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INTERLAKEN DEPOT FIRE

Riccardo Keller and Bryan Stone



MAIN PICTURE: The rear of the damaged G3/4 No 208.



INSET FAR LEFT: The general scene of destruction after the fire.




INSET LEFT: Work to recover C5/6 No 2869.

All photos: Riccardo Keller

At 08.50 on November 16th the alarm was raised in Interlaken Ost that the Ballenberg Dampfbahn locomotive depot and workshop were burning. Although the fire, mainly in the wooden workshop built in 2000, was extinguished by 10.00 the building was completely destroyed. When two of the editorial team passed by on the Brünig line on December 4th only ruins stood. The cause of the fire, thought to be a heating fault in the depot, is being investigated by the Cantonal Police. Within the ruins were steam locomotives G3/4 No.208, normally in regular use on specials between Interlaken Ost and Meiringen/Innertkirchen, HG3/3 No.1068, a Brünig rack 0-6-0T which has been under restoration for 6 years, and the frames, wheels and motion of C5/6 No.2969, being restored under contract for the preservation organisation "Eurovapor Lokremise Sulgen". In the adjoining depot, almost untouched, was HG3/3 No.1067, used regularly for specials on the Meiringen – Giswil section of the ZB.

The Ballenberg Dampfbahn has the last Brünig locomotives, of which No.1068 was also the last steam engine built for SBB, in 1926. No.1067, its predecessor, had been built in 1910. After electrification in 1942, both were kept as reserve, and worked also on the Meiringen-Innertkirchen-Bahn. From 1965-2007 No.1068 stood as an outdoor exhibit at Meiringen station before being rescued for restoration with its first steaming due in 2016. No. 2969, built 1916, was one

of the last C5/6 in service, withdrawn in 1964 and long exhibited in Wintherthur. The boiler, now fully restored and in Eurovapor's shops in Sulgen, was due to be re-installed in the frames this winter, and steamed in 2014. The frames and wheels were well advanced, and cab panels had been fitted, before fire broke out. The locomotive was being prepared to roll, on its own wheels, to Sulgen (TG) by the end of February to be reunited with the newly restored boiler. This has been set back by several months. Much is intact but the motion was grossly overheated (at a temperature of about 1100°C), so replacement will come from No.2958, exhibited at Romanshorn. The fire melted a number of bronze and copper items. The condition of the piston valves is not clear. On December 16th the chassis and all retrieved components were moved by transporter truck to the yard in Interlaken, and from there by road to Sulgen. The depot there will be re-equipped so that the wheels can again be dropped, for examination of the bearings, while small components are being reconditioned by a specialist in the Ticino. The hope is that given the funding, work can be completed with a delay of some months. Much is however still to be clarified. If SRS members wish to contribute to the work of restoring this important locomotive Eurovapor's Bank details are: IBAN: CH38 0900 0000 8503 0747 6; BIC: POFICHBEXXX; PostFinance AG, Mingerstrasse 20, CH-3030 Bern. 

Riccardo Keller is a member of the Eurovapor restoration team.