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BRING ME SOME ROCK FROM THE PIER DAD



All the pictures are by Ron Smith and were taken at Luzern on 26/8/93 or 17/8/96 (next page),

grabbed it out and put it into railway wagons. "So it was railway ballast?" I asked. "Not necessarily" was the reply. He went on to explain that at the moment it was being used for a road construction project some distance away.

Christine and I were staying in Luzern and decided to take a trip across the lake on one of the superb ships. The views are marvellous, and we sat in the sunshine mesmerised by the sparkling sun-tipped ripples of the wake. Suddenly I became aware of a colourful barge chugging past us towards Luzern, loaded down to around six inches of free-board by a cargo of fresh granite ballast, looking like railway ballast.

This mystery had to be investigated so I went to find a crew member. I asked what it was all about. Not perturbed by this non-typical tourist enquiry, the sailor said that if I looked forward to where he was pointing just beyond Stans, I would see a scar in the side of the mountain close to the lake. This was the quarry where the stone was produced. From there it passed by conveyor belt to the lakeside and was dropped into the barges. The barges then took it across to Luzern where a crane

I pondered this. So it was taken by conveyor to the barge, shipped across to Luzern, grabbed out and into rail hopper wagons, taken to a siding and dropped onto the ground, scooped up and put into lorries and taken to the road works. I asked the crewman why on earth they did not simply load it

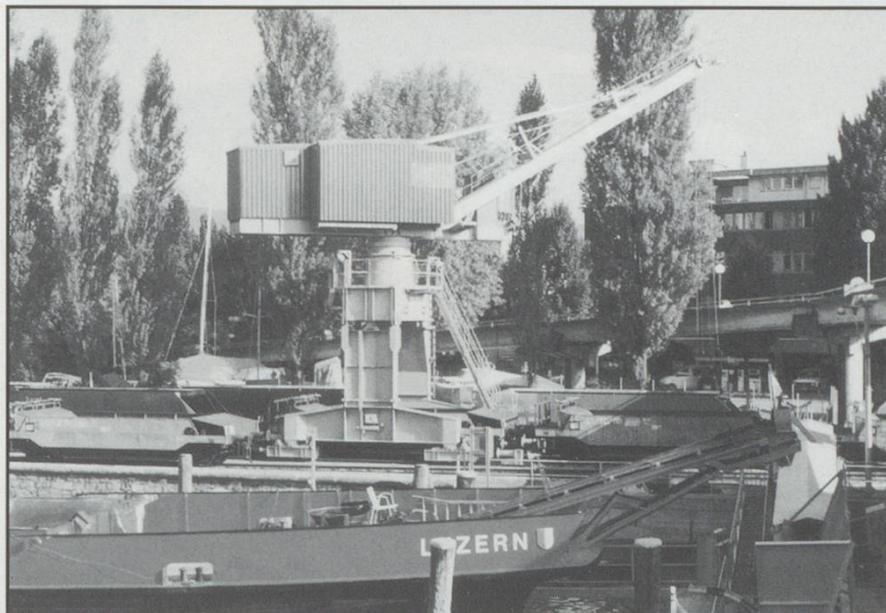


into lorries at the quarry and drive it to the road works. He looked at me pityingly as the answer was obvious, "Pollution!" he said emphatically, and went off.

In Britain we would not consider anything but the cheapest cost. In Switzerland they have a more responsible attitude, and are wealthy enough to pay the extra to have things done in the best way for the environment. Suitably ashamed I rejoined Christine and determined to find the pier when we returned to Luzern.

The next day we crossed the front of the station and continuing on, passed the boat landings and the bus park, round to the back of

the station sidings. A slightly elevated walkway carried us over the lake ships' docks and workshops, and then there was the pier ahead of us. The line is an extension of the siding, which continues across the road and under a self-propelled straddle grab crane on its own tracks so that it could load the wagons without needing a shunting loco to move them. The hopper wagons that I have seen there have been



mostly SBB but some DB wagons have also been seen. I have never yet caught the shunter moving the wagons, but the facility appears to be regularly used.

Sometime between August 1993 and August 1995 a new crane was installed with a sign "PSKRAN MANNHEIM" prominently fixed to it. It is larger than the old one with a much superior cab for the operator, and

appears to have a larger capacity grab bucket. This would make a useful addition to a model layout. The barges are fairly simple to make, and the operation would be a useful feature to fill the inevitable corners on a baseboard. Unfortunately my own modelling skills are not up to it but who knows? One day I will have a go.

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Ron Smith

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