

To Switzerland in guineas. Part 1, Geoffrey Kichenside's recollections of the Ian Allan tours

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To Switzerland in guineas

The first part of Geoffrey Kichenside's recollections of the Ian Allan tours

Between-station stop on 19 May 1961 on the BLS to look at the snow protection. In the centre is the "boss", Ian Allan.

Photos: Geoffrey Kichenside except where stated

I was interested in the reference in the March issue of *Swiss Express* to the Ian Allan Swiss Tours, (priced in guineas), which that firm organised in the 1960s. While I had nothing to do with the pricing policy I travelled on several of them and actually led a few. At the time I was one of Ian Allan's editors, originally covering *Model Railway Constructor* and later *Railway World*.

The first Ian Allan Swiss holiday was from 13th – 21st May 1961, a two-centre arrangement staying in Brunnen at the south end of Lake Luzern and Gunten on the north-east side of Lake Thun. The aim was to show beautiful Switzerland and the efficiency of the Swiss transport (particularly the railway system) to primarily British railway enthusiasts, although participants came from other parts of the world as well. We included not only excursions to

Later that day the group is ready to board the BLS Blue Arrow set after walking along the railway's mountainside path.

the well-known sights, but also out-of-the-way places and a few behind-the-scenes visits. At a few places we were invited to do things like leaving trains between stations, which would not only be frowned on in Britain, but positively forbidden. The idea was pushed by that doyen of writers on Swiss railways Cecil J. Allen, ably supported by the staff of what



was then called the Swiss National Tourist Office (SNTO) in London. Although Ian Allan Travel was then in its early days, the itinerary planning and travel arrangements, ticketing, hotels, and excursions were organised by SNTO, and one or more members of their London staff escorted the holidays throughout. The holidays were also accompanied by Ian Allan Ltd staff and as I had already been to Switzerland independently on two or three previous occasions I was asked to join. This was mainly to assist in guiding the group during travel, to ensure that we were all at the right platform at stations, that we were on the right train and in the right reserved accommodation.

On some trips we had reserved seats in ordinary coaches and on others we were in special coaches shunted from one train to another where we needed to change trains.

At some places during the day a meal was provided, perhaps in a station or mountain restaurant, but at the hotels it was usually a half-board arrangement. Things rarely went wrong although once, when booked on the 'Lorely Express' from Hook of Holland to Basel, the train ran in three portions and the restaurant car was not included on our train. One of our party took advantage of a few minutes stop (at Koln?), and came back with a few bars of chocolate carefully

RhB transfer on 4 June 1962 on the way from St Gallen to St Moritz. Our first class coaches were attached to the back of a Landquart-Davos service seen here leaving Klosters, but on to St Moritz we ran as an extra.



Queen Victoria immortalised in the rockface of the BLS Viktoria Tunnel.

broken into equal squares so that all 40 or so members of that group had one piece! It was a very surprised Swiss restaurant car manager later that day at Basel who found he had an unscheduled group for dinner to be served before Bern.

On the first holiday it was just as well that we had SNTO and Ian Allan Ltd staff, for the group totalled about 80 participants and British railway enthusiasts do have a tendency to wander off to photograph something of interest on the other side of the station just as the train on which the group are travelling is approaching. Hardly surprising at that time when there were such delights still to be seen as "Krokodiles", Ae3/6, Ae4/7 and many other rod-coupled electric locomotives from the early electric years of the SBB,

and their equivalents on the BLS and metre gauge RhB. There was even the odd steam locomotive, and the Stansstad – Engelberg Railway was still isolated until December 1964 and had not yet morphed into the Luzern – Stans – Engelberg, let alone the Zentralbahn.

Transfer from one base to another was not necessarily by the most direct main line route. Brunnen to Gunten was by way of Luzern and while we continued by the Brunig line to Interlaken we reached it via the summit of Mount Pilatus and Alpnachstad. Our luggage meanwhile was taken from one hotel by luggage transfer by train as if by magic, and awaited us in our rooms at the next hotel so





From St Moritz the 1962 holiday included a day on the Bernina line to Tirano. It included a stop at Brusio where former Bernina Ge 4/4 No 181 (originally built in 1916 as a Ge6/6 with six-wheel bogies for freight) is seen approaching.

there was no need for participants to take cases on excursions. The enthusiasts' holidays were nearly all in First Class train accommodation, both in getting to and from Switzerland and within Switzerland, except where local trains were one-class only, and mostly SNT0 booked us via Harwich and Hook of Holland using the Rhine Valley route through Germany.

The second holiday in 1962, which left London on 1 June was an ambitious four-centre venture, staying at St Gallen, St Moritz, Zermatt and Luzern, two nights at each venue. Even though it was June the snow was still well down the mountains that year. Although the transfers as far Pause at Bernina Ospizio on our trip to Tirano.



as Zermatt were by the regular routes, from there to Luzern was via the very popular BLS day excursion through the Simplon Tunnel to Stresa on Lake Maggiore. My notes of the time are missing but I think on this occasion we came back by the BLS route to Interlaken and the Brunig line to Luzern, but on another transfer from Southern Switzerland we went on to Milano and reached Luzern over the Gotthard.

As illustrated on the leaflet shown in SE 117 the 1963 adult tour was based at Interlaken, Lugano and Zürich and in 1965 we were based at Brig and Engelberg. With 1964 the year of the Swiss National Exhibition (Expo 64) at Lausanne, I was involved in seeing various things in Switzerland for the magazines *Railway World* and *Modern Railways* rather than escorting the holiday

tours. Handling Expo 64 traffic on SBB was a fascinating subject involving planning on a massive scale with trains from all parts of the country rather like the Cup Final, or the Olympics in Britain, but not just for one day or a fortnight as the exhibition ran from 30 April to 25 October. A day in the new Lausanne signalling centre saw it from the sharp end, with the many extra passenger trains having to be fitted between the freight services and the empty stock of Expo 64 extras to and from Denges marshalling yard at Renens. Also looking at freight train services I had a day in Luzern control office watching traffic over the Gotthard. Fascinating here was the fact that the Luzern-based controller was speaking in Schweizerdeutsch on the radio to his opposite number in Bellinzona who replied in Italian yet both could understand each other.

But back to 1963 which also saw the first of several Swiss railway holiday tours for youngsters. No SNT0 staff on these trips for I was thrown in at the deep end and told I was to lead the groups, which from memory were about 20 strong, although I did have the help of one or two parents as the under 12s had to be accompanied by one. Fortunately I knew the way to Switzerland and around the country, and we were booked by the Short Sea Route, and on the stalwart CB, the Calais – Basel train. The first problem on that 1963 trip was that train CB ran in two portions, the first with the couchette coaches in which I, and most of the group, were booked. The parents with the remaining boys were in sleeping cars running in the second portion. By the arrival in Basel this was around 30-min. late. The entire group was due to travel together in reserved

accommodation from Basel to Zürich – and I had the group ticket! I inquired at the information desk what we should do and was told to go on in our reserved seats and the late running members of the group would follow. Sure enough as our train left Liestal the conductor appeared and told me the remainder of the party had been located as they passed through from the French to Swiss parts of Basel station and would meet us in Zurich for the onward trip to Rapperswil. On that first junior holiday most of the group stayed in the youth hostel within a sports complex, the parents and their children in a hotel. For the following junior holidays we stayed in guest houses, or small private hotels, the year after at Stansstad, and in 1965 at Arth am See.

There are plenty of memories of those Swiss holidays. Sometimes we disembarked from trains between stations, as on the occasion when we inspected an avalanche shelter on the then single track BLS main line in the Lotschental, walking on the mountainside BLS footpath above or under the spectacular viaducts near Hochtenn. Or getting off a Furka-Oberalp steam special on the open mountainside, to take a close look at the Steffenbach folding bridge (today on the Furka Dampfbahn section), not to mention slipping on and sitting in a patch of melting snow! This was followed by a walk through the 548m long spiral tunnel just below Gletsch while the steam train waited at the bottom. There were the behind the scenes tours of Zürich Hauptbahnhof and the locomotive depot, inspections of mountain cable car control rooms, of course the magnificent mountain scenery, and occasional beautiful wood-panelled historic de-luxe first class saloons allocated for our use. Then there was the meticulously detailed planning of the routes and sometimes tight connections by SNTÖ, railway, lake steamer, and mountain line staff to make these holidays such a success.

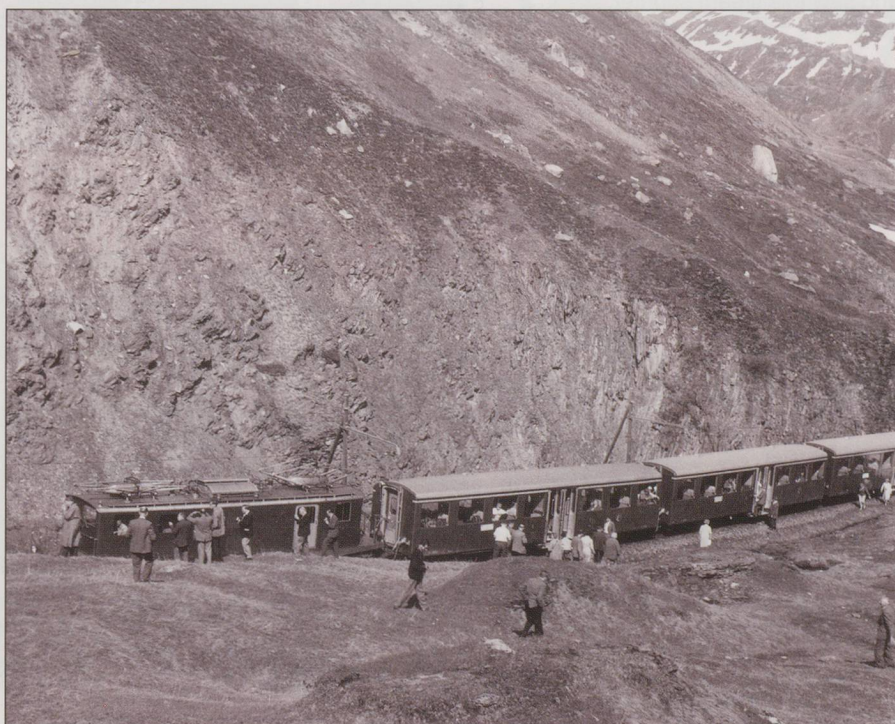
One memory I have, inadvertently touched on in SE118, was in respect of signalling at Rapperswil. I had arranged a visit to the control room of this important junction for the junior party. The switch panel there looked very much like the one-control-switch panels used at some locations on BR at that time. The stationmaster turned what I assumed to be a route switch amongst a cluster of switches. Two or three minutes later a panel light alongside the switch came on. Between my limited German and even less Zuri Schweizerdeutsch, and the stationmaster's small amount of English. I asked if the

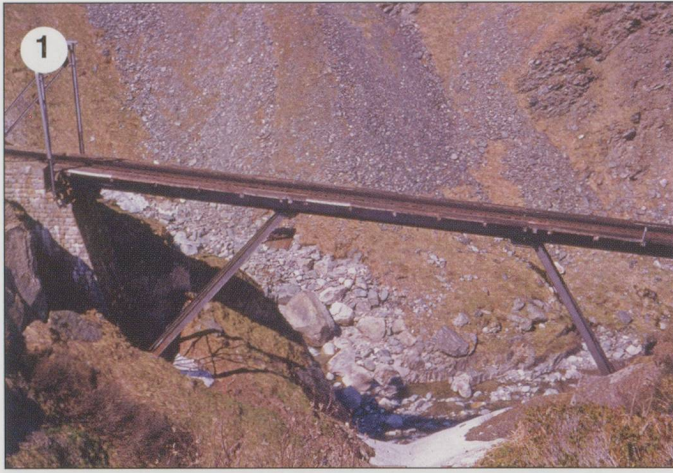


The following day 6 June 1962 we followed the Glacier Express route. Our coaches were coupled on a local service as far as Andermatt seen here at Oberalpsee waiting to cross an east-bound train.

turning of the switch set all the points. Effectively the reply was *“when I turn the switch it makes a light come on in the yard hut, the man in the hut goes out and throws over the hand point levers for that route and switches on the light on my panel to say that he has done it. I then open the signal”*. This was the basis of much continental signalling then, even where the points were controlled from an interlocked lever frame, the main running signals and the block system were controlled by the stationmaster, often personally. Entrance – Exit panels were then coming into use as in Britain and today

Later, our train now running as an extra stopped near the Steffenbach folding bridge and the group are seen leaving the train on the open mountainside.

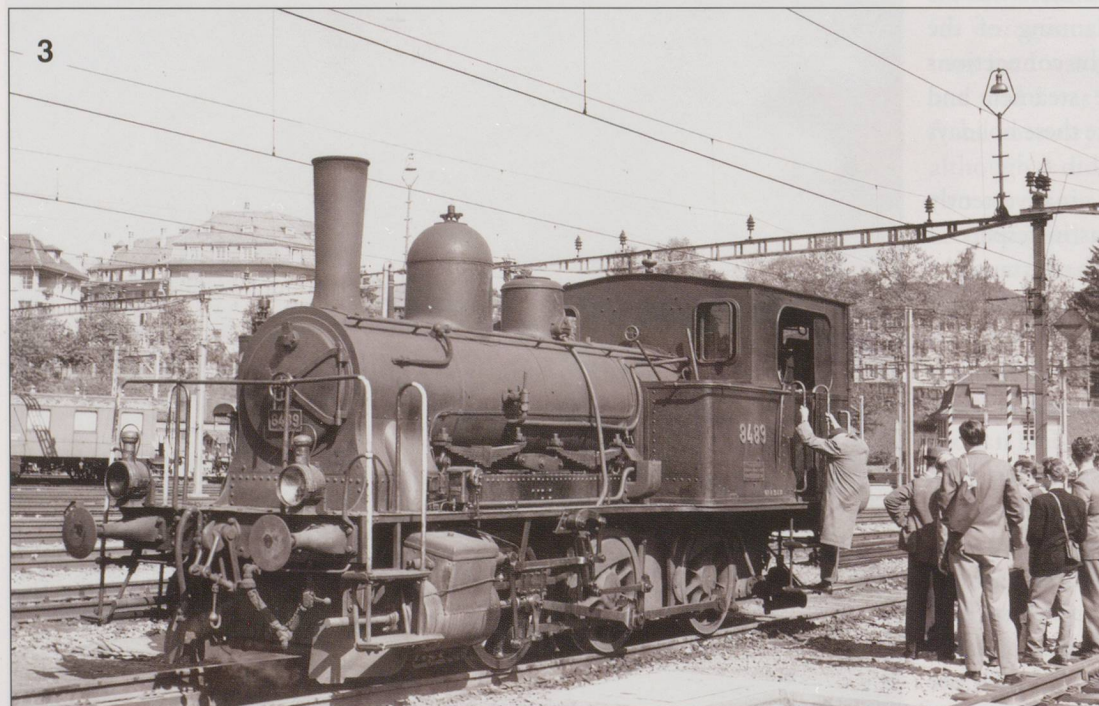




1. Close view of the Steffenbach folding bridge on the former Furka-Oberalp line between Realp and the original Furka summit tunnel.


2. Mountain climbing while we were in Zermatt on 7 June 1962. The Matterhorn seen from the Stockhorn cable car which extends the mountain experience on from the Gornergratbahn top station.


3. Luzern, 9 June 1962, where we visited the locomotive depot and saw this steam shunter.



Switzerland leads with the European Train Control System.

When we went on the Gemstock aerial cableway at Andermatt the director enthusiastically explained in detail the back-up system for rescuing passengers if the cable cars should stop in mid flight and not be able to proceed. A trap door in the floor of each car could be opened and passengers in a sort of bosun's chair attached to a cable could be lowered one by one down onto the mountainside below. Guess who was volunteered to demonstrate the escape procedure – fortunately not too far out from the lower station but I finished up in the snow!

These holidays not only showed the participants the excellent Swiss transport system but also introduced them, particularly the youngsters, to a different culture and also food. At Stansstad for example the jolly larger-than-life hotel proprietress most evenings served up long flat pasta with the evening meal – virtually unknown to British youngsters at that time. The boys immediately dubbed it “fanbelt” and it was not their favourite Swiss food and a fair bit was left. To this day I can still hear ringing in my ears the owner's shrill voice “*essen, essen Sie müssen essen!*” As for the adults the food in hotels and restaurants was good and sometimes included Swiss delicacies. But on one tour continental breakfast was never really enough for one participant. Travelling from Engelberg to Southern Switzerland he had breakfast in the hotel, a breakfast snack on the ship to Fluelen, something more at the station and, since the train over the Gotthard included a restaurant car, he then had a full cooked breakfast. These holidays were certainly enlightening and if he was missing we knew where to look for him! 

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4. While staying at Zurich in June 1963 we joined this steam special on the Sihltalbahn.

5. Swans nesting by the sidings at Stansstad in April 1964. If staff wanted to move coaches in the nesting season they could be faced with aggressive swans!

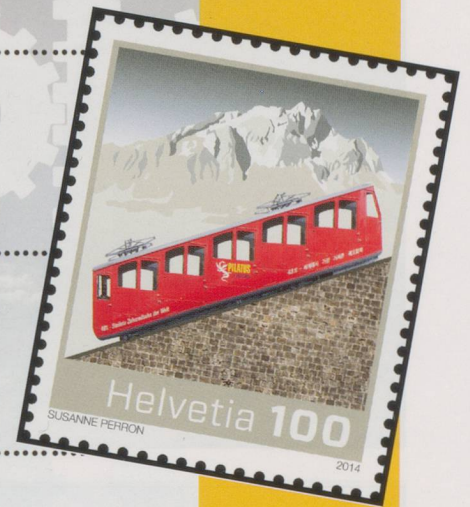
6. 11 June 1965. The author's 'Emergency Escape' from the Gemstock cable car, Andermatt.

Photo: A. B. MacLeod

Pilatus Philately

Michael Farr

125 Jahre Pilatus Zahnradbahn 125 ans du chemin de fer à crémaillère du Pilatus
 125 anni delle ferrovie a cremagliera del Pilatus 125 Years Pilatus cogwheel railway



This year's postage stamp issue with a railway theme celebrates 125-years of the steepest cogwheel railway – the Pilatusbahn. Swiss Post issued a CHF1.00 stamp on 8th May and this will be available from post offices for a year, or until stocks are exhausted. A sheetlet of 10 stamps is also available as well as a “maximum card” – a postcard with a picture of the little red railcar dwarfed by the mountainside as it climbs at a remarkably steep angle. The card can be bought only at the special philatelic counters, or by post.

The railway began operating on 4th June 1889 after 600 men had toiled for 400 days to construct this, still the steepest cogwheel railway in the world. Due to the gradient of the line the engineer Eduard Locher-Freuler (1840-1910) designed a unique rack system, named after him, and because he later turned his efforts to bridge and tunnel

building no other railway uses this particular design of rack. He also chose a gauge of 800mm and introduced some particularly small radius curves as his line conquered gradients of up to 48%, almost 1 in 2, over 4.5km.

Mount Pilatus, 2,132m high, is shrouded in legend. Its name is said to come from Pontius Pilate whose soul came to rest in a small Alpen lake as he wrestled with his guilt over the crucifixion of Christ. According to the legend anyone disturbing his spirit would cause a devastating storm and in an effort to protect against this the Council of Lucerne forbade people from walking on the mountain, which became known as the forbidden mountain. This restriction was lifted at the end of the 16th century, so today's visitors can wander at will. There are, however, no guarantees about the weather! 