

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2016)
Heft: 125

Artikel: Brockenhaus bargains : in expanding her collection of Swiss memorabilia Heidi Marriott shows that shopping in Switzerland need not be expensive
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854015>

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Brockenhaus Bargains

In expanding her collection of Swiss memorabilia Heidi Marriott shows that shopping in Switzerland need not be expensive

All photos: Heidi Marriott except where shown

The first time we discovered second-hand shops in Switzerland was when I 'Googled' 'Zürcher Brockenhaus' out of interest to see what was in the big pink building we kept seeing on the way into Zürich Hauptbahnhof. We were already building up our 'Swiss Collection' from charity shops, car boot sales, eBay, and the generosity of family and friends who knew about it, but "Brocki's" was a whole new discovery! Brockenhauses, Brockenstubes, Brockishops or Brocante are collectors' paradises where you can buy anything from bric-a-brac to books, furniture to fondue sets; sledges to souvenirs and clothes to cow bells at fabulously low prices. Stores are located throughout Switzerland, usually in more 'out of the way' places; which adds to the fun of hunting them out and visiting the real Switzerland, areas that most tourists miss. As would be expected there are various types of stores:

The Chain Store – HIOB: www.hiob.ch/en/

HIOB International operates Thrift Shops (Brockenstuben) throughout Switzerland to raise funds for relief work throughout the world. The shops accept donated goods from the public and businesses to sell on at fair prices. They also carry out house clearances. Goods from Switzerland are also recycled and sent to Third World and emerging countries. These stores always have plenty of well-priced bargains. Our favourite is the Frutigen store. Situated on Falkenstrasse and open from 09.00-12.00 & 14.00-18.30 Monday-Friday, and 09.00-16.00 on Saturdays, this looks tiny from the outside, but is like a Tardis inside. This store also has the bonus of a fabulous trip on the BLS Lötschberg route to get there!

The Department Store - BärnerBrocki Bern: www.baernerbrocki.ch/

Donations made to this store support the work of GEWA, a social economy enterprise. This helps people back into work, especially those with additional needs. This store at Papelweg 24, and accessed via Bus Line 20 from Bern Station to Bern Lorraine, is our favourite Brocki. They have an excellent selection of books and a wide variety of departments. On our last visit they even had a complete railway layout based upon Blausee for sale for the bargain price of CHF189! However we purchased 'a-bit-of-real-railway' for just a few francs without even knowing what it was. Luckily an email to the SRS experts has solved the mystery and it turned out to be "*A souvenir from the reopening in 1979 of the restored high rail bridge of the Bern – Schwarzenburg line, (the GBS, now fully integrated into the BLS), crossing the Schwarzwasser ravine at Km 14. As so often, the opening was taken as grounds for a popular festival. It appears to be a sectioned rail spike of an early variety*". Not many people can say they own one of these - or probably would want one! This store even has its own Bistolino serving tea and

coffee with freshly baked home-made cakes, and has toys for the kids to play with.



The BärnerBrocki store in Bern.

The drive-through (perhaps technically a 'ridethrough'!) - Brockenhaus Brünig: www.bruenigs/epp.ch

You may have noticed this Aladdin's Cave on the Zentralbahn's Brünig Hasliberg station. This store buys antiques and new or used goods of all kinds. Unusually for Switzerland this store opens from 09.00-18.00, 7-days-a-week, and also holds monthly Sunday flea markets (floh markt). The prices here are slightly more expensive as the range of goods is more 'antiquey'. In 2015 there were numerous heavily discounted souvenirs here from the Grimsel Pass which, en masse, really demonstrates the skill the Swiss have of making every conceivable item into a souvenir. We assumed that a souvenir store on the Pass had recently closed down! This makes a good break on the splendid rail trip from Interlaken to Luzern.



Sometimes bargains can be spotted from the train window – well worth a visit.

The Shopping Centre - Bodeli Brocki: www.boedelibrocki.ch/

This Brocki is in the Zentrum Seeburg on Böningstrasse in Interlaken, close to Interlaken Ost, and is combined with a 'discount store'. The Centre helps young adults with mental

health issues; disabilities and special needs, who are often working in the store as they are helped into work in the private sector. They also offer a wide range of handmade wooden items such as toys, and the novelty garden planters often seen in Swiss gardens. It opens from 09.00-18.00 during the week but closes at 16.00 on Saturdays.



The large selection of garden planters on sale at the Bodeli Brocki. Photo: Roy Marriott

The Corner Shop - Brockenstube Frauenverein Thun: www.frauenvereinthur.ch/

This store is run by the Women's Association, which was founded in 1876 and is a non-profit organization; they support social projects, institutions and disadvantaged people. We discovered this Brocki by accident while heading to the HIOB in Thun, and it is probably what a store would look like if the Women's Institute in England ran it. It is at Grabenstrasse 6 and is housed in what seems to have once been a residential flat, so has small rooms of goods for sale, all at excellent prices. Finding a brand new SBB mug here for 50c pleased my husband. The ladies who work here are always very smartly dressed, helpful and friendly - and seem rather posh! It is open on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 09.00-11.00 & 14.00-17.00 and on Saturday from 10.00 to 12.00.



The Brockenstube Frauenverein in Thun. The ladies who work here are always very smartly dressed, helpful and friendly - and seem rather posh! It is open on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 09.00-11.00 & 14.00-17.00 and on Saturday from 10.00 to 12.00.


Antiques Emporium - Park Hotel, Goldswil: <http://www.troedlermarkt.ch/>

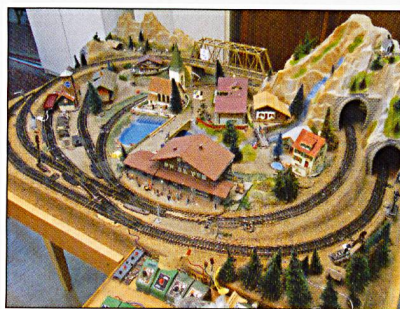
This Flea Market is located in what was once the Park Hotel at Huptstrasse 61 in Goldswil. There is a bus from Interlaken Ost. There are 40 themed rooms spread over 3 floors with a large selection of second-hand items. There is also an adjacent furniture store. This market has super-cheap everyday objects, collectables and antiques. Additionally, there is often a selection of Swiss model railway items by companies such as Marklin and Roco for sale here, and on our last visit there was also a large selection of railway books, postcards and pin

badges. It is open every afternoon from 13.30, and additionally on Saturday mornings.



Not quite what it would appear. No longer the Park Hotel hotel, now a Flea market away from the commercialism of Interlaken's main streets.

As can be seen the upside to getting these 'Brockenhaus Bargains' is that at the majority of stores you are supporting worthwhile causes with your purchases. The downside to our level of collecting is we have recently outgrown our small home and have had to move to a larger property, and this is currently having an extension built to help house the collection. This move has rather neutralised the 'bargain' aspect of it all! Once the work has been completed I will write Part 2 of this article, and probably have to open the Somerset base of the Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum! 



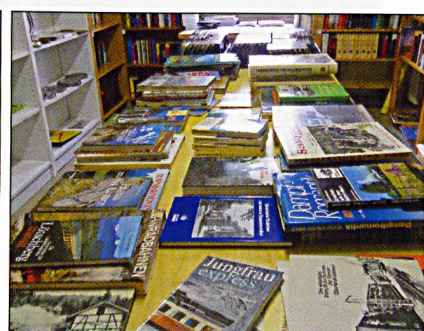
You might even find a model railway.



A Grimsel Pass souvenir.



A railway rarities find.



Loads of Swiss railway books at bargain prices.



Bargains Galore!

Some of the Miggy Piggy collection - plus a railway mug!!