

The Aigle-Leysin railway

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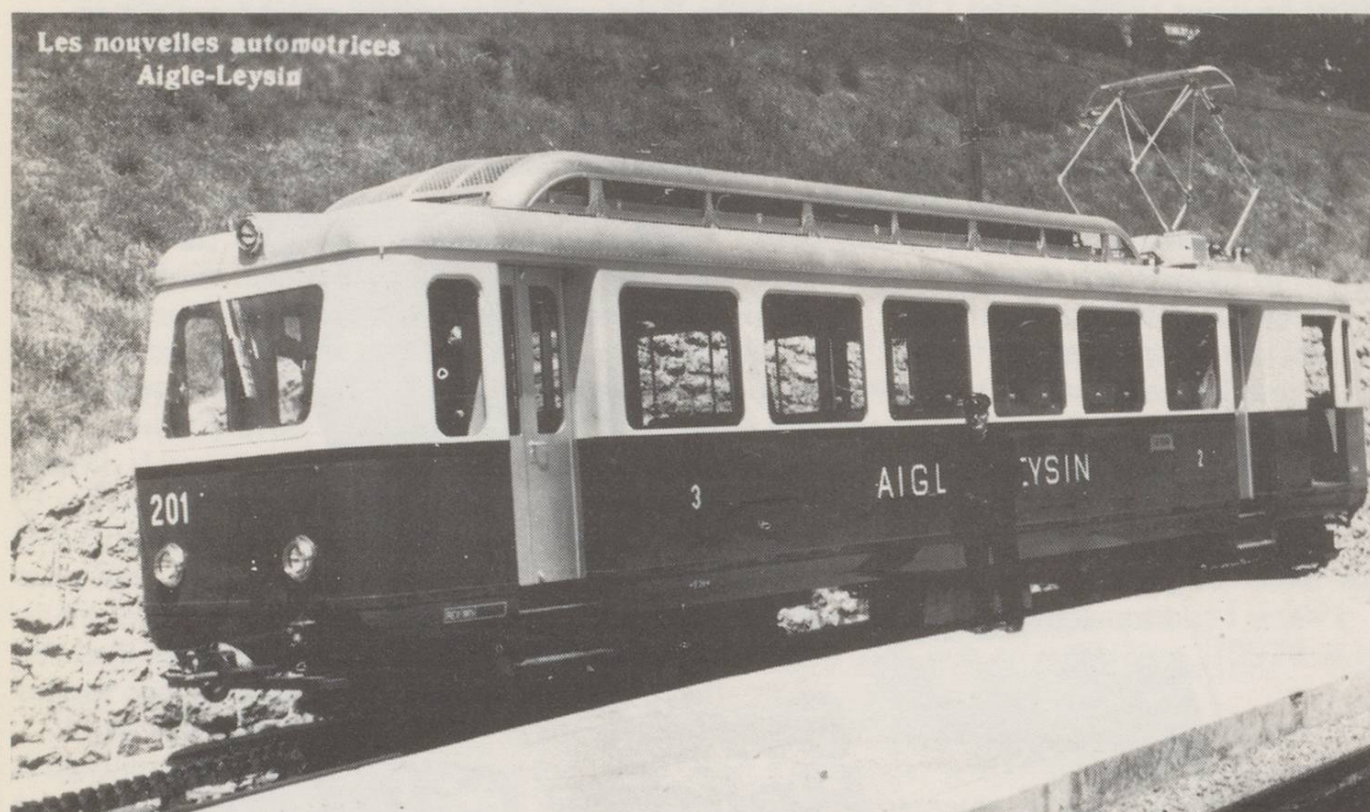
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THE AIGLE - LEYSIN RAILWAY, an introduction by Alan Pike.

This metre gauge line, 6.209 km. long, owes its existence to people's bad health !

In the latter part of the 18th. century, doctors recognised the curative properties of the little village situated in a sunny position some 1400 metres above the Rhone valley and only a few kilometres from Lake Geneva. To get there, sick and healthy alike had to take a horse drawn coach along the deep gorge of Les Ormonts to Le Sepey where the horses were changed to tackle the final climb to Leysin. The journey took 5 hours.

The proprietors of the sanatoria wished to develop their business and better transport was essential. The trials and tribulations in getting the line form a story of its own. It was electrified right from the start at a pressure of 1300V, D.C. and opened in three stages; an adhesion section from the main line station at Aigle to the depot on the outskirts of this delightful little town, a distance of 1.030 km., on 5 May 1900; the main section using the Abt track system, 4.842 km. long, on 6 November 1900 and terminating at Leysin-Feydey; and a final extension of only 337 metres to end under the imposing Grand Hotel thus completing the line on 12 September 1916.



BDeh 2/4 no. 201. This postcard picture was mailed by the editors father (R.Ramage) on 28 Jan 1947 from Leysin. Photo E. Kull.

At first sight, the rolling stock may not look very interesting - apart from its Great Western Railway livery - but a look round the yard at Aigle will usually reveal some freight wagons which could well interest railway modellers. But a short ride on the train, or better still, a pleasant walk along the route to the depot is most rearding for, there, one will find diminutive locos dating from between 1909 and 1919 and another built in 1949. Representatives of the two types of rack railcars, the 200 series built in 1946 and the more powerful 300 series of 1966, are likely to be there or working trains.

An interesting feature is that the trains all run into the depot to enable them to reverse before continuing their journey in either direction. The rack line climbs abruptly away from the depot on a gradient of 1 in 4.3 up through the vineyards clinging to the steep mountainside. The view gets better all the time: first of the impressive gorge below and then opening out to provide a panorama of great peaks before arriving at what is now a ski

resort in winter and a place to take pleasant mountain walks in summer. In the journey of only 6 kilometres the line has climbed 1047 metres.

Leysin is of special importance to a declining group of British men for some of the troops who escaped into Switzerland during the 1939 - 45 war were detained there. I was told by one of them that their Swiss 'captors' were most kind.

(Editors note) I am pleased that Alan Pike has mentioned the significance of the military "captives at Leysin in his story. My father was one of their number and in his time there he recovered from a serious illness thanks to the devoted care the Swiss bestowed upon many of our servicemen who served in World War II. It was this occurrence that first aroused my interest in Switzerland at a very early age since at home we were the recipients of Red Cross parcels and postcards of a lovely mountain village with its shiny little electric trains. These postcard scenes made an indelible impression on one young mind. Such a contrast to the war debris, sand bags and propped up buildings which surrounded our London home.

BOOK REVIEWS

Die Triebfahrzeuge der Bahnen der Jungfrauregion

Some time ago a very useful little book was published in Switzerland on the motive power of the RhB which included both photographs and side-elevation drawings. Now the same publisher has produced a similar soft-cover book on the locomotives and railcars - past and present - of the railways in the Jungfrauregion.

Included are specifications, photographs and side-elevations of the motive power of the BOB, the Schynige Platte Bahn, Bergbahn Lauterbrunnen-Murren, Wengernalpbahn and Jungfraubahn.

Among the steam rack locomotives are four 0-4-2T's built for the Wengernalpbahn in 1985 which were identical to Nos. 1, 2 and 3 of the Snowdon Mountain Railway. From these, and other, early examples the book comes right up to date with Nos. 311, 312 and 313 of the BOB which were completed in the last quarter of 1986.

The book has 96 pages and illustrated with 46 black and white and two colour photographs plus 46 side-elevation drawings.

Available from Robert Spark Railway Literature, Evelyn Way, Cobham, Surrey KT11 2SJ. Price £9.25 including postage (10% discount to SRS members).

Continental Modeller

The January/February edition contains the usual world wide coverage but of especial interest to S.R.S. members is a fully illustrated article about Roger Desoutters delightful Swiss HO layout - Wintertal. Composed in a winter setting of snow and fir trees it will prove to be an inspiration to modellers of the Swiss landscape. U.I.C. codings which prove a puzzle to many are fully explained in the first installment on this subject. The March/April issue continues with further details about U.I.C. codings and there is a comprehensive review of the latest international model railway products unveiled at the Nuremberg Fair. Many other features including Majorcan track plans, German BR9 2-10-2's, American and continental layouts. Colour and black and white photographs. Price £1.10

Euromodel Rail Review

The new look issue no. 25 of Euromodel Rail Review promises to be one of the best so far. Included in the latest edition is an article about the RhB, a Z gauge Swiss diorama and a full report from the Nuremberg Fair. 60 pages with full colour throughout. Price £2.50. Since establishing its new office in East Anglia E.R.R. has also opened a new showroom on the premises in Pollards Lane, West Row, Bury St. Edmunds. In addition to its usual range of continental books, postcards, magazines they have lots to offer from the Marklin HO range as well as demonstrations of Z and gauge 1 items.