

# Switzerland to Snowdon : Mike Ellis tells how two Swiss sisters will be united for the first time in 126 years

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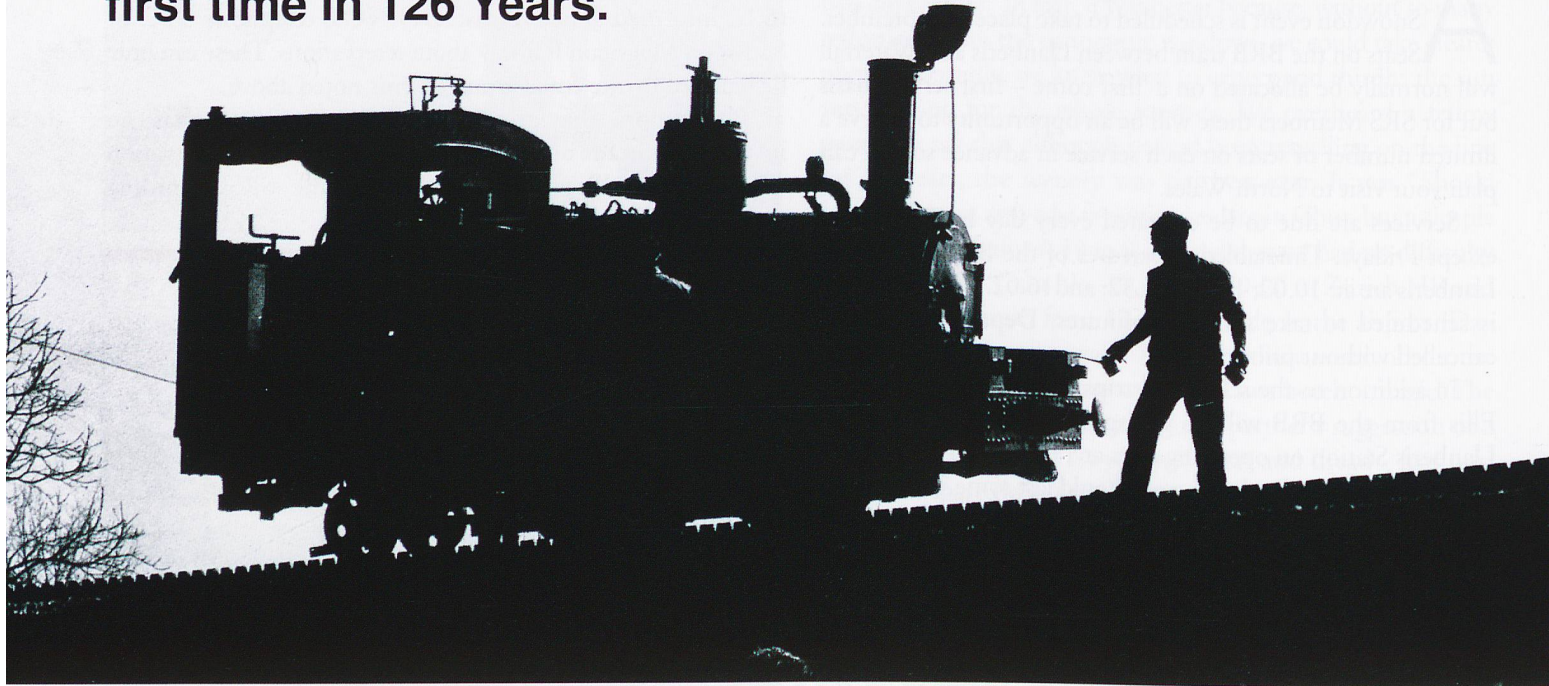
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# Switzerland to Snowdon

Mike Ellis tells how two Swiss sisters will be united for the first time in 126 Years.



An early photo of No.2, where the original rear 'picture window' is to be seen. *All photos:* courtesy of the BRB except where shown.

## In the Beginning - Part I

The Brienz-Rothorn Bahn (BRB) operates from Brienz at the eastern end of the Bernese Oberland's Brienzersee. It was built in 1891/2 to capitalise on the then booming Swiss tourist market and has always been a unique attraction in its own right, rather than serving a transport need. It was the first to utilise the Abt rack and pinion system, necessary to handle the gradient and weight of trains climbing 1,800m to the 2,351m summit, which was the world's highest railway in its day. Today the BRB is the only non-electrified mountain railway in Switzerland. A 100% steam service is always the aim, utilising locomotives that are up to 127 years old. The BRB was mainly constructed using manual labour but as the track progressed up the mountain the equipment brought to operate the line was used to aid progress. Loco

No.2, built in Winterthur in 1891, was one of these and is the first 'sister' in our story. She is the oldest operational steam engine on the BRB.

## In the beginning Part II

Once the BRB had opened and proved itself, word of its success soon spread. At this time a project had commenced to construct a railway from Llanberis up Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales. A fact-finding group even visited Brienz in order to inspect the BRB, its methods and construction. As a result the Snowdon Mountain Railway's (SMR) initial rolling stock, including our second sister, was also supplied by the SLM. So this is the background to a project to unite two sister steam locomotives that have never been seen, or worked, together.



## The rest is history

The current story started in 2012 at a travel trade show in London. I was representing the BRB, and when in conversation with James Wilson from the Switzerland Travel Centre I suddenly had a flash of inspiration: why not place a BRB loco as an eye-catcher at the exhibition entrance the following year! James thought the basic idea was sound, but would probably be too expensive just for the trade show. However, he knew someone at the NRM and perhaps a BRB loco could be exhibited at York to the mutual benefit of all. Sadly, like many good ideas, this also failed due to the costs involved.

'Moel Siabod' – younger sister to BRB N°2 freshly restored seen on shed at Llanberis.

*Photo:* Snowdon Mountain Railway.




Then in 2015 a colleague at the Jungfraubahn called. They were hosting a visit from Mike Robertshaw, the SMR's Senior Engineering Manager, and would we like to show him around the BRB. No problem – and the seed of an idea started to grow. On his arrival I wasted no time in getting Mike up on the footplate of a similar engine to one of his, and once we were 'on the road' I asked "would it be feasible to run a BRB loco on his railway?" A rather cautious 'maybe' from Mike was all I needed, and that's how today's project started. Looking back over the last 3 years it's been a roller-coaster ride - in more ways than one. Without the unwavering support of some colleagues it would never have happened. Switzerland to Snowdon has been a team effort and no one has had an easy time making it happen.



During April 2016 the Swiss Team made gauging trials with the 'Brienz Roller'. Under the guidance of Mike Robertshaw (nearest camera), we were able to determine exactly where our limits of running are. This photo shows the commencement of the Gripper Rail which, as suspected lies foul of the Brake Drums, simulated by the two round rings left and right of the Pinion Wheels.

and special location.

We are bringing from Brienz, in the Bernese Alps, not just a historic Swiss Steam Locomotive, but an entire operational Swiss Steam Train dating from 1891 – something never done previously. This is a train that is currently in daily use and is being sent as an Ambassador for Swiss Tourism to the UK – again something that has never been done previously. The train, complete with its Swiss crew, will be working in timetabled public service for the entire month of September (Fridays excluded) – never, ever done before! We are offering this very limited service to the general public for FREE - there are no extra charges and it will be offered on a first-come-first-served basis each day. This is happening on the UK's highest railway. Everything mentioned above is unique in its own right, and as a combined event this is simply a once in a lifetime chance to see and experience. As a final 'insider' word to SRS Members this is really only going to happen once - in September 2018. We have arranged that you will have a limited special booking facility in an attempt to avoid any wasted journeys to Llanberis. Details of this are outlined elsewhere in *Swiss Express*. 

The technical side of the project was proved early on. Just having the same track gauge and rack pitch is far from the end of the discussion. In 2016 Daniel Schlosser, BRB's Operations Manager at the time built a skeleton test vehicle (the 'Brienz Roller'), that was shipped to, and reassembled at, Llanberis. This was to prove where we could, and more importantly could not, run our Swiss equipment. A service to the top is not possible due to the SMR's use of a gripper rail that fouls the BRB loco's brake drums by an irreducible 5mm. However, it is possible for our loco to run a part-way shuttle between Llanberis and Waterfall Halt. This has been re-built for the project. In hindsight this enables us to serve more people than initially planned, and makes the train much more visible in Llanberis. During April 2016 our Swiss Team made gauging trials with the 'Brienz Roller' under the guidance of Mike Robertshaw to determine exactly where our limits of running are.

Originally, the event in Wales was to have taken place in September 2017, however, this unfortunately had to be abandoned due to financing, logistical and other issues. Having reviewed both the costs and other associated problems we have been able to bring this complex project to fruition one year on. Nick Robb, STC's Sales Manager, has invested an enormous effort into developing the concept of what is going to happen into detail and reality. We now have a 'Visitor Experience' - and not just a page of ideas.

## The Visitor Experience

Llanberis is not exactly 'just around the corner' for most people, so what is going to happen, and be available to visitors when they arrive? Just bringing the two 'Sisters' together is an excellent idea, but not enough. Llanberis is indeed not just around the corner for most of UK inhabitants. It is however set in the middle of a 'mini Switzerland' of scenery and offers a wide selection of attractions that make it a great region to visit. What we are therefore offering is something unique and very special, in a unique



Photographed here at Planalp, No. 2 is pulling away on the second half of her journey to Rothorn Kulm. In front is passenger coach B1 which is also destined to appear with her in Snowdonia in September.