

Book and DVD reviews

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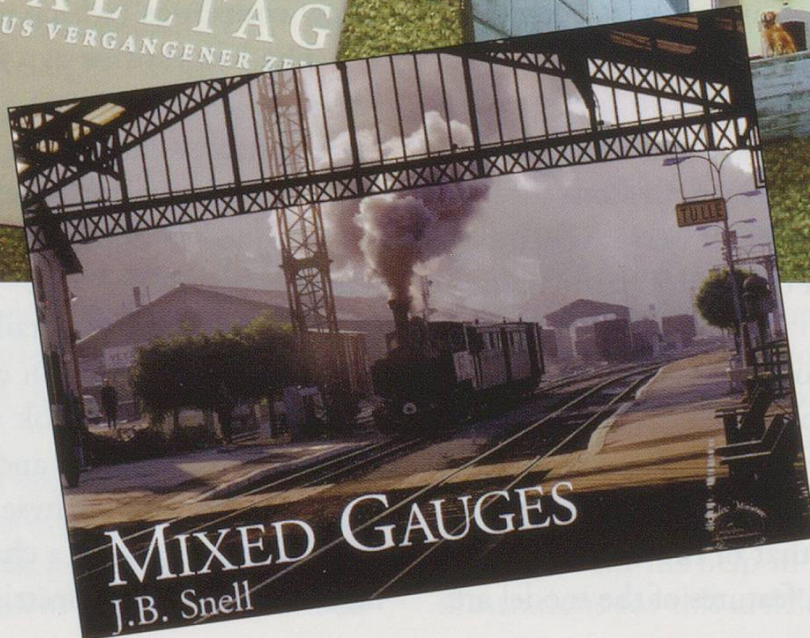
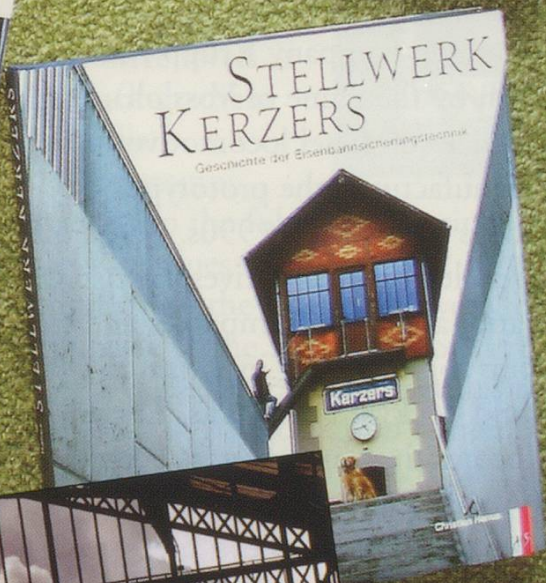
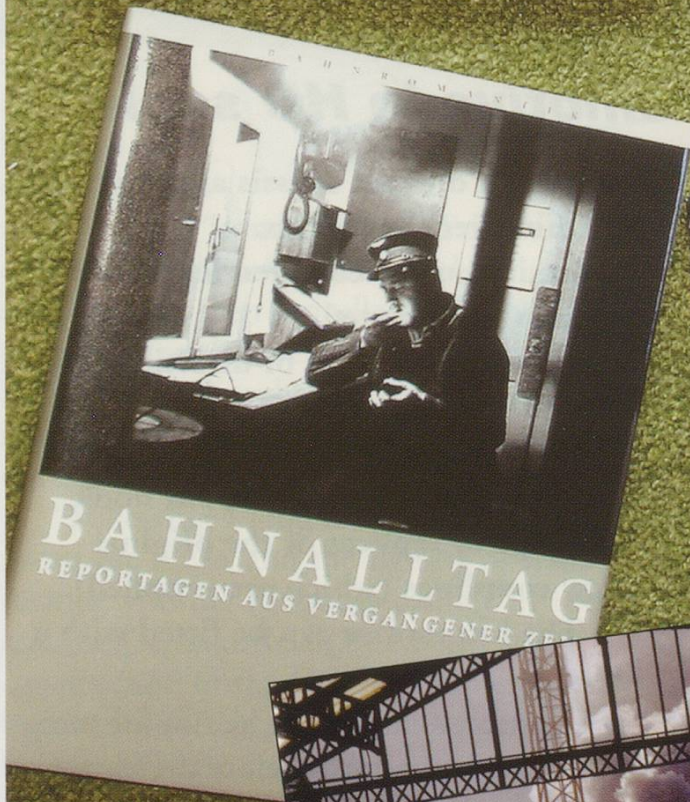
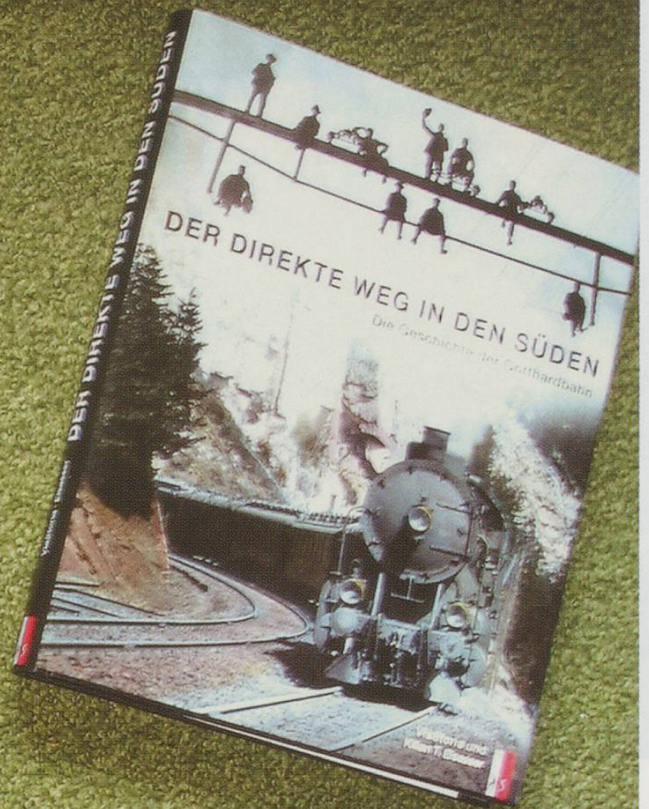
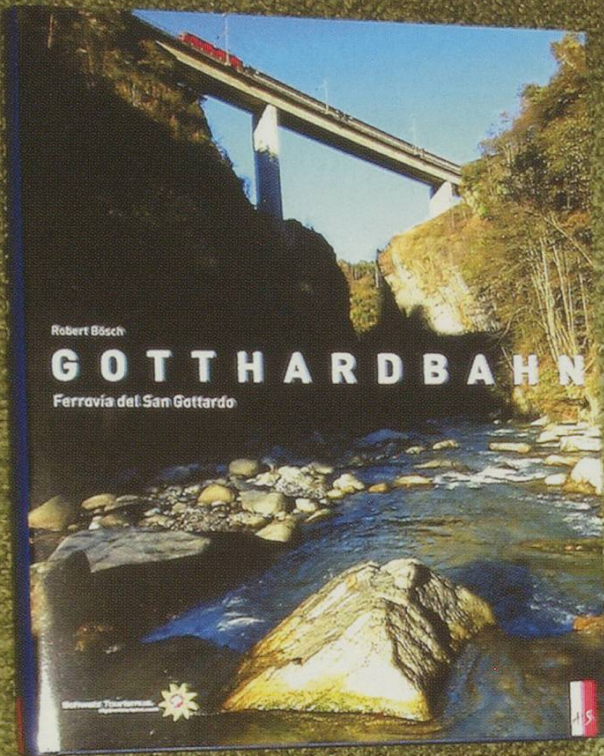
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BOOK AND DVD REVIEWS



BAHNALLTAG - Reportagen aus vergangener Zeit

Photographer: Rob Gnant. Authors: Iso Camertin and Thomas Köppel. Publishers AS Verlag A.G., Buhnrain 30, CH - 8052 Zürich. Language: German. 160 pages with 120 B+W photographs in Duotone. Format: 9" x 11", hardcover. ISBN: 978-3-909111-44-2. Price in Switzerland: SFr. 88, or Euros 55. Internet: www.as-verlag.ch

That the name of the photographer ranks in front of those of the authors, is significant. This is a book of photographs of the people in, on and around the railways. As a professional photo-reporter for amongst others "Die Woche", "du", "Epoca" and the weekend supplement of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", Rob Gnant spend more than a quarter of a century observing people. His photographs of railway people from the 1950s bring back many memories to this reviewer, who was then in his late twenties and a big rail fan! Of the co-authors, Iso Camertin has written an essay on rail travel. In it, he states: "As soon as a person appears in a picture, there is a story waiting for the observer. He can ignore it and continue leafing through.... but there are lots of railway fans who will discover something to make their heart beat faster in every picture that has even the faintest connection with the railway world." He must know rail fans well! The other Author, Thomas Köppel, has written the short introductions to the groups of photographs. But the 120 mostly full page photographs are the mainstay of this book.

They are also the reason I can recommend this book to all lovers of the railway, even if they do not know a word of German: the photographs already tell their own story. The romantics amongst you even can make up their own story. But there is another aspect. In looking at model railway layouts, I sometimes rant on about the lack of people. Not only passengers and railway people, but also all the other people going about their business around the railways. If ever there was a collection of prototype pictures that will give you plenty of inspirations on setting scenes and poses with people, this is it. It is fitting, that the book has been published with the help of SBB Historic. Today, many of the scenes pictured are history: the steam engines, the trains loaded with Italian workers and their luggage all tied up with string going home for Christmas, the collecting of ice-blocks for the cooled vans, the full service restaurant cars and mail vans with their army of workers sorting the mail en-route. But some things have gone and come back: the Steffenbach Bridge on the Furka summit line is taken down again in winter and re-erected every summer by the enthusiasts running the steam railway now. For all of you, who have been coming to Switzerland for many years, do as I did: browse and enjoy! **GMH**

DER DIREKTE WEG IN DEN SÜDEN - Die Geschichte der Gotthardbahn

Authors: Kilian T. Elsasser and a team of authors from the "Via Storia" Centre of Studies on History of Traffic (associated with the University of Bern). They also act as publishers, c/o AS Verlag A.G., Buhnrain 30, CH - 8052 Zürich. Languages: Separate editions in German and Italian. 232 pages with 310 photographs both in B+W and in full colour. Format: 9" x 11", hardcover. German Edition: ISBN: 978-3-909111-42-8. Italian Edition: ISBN: 978-3-909111-43-5. Price in Switzerland: SFr. 98 or Euros 60. Internet: www.as-verlag.ch

As a companion to the book "Gotthardbahn", this book covers the history of the 125 year old railway. The opening of this railway in 1882 was not only of huge importance for the Canton of Ticino, up till then just about isolated from the rest of Switzerland by the barrier of the Alps. But from the very beginning it also provided a direct link between Germany and Italy and thus became one of the backbones of the European Railway system. Thanks to a continuous program of modernisation over all these years, like the modernisation of the signalling, double-tracking and electrification, it is still today one of Europe's main thoroughfares. This will certainly remain the case after the opening of the base tunnel. However, the fate of the famous railway over the summit might in time become doubtful.

But back to the history. The book treats all the aspects of this monumental project. Faced with continuous difficulties, the initiators, industrialist and financier Alfred Escher and civil engineer Louis Favre, fought on with dogged determination. And the difficulties were numerous. From the lengthy discussions and political horse-trading about the route, over the technical difficulties of a project that had never been attempted before, procurement of locomotives capable tackling the stiff gradients, labour unrest and numerous accidents, as well as investors losing confidence (nothing changes... all they wanted was a quick return).

This is a big, heavy and well illustrated book. The majority of the 232 illustrations are in B+W. This is to be expected in a historical book. They are all beautifully reproduced in duotone. Some of the colour prints are reproductions of hand-coloured postcards, and then there are the proper colour photographs. Many photographs are from the archives from SBB Historic, the Lucerne Transport Museum, the Hugo Hürlimann Collection as well as several other collections. Others are by well known photographers like Robert Bösch. All are technically perfectly reproduced, as we have become accustomed to by the AS team. The text has been written by six competent traffic historians. The 300 (!) annotations and a literature list of 100 titles documents the amount of care and research involved in this project. It has been well worth while: they can be proud of their work! **GMH**

STELLWERK KERZERS - Geschichte der Eisenbahnsicherungstechnik

Author: Christian Hanus. Publishers: AS Verlag A.G., Buhnrain 30, CH - 8052 Zürich. Language: German. 144 pages with over 30 drawings and 170 photographs both in B+W and in full colour. Format: 9" x 10", hardcover. ISBN: 978-3-909111-45-9. Price in Switzerland: SFr. 54 or Euros 32. Internet: www.as-verlag.ch

A book about a signal box! But not just any signal box. The box at Kerzers, where the lines from Bern to Neuchatel and from Aarberg to Murten cross, actually houses quite a unique collection of Swiss signalling techniques over the ages. Built in 1896, it was state of the art at the time, with double wire control over signals and turnouts. In 1928, 1944 and 1963 this wire control was replaced in stages by relay controls. What makes the Kerzers box special is that at every modernisation the old installation was not junked. Quite the contrary, it was adapted to work with the new controls! For instance, when the relays were installed, the mechanical levers were left in place and fitted with electrical contacts, which operated the relays. The original primary mechanical interlocking for the release of the routes, which was installed away from the box in front of the station building, was also kept in use to route the current to these new contacts. Again, when the end came in October 2004 with the new Alcatel all-electronic installation, the box was not demolished but kept in working order by a group of dedicated enthusiasts. Last year, they conducted no less than 70 guided tours for visitors from all over Europe through the installation! I can vouch for the fact that there is interest from outside Switzerland for at the request of a Dutch railway magazine, I had to make a special trip to the box to photograph some details inside and out. It is even available in model form: the German firm of Faller brought a model out in HO (190215), although the background in the photo on the box shows high mountains and as such has nothing whatsoever to do with Kerzers...

To really appreciate a technical book such as this, it is clear you would at least have to have a working knowledge of German. If you do, there is a mine of information on both the history and workings of signalling in Switzerland, not just in Kerzers, where a lot is preserved in working order, but also from many other locations all over the country. Interlocking as well as other safety aspects are well explained and illustrated. Naturally, Kerzers, in its unique location at a crossroads used by both TEE and TGV trains, is described in great detail with drawings and aerial photographs. **GMH**

MIXED GAUGES

Author: John B. Snell. Publishers: Camden Miniature Steam Services, Rode, Frome, Somerset BA11 6UB. Language: English. 256 pages with 48 photographs in B+W and 386 in full colour, of which 50 are printed full page. Format: 9" x 11", hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-9547131-6-4. Price: £51.90 post free in the UK, or £58.00 worldwide by air. Internet: www.camdenmin.co.uk

This review is out of the ordinary. In this big book, only 8 of the 250 pages are about Switzerland. Why review it? Firstly, it is by a very good friend; secondly it is in English! But more importantly, it is about railways from all over the world, mostly steam. I live in Switzerland amidst its wonderful railways, but I do miss steam, we hardly have any. From 1950 - 1970, I travelled a lot, enjoying the heyday of steam. I know quite a lot of you did too, so I am sure this book will bring back many memories.

John Snell has always been associated with railways. Although trained in the legal profession, he had a keen interest and later a profound knowledge of technical things. After turning his back on the gowns and a stint with London Transport, he became actively involved in the first preserved Railway in the World, the Talyllyn. Finally he was the GM of the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway for 28 years. He has written half a dozen books about railways. In his latest book, John takes us through half a century of travels on all five continents. As the title suggests, trains were running on broad, standard and narrow gauges. Exotic locations like Fiji are covered as well as better known locations. In fact, the only major countries not covered are Russia, Japan, China and India. Switzerland is; see how Göschenen looked in 1962, the Lötschberg as a single line, the Furka in 2000. John's narrative is very personal, yet always informative. He took most of the 434 photographs himself; they are all full of atmosphere. Taken on slides, by now forty years old, they have been on the whole skilfully reproduced and are reason enough to treat you to this book. You cannot look through this book only once and then put it away - browse again and again and enjoy something different every time! **GMH**

ZUGE AM GOTTHARD – JUBILAUM 2007

DVD by Ernst B. Leutwiler. 60 mins. It is available in the UK from R. Smith, Rhus, Banff Road, Keith, AB55 5ET (to whom cheques should be made payable - or pay via PayPal) for £23.99, including postage and packaging.

This DVD shows some of the huge variety of trains that ran over the Gotthard in September 2007 during the

125th anniversary of the famous line over the Alps. The DVD has three sections, each of approximately 20 minutes. Each section is filmed to high quality from a static camera, with no zoom or pan, making you feel you are there. There is a brief commentary introducing most of the trains, otherwise the only noise is the sound of the trains passing. The commentary is in German, spoken clearly and slowly, and is easily understood with even a low level of German understanding. The first section was filmed in open country between Schwyz and Steinen, on the morning of Saturday 8th September. Amongst the wide variety of trains there is a Re460 with a hotchpotch of coaches on a Cisalpino service. These trains will become EMU operated as soon as Alstom can deliver the new sets. An interesting contrast is a new FLIRT EMU on a local service being passed by the TEE livery "Grey mouse" historic EMU. One of the steam powered specials, with a German pacific roars past.

The next section is at the south end of Erstfeld station on Thursday 6th September. Erstfeld, of course, is the iconic depot at the northern end of the Gotthard, and is always full of activity. Variety includes the latest Vossloh "Cargo" liveried Bo-Bo diesel running in from the Amsteg base tunnel workings, an Re4/4 with a single van, Re10/10 freights with Re4/4 bankers, a "Sersa" diesel loco with a ballast train that has a flat wagon on the back with a worker riding on it quite safely, Hupac trains (including one uncharacteristically lightly loaded with just 3 lorries), a Post Office train, mixed freight trains and a variety of passenger trains.

The final section, filmed at Intschi on Saturday 8th September, has plenty of action. It is remarkable how all the special trains were slotted into the normal timetable, although many freights were diverted over the Lotschberg. Amongst the variety are "Railion" red locos on freights, sometimes double headed with BLS locos, the "Churchill" Red Arrow EMU, the TEE EMU again, and the stirring sight, with masses of clag, the German pacifics, one coal fired, one oil, double heading a motley collection of coaches with an historic electric loco on the back for insurance. This particular sequence is repeated as a finale to the DVD.

This is a great DVD to just sit back and watch, relax, and see the variety of trains roll by.

Footnote

Bill Weber, a member in the United States, notes that the Swiss Transport Museum is listing a new 96-page book about Louis Favre the builder of the Gotthard tunnel for SFr22, or about US\$20.

European Railways Combined Volume II, 2008 Edition - Austria & Switzerland

Published by AEB Rail Publications, 27 Chatsworth Avenue, Warton, Preston PR4 1BQ.
Language: English. 108 pages. Format 15 cm x 25 cm; softback, perfect bound.
An order form can be downloaded from www.aebmail.co.uk Price: £9.95 post free

In the 10 years or so since Platform 5 last published their Swiss Railways book many changes have taken place in Switzerland. A great deal of new stock has been put into service with the consequent withdrawal of older classes, whilst a trend to merge some of the private railways into singly managed entities has continued.

This book is one of what is becoming an annual series, covering both the UK and a limited number of countries in Europe that aims to present an up to date record of operational motive power. The latest release of 4 volumes (1 UK and 3 Europe) has been updated to 29 November 2007.

The first 44 pages of the book cover Austria (ÖBB, independent railways and tramways), with the remaining 64 pages devoted to Switzerland. The Swiss section starts with an explanation of the method of calculating the check number, which follows the serial number of all computerised numbers. There follows a list of Federal Railways depots and then sections dealing with all its shunting tractors, electric locomotives, electric shunting locomotives, diesel locomotives and departmental locomotives. Under the heading of each class, for which no technical information is given, is a list of current operational locomotives within the class as well as names (if carried) and allocations (where known). Also included are more recently withdrawn examples. Of particular note are listings of the numbers of stock on order but not yet delivered.

The Private Railways section starts with an index of all the railways showing their code and name. Each company is then individually dealt with, showing the gauge(s) of the line(s) operated followed by a short description and a numerical list of all powered stock giving the type and allocation where applicable. Operational historic stock within each company is included. Groupings of companies show the constituents listed separately under the group heading but for those more familiar with the old names these can easily be located within the text from the index at the beginning of the section. As a bonus there is a section at the end of the book covering tramways in Switzerland giving under the heading of each operator numerical listings of both their operational trams and works cars.

Even though there is little or no technical information in the book, it succeeds in giving an overall picture of the current situation on what is operational on the railways and tramways of Switzerland. A number of errors occur, particularly in the Private Railways section, but it is understood these are being addressed by the publisher for the 2009 edition. The book represents excellent value for money and will be a handy reference on visits to Switzerland as well as providing a basis on which to undertake further research.

Shedmaster