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Two Elephants from Erstfeld




On Saturday the 21st October, the Gotthard 'Mountain' route echoed to the impressive sound of a train double-headed by two of Switzerland's most impressive locomotives. This day marked the return to service of Eurovapor's C5/6 No.2969 'Elephant' after a long and problem-ridden restoration, mostly at Sulgen. After much work had been completed on the 20-year project, in December 2013 its completed chassis and mechanism were caught in the disastrous workshop fire of the Ballenberg railway in Interlaken. Getting the work back on course required some heroic efforts as well as solid finance, but it now has an unrestricted licence to operate in Switzerland, a remarkable achievement after 49 years out of service. On the triumphant return trip it was accompanied over the historic line between Erstfeld and Bellinzona, by SBB Historic's

ABOVE:
Nos.2978 and
2969 pause at
Göschenen.
Photos:
Christoph Perrez.



The two 'Elephants' storm up the north ramp to Göschenen. similar 'Elephant' C5/6 No.2978 – the two making an impressive sight for those lucky enough to be at the lineside or riding the train. Unfortunately the day for No.2969 ended in Faido, when a connecting rod big end bearing overheated, but no serious damage was done. Those who remember regular steam operation know that hot axle boxes and big-ends were always with us, even then. 

commenced in September 2012 and due to the difficult terrain and various other problems that occurred (including major tunnelling issues and the need to use helicopter transport), it soon became clear that the CHF52m budget would be exceeded. Now this small village in a delightful, but under visited by non-Swiss tourists, area of Switzerland has probably the most sophisticated access transport of any community in the world. 



LEFT: Nearly at the summit station.

BELOW: An early view of construction showing some of the difficulties to be overcome.

