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Vintage Trains over the Lotschberg Route

John Weaver



The special arriving at Spiez.

Photos: John Weaver except where credited

The June 2018 issue of *Swiss Express* brought news that the BLS were to run, on five summer Sundays, “turn up and travel” heritage trains from Burgdorf, over the Lötschberg route, to Brig. By chance I happened to be holidaying in Interlaken on one of the Sundays and the opportunity to ride on the vintage stock seemed too good to miss.

The pleasure of being on the platform at Spiez on a fine sunny morning was somewhat tempered by one question: would there be seats for my wife and me? Reservations could only be made for parties of ten or more - so what were the BLS expecting? However, an “*Extra Zug*” departed Spiez at 09.05, covering all stations to Brig. The regular train followed at 09.10. Thus, with the hikers and most

other travellers catered for, there were very few awaiting our special, which was scheduled to depart at 09.15.


The Heritage Special duly arrived, and there were seats for everyone aboard the four carriages. Haulage was by BLS Ae6/8 No.205. Built in 1939, it is one of three that remain of a class of eight locomotives, the other two being in private ownership. No.205 had worked the Lötschberg route, freight and passenger, for 56 years until its withdrawal in 1995 to become a working museum piece.

After 20 minutes into the journey, the train made an advertised stop at a station. Not an exceptional event,



one might think, but this was Blausee-Mitholz and it had been closed for over 20 years! It remains in excellent condition - it is said that on closure its station master retired to live there and maintain its railway appearance. However, no one was on hand to explain why the train should stop and, certainly, nobody either boarded or detrained. The general idea appeared to be to lean out of the window and take a photograph of the station. Thus after a few moments progress resumed.

Once through the Lötschberg Tunnel, the next event to look forward to was the planned photo-stop of 10 minutes at Hohtenn. Perched on a ledge high above the Rhône Valley, this station seemed an odd choice for photography, but nevertheless many of the passengers detrained to record the scene. A problem arose in that some wished to be photographed posing beside the locomotive and others wanted a 'railway scene'. The driver got off the locomotive to good-humouredly take charge, such that all were satisfied - except me! On raising my camera for the classic shot, a voice said "Hello John!". It was the photo editor of *Swiss Express*, no less: and with his own camera! So, perhaps I could have stayed on the train after all?

The train continued to Brig and with the prospect of waiting over four hours for its return north, we took to a regular service train: the appeal of a paddle boat in action on Thunersee winning us over. Full marks and thanks to the BLS for running such specials - let's hope for more in 2019. 

LEFT AND TOP: BLS Historic ran a special in September from Burgdorf to Brig and return over the old BLS line with Ae6/8 205, halting at Hohtenn for a photo stop. Current photo editor Tony Bagwell was on the train and who should he bump into on the platform but previous Photo Editor, John Weaver.

Photo: Tony Bagwell

MIDDLE: Blausee-Mitholz.

BOTTOM: Passengers view the train at Hohtenn.

