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Switzerland to Snowdon

– a unique event in Wales with a very Swiss twist...

The following exclusive interview for **Swiss Express** is with Mike Ellis the UK sales representative from the **Brienz Rothorn Bahn (BRB)** and James Wilson the Product Manager from **Switzerland Travel Centre (STC)**, both co-managers of this exciting, idea soon to happen in North Wales.

SE – Mike, the name ‘Switzerland to Snowdon’ alone suggests something interesting but what are we talking about exactly?

Mike – ‘Switzerland to Snowdon’ is the title of a project we started over 3 years ago. The central aspect is the transportation of a steam locomotive and matching passenger coach from Switzerland to the Snowdon Mountain Railway in North Wales. The plan is to place this equipment, currently in service on the Brienz Rothorn, in special passenger service on Snowdon. The exercise is more than simply that however, we are doing this in partnership with Switzerland Travel Centre and ST (Switzerland Travel) and the Snowdon Mountain Railway (SMR), to generate interest and promote Switzerland as a holiday destination to the UK market.

SE – You mentioned partnership, how does this work between such diverse companies?

Mike – The key partners or ‘Core Team’ as I like to call it, consists of STC and ST in London, the BRB in Switzerland and the SMR in Llanberis. Each partner carries an element of risk, cost and work but also has

the potential to win returns from this participation. As an example: the BRB is taking quite a step into the unknown with this exercise, they are sending a 120 year old train to the UK and placing it in service. That is a risk. The preparation work and on-site staffing has to be covered by the very small workforce in Brienz while staff is away in Wales. This is the cost. The up-side though is that the BRB will be in the centre of a major marketing event for 4-5 weeks. They stand to gain publicity that would otherwise be unobtainable. That is the win. Although we are a group of diverse companies there are many things we do that are common to all and this is a significant help. We are all in the vacation and excursion business, we are all railway oriented and we work directly with and understand the customer.

SE – How Mike does an idea like this start and how does it develop into an event like the one you are leading?

Mike – What a question! I’m sure each mad idea like this one starts with a ‘what if’ moment. ‘Switzerland to Snowdon’, or S2S as the team now knows it, had just such a start and that was at the World Travel Market in London during 2013. I was at a networking event and

was talking to James, whom I hardly knew at this time, when I asked him what he thought of me bringing a BRB loco over the next year to stand in front of the Excel Exhibition Centre for the following year's World Travel Market. Two or three glasses of wine later we were planning a tour of the UK ! To answer your question further: the reality develops through good trust and understanding of those involved. As the project gets larger with more people at the table this becomes much more of a concern for the project manager and believe me I have had many sleepless nights over this adventure! As a project manager I think of success factors, these are crucial to keep interest and motivation alive during the 'Dark Times'. The critical success factors for me have been the people, we have a good team on all fronts, the mutual win opportunities we have for each partner and the uniqueness of this plan. Above all though, my wife Helena who has listened to me ranting away frustrations for nearly 4-years and put up with my ups and downs the whole time. Without her patience I'd have given up long ago! So, to answer how it all started: it was at a meeting with myself, James Wilson and 'Fraulein Chardonnay' in London's Docklands in 2013.

SE – OK Mike, we have heard about the general status and idea, what do you have for detail? Swiss Express readers like detail.

Mike – Here we go: as I said we are planning to bring a BRB loco over to Snowdon. This will be BRB N°2 SLM build number 689 from 1891. This is one of the locos that was used in the construction of the Brienz Rothorn Bahn in 1891/2. This is a locomotive working with the Abt Rack system and with a gauge of 800mm; this makes our train compatible with only one railway in the UK, the SMR. The

passenger coach is BRB N° B1 built in 1891 by SIG and it seats 40-people, it's a perfect match to the loco.

The service is planned as three return trips per day from Saturday 9th September until Sunday 1st October, Fridays excepted.

This is quite a unique event on several fronts. This is the first time a Swiss rack railway has sent an operational train to the UK and placed it in passenger service. This is the first time that the locos on the SMR have been seen alongside their sister, (the SMR and BRB locos were built at the SLM works in Winterthur). This, I believe, is the oldest operational steam train ever to be sent as an 'ambassador' to the UK. Static locos have been sent but not a complete train in normal use from the 1800s. On Snowdon the SMR has built us a new halt part-way up Snowdon. This will give us the opportunity to provide our guests with a 'surprise' and vantage point from which to capture the train in action on a drive-through service on the highest railway in the UK! Finally, this is only going to happen once, for one month, this September.

SE – This sounds like quite an adventure that will attract serious attention. How do people find out more about it?

Mike – Not all details are finalised at this point but we plan to have on-line ticket sales open shortly via the SMR internet portal. The project will be covered in the social media with regular updates. The Swiss Railways Society will also have further details as soon as they are to hand. We hope to involve TV and associated news companies nearer the date of course. 

