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MEMBERS' LETTERS

From Peter Arnold – By e-mail

I am responding to the article by David Adams on Swiss Reliability (Swiss Express – September 2007) having experienced four minor problems during a recent 3-week holiday in Switzerland. My wife and I always enjoy our Swiss holidays, during which we love high altitude walking, but if there are any chances of seeking-out steam I usually manage to arrange something! This year was no exception when we stayed first at Saas Fee and then Mürren.

On Sunday 26th August, just two days after riding from Gletsch to Realp on the Dampfbahn-Furka-Bergstrecke, we spent the day between Stalden-Saas and Zermatt photographing one of the scheduled MGB steam trains hauled by HG2/3 No.7 *Breithorn*. Although our train from Randa to Zermatt ran as scheduled the 12.30 ex-Zermatt did not put in an appearance at all.

Our second experience occurred on Tuesday 4th September. Because poor weather had dissuaded us from walking, we took the afternoon sailing on Lake Brienz on board the DS *Lötschberg*, paying the supplement to enjoy the quieter 1st class accommodation. During our return journey, taking an opportunity to go down to the main deck to look down into the engine room, I noticed the engineer's mate, with his hands looking very oily, talking to the engineer and pointing forwards. A short time later at Bönigen, after passengers had disembarked, the gangplanks withdrawn and with the ship seemingly ready to proceed, the engineer was seen to climb up to the bridge and speak to the captain. This was followed by an announcement to the effect that there would be a short delay due to a mechanical problem. Some ten minutes later the gangplanks were put back whereupon another announcement was made requesting all passengers to disembark and take a bus into Interlaken because the ship was unable to proceed. Some 60 passengers walked the short distance to the bus stop to await the next bus - the driver's facial expression when he came round the corner and saw the queue was indescribable!

The following Saturday, 8th September, saw us on the 10.33 departure from Brienz propelled by H2/3 No. 16 taking us to Rothorn Kulm, the starting point of our day's walk back down to Planalp via Lattgassli and the Chruterer Pass - an adventure in itself. During our descent from the Chruterer Pass towards Mittelstaffel we had some marvellous views not only of the scenery around us but also the BRB trains below. In the early afternoon we watched two ascending trains (one powered by a modern steam loco followed by a diesel-hauled one) as they approached the

site of the former Chumad bridge. I commented that the oil-fired loco should not be emitting so much smoke and, almost at the same time, the exhaust beats became much slower until eventually the loco came to a stop with the fire out. The driver seemed to make an attempt to relight the burner, resulting only in a cloud of blue smoke, by which time the following diesel train also had to stop. We were just debating whether a diesel loco might be able to push two trains (with the assistance of the "sick" steam loco) as far as the loop at Oberstaffel when the driver managed to relight the fire. We continued watching as the two trains climbed uphill and, despite some rather oily smoke at times, once past Oberstaffel the steam loco seemed to recover.

The following day started as one of those glorious days with a layer of cloud in the Lauterbrunnen valley and the peaks showing above it. We travelled across from Mürren to Wengen and up to the Mannlichen summit where we spent time just taking in the views before walking to Kleine Scheidegg. From there we took a WAB train down to Grindelwald where we arrived to hear an announcement informing passengers bound for Interlaken that no trains were running and a replacement bus service was in operation! Swiss (un)reliability - or did we put a jinx on the Swiss transport system?

From Paul M. Grant, Toronto, Canada.

Having stayed at an excellent B & B in Spiez I consider that more of our members should be aware of it. The establishment, run by Herr und Frau Tschirren, is fairly close to the station at Eigerweg 17, 3700 Spiez. Herr Tschirren is a retired BLS driver and we had many conversations about his professional career whilst I was their guest. There is a good breakfast spread laid-out each morning and apart from all the usual beverages being available, for a person like me who does not drink caffeine, they were happy to infuse a mint tea from leaves freshly picked from the garden each morning. Some of the rooms have balconies. The rate is around SFr 50 to 60 per night with a small discount for longer stays. If anyone wishes to contact me regarding staying at the Tschirren's home they are welcome to call me in Canada on + 1 416 487 4049.

Editor's Note: This is a shortened version of Paul's letter in which he covered some aspects of the working of the new Base Tunnel – information that appears elsewhere in this magazine. Paul also supplied detailed directions to the house from the station. You are welcome to Email me for these.