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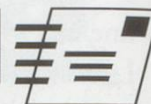
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Letters are welcomed on any relevant subject. Please ensure that when you send an email letter you include your address.

From – Geoffrey Bryson – Westcliff-on-Sea

Swiss Franc-Sterling Exchange Rates

In the September 2003 issue a query was raised over 1929 exchange rates. As a retired foreign exchange manager I will try and give the rates over a longer period.

From the 1865 foundation of the Latin Monetary Union until 1914 the rate was SFr25 to £1 sterling. The 20 gold franc coin was identical for France, Switzerland and Belgium as was the 20 lire for Italy, 20 pesetas for Spain and 20 drachmae for Greece. The rate for the German Empire's reichmark was RM20.43 to £1 and USA dollars were \$4.86625 to £1 sterling; all were gold based.

After the Great War the rate became fewer francs until the Gold Standard was re-established by Winston Churchill in the spring of 1925, ill advisedly at the old pre-war rate making a pound worth \$4.86625 once again. British Gold Standard was abandoned for ever on 21st September 1931. The rate then fell but was highly volatile, especially after the Swiss also abandoned the Gold Standard on 26th September 1936. The last pre-war quotation in Cooks Continental Timetable for August 1939 is SFr21 to £1.

At the start of WWII sterling was fixed at \$4.02 leading to SFr18 to £1 and this was confirmed at Bretton Woods and lasted until the sterling devaluation in Autumn 1949 when sterling fell to £2.80 and SFr12.23. Throughout this period of exchange control only a limited number of Swiss Francs were available to a queue of British tourists, and then only up to a maximum of £25 per head in several of those years. This sudden drop in the value of sterling made Switzerland very expensive for my first visit in 1951, although the food and goods on sale were a delight coming from rationed and austerity Britain. The rate was still SFr12.23 when I worked in a very expensive Zürich in 1960, such that I received a supplement to my good London salary of some 50%. The rate was similar until currencies floated in 1971. At the end of 1972 SFr8.84 and two years later SFr5.98. Swiss francs were booming and by 1976 it was SFr4.08, 1978 SFr3.42, 1985 SFr3.185 and 1986 SFr2.63. It continues a highly volatile path and today the business rate is around SFr2.22.

I hope that clarifies the historical exchange rates which are so often misquoted in the media.

I would like to make a couple of other points.

- Unesco headquarters are in Paris, not Geneva as quoted on p48 of the September issue (*Editors note the quote was direct from the BLS press release.*)
- Page 51 of the same issue mentions the appointment of a Transport Ombudsman. The Rail Passengers Council and its regional committees act like an Ombudsman for railways in Britain with the London Transport Users Committee also acting for the underground, buses and trams. (*Would anyone like to comment on this any further?*)

From: Lester Weeks – Teddington

Exchanging One's Tokens

When I made my first visit to Switzerland in 1947 the exchange rate was £1 = SFr 20. Of course, that is not to say that George Behrend's recollection of the 1929 rate of £1 = SFr 12 is not correct. The late twenties and early thirties (so my parents told me) were particularly hard times in Britain, and this might well have adversely affected the value of the Pound. Was it not in 1929 that Britain left the Gold Standard?

Since 1947 the Pound has taken a long slide in relation to other currencies. Surprisingly enough, in such circumstances, Switzerland continues to be excellent value for British visitors. Everything is of the highest quality, including, as we well know, the constantly upgraded public transport system. We also need to be grateful for the modest Swiss VAT rate of only 7.6%. This falls to a mere 3.6% for hotel accommodation and meals!

CD Timetables

You may be interested to learn that, for the first time, the Swiss Tourist Office in London will have this year (they say a few) copies of the 2003/4 Kursbuch on CD-ROM for sale. The price is the same as for the paper version and they should be in when you read this letter. The CD includes an added bonus in that there is a free download of nearly all railway timetables throughout Europe. Moreover, there are sometimes update downloads later in the year.

Incidentally, I eventually managed to pry a copy loose last year from the SBB, St. Gallen. Every possible obstacle had been dragged out in an attempt to prevent me receiving the CD. It seemed like it must contain State secrets!

From: James Henderson - Tetbury

In and Around Interlaken

1. The Berner Oberland Bahn (BOB) is very short of motive power since the accident at Gsteigwiler on 7th August 2003. BOB ABeh 4/4" 313 heading a combined train from Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen down the valley collided head-on with ABh 4/4 305 heading an 'extra' up the valley, after the driver of 313 went through a red light. The casualties totalled 64 people, of which 26 were medium injuries, and 37 lightly injured. One Swiss man died some time later of his injuries.

ABeh 4/4 305 was buckled in the middle, as can be seen in photos of the accident published in *Schweizer Eisenbahn Revue* 10/2003. The driving trailer newly converted from the RBS ABt 411 and coach B 273 were also extensively damaged in the crash. ABeh 305 and ABt 411 will be repaired by Stadler at Altenrhein, and ABeh 313 by Winpro at Winterthur (*Eisenbahn Amateur* 10/2003). The two BOB Triebwagen ABDeh 302 and 303 dating from 1949 have been put back into service to cover the shortages and extra coaches have been borrowed from the SBB Brünig.

2. In the Ballenberg Dampfbahn works at Interlaken Ost the chassis (frames, wheels, cylinders and motion) of the SBB C 5/6 Nr 2969 (Erstfeld shed-plate) was on a metre gauge rollschemel being dismantled for overhaul. The boiler was presumably elsewhere for specialist attention.

Also in the works was BDB HO 3/3 Nr 1068 (from the plinth at Meiringen) which looked as if it had a lot still to be done before it would be back in service. The boiler did not appear to have yet been removed from the frames.

3. At the Bern 'Modell-Hobby' Exhibition Roco had on show their forthcoming SBB Re 4/4" (single pantograph) model, which looks superb and also the Doppelstock Bistrowagen 'Passagio' which should be available very shortly. The 'Barwagen' for the 'Kolibri' sets is already available. Roco said that they would be producing the BLS Ae 4/4, based on their excellent BLS Ae 8/8 models, in 2004.

4. Bemo will not now be producing the BOB ABeh 4/4 model, but Banninger, in the guise of CREST-A-TOYS GmbH, Wülflingerstrasse 11, CH-8400 Winterthur, are planning to produce HOm brass models of 311 & 312 and are collecting names of those who show advanced interest before starting production. The price indicated is SFr 1200 to SFr 1400.

5. Bemo are planning to produce RhB 0 314 Nr 11 'Heidi' in the preserved form in due course.

6. Lima were not at the exhibition and are believed to have ceased production.

7. The specialist shop in Luzern for brass models, Hochstrasser, is no longer functioning.

From: Bill Juergens - California

Active in the USA

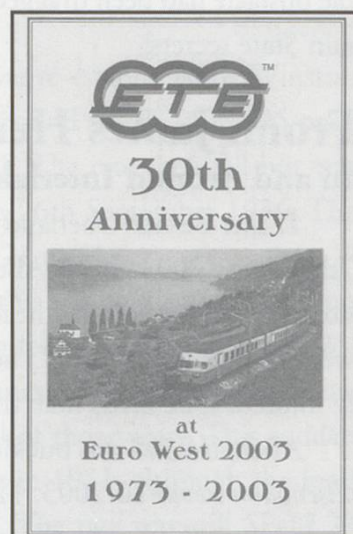
I want to let you know that SRS members in California are active with our Swiss layouts. We had a two-day public show, known as EuroWest2003, in July 2003 at the Basque Cultural centre, in South San Francisco.

I have enclosed two books. The black and white book gives the history of the EuroShows, a description of the layouts and the activities for the two days. Our Swiss layout is written about in the Meter Gauge Module Group section. I was on the committee and was given the assignment to get a 30th Anniversary book printed for the banquet. I was asked to identify 3-5 persons from the Sacramento Chapter for Recognition Awards.

The 30th Anniversary book identifies the banquet program, menu, Recognition Awards and a chronology of the European Train Enthusiasts organisation in the USA, which is the hosting body responsible for the exhibition. 107 people attended the dinner, an excellent number!



(Editors note - covers of the two books are pictured here and you can find more about the module group at <www.ete.org>, click on layouts then Tobias Giles' Module Layouts. The actual books have been placed in the archives)



Since this letter was received the Editor was saddened to learn that Bill passed away peacefully in his sleep during March 2004. He often made the effort to come to the AGM and was a familiar and friendly figure who loved a chat. One way and another he did a lot to promote the Society and Switzerland in the USA and will be missed by many of us.

The sympathies of us all go out to his family.
He was a good bloke and you can't say fairer than that.

From: Alan Dutton – Woodbridge

Non Silentio ad Draconem

I was very interested to read David Baker's articles on the Thunerseebahn. By co-incidence I have a copy of *Bahn Im Bild No.28-Innsbrucks Strassenbahn*. This has details of those vehicles bought from the Thunerseebahn in 1954 together with three photographs. There is also a list giving brief details of the fleet and its history.

The list confirms the numbers of the motor-cars sold and also shows that six trailers were purchased at the same time, these being numbers 31, 32, 34, 52, 53, 54. Only two of each appear to have been converted for use in Innsbruck, motor-cars 4 and 6, which became nos. 61 and 62 and trailers 52 and 32, which became numbers 161 and 162. It would seem that motor-car 61 was quickly used as works car. The two trailers were sold the following year to the Stubaitalbahn and there is no further information regarding their service there. The book has three photographs of these vehicles, 4/61, trailer 31 as received and 52/161 refurbished. All vehicles are shown as being built by Crede in 1913.

Bahn im Bild was a series of 36 books published in the 1980s and I have two from the series. They give excellent coverage of various Austrian lines and there is a second series of 5 dealing with other European lines. More may have been published and I would presume that none are now in print.

From: John Eve - Hitchin

In September We Went to Zürich for Lunch

One Wednesday in September my wife and I decided to take advantage of an easyJet offer paying our airport taxes and have a day out in Zürich (£30.00 each return). We decided on the first flight out (07.55) and the last back (21.45), as Luton is only 10 miles from home. EasyJet was on time in both directions, and the weather was fine and warm. In fact it was still shorts weather in Switzerland.

We arrived about 10.30am local time, bought our 24hour Zürich cards (SFr15 each) from the Airport station ticket office. An official City Guide is available from the Tourist Office at Kloten Airport. This card, complete with map of the area covered and details of museums and restaurants, gives unlimited travel on trains, a "Kleine Rundfahrt" on the lake (as far as Erlenbach and Thalwil, the Felsenegg cable car and the trams and buses in the Central area. You can also obtain welcome drinks in some restaurants, admission to various museums and trips on the river Limmat. See <www.zürich.ch> for full details.

We took first the train to the Hauptbahnhof and then found the platforms for the SZU to the Uetliberg for lunch, in the inevitable Bahnhof buffet. We then walked for two hours to the Felsenegg for coffee and cakes. We used the cable car down to Adliswil and the train back to the city.

After a stroll down to the Bürkliplatz we went by boat to Erlenbach (ZH) via Thalwil and used the train from Erlenbach to Tiefenbrunnen and walked back to the Bürkliplatz through the park and along the lake-side. As we were not due back to Kloten until 19.30 we had time for a meal and a stroll along the Bahnhofstrasse, looking at all the things we couldn't afford! It was a well worthwhile day out, and made a change from driving up the M1 to Derbyshire for the day.

From: David Russell - Ilford

Back in Action: The World's Most Modern Steam Locomotive

The world's most modern steam locomotive has been returned to steam in Switzerland, following two months of overhaul work and fine-tuning. Ex-German 'Kriegslok' No. 52.8055, which was rebuilt in 1999 and modernised complete with oil-firing, improved draughting and alterations to its wheels and axles, passed its boiler inspection on November 7.

The locomotive's first public trains are on December 11/12 from Zürich to Schaffhausen with the Nostalgie - Istanbul - Orient - Express luxury train. The locomotive is to be used on NIOE charter trains, and for further tests of modern steam traction ideas. The 2-10-0, ever-distinctive because of its bright yellow running plates, is owned by DLM, the company that is also actively involved in the construction of a small fleet of brand new rack locomotives for Swiss mountain lines (*Steam Railway* 288).

THE CLASSIFIED SECTION - Members Adverts

FOR SALE: HOm layout "Taste of Switzerland" as seen at 1995 Derby AGM, now with modified fiddle yard. Loosely based on RhB. 10 ft x 5ft 8 ins; splits into 3 sections for transit. Complete with transformers and 3 hand held controllers. No stock. £400. Collection/delivery to be arranged. Tel: Brian Hemming at 01276 856051 or e-mail b.j.hemming@btinternet.com

FOR SALE: Chris Appleby's Swiss Railways 1997 edition (published by Platform 5). Duplicated Christmas gift. Pub: £13.50. Offered at £8.00 including postage to UK and CI. Michael Farr, 1 Trethurgy Gardens, Callington, Cornwall, PL17 7RH.

INFORMATION REQUIRED: I would like to convert a BEMO coach into a Brünig driving trailer and need some photos to assist. If you have any please contact Ron Thomas on 01397 269469. Many thanks.