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HAVING A FIELD DAY

- photographing the Gotthard in 2006.

David Adams



11626/11347 heading a southbound Intermodal at Wassen.

Photos: David Adams.

Despite having used Erstfeld as a base for my Swiss wanderings for several years I have always fought shy of spending time at Wassen. This was mainly due to the fact that I can remember Wassen before the A2 autobahn was built and I have never quite come to terms with this scar on the landscape. However, in view of the decline in pure Swiss motive power on several freight workings I decided to spend Thursday 15th June 2006 capturing the current scene on the north ramp and enjoyed the added bonus of the autobahn being closed for the whole month due to a rock fall near Gurtellen.

Having studied maps of the area I started the day by heading for Shützen on the 09.28 Göschenen bus from Erstfeld. Shützen is the second stop and the journey time is about 5 minutes - the alternative is a good 30 minute walk. On alighting, I waited for the bus to

proceed before crossing the road and heading off in the same direction. After passing a wide drive leading up to a house there is a narrow path on the left which rises fairly steeply above a retaining wall. I took this relatively short path and turned left on reaching a road that leads onto the first overbridge south of Erstfeld.

The weather was almost perfect all day, just a slight haze in the distance. Arrival at this bridge earlier is pointless as southbound trains are still in shadow until about 09.30 by which time the sun has risen sufficiently and is illuminating them from the side so that shots in both directions are possible for about an hour. Southbound trains approach the bridge round a sweeping right hand curve which allows the full length of freight trains to appear in the shot. A steep wooded backdrop leading up to Schwandi, which can be accessed by a cable car from



523004 passing through the neutral section with the 09.01 Erstfeld - Zug S2 service north of Schwy

Ae6/6 11461 heading south with a Sersa infrastructure train at Shüten.



behind the Hotel Frohsinn, dominates the curve and Erstfeld can be seen in the distance. Freight trains are struggling to accelerate on the initial 1 in 38 climb from Erstfeld but passenger trains make swifter progress. It took 43 seconds

according to my camera clock between locos 11672/11175 heading a freight and its banking loco 11346 passing me, whereas in comparison the time for a train of similar length at Wassen was just 27 seconds. In the opposite direction the view of the railway is not so open, as trains appear from under another bridge about 250 metres to the south, but nevertheless it provides for some pleasing shots.

I spent 1½ hours here and saw 19 train movements giving an average of a train every 5 minutes. Having gone digital earlier in the year I

took a shot of almost everything that passed. The variety could not have been better with three consecutive southbound freights producing Re10/10 matching formations, 2 red, 2 Cargo and 2 green. The latter are now relatively rare with only 7 Re6/6s, no more than 8 SBB-C Re4/4iis and one Re4/4iii remaining in their original livery. These were banked by Re4/4iis 11346 (green), 11342 & Re6/6 11668 respectively. Ae6/6 11479 banked the first freight I saw and 11461 also headed south with a short

“Sersa” infrastructure train. Northbound, a pair of DB/Railion 185s headed a train of empty bogie hopper wagons (a regular working for a pair of 460s a few years ago) and later four 185s running light were followed by an Re20/20 foursome on an intermodal. Due to the autobahn closure most passenger trains that day were strengthened and 11108 (Swiss Express livery and currently the oldest SBB-P loco in daily main line use) with 11157 were hauling 14 vehicles on EC173, the 08.09 Schaffhausen – Venezia.

I planned to catch the bus back to Erstfeld - due there at 11.24 and then go forward by the 12.24 train to Göschenen. The bus ran 3 minutes late but fortune was on my side and I was able to join the 11.24 itself running 4 minutes late. Changing at Göschenen there was time to take a couple of shots of the MGB and of another Re20/20 formation before travelling up to Andermatt on the 12.09.

This is a good time of day here as Glacier Expresses abound (3 eastbound in an hour) providing several photo opportunities. Returning to Göschenen on the 13.28 I took the 13.45 bus to Wassen Bahnhof. I have since been told that the bus now only stops in the village at Wassen Post, a little further on, and it is therefore necessary to walk back past the Bahnhof to access the sharp left turn which leads down steeply, through a tunnel under the A2 autobahn, to the famous location of Wattingen curve on the lower level. Arriving at 14.00 I found lighting conditions suitable for shots in both directions until I departed at 16.15. Shots of southbound trains are probably better taken from a point where the Reuss River and the Gr. Windgällen (3rd. peak from the left in the distance – with Erstfeld lying on the valley



11157/11108 with the 12.25 Molano - Zürich at Wassen.

Running light, 185125/139/122/132 passing Shützen northbound on 13/06/2006.





11109/11209 passing a northbound freight with the 08.09 Shaffhausen - Venezia north of Schwyz.

185564/185567 heading north at Wassen.



floor beneath the left hand peak) can be included, and northbound trains from nearer to the tunnel. However, by moving around the grass bank overlooking the railway it is possible to add some different dimensions to avoid all shots being identical. I found that the best solution for dealing with light engines was to take pan shots from an elevated position. In fact the higher the position provided the more pleasing the results.

The lack of northbound freights was noticeable during the afternoon and there must have been a considerable imbalance between Italian exports and imports that day, hence the number of northbound trains with multiples of four locos at the head. Train movements again averaged one every 5 minutes and three southbound freights passed in just seven minutes from 15.05. The spectacle of the afternoon was the red container train conveying paper from Sweden to Italy at 14.51, top and tailed by two pairs of DB 185s. The pair at the rear did not return so I assume they continued to the Italian border. I was more than pleased with the variety of traction on offer, especially the number of

green SBB locos which made up for the absence of TXL, FNC, Hupac and R4C examples. Between trains I am always on the look out for wild life but that was a major disappointment - just one carrion crow in over two hours at Wassen and a solitary redstart appeared briefly at Shützen. That apart, it had been a truly wonderful day. Two days earlier I travelled to Schwyz and leaving the Bahnhof I walked north along the road paralleling the railway on the east side of the line for about 15-20 minutes until I reached a track leading to a

farmhouse. There is an opportunity here for shots in both directions and a neutral section can be included in shots looking north. Do any modellers include this feature on their layouts? Lauerzersee lies on the opposite side of the railway but cannot be included in any shots, unless of course you are able to carry a tall stepladder to the site as one photographer had done the previous morning! Muckspreading was in progress around the nearby farm building, fortunately down wind of my position. There were trains every 5½ minutes between 08.43 and 10.01 including the first time I had seen reversible working in operation between Arth-Goldau and Schwyz.

I still have more places to explore on my 2007 visits and am pleased to note that the rumoured use of ICNs on some Gotthard line workings has yet to materialise and will not lead to a reduction in loco hauled IC trains on this route, and who knows what other open access operators may have appeared on the freight scene by then? I hope that the above information will inspire those that have yet to explore these locations. Wednesdays and Thursdays are the peak days for freight, Sundays and Mondays being the quietest, but the daily sight of pairs of Re4/4iis on passenger trains is no more, their Gotthard duties having been taken-over by single Re460s.



ETR 470007/57 with the 07.10 Milano - Stuttgart at Shützen.

11203 with the 14.39 Locarno - Zürich at Wassen.



Editor's note: David has provided comprehensive lists of the movements that he witnessed on the days he describes here. Due to space limitations we have placed these on the Society website. If any reader wishes to receive a hard copy please write to me and I will print one off and mail it to you.