eglisau. Apart from accidental damage, none have been withdrawn, although new bogies have raised their speed from the original 80km/h, then no problem as the Crocodiles had a maximum speed of 75 km/h. Today this is an intolerable

limitation on pathing. Later variants allow 100 km/h loaded with a 90t weight allowing trains of up to 1,800 tonnes to be run. There is no sign of a fall in demand for gravel. Today at least 350 such 'Swiss Standard' bogie gravel wagons are in use, built first by Schindler and later Meyer in Rheinfelden, plus a number from other builders. There are

some 2-axle wagons and others acquired second-hand from DB. Claimed to be the most successful Swiss wagon design, they are now mostly hauled by Re6/6s. In June 2012 a jubilee train was put together by Urs Berger, the gravel pit owners, and the DSF museum, to run along the Rhein valley line with one of the preserved Crocodiles. There is a detailed booklet, 'Die vierachsigen Kieswagen, 1962-2012', on the gravel wagons and their work (www.containercars.ch). 



TOP: No.13256 at Stein-Säckingen 1969.

Photo: Bryan Stone

BELOW: Modern Re 6/6 operations.


Photos: Don Gatehouse



BRAMBLE THE SRS DOG Bryan Stone



Bramble is an Irish Setter, and had her own annual season ticket to ride Swiss trams and trains, steamers and cable cars. And ride she did, becoming an expert at leaping up three steps, at wriggling into the space under the table, and creeping into the corridor to see what's what, or asking for bones when the minibar came round! She went on narrow-gauge and inter-city trains, always in the First Class, in ice and snow and blazing summer days, but also on the Gellmerbahn (106% and not easy), to Bière and Pons de Martel, and the Brienzer Rothorn, and many steam museum trains. That's how she got into *Swiss Express*, describing the days out she organized for me and SRS visitors. She learned to distinguish an Ae6/6 from a Re 4/4; to smell a Mallet a long way off; to supervise events on the platforms, and to make for the grass and the station fountain (increasingly rare these days).

But Irish Setters do grow older; in May 2012 she had an emergency operation and had drastically to slow down. Now she is nearly 13, and since I also recently had an operation, which reduced my train riding for a while, Bramble has truly retired. She is with my daughter, who bred her and many others, and sleeps and eats, and dreams of outings long past at Susan's kennels in the Bernese countryside. She will ride the rails no more. So she asks me to say thank you to those members who ask about her. She assures them that she has enjoyed helping them, has seen quite enough trains for one dog's life, and is very contented. 

Editor's Note. Bryan's daughter Susan is an internationally renowned breeder and judge of Irish Setters. Her dogs are regular winners at Crufts. Bramble has a good lineage.

TOP: Bramble enjoyed her days out on the trains.

RIGHT: Though perhaps not waiting in the rain at Planalp.

Photos: Bryan Stone

