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Autor: Farr, Michael

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CELEBRATING PENTECOST AROUND LE LÉMAN

Michael Farr reports on some events that took place on Pentecost weekend



La Suisse, Simplon and Rhone let off their balloons


Photo: CGN

All aboard the Parade Navale

In Switzerland the Pentecost weekend is a popular public holiday with many special events on offer. On Le Léman the Compagnie Générale de Navigation (CGN) presents its Parade Navale, during which the captains of all available paddle ships show off their expertise at manoeuvring their craft in a 'Choreographie Navale'. This includes proceeding along the lake in arrow formation (until one of the ships speeds up and breaks free) or follow-my-leader style circling off the shore. The climax of the display is the release of 2,000 balloons, a different colour for each ship. The five paddlers taking part this year were *La Suisse* (1910), *Simplon* (1915-20), *Savoie* (1914), *Rhône* (1927) and *Montreux* (1904). Passengers (who need to pre-book) can order a gourmet-style lunch which is served before the main event and this year ships departed from both Geneva and Lausanne, calling at various landing stages on the way to Nyon where the main celebrations were held. As each passenger boarded they were offered a card to complete and attach to a balloon, those being carried furthest and returned to CGN winning prizes.

We boarded the CGN flagship ps *La Suisse* at Nyon and with the weather threatening rain we found a seat partially under cover at the rear of the ship. Even so it was extremely cold and wet and we were glad to move inside the top deck saloon to warm up with a cup of coffee when the diners had vacated their tables.

The Parade Navale is an important date in the cruising calendar on Le Léman and an opportunity for CGN and the 'Friends of the

Steamboats of Lac Léman' (ABVL) to show off the magnificent restoration of the ships – and this year to canvass further support for the restoration of *PS Italie* that is due for completion by 2015. This was the fourth time that the town of Nyon had hosted the Parade Navale and it provided many on-shore activities, including the inevitable wine tasting. By the time the ships had completed their mid-lake 'ballet' and returned to show their paces off-shore the quayside was lined with a throng of spectators who cheered as each paddler passed by with a blast from its whistle, with the biggest cheer when the 2000 balloons were released. CGN itself has this year regrouped into four divisions covering local lake transport (CGN-Mobilité), pleasure cruising and gourmet dining (CGN-Horizons), exclusive boat rental (CGN-Exclusive) and technical services (CGN-Technique). At the same time its 1990s style logo has been updated to show its initials and a small anchor. Its association with the lake is represented by the wavy shape of the crossbar on the 'G'. 

Crowds watch as Savoie leads the parade.

Photo: CGN



A busy time on the Blonay-Chamby

As well as providing rides on steam and vintage electric trains from May to October, the Blonay-Chamby Museum Railway holds special events over the Pentecost public holiday in May and also on two weekends in September. The May 2013 event was billed as 'Festival vapeur de Pentecôte' and every available piece of motive power and rolling stock was pressed into service over the holiday. As well as an enhanced timetable, several trains ran through from Chaulin Museum to Vevey over the tracks of the Chemins de fer Electriques Veveysans (CEV) section of Montreux-Vevey-Riviera, the local transport operator in the GoldenPass/MOB Group. After disappointing weather during the previous week Jean-François Andrist, President of the BC, spent a sleepless night fearing a wet weekend, but on the Saturday morning his wife told him that miraculously the sun was shining, providing ideal weather for riding on and photographing trains. A highlight on Saturday was the arrival at Vevey of a standard gauge steam train operated by Dampf Bahn Bern using their Eb 3/5 locomotive hauling three coaches and a van. While its passengers took the Blonay-Chamby's metre gauge train to the museum, their loco was turned on the unique dual-gauge turntable at Vevey and readied for the return journey. Although Sunday's weather was variable Monday morning was ideal for photographers wishing to picture the grand défilé of locomotives and railcars, which left Blonay from about eleven o'clock onwards at five minute intervals. Thus the photographers poised on the favourite viewpoint by Cornaux halt, deposited there by a special run with former RhB railcar No.35, were able to capture the passing of one train after another. Judging by the crowds queuing at the little chalet-style booking office on Monday morning, the BC members must have been well pleased with the results of months of planning and drawing-up timetable schedules. ❏

The little 1900 Krauss-built locomotive G2/2 No. 4 of the Ferrovie Padane Rimini, is usually restricted to pottering around Chaulin Museum yard and making the connection to Chamby station. However during the Pentecost week it was allowed out on the main line and made several trips to Blonay hauling a former Nyon-St Cergue-Morat coach.

Photo: Michael Farr



ABOVE: Ex-Zell-Todnau G2 x 2/2 105 waits to take another load of happy holidaymakers on the scenic trip to Blonay.

BELOW: Former Jura-Simplon G3/3 loco No. 909 replenishes its coal stocks at the bifurcation near Chaulin Museum.

