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THOUGHTS FROM THE CHAIR - Paul Russenberger

It's a Bank Holiday in England, so it's raining as I write this. "Just like Switzerland," you might say. Actually, a fairer comment than you might think. After the Massif Central in France, the higher land of Switzerland can be the first place of significant altitude that westerly winds from the Atlantic encounter. Clouds can easily gather and drop their moisture, though given the picture postcard views so reasonably shown in advertising material one could be forgiven for assuming that a wet day in Switzerland is a rarity.

As we well know in the London Branch, most of Alan Pike's photographs sometimes seem to be taken in the pouring rain, or so he tells us. He often says "I must have been there, it was raining." That is not really true, but the first time I met him in Switzerland at the BLS 100 steam parade at Därligen, it was raining. How any of my images came out at all I regard as a miracle. I do recall being the last person to retreat indoors, but I had come prepared with full wet weather gear bought a few years previously for a camping trip to Iceland.

This may be the ultimate challenge for modellers. Has anyone thought of simulating falling rain on a layout? I have seen layouts with real water in docks – a diorama based on Exeter comes to mind – but never rain. Given that trains in Switzerland do sometimes disappear into clouds, has anyone thought of using a cloud instead of a tunnel mouth for the entry into the fiddle yard?

No, I'm not really being serious. Or am I?

Unless you are modelling an exact location and doing so with no deviation from the original, then any model has a degree of fantasy to it. I have been collecting HO models for over 35 years. I was still at school when I "went continental" – and some of the other members of the school society thought I ought to be referred to the school doctor for treatment of this psychiatric disorder – but have never regretted it. Apart from a terminus-to-fiddle-yard-with-continuous-run layout I started in the loft when I lived with my parents, I haven't really got very far, with all the usual excuses. Currently, track is cut and assembled for a working diorama on the French – Swiss border, to be set in the 1960s in Canton Zargau (Zargovie in French). I mentioned this to a Swiss enthusiast friend and received a listing of stock known to have operated through Pontarlier and Delle in the 1960s. I am grateful, very grateful to him; but I want to run my models in my fantasy world. I want my Soviet sleeping car to arrive behind an Re4/4 II and SNCF 232 U 1 to take a few coaches out in the direction of Paris. I know that 232 U 1 was withdrawn long before 11101 appeared, though both ran in the 1960s and both classes have hauled Soviet sleeping cars.

It doesn't worry me; it's a corner of Switzerland I would have liked to have seen, would have liked to have existed and where it never rains. If it ever appears at an AGM or in "Continental Modeller," you will get a fuller explanation.

It might even stop raining! And Judith has suggested I should do some modelling!

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