

Steam in Brienz 1997

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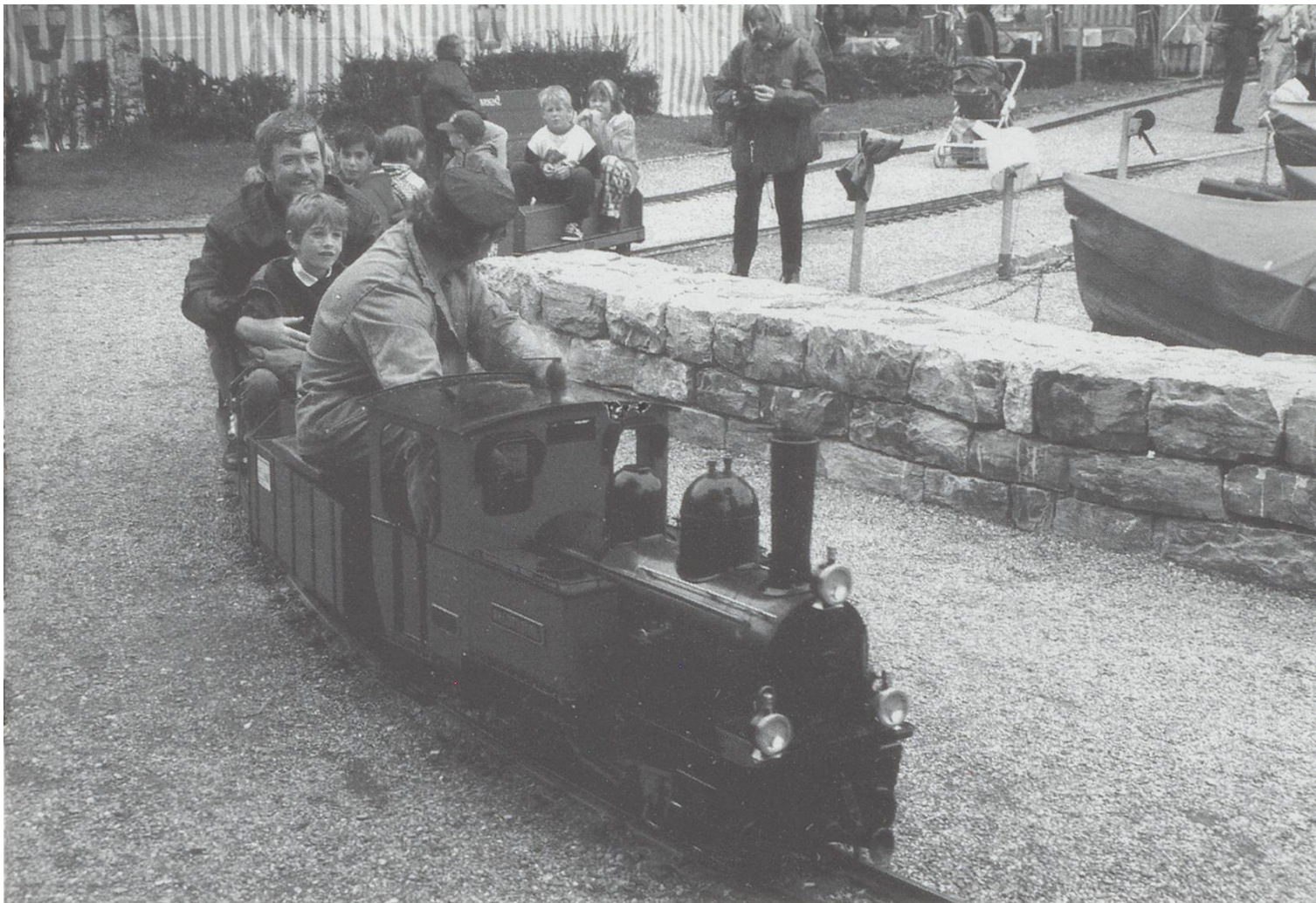
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Steam in Brienz 1997 By Peter Arnold

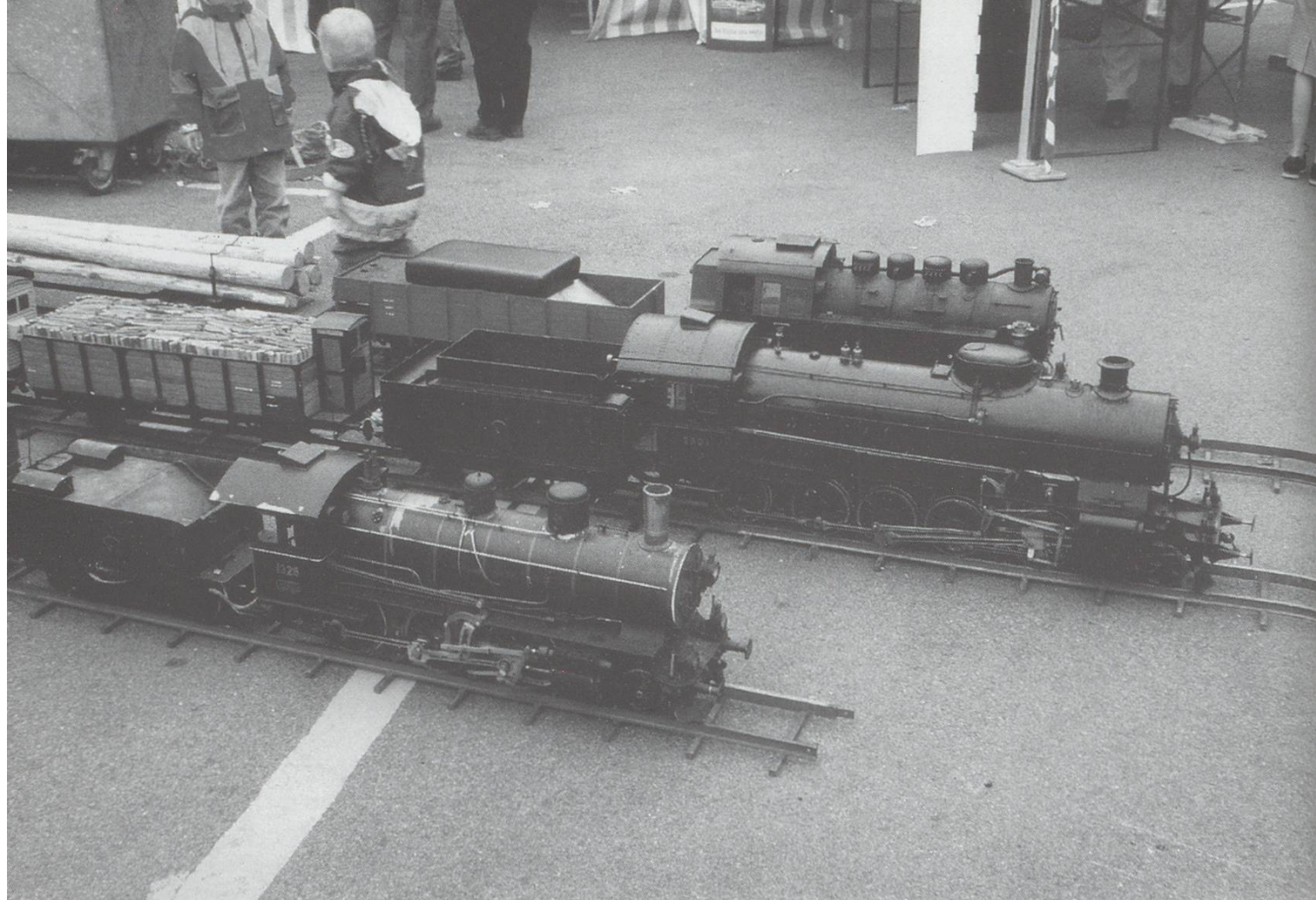
Less than 6 weeks after our previous holiday in Weggis my wife and I landed at Zurich once again, this time bound for the Hotel Edelweiss in Murren. We had been here previously, but only as day trippers, and thought the village might prove noisier than some. How wrong we were! Murren proved to be delightfully quiet each evening once the daytime crowds had gone and our hotel was a real haven of peace, perhaps too much so for some people's liking. I had planned this 2-week holiday to be within reach of my favourite centre of Swiss steam, the Brienz Rothorn Bahn, as well to allow access to the myriad of mountain footpaths beyond Murren.

The first of our two visits to Brienz was on Saturday August 23rd, a glorious summer's day. Upon reaching Brienz we found No. 15 (SLM 5690/1996) waiting to propel a pair of the 1972 built carriages with the 10.15 departure up the mountain. Also there in steam was No. 2 (SLM 689/189 1) with one of the 1872 bogie carriages but this train set was to see no use for the whole day! We travelled up to Rothorn Kulm, noting en route the work being carried out to convert a

footpath into a farm road high above Chilemad. We do hope the finished work doesn't mar this beautiful mountainside.

Once at the summit we spent some time enjoying the views before doing some "detective" work. On a previous visit when we had walked from the summit to Brünig, we had spotted a path disappearing into a tunnel at the top station of the Eisee chairlift (winter operation only), this tunnel being signposted to Rothorn Kulm. Accordingly this time we entered the top station of the Sörenberg - Rothorn cableway (LSBR) and, sure enough, there we found the other end of the tunnel with a sign advising that the door at this end is locked at 17.00 every day. We now know that this route, which runs partly in a tunnel and partly along a gallery in the rock face, is an easy way of avoiding a very steep loose footpath on the eastern face of the Brienz Rothorn.

Satisfied with our find, we then took the 13.30 train down as far as Planalp. Our train was a similar formation to that on our uphill journey albeit with No. 14 (SLM 5689/1996). No. 7 (SLM 3611/1936) followed us with a train composed of



one 1972 and the unique open ended 4w carriage B21.

At Planalp we sat enjoying the sunshine for a couple of hours whilst I obtained some photographs of the various trains as they travelled back and forth and of course we visited the nearby restaurant for a beer before catching the 16.04 train back to Brienz. This part of our journey was with No.6 (SLM 3567/1933) with its 1930's style train set composed of carriages B16 (bogie) and B26 (4w). We were closely followed by diesel loco No. 11 with bogie carriages B14 & B15, all three of these vehicles dating from 1987. After our arrival back at Brienz we were treated to the sight of No. 15 departing at 16.30 on a wedding special with each carriage door bearing a posy of flowers. Beyond the station building No.4 (SLM 720/1892) was standing at the end of track being. This loco appears to be non operational this season but in use as an advertisement to catch the eye of passing motorists.

This year's BRB timetable shows an increase in services but our impression during this visit, on a beautiful sunny day, was that the railway was not as busy as we had often seen it. The

Previous page: 7¼" gauge loco Brienz (5" gauge circuit in background)

Above: 5" gauge locos on display at Brienz.

Photos: Author

weekend did mark the end of the traditional French holiday period so perhaps this was one reason. Although it is heartening that the BRB is keen to maintain their steam operations, I noted that the one diesel in operation was the only loco to have performed four round trips that day. I wondered why veteran loco No.2 was in steam and ready to go, in preference to the more modern Nos. 6 & 7 both of which were still on shed, and then not used. It was also surprising to see that carriages B 14 & B 15, although designed for use with steam loco No. 12 (SLM 5456/1992), were paired with a diesel loco. For the record the locos in use, and the number of round trips, were Nos. 6 & 7 - one trip each; Nos. 12, 14 & 15 - three trips each; No. 11 - four trips.

Exactly one week later, with the weather forecast to be unsettled, we decided to return to Brienz to see the "Kleindampfbahntreffen" (miniature steam railways meeting) which was being held on the lake side promenade that weekend. After strolling around the village for an



Above: Steam launch at Brienz "MS Brienz" behind.

Photo Author

hour or two, the dull weather turned to wet weather!

There were two miniature railways in operation. The 7¼" gauge track ran, from the boat landing stage, some distance along the promenade whilst the 5' gauge track ran in a circle around the outside of a refreshment marquee. There were several locos in operation on both tracks together with others on display. Despite the rain the various operators, both young and old, were thoroughly enjoying themselves as they entertained the crowds who were watching from wherever they could find shelter! Other attractions included a small stationary steam engine providing power to a grinding wheel which was available for anyone who wanted to sharpen their penknife. Last but not least was a small steam launch offering short trips on the lake for a couple of francs. Meanwhile across the road, although we had seen BRB No. 1 (SLM 722/1892) leave in clouds of steam with a fairly full train, most trains were not well patronised and the 15.00 departure was cancelled. Hardly surprising when the cloud level was below the cliff top behind the village!

The following day was the last full day of our

holiday and, in complete contrast, the day dawned brilliantly - so much so that we decided to take the cablecar from Murren to the Schilthorn. Once there we just couldn't believe how clear were the views. There were literally no clouds to be seen anywhere and after a couple of days of cool weather there was no haze at all. We spent four hours just drinking in the scenery which included making a beer last for one hour in the restaurant, the time it takes to revolve 360'. What a perfect day to end a holiday!

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