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SHUNTING, CHIPBOARD AND THE STB

s'Murmeli



A large load of glue in 100 tonne tanks being pushed down the main line to the works siding, which is behind the wooded hill in the background.

Travelling around Switzerland by rail takes one to some apparently off-the-beaten-track places that turn out to be far more important than first appearances suggest. Menznau, on the old VHB Huttwil – Wolhusen line, is a small town of some 3,000 people and fits into that category. It would appear to be a sleepy place with a school, a bank, the usual Migros, plus a café with good cakes. However, just around the corner behind the hill is the large plant of the internationally-known Kronospan company that produces chipboard and similar building materials from the abundant supplies of local timber. Its products go far afield, including to the UK. This establishment is a big user of SBB wagonload freight services, with tank wagons of adhesives coming in and many types of specialist high capacity and container wagons going out. SBB even had Ee3/3 shunter No 16454 based there this summer simply to handle the

Kronospan traffic. In 50 minutes at the station I saw this loco come and go several times. Whilst it shunted the yard, an Ae6/6 620.420 arrived, and left with a freight train, and four local passenger trains called. The PostAuto also appeared twice.

I like those little Ee3/3s. They are old and now fast disappearing, especially from passenger stations, though Bern, Luzern and others still had them this summer alongside the newcomers from Stadler. SBB Cargo has more, including the Menznau example. Today, it seems a long time since the SBB was so desperate to save coal that it ran the overhead wires into sidings, even at Menznau in the wilds of Kt. Luzern, to shunt electrically whenever possible. That reminded me of the two E3/3 0-6-0Ts, Nos 8521 and 8522 which, to save coal in WWII, were fitted out with pantographs and a sort of immersion heater in the boiler. The idea worked after a fashion, not enough to



The works still justify a full-time Ee3/3 shunter seen here on the highway crossing outside the works...

run on the main line under the wires, but OK to work in a yard. The drill was to boil away until the pressure came up, go away and shunt, and then boil again. No 8521 went the way of all things but, stripped of its electrical bits, No 8522 found its way to the Sursee-Triengen-Bahn (STB) where at 103 years old it is still working. This short railway was never electrified, so photographers can get rustic images of steam at work with no disturbing catenary to spoil their images. It is still very active with both freight and specials, so No 8522 and its fellow 'Tigerli' E3/3 tank engine No 8479 are often at work, including steam tourist days on summer weekends.

However, in this part of Kt. Luzern the wheel has come full circle. There are proposals to extend catenary up the STB and to incorporate it into the Luzern 'S-Bahn' network to serve the fast-growing population on its route. Nothing is decided yet, but it could happen fast, although I doubt whether old No 8522 will again be 'electrified' as she was in 1942.

... and shunting the Kronospan traffic.

