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The Essential Guide to Swiss Heritage and Tourist Railways.

Author: Mervyn Jones. Published by Oakwood Press. Language: English. 196 pages, including 120 photographs in full colour. Format 6" x 8"; softback. ISBN 978-0-85361-659-7.

Price in UK: £15.95.

Just suppose you were asked to compile a guide to Swiss Railways that would entertain and inform both the first time visitor and the veteran of many visits. Limit yourself to 196 pages of A5 format (6"x8"), and include over 120 photographs – not just the classic views, but scenes to stimulate the aforementioned veteran to think afresh on some favourite locations. So: what to include, what to omit? Author Mervyn Jones has adhered closely to the book's title, omitting information that can readily be found elsewhere, but providing details of many websites, both within the text and as an appendix ('Interesting Websites'). In fact, it might be argued that for those with access to the web, all that is ever needed is a list of websites! Perhaps so, but a splendid book such as this can be far more fun.

There is no index as such, so to test the system, how easily can the large (the B.L.S.) and the small (such as the Misoxerbahn) be found? And what are to we learn of them? The railways are grouped by Region, which presupposes a degree of geographical knowledge. Two maps of Switzerland are included, and both could - easily be more helpful. That inside the front cover shows the cantons and just five cities. Given the regional format it is a pity that they were not identified, or were more locations – Basel and Brig, for example. The second map, inside the back cover, is sprinkled with numbered dots (5 of them outside the Swiss boundary!) and.... nothing else - no towns; no regional boundaries; no railway lines – all of which may have helped. A list on the adjacent page does identify each dot and gives the page number to refer to. Had this list been in alphabetic order, it would have served as a conventional index – although in my search 'B.L.S.' was found under 'Lötschbergbahn'!

Having found the Misoxerbahn (the Ferrovia Mesolcinese), there is plenty of information – its route, rolling stock, operating dates, tariff, places to visit, etc, plus a photograph of one of its vintage units. The author has used this approach for most of the 117 entries (they should keep you busy!),

providing comprehensive detail that is both succinct and understandable. The larger railways have presented more of a problem, in encapsulating their history within a few paragraphs, and listing their rolling stock and routes – information that might better be found elsewhere.

The photographs are splendid and some of them deservedly occupy a full page. The book is probably worth buying for these alone. The author and his wife have taken most of them, and it is clear that they put much thought into being in the right place at the right time – not least, catching a number of steam trains in action. Commendably, in a book so full of detail, the only error I found was to a caption.

Overall this is an excellent publication that is a book both for the library of the stay-at-home, and as indispensable luggage for those setting out for the highways and byways, the museums and preserved lines, of Swiss railways. It should inspire and entertain us all. *JTW*

Editor's note: This book is available for £15.95, including postage to UK addresses, from Society Sales. Purchasing from here helps SRS funds, otherwise please support your local bookstore.


Albulabahn – Harmonie von Landschaft und Technik.

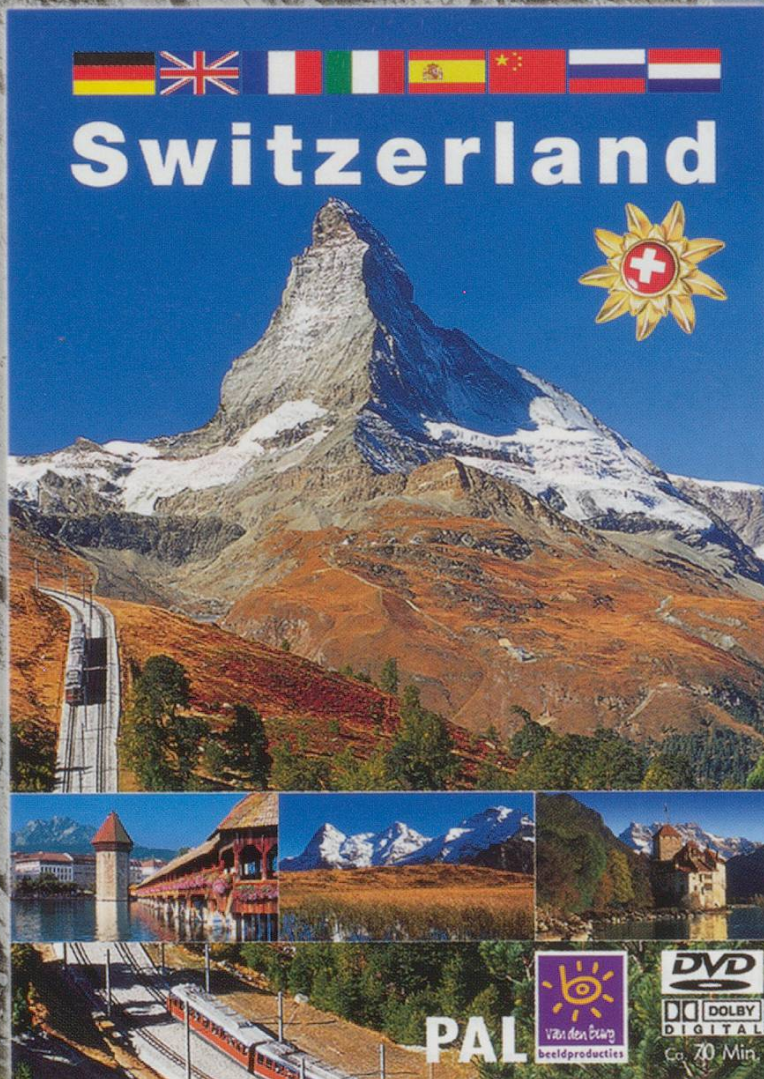
Authors: Gion Caprez and Peter Pfeiffer. Published by AS Verlag A.G., Buhnrain 30, CH-8052 Zürich. Language: German. 160 pages, 125 photographs in b+w duotone print. Format: 9" x 11"; hardcover. ISBN 3-905111-89-6

Price in Switzerland: SFr. 88 or 55. Internet: www.as-verlag.ch

This is not a new book, it was published in 2003. I must have been in the wrong place when it came out, as I managed to miss it at the time. But as I do know anything Rhätian has a big following amongst our readers, I will rectify this now. The book appeared in the historical series "Bahnromantik", printed in the superb way of black and white reproduction that is called duotone. Other books in this series include the "Golden Pass", "Bernina Bahn" and more recently "Brünig/Brienzer Rothorn". The Albulabahn is without a doubt one of the most spectacular feats of railway engineering in Switzerland. As always, I also look at the possibilities of inspiration for the Modellers amongst us. If you model in HOm and ever wanted inspiration for a bridge, this is the book for you. I do know BEMO published a book of bridge-plans a long time ago, but it is quite different to be able to see the real thing in its natural surroundings. There are many photographs of the building of the line. To see how things were done a hundred years ago, without all the modern machinery and technology, is fascinating to see - and surely not only for a civil engineer like me!

To save transportation costs - in those days higher than labour costs - mostly locally available materials were used. In the area in question, this means wood for the scaffolding and stone for the final structures. Literally thousands of workers built the line in very difficult terrain. Excavation of the cuttings was mostly done by pickaxe and wheelbarrow. The many tunnels were also dug out by means which look very primitive today. Also, as the title "Landscape and Technology in Harmony" suggests, it seems to me people in those days took more care to blend structures into the landscape. Just look at how Motorways have ruined the narrow valley of the north ramp of the Gotthard, or crushed the view of the Chillon castle from the Lake of Geneva... There are also many nostalgic views of life as it was long ago, like the loading of wagons with wood at Tiefencastel or the Coaches waiting at Samaden or Celerina, to take the passengers on to the Hotels in St. Moritz before the line was completed. Just like today in Zermatt. The text is only in German, as usual a pity, but understandable. I will not bore you with my usual plug of the advantages for learning a bit of the language. If you are at all interested in the history of this famous line - this is the book for you. *GMH*

 This DVD will take you to many of Switzerland's most beautiful places; towns, villages, lakes and mountains. English spoken, 70 min. - also available in NTSC



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Schweiz, Suisse, Switzerland.

Author: Andres Betschart. Photos mostly by Christof Sonderegger. Published by AS Verlag A.G., Buhnrain 30, CH-8052 Zürich. Languages: English, French, German and Japanese. 112 pages, 90 photographs in full colour. Format: 11 " x 9 "; hardcover. ISBN 3-905111-55-7.

Price in Switzerland: SFr. 40 or 25. Internet: www.as-verlag.ch

This book, published in conjunction with the Swiss Tourist Organisation, is not about railways. It is very much a book of pretty pictures of Switzerland. A coffee table book yes, but I have included it in my reviews because it is a quality book with 90 very well reproduced pictures, mostly full page or larger. There is no text in this book apart from the captions and those are in English, as well as in German, French and Japanese (!). It is, most importantly, available at a very fair and affordable price. You will find photographs of almost all of the famous locations in the country, from the mountains via the countryside and the lakes to the villages, town and cities. You could play "Kilroy was here"! At just over two pounds in weight, it is not too heavy to bring home on your next trip. You can then impress your friends with your "local" knowledge and convince them to come and see for themselves why people keep coming back to Switzerland. After looking through this book, even the most cynical sceptic will have to admit that Switzerland is not a country of sinister bankers and cuckoo-clocks, but a very varied and beautiful country that is well worth a visit! *GMH*

Switzerland: An Overview.

Authors: Emil Zopf, Iso Camertin, Benedikt Loderer, Peter Stamm, Peter Krebs. Published by AS Verlag A.G., Buhnrain 30, CH-8052 Zürich. Languages: English, French and German. 200 pages, 119 photographs in full colour. Format: 9 " x 11 "; hardcover. ISBN 3-905111-01-7.

Price in Switzerland: SFr. 88 or 55. Internet: www.as-verlag.ch

This book shows Switzerland as seen from above. The aerial photographs have been selected from the 100 00 strong "Photoswissair" collection of the appropriately named "Luftbild Schweiz" Foundation. The collection was started by the famous Swiss Flight-Pioneer Walter Mittelholzer. The oldest photographs date from 1918, but the collection is kept up to date by the Foundation. All very interesting, but why am I reviewing a book of aerial photographs for a Railway Society? For the many inspirations it can give to the railway modellers!

First of all it is clear, that Switzerland's mountains will play a prominent role in a book like this. A Swiss layout will have to feature some mountainous areas. And here the shapes, structures and the colours as seen in the photographs will give you plenty of ideas! But there are also lots of aerial views of cities and towns. It is here that we can see the important role the railways play in Switzerland: there is a railway line clearly visible right in the middle of almost every town. Again, inspiration for Modellers: have a lake right on the edge of your layout, with a boat waiting for the tourists, as seen in several of the pictures! You can also find many views of railway installations: yards, roundhouses, stations and the like: inspiration for track plans. But it is also a book that will impress your friends who unfortunately do not share your interest in railways. Switzerland is a beautiful country - and this book gives a view, which is quite unusual. You will be surprised how different even places you know quite well will look from above. In these days of flights at altitudes of tenth of thousands of feet, well above the clouds, you no longer get to see the ground - and if you get to see it, it is much too far away.

I was lucky to have known the time of propeller planes, where you still could enjoy views like this as a simple passenger in a Douglas DC 3 or a Convair Metropolitan. The text is not to be forgotten, especially as it is available in English as well. The authors are all well known publicists; even a colleague from the Association of Swiss Railway Journalists. As we have become accustomed to from AS Verlag the printing is superb. The choice of photographs is also well balanced - not surprising, as books about mountains are another speciality of this publisher. If you do not buy this book yourself, at least pester your club or branch librarian to get it. *GMH*