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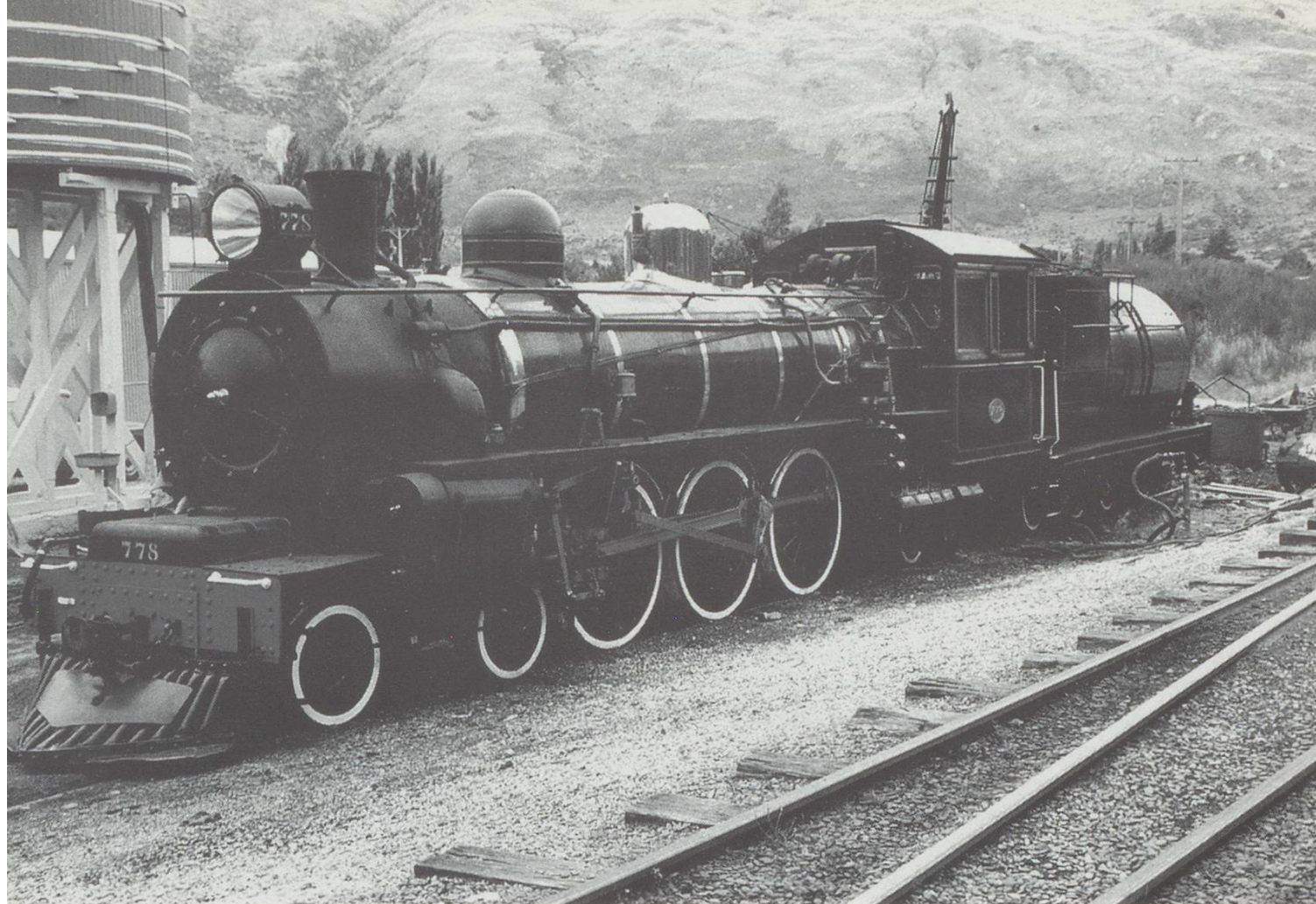
A visit to our Antipodean relations, or The S.R.S. "Down Under" by David Broomfield

Now that my wife and I have both fully retired we were at last able to take up a long-standing invitation to visit her schoolfriends who emigrated to New Zealand 35 years ago. What a trip it was and what excellent hosts....but that's another story. Readers may be asking what this has got to do with the S.R.S. but much as I was looking forward to the adventure, the thought of Swiss Railways deprivation for over a month caused me to think of ways of alleviating that distress. Well, the journal proclaims "over 950 Members Worldwide" and, being vaguely aware of the existence of an Australasian Membership Co-ordinator, a quick check before departure revealed that not only did Darryl King live in New Zealand rather than Australia but that he was a Christchurch resident, the city in which our hosts live and which was to be the centre of our visit. I duly noted his address.

On arrival, a glance in the telephone book produced his number so I gave him a ring. Darryl is very easy to get talking and we were soon into a long conversation in which he gave me a lot of

information ranging from his activities on behalf of the Society to the addresses of model shops in Christchurch and the present state of New Zealand Railways. As I hoped, he soon suggested a meeting and indeed proposed that he should get some of the other local members together to meet me as well. I was a bit concerned that I was being regarded as an ambassador from the "home" society and might be treated too much like an honoured guest but, of course, I needn't have worried - New Zealanders are not like that, they're just friendly and straightforward!

When the appointed evening arrived Darryl insisted on picking me up and whisked me off to our first stop which turned out to be the pavement, it being a warm summer evening, outside Eurail Models near the junction of Barbadoes(sic) Street and Edgware Road where I was introduced to half-a- dozen local members and Swiss railway aficionados including the shop's proprietor, Geof Elmsly. Geof is early retired from teaching and is now able to devote his time to "his proper job"



running the shop! After chatting about this-and-that, railways in general, Swiss railways in particular, the weather and the price of fish, as railway enthusiasts do the world over we eventually moved inside the shop as the sun sank lower. It was a sight for sore eyes - I would never have believed that one could find a shop devoted entirely to Continental European railways round the other side of the world but there it was. And what an excellent stock including a special feast, whole racks of RhB Bemo. Geof also stocks most of the other well know ranges including Roco (plenty of Swiss items) which he displays on shelves in glass cases, an idea which he confirmed that he picked up from model shops on the Continent itself during a recent trip, so much easier for would-be purchasers to see and so much more enticing. To the rear of the shop was a large and impressive HO layout featuring Alpine scenery and lots of Swiss stock unfortunately with services temporarily suspended. This layout and an RhB diorama also built by Geof are used frequently to publicise the Society.

In due course and after politely ejecting several members of the public who had wandered into the shop - who says model railways have lost their pull - we adjourned to a hostelry where I was

Previous page: Diesel electri Co-Co DX5419 (NZ Rail, DX class of 1976) At Kaikora, about 100 miles north of Christchurch, South Island on southbound freight, waiting to cross with a north bound freight, Feb 1996. Above: Preserved Ab Class 4-6-2 No. 778of NZ Rail, awaiting further service on the Kingston Flyer - preserved branch line Otago Province, South Island, Feb. 1996.

Photos:DavidBroomfield

introduced to Peter Platt, its manager and another Society member. Peter is a Marklin fan but he has also managed to adorn his establishment, which was a sort of cross between a Macdonald's and a pub (if he will pardon the description), with two circuits of LGB operating at ceiling level; one featuring the usual Orenstein and Koppel plus Austrian narrow gauge style stock and the other, much longer, a big diesel hauling bogie freight stock much resembling that which I subsequently saw on New Zealand Rail. I was a bit concerned that "exuberant" customers might try to bring the trains down but was assured that New Zealanders didn't behave like that and that, in any case, Peter was quite large enough to stop them. Again the conversation ranged widely. I was quizzed on the construction of catenary, finding myself regarded as a bit of an expert following my article in Continental Modeller which I was flattered to find

everyone seemed to have read. I tried to disabuse them of that idea but offered what help I could. Incidentally can anyone confirm that posts are erected vertically and not at right angles to the ground irrespective of the gradient of the line? Seems like a silly question but what's the answer? I asked why the attraction to Swiss Railways but of course there's never a real answer to that one although I was directed to the similarities with the local network: a rugged mountainous terrain predicating extensive use of the narrow gauge, 3'6" versus Metre gauge etc. The time flew by and all too soon, although it was well past midnight, we said our goodbyes and Darryl got me home. My thanks to him and to Geof, Peter, Grant Cousins, Michael Poynton and Geoff Proctor for a marvellous evening.

Darryl tells me that our Australasian membership currently numbers 40 of which 19 are in New Zealand. Besides co-ordinating the collection of subscriptions and thus saving the Society considerable bank charges he tries to issue a local newsletter to supplement Swiss Express when time and his job with the electricity company will allow and, with the agreement of his members, circulates a local membership list. The local members have group meetings in Christchurch including talks and videos by anyone who has recently visited "Mecca" and participate in local model railway exhibitions shewing layouts and the Albula diorama to publicise the delights of Swiss railways. Their enthusiasm is clearly boundless.

Of the railways of New Zealand themselves they are indeed to narrow gauge and do pass through some sensational mountain scenery but there I feel the comparison with Switzerland ends. Electrification is limited, branches have been completely pruned and, apart from some commuter services in Auckland and Wellington, passenger trains are restricted to a tourist service amounting in almost all cases to no more than one round trip a day on each of the main lines. Clearly this is not intended to provide for business and domestic passengers who go by road or fly. The problem, of course, is that having been built to the narrow gauge to limit the already extensive engineering works, the lines are seldom suitable for high speed running and the trains are very slow - four hours and ten minutes for the 230kms from Christchurch to Greymouth for instance.

When I made that admittedly spectacular journey, the train left half-an-hour late (no apologies - even BR does better than that!) delayed by an incoming freight. These are the basis of the surviving network with block coal trains and lines of well loaded container flats which seem to keep the number of lorries on the already empty roads to a bare minimum. The system has recently been acquired by the ubiquitous Wisconsin Central so everyone waits with baited breath to see what changes will occur.

I never expected to circumnavigate the globe and it was indeed the trip of a lifetime but the meeting with fellow Swiss rail enthusiasts gave it that little bit extra. If anyone else is going that way I suggest you get in touch, they'll make you very welcome.

What you missed in February

From the West Midlands SRS Group

The West Midlands Group officially meets on the last Wednesday evening of each month, in one or other of our homes around the area, or more often by arrangement.

Last February we met in the home of Richard Pinner in Birmingham. I believe that a number of members around the country will be familiar with Richard's fine collection of photographs taken over many years from the high mountain paths of Switzerland. This was our first visit, and what a treat was in store for us as he showed us some spectacular views north and south of the Lötschberg Tunnel. We hope to make a return visit later in the year.

Earlier in the month we were able to help a new member of the Society as he takes his first steps in railway modelling. On another evening we had a running session on an MOB layout with a visit from RhB stock including a superb model of RhB No. 1. This model could almost tempt me back to steam!

The other special treat in February was to view a video taken by one of our group on his annual skiing trip to Switzerland. He took a ride on the twice monthly steam hauled train on the RhB and on the return run he was able to ride on the footplate of No. 107.

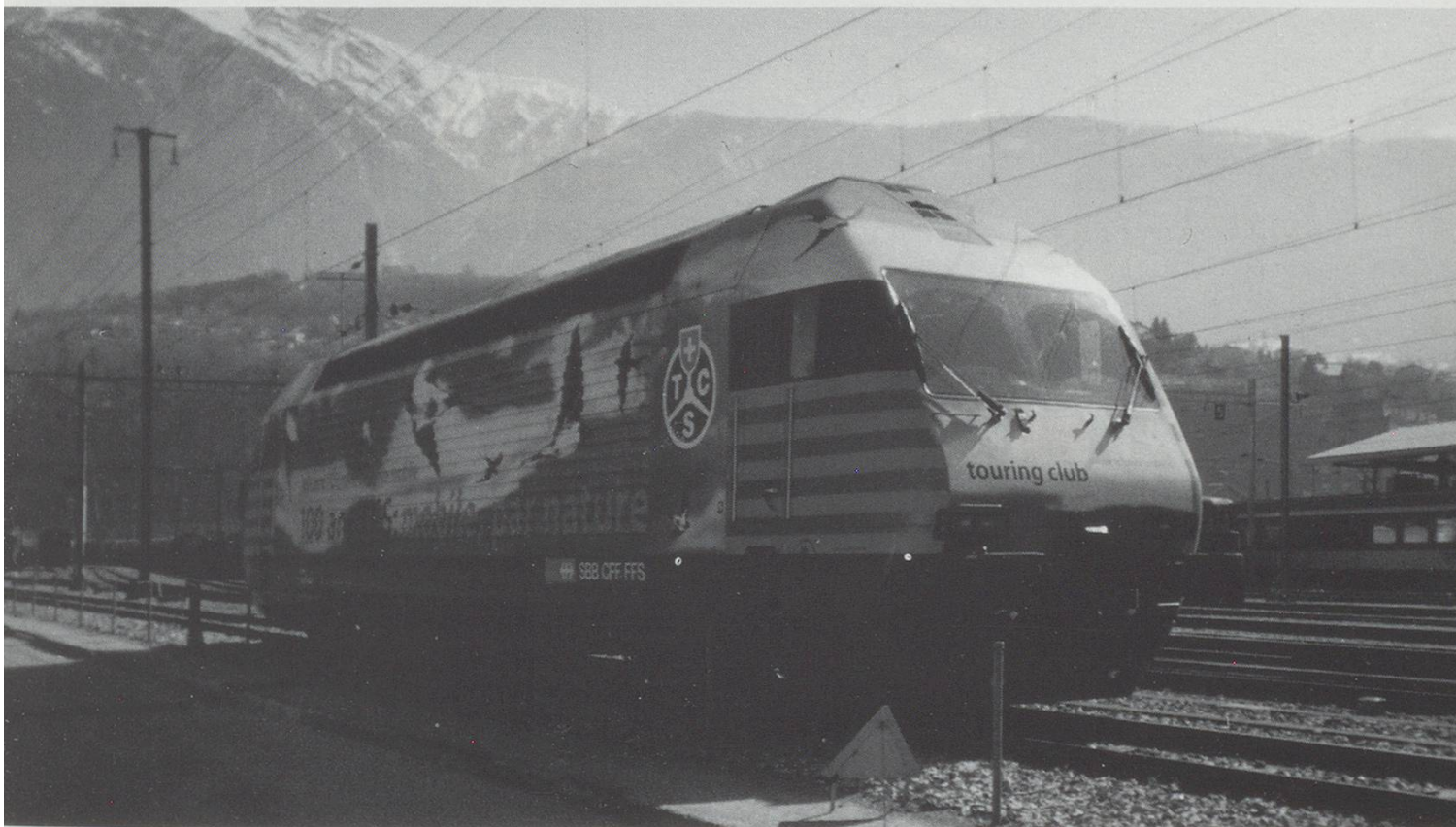
See what you missed!

If you would like to join with us, contact Gerald Savine, details on the Society page.



Above: The old coach of the Rigi-Scheidegg Bahn referred to in Swiss Express vols. 4/7 & 4/8 this photo was taken in 1985 by our member Michael Cross.

Below: The latest livery on Re460-022 for TCS seen here at Brig on 11th March 1996, photo by Steve Horobin.





Above: The high level Post bus station that has been constructed over the main station at Chur. Photo G.J.S.Carr

Below: The two open coaches obtained from the Brünig line now in service on the Aigle-Sepsey-Diableret (ASD)

