

The models, the mountains and a museum!

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THE MODELS, THE MOUNTAINS AND A MUSEUM!



THE MODELS. When my father, the late Barry Harper who some SRS members may remember, first started his interest in model railways it was with the GWR. Naturally he adopted the British 4mm scale, but in the interest of accuracy he opted to use 'fine scale' EM gauge track. However, two things in the late 1950s prompted him to change his emphasis. One was that every time he scratch built a model, someone would almost immediately bring out a kit of the same vehicle! The second was a holiday to Switzerland, a country he developed a keen interest in.

At that time there were few small-scale models of Swiss railways, and certainly none available in the UK, so my father started to build his own Swiss rolling stock. Drawings were purchased from Walter Studer, or were culled from *Eisenbahn Amateur*. Having no other points of reference at that time, my father

continued to build in 4mm scale with EM gauge track. As a boy, I remember helping him with his layout, part of which was displayed at the Easter 1967 Model Railway Club exhibition at Central Hall, Westminster, and was photographed for the front cover of *Eisenbahn Amateur* magazine. My father continued making models of SBB & BLS prototypes until the early 1980's, and when I left home he moved into my old bedroom and constructed a layout based on the RhB using Bemo rolling stock.

All the buildings on this layout were built from real prototypes, based on photographs and measurements that he took whilst on holiday – in each photo he had my mother stand next to a doorway for a height measurement! Having returned home, plans were drawn up, and the buildings were constructed. He made models of Alpnach Dorf station on the Brünigbahn (named 'Merligen' on my father's layout),

various buildings in Lenk & Brienz, and several others. When my father died in 1997 most of the models were packed away (I did however use some of the buildings on my own MOB layout) and remained so until last year. As a family we tried to see if anyone was interested, either in Switzerland or at home, in having the collection; however, because of the unusual scale, we drew a blank.

THE MOUNTAINS. Just a week before the very heavy rains that devastated large areas of Switzerland last summer, my own family - together with my mother - visited the Interlaken area. To interest the children on a wet afternoon we set-off to visit the "Model Eisenbahn Treff" near Interlaken West station. We found the building was being demolished and were redirected further down the road to the "SBB Historic Eisenbahn Treff". We found that the old collection had been moved here, together with loads of other goodies - including a train simulator that allows you to drive over three routes from a complete Re 460 cab. Enquiring if the manager was about, and having been told no, we were given a contact telephone number. Then, whilst walking around, my mother spotted a man in a suit appearing from behind 'Staff Only' doors. We ambushed this gentleman and discovered him to be Dr Walter Ellenberger, the Museum's Director. Going on to explain about my father and the models I showed him some photos I had taken of them and suggested that his collection might be a suitable home for them. I think he was a little amazed that we would want to donate models to a museum in Switzerland!

I maintained contact with Dr Ellenberger whilst I organised a trip to take the models to the museum. I decided to retain a few favourites, but would donate the majority of the models, including the model of Alpnach Dorf station. On the 20th January it was finally time to go. With most models packed in a strong box within a suitcase, plus the station model carried separately in a very strong container, I set off to catch the

17.09 Eurostar from London Waterloo to Paris Gare du Nord. I found the journey was noticeably smooth on the new high-speed line, having previously only trundled over the old route to the Channel Tunnel. Having arrived safely in Paris I had 1 hour for the bitterly cold 10 minute walk to Paris Est station (and a much-needed warm coffee) before boarding the train for Basel SBB, where I arrived at 04.50! However, I was soon on the 05.27 to Interlaken, arriving on time at 07.30. With snow & ice everywhere I crossed the road to the Hotel Bahnhof for a very welcome shower, change of clothes and breakfast.

THE MUSEUM. Having both freshened-up and warmed-up I rang Dr Ellenberger who, already at work in the museum, suggested that he would walk up and meet me. Wrapped up warm I set off down the road, with the carefully unpacked box of trains in one hand and the station in the other. I met Dr Ellenberger almost outside the hotel, before we walked together down a rather slippery footway to the museum. Arriving there I was taken through to the combined workshop/restroom. Here there were test tracks for the various gauges that the museum operates, a fully equipped workbench, storage for models in various stages of repair plus a small refreshment facility and seating area with a view directly on to the main line outside.

As we started to unpack the models a young





were moved down the road on the large station handcarts, with some of the large layouts requiring four carts under each! The Om layout that featured in the Roco catalogue when they produced the Alpinline range has been reinstalled with all the various sections linked by high level rack assisted tracks. Some of the order has been changed and new sections built to represent RhB, the Brunig line, etc. – all very impressive. Another O gauge layout, operated by push button, takes up most of the 1st floor. Also on this floor there are a

volunteer at the museum joined-us and was amazed at the models, and at Dr Ellenberger's impressive run down of the work history of the prototypes of the locos and the various differences between coaching types and uses. When the collection was unpacked a temporary showcase with a glass front was found and between us the models were placed in it for safety. It is intended that a purpose made showcase will be built to display the models, hopefully before the museum opens in May.

The last item to be unpacked was the Alpnach Dorf station building. This was initially greeted by stunned amazement, then by a rapid conversation in German that I could not follow. An HOm scale MOB coach was produced, stood alongside the building, and rapid measurements were taken. More excited conversation followed before it was explained that the station would be perfect for a Brunig line diorama in HOm. Would I object to the station having its correct name? I agreed to this so, hopefully, the building will feature in such a diorama in the near future. Finally I was treated to a superb lunch at an Italian restaurant just along the road followed a guided tour of the museum and its inner workings.

If you have not been to the museum on its new site, it is well worth a visit. Most of the exhibits from the old Model Eisenbahn Treff

number of small layouts in scales from HO to LGB for children to play with, together with a seated area with your refreshments delivered by LGB train! Alongside you, as you sip your hot chocolate, there are a series of superbly executed dioramas depicting various aspects of Swiss railways through the years.

For the technically minded there are various items from full size locos to assist in explaining how things work, and items of memorabilia for those interested in history. There is a cinema showing historical and modern footage, both amateur & professional, encompassing all aspects of Swiss rail. A superb display of Gauge 1 models, representing Swiss rail through the years takes visitors to the museum shop that sells a variety of DVDs, videos, books, some old railway memorabilia, models from various manufacturers and a number of railway based souvenirs for younger enthusiasts. Also, there will now be my father's models. As a family we are all honoured, thrilled and very grateful to Dr Ellenberger, and to the SBB Historic for finding a place in Switzerland for them. I know my father would be amazed as to where they have ended up!

I intend to return again next year to see my father's models and I urge you to join me in visiting this splendid museum in Interlaken when visiting Switzerland. *You will not regret it.*