

# Swiss locos in France

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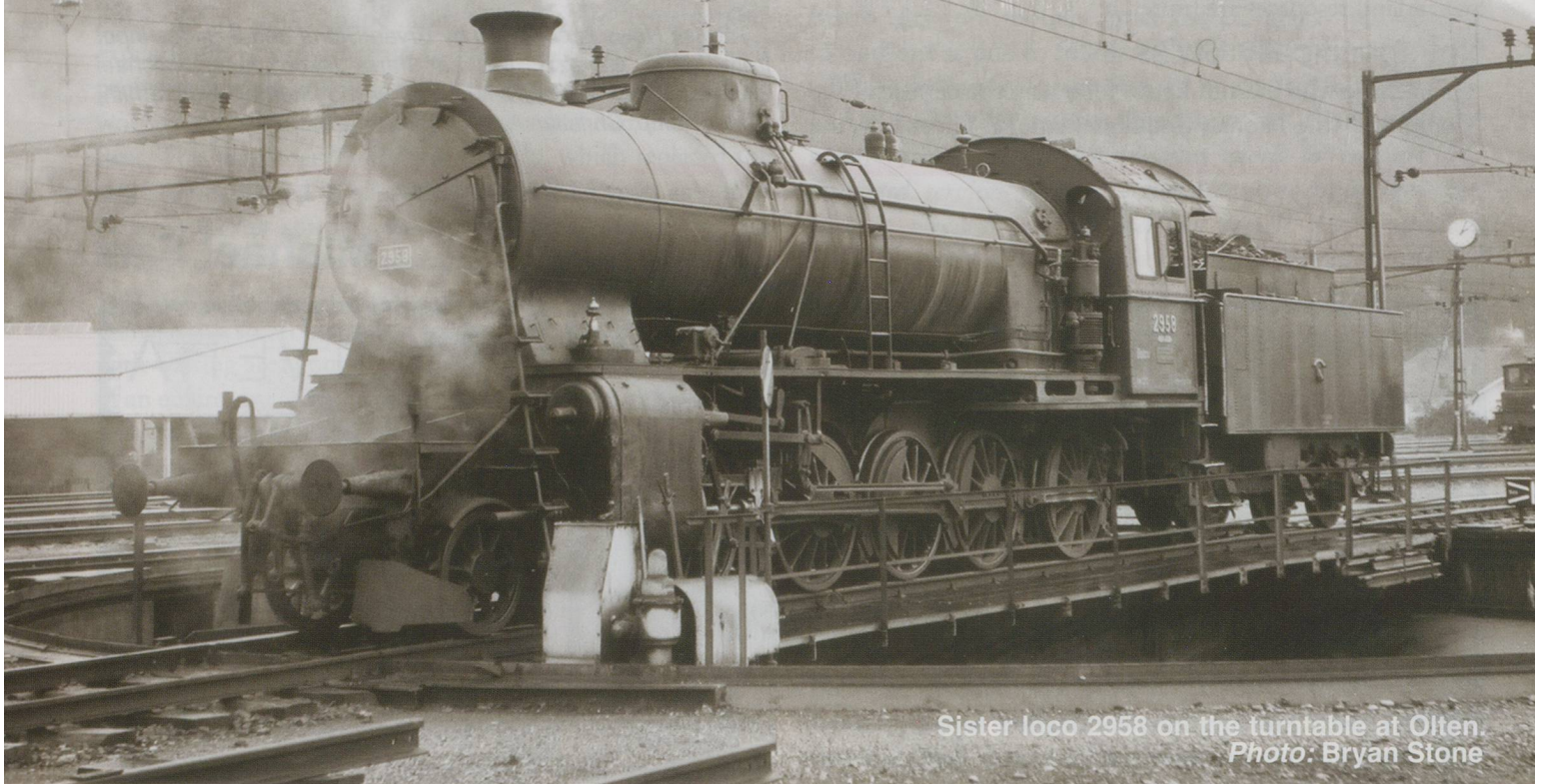
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# SWISS LOCOS IN FRANCE

Keith Scotland



Sister loco 2958 on the turntable at Olten.  
Photo: Bryan Stone

**D**uring a recent trip to the Franche Comté region of France, near the Swiss border, I had some time to spare at Lons Le Saunier. The station has a large area in front of it for car and taxi drop off and pick up, with the bus station to one side. The other side has the goods shed converted into a drive through McDonalds, which seemed to be very popular - despite the French having the reputation for good food and discernment! Across the road, directly facing the station is the "Café de la Chemin de Fer", so I went across there for a coffee and to pick up a sandwich to eat on the train later. The café was quite busy, both with tourists and locals, the coffee good and the sandwich freshly made to order - but what surprised me was on the facing wall a large mural of a SBB C5/6 2-10-0 at the station. I took the photo, and puzzled why a Swiss loco should be on their wall.

The loco depicted is No.2978, which is the one that is preserved by the SBB. It is the last standard gauge steam loco delivered to the SBB and represents the pinnacle of steam loco development in Switzerland. The SBB produced an excellent book describing their preserved locos, I have the French language version 'Locomotives historiques des Chemins de fer fédéraux suisses' published in 1997 (no ISBN number). I understand that by the end of the first decade of the 20th century the Gotthard line required more powerful locos, which would also need to have a top speed of 65 km/h. Two prototypes were ordered from SLM, Winterthur with four cylinders, simple expansion. These two proved to be disappointing, were modified, but even so did not last long. As the system of compounding on C 4/5 locos, Nos.2701 to 2732 had proved so successful, this was applied to the series locos Nos.2951 to 2978. These had two high-pressure inside

cylinders (470mm dia.) powering the second drive axle, the low-pressure outside ones (690mm dia.) powering the third axle, all with Walschaert's valve gear. The driving wheels are 1330 mm (4' 4 $\frac{3}{8}$ " ) diameter. The leading pony truck is combined with the leading drive axle in a type of Helmholtz - Winterthur bogie, which, with a side play of 25mm on the rear axle, allows the locos to negotiate curves easily. These locos weighed 86t - 128t with a full six-wheel tender (18t water/ 8t coal). With an axle load of just 15.3t, these powerful locos could go almost anywhere.

No.2978 went into service in 1917 at Erstfeld depot where she worked until withdrawal in 1967, apart from a period in 1945/46 when she worked in France. Would this be why she is portrayed on the wall of the café? Was the appearance of these powerful, clean looking, Swiss locos at Lons le Saunier so striking that they immortalised her this way? On withdrawal No.2978 went to Biel / Bienne for restoration, and from then to 1995 was shedded at Valorbe and used occasionally for special trains both in Switzerland and "abroad". Perhaps this included a visit to France and Lons le Saunier? In 1996 she was again overhauled at Biel / Bienne, and is still in working order today.

Our Swiss colleague s'Murmeli (The Marmot) has supplied the following

In 1944, following the Normandy landings by the Allies, the retreating German army left the French railways in ruins, and seriously short of functioning locomotives. But Switzerland was dependent upon French transit for imports of foodstuffs and other critical materials, and at one stage in October 1944 over 300,000t of Swiss cargo had accumulated in Spanish and Portuguese ports, while at home acute



shortages reigned. The SNCF was prepared to let 2-3 trains run per day if SBB could loan them locomotives. The Swiss agreed to this and were also prepared to supply the coal required, on a 15 tonne-per-delivered wagon basis, as well as to supply the wagons. By March 1945 two-trains-daily were operating each way between Cerbère and Genève, and by October 1945 there were 12 C4/5 and 24 C5/6 in France. They were stationed at Ambérieu, and ran extensive distances, in total 580,000 km, of which 88,000 km were in Oct 1945 alone. The records do not show exactly where they worked, although it is always said that they ran to Toulon and Sète. However, they did work local diagrams all around Ambérieu, and as Lons-Le-Saulnier is only a short distance north this may explain the mural of No.2978 that Keith Scotland has written about. The locomotives were returned after Oct 1945 when brand-new American 141R locos started to be delivered to the SNCF, allowing the thirty-six 30 to 40-year-old Swiss engines (on expensive rental) to be handed back. Most of them lasted until the 1960s in freight or relief duty; many spent their last years as heavy shunters or as

breakdown train engines. Sister loco No.2965 is on display in the Verkehrshaus museum in Luzern.

*Editor's note: As the people depicted on the mural (painted in 1998) appear to be wearing Edwardian dress, from the period before the loco was built, I can only think that there is a lot of artistic licence at play here!* 🇨🇭

The mural on the café wall .

Photo: Keith Scotland



## AUTO AG INTERLAKEN

I was greatly cheered during our first Swiss holiday in 1990 to discover that

### 'Ticket Collector' Michael Farr tells of his first encounter with Switzerland

Mr Edmondson's wonderful pasteboard tickets (invented in Cumbria), lingered on at less important stations and on certain private lines. Staying at Wilderswil, near Interlaken, meant we frequently used trains of the Berner Oberland Bahn, which had neat little litterbins between each pair of seats. Surreptitiously investigating these bins often revealed hidden gems of tickets and as the Swiss are generally a clean and tidy race anything discarded was likely to be in reasonable condition, though chewing gum could be a problem!

One day I found a ticket issued by Auto AG Interlaken for a coach journey. I wrote to their offices and soon a large envelope arrived containing a card on which someone had very carefully mounted, without the use of glue, what I assumed to be a virtually complete set of their issues. They covered bus tours from Interlaken to Blausee and Kandersteg; a 'Country Tour' through Emmental to Bern; a day trip over the passes Grimsel, Furka and Susten; a Cheese Dairy Tour; full day tours to Luzern and Montreux; an afternoon outing to the Reichenbach Falls and Ballenberg open-air museum, or an indulgent visit to a Chocolate Factory (probably the Nestlé/Cailler premises at Broc). Other afternoon trips were to Schwarzsee and the Trümmelbach Falls, Grindelwald, Stechelberg and the Schilthorn with its

"James Bond" revolving restaurant. I understood that Auto AG Interlaken was a subsidiary of

BLS but could find nothing to confirm this. I enlisted the aid of fellow SRS member and BLS expert Peter Marriott who found the answer in an official BLS book of 1998 that also noted Auto AG ran bus services around Interlaken in conjunction with SwissPost to Beatenberg, Bonigen, Habkern, Iseltwald and were solely responsible for the Niederried service. Sadly for me by the time I visited Interlaken drivers on these services issued machine-printed tickets. In addition Auto AG offered the selection of coach tours covered by the tickets illustrated here. Peter was even able to supply a photo of a model Auto AG coach!

Finally I would like to thank those members which have in the past put their used tickets aside and sent me a 'goody-bag' from time to time. Their kindness has been greatly appreciated not only by me but by other members of the Transport Ticket Society to whom I have passed any duplicates. However as I pass the 75 years mark, and with a collection of tens of thousands, space is at a premium and even my TTS friends are no longer able to accept large quantities of modern computer-generated tickets. I shall be very happy to offer a good home to any that you have in hand but please do not go out of your way to continue saving tickets for me. It is, rather sadly, the end of an era which I began on 1st June 1948! 🇨🇭

