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From John Morgan by Email.

The 08.54 office workers' bus from Matten to Interlaken West arrives at the station in plenty of time to catch the IC962 09.06 to Basel. A visit to the kiosk - known as 'The Banana Shop' by my hotelier friend - to stock up on edibles allows a minute or so before the train arrives. On December 9th I took too long to select the very best banana to see the train disappearing north. My intended journey was Thun, Lyss, Buren, Kerzers previously neatly timetabled and which enabled me to travel over 'new' lines.

Already I could see a lost hour, one not especially warm in the waiting room. However, my new Kursbuch (2008/9 - staggering value for CHF15) produced the comforting knowledge that the 09.23 to Interlaken Ost from Berlin would shortly be able to take me in the 'wrong direction'. A 09.28 arrival allowed me to catch the same train going back to Berlin at 10.01. Although encouraged to get out of the train there really was no need to do so and my warmth was maintained. Cleaning staff, I noticed, were not much in evidence - the toilets in particular had been avoided, strange for such a long-distance train.

So, back to my intended route but, with an hour lost, Bern was now my first stop, then Lyss - no Buren - and Kerzers (which, would you believe, has a 'Papiliorama' stop; yes, it's a butterfly sanctuary). A visit to a local Migros enabled me to buy a set of handkerchiefs beloved by my wife (who was at home with the cat), but I was already lost. A passing stranger responded immediately to my "Entschuldigen Sie, bitte, wo ist the Bahnhof?" and I was away for the 12.49 back to Bern allowing a visit to the excellent "Staufacher" bookshop before catching the 14.04 back to Interlaken. (On another day I spent too many francs at the superb music shop Krumpholz in Bern which has just been renovated.)

So, never travel without your Kursbuch - I had one or two knowing smiles from various train staff, especially when I was in 2nd class with my 1st class Swiss pass (you can't afford to miss a train when 1st is several carriages away!) - and never complain how heavy it is. Try, perhaps, to avoid carrying the two bus timetables as well or your banana will be well and truly squashed: just learn them off by heart!

Just GO ... and travel through Burgistein-Wattenwill, Munchenbuechee or Suberg-Grossaffoltern. A snow white-out on my later return to the Basel airport hindered the trains and the timetable not a jot. Just GO.

From David Aldis by Email.

Whilst talking to some members at the SRS stand at the Warley Exhibition it became clear that they knew nothing of Alan Spencer's proposed Swiss tours in April and September 2009 so I am writing with some details. Alan used to run tours under the Locomotive & Carriage Institution banner, but has now set up his own organisation - Charters Helvetia (2008). Two tours are proposed, one from 4th to 6th April and the other in September. Both are planned to use several different types of BLS motive power and they will travel far and wide in Switzerland visiting all sorts of nooks and crannies to satisfy the most demanding of track bashers. Alan can be contacted on 01332 295378; 07933 509987; or at spencera2@sky.com

SWITZERLAND - CHATEAU D'OEX

Beautiful apartment (sleeps 2) in newly-converted period hotel with superb facilities (indoor pool, fitness room, sauna, laundry room, computer room etc) in Chateau D'Oex, a small winter/summer resort in the Bernese Oberland.

The apartment is a few minutes' walk from the station, a stop on the famous Golden Pass Line between Montreux and Zweisimmen. This makes it an ideal base for exploring a wide variety of main line, narrow gauge and mountain lines in the Lake Geneva, western Rhone Valley and Bernese Oberland areas.

**More details from Eddie Stedman
on 01737 552967 (eve.)
or eddiestedman@hotmail.com.**

I am also aware that Peter Huber and the SBB at Chur may be running another "Die Schweiz auf Nebengleisen" tour in 2009. They were too busy running specials for the European Football finals in 2008 to run a tour. He suggested to me that if the tour did run it may be based in the Interlaken area and he was trying to get authority to traverse the "y" turning point at Kleine Scheidegg as part of the tour.

From Paul Grant – Toronto.

I was interested to read the comments on the RhB in recent editions of *Swiss Express* and would like to add my voice to the debate over the manner in which this line appears to be planning its operations. For example I wonder why the RhB does not route its regular service from Chur to St Moritz via the Vereina Tunnel on alternate hours. This would help to make better use of this expensive addition to its system whilst opening-up many more journey opportunities. It would also help them to take the pressure off the busy route through the Albula Tunnel. One of the difficulties these days for "normal" travellers

on this line (and on the Bernina) is the preponderance of Glacier Express observation cars that require paying a supplement. Sometimes this is necessary just to get a seat on the train yet in my experience although the normal cars are full the observation cars are often half-empty. The Swiss Railways are there to serve local needs as well as those of tourists and it is as well to remember that not all tourists have unlimited budgets - I for one am a Senior Citizen on a limited budget. The Glacier Express is a great success for the RhB and the MGB but they should be careful that getting this Goose to lay an excess of Golden Eggs may actually result in problems for their bread-and-butter business.

Again speaking as a tourist of limited means who wishes to see alpine scenery, not speed under it, I am grateful that the BLS and Canton Bern have chosen to not only keep a good basic service running over the old Lötschberg route but have also invested in new rolling stock for it. Let us hope that the service providers take the same positive action when the essential Gotthard Base Tunnel opens.

HOTEL DE LA PAIX

in the heart of INTERLAKEN

(Bernese Oberland)

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