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MOVING MOUNTAIN TO LAKE

- for some jobs a skip isn't enough!



482013 moving forward before reversing its train over the level crossing. The on-board videocam is just above the handrails on the side of the loco.

All the photos in this article are by David Adams.

I spent my usual week based at the Hotel Frohsinn in Erstfeld in early June 2005 and the less than perfect weather conditions for the first three days, cool and overcast, gave me an opportunity to explore places that would not have been on my agenda in sunnier conditions. In fact had the sun been out, a few photographs I took at Spiez on the Monday would have been impossible from the vantage points concerned and the results were quite encouraging.

It rained heavily during the Monday evening and the following morning. I decided to cut the planned local photo session and went through the Gotthard tunnel to Airolo on the south side of the Alps in search of the sun. Sure enough the clouds were dispersing there and the sun shone on Cargo liveried Am diesel 843055 which obligingly positioned itself against a snow covered mountain backdrop during its shunting movements to form a southbound local freight. Feeling a little more cheerful, I headed back north on the next train with a view to walking round the nature reserve at Flüelen, if the rain had stopped. Despite the general

decline of such duties over much of Switzerland I noted that station tractor Tm 8776 was still resident at Göschenen for the ninth consecutive year. At Flüelen I alighted in the dry with signs that the cloud was breaking and indeed sunny intervals prevailed soon afterwards. I walked down the road alongside the west side of the station to the ungated level crossing which carries the line to Flüelen Wharf where the stone trains from Erstfeld unload.

These trains originate at the NEAT site at Altdorf and convey stone excavated from the new Gotthard tunnel, great emphasis being placed on environmentally protective transportation. They are tripped along the single line branch to Erstfeld station by a private diesel loco, 847853, where normally either a 482 or an Ae6/6 takes over. I recently noted on a web site, which has since removed the information, that there were six timetable paths a day for such trains to operate between Erstfeld and Flüelen departing at 04.50, 07.23, 10.48, 13.03, 16.34 & 19.22. The poorer quality stone which resembles rubble is taken to Flüelen

while the better quality stone appears to head for more distant places in block trains of two axle hoppers. Sometimes a long distance working appeared to replace a local trip to Flüelen.

I paused for a few minutes at the crossing to watch passing traffic on the main line. I was just about to continue when a class 482 could be seen approaching from the south. It arrived with what I assume was the 10.48 stone train from Erstfeld, a journey of just 9km. The train passed me and the loco ran round. It then drew forward before reversing across the crossing which was guarded by an SBB Cargo employee holding a red flag while another gave instructions to the driver by radio. Once over the crossing the line becomes two sidings and the train reversed into the south side siding. Here the train was split. The loco and front portion drew forward and then reversed down the north side siding towards the discharge facility which is situated on the southern shore of Vierwaldstättersee at the end of

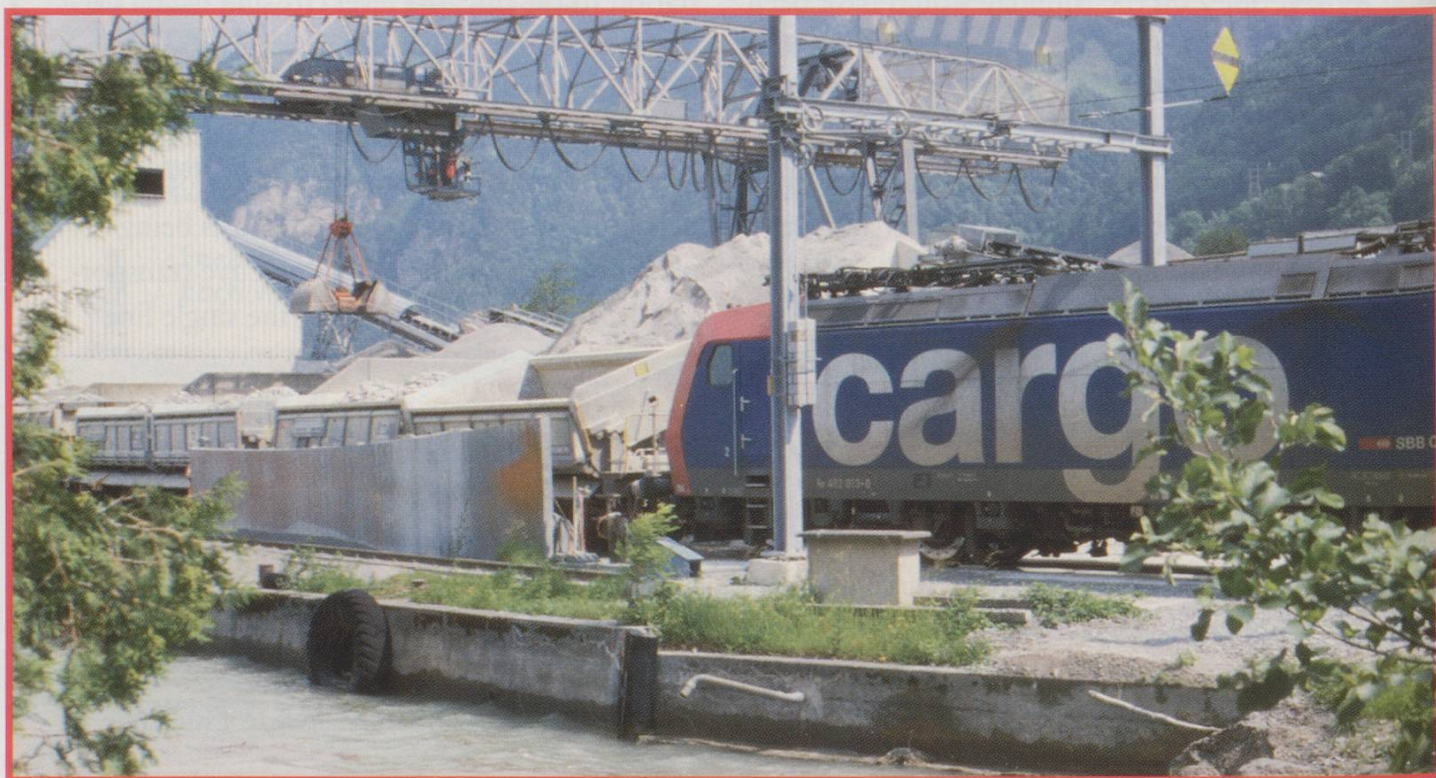


ABOVE: 482013 at the discharge site with Vierwaldstättersee in the background. The yellow diamond with a black stripe above the loco denotes the end of the overhead power supply hence the need to use the front pantograph.

BELOW: The start of the lengthy unloading process.

this short branch. When it stopped the loco was still visible from the crossing. A broad roadway runs alongside the north side siding so I headed off to explore further.

482013 had stopped just short of a point where a yellow diamond with a black stripe attached to the overheads denotes the end of the electrified section, the front pantograph being used so that part of the loco could be positioned beyond this point. A small privately owned 0-4-0 diesel shunter resides in the sidings

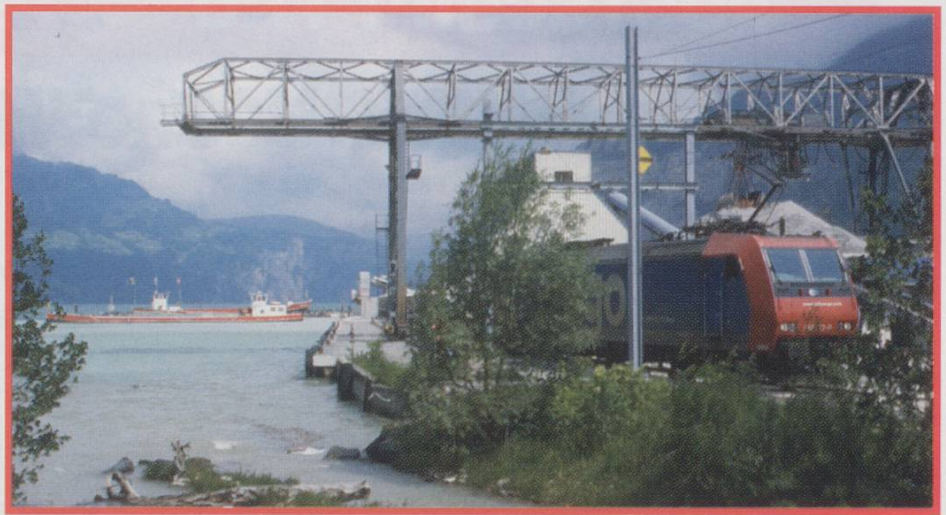


at Flüelen near the station and can be used right to the extremity of the line. I have yet to see this loco used though it does appear alongside 460118 in a picture of the unloading facility in a Gotthard Tunnel brochure. The wagons are mostly low bogie hoppers with two sections for carrying the stone. To unload, the upper sections tilt to the side and the stone drops down onto an underground conveyor belt at the side of the track. The conveyor belt carries the stone to one of the long barges that transport the stone a short distance to a site near a point where the River Reuss flows into the Vierwaldstattersee where islands have been formed, ironically just offshore from the nature reserve I was planning to visit. These man-made islands contribute to shoreline remediation in the Reuss delta and also provide a haven for wildlife.

The unloading process, which requires the train to move forward one wagon at a time, took just under two hours and I suspect that this is quite a tedious duty and not one that is loved by the drivers. 482013 had already worked the 07.23 trip from Erstfeld that morning. Class 482s, (most other such trains I saw that week were in the hands of Ae6/6s), are fitted with a "mod com" which negates the need

for the driver to lean out of the cab window to view the vehicles behind the locomotive, namely a video display in the cab which shows a view looking back along the train taken by a video cam situated just behind the cab door on both sides of the locomotive.

Because I planned to sample the BD line from Wohlen to Dietikon in the afternoon, (what an entertaining journey that is - highly recommended!) I could only spend a limited amount of time watching proceedings. I had been in the right place at the right time that morning all thanks to the early inclement weather. I never did make the nature reserve or see the Peregrine that regularly flies over the site but the afternoon turned out to be quite entertaining as well, which is certainly a lot more than I had expected as the rain poured down at 07.30.



ABOVE: While 482013 discharges its load, a loaded barge sets off for the short journey to the Reuss delta.

BELOW: Ae6/6, 11441, departing Erstfeld with a stone train for Flüelen.

