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THE LONZA GORGE

By R. Pinner

When one leaves Goppenstein in the direction of Brig while travelling between a series of tunnels and snowsheds, one gets a few glimpses of a deep gorge with a road at the bottom. On the other side of the gorge one sees a steep rocky wall and can imagine a similar wall above the railway line itself. This gorge is the lower part of the river Lonza, which comes out of the Lötschen Valley one of Switzerland's most beautiful alpine valleys. Like all the valleys on the south side of the Bernese Alps it is almost a hanging valley; short, deep, dramatic and fearsome in appearance, enclosed in huge nearly vertical walls.

The glimpses one gets from the train between Goppenstein and Hohtenn are tempting and hopefully this article should help one to visualise its true size and appreciate the engineering marvel of building a railway through it. From the road between Goppenstein and Gampel in the Rhône Valley one gets a better impression than from the train, but the best viewing place is from the footpath joining Goppenstein and Jeizinen, a very small village on the opposite side of the Hohtenn, but 1500 feet higher and therefore with far better views down and across the Rhône Valley. The very steep and exposed path leads across the steep mountain side through the gorge but has to climb 1300 feet above Goppenstein. This part needs a good heart and lungs and a good head for heights. One can get to two excellent view points from which it is possible to get a grand view to watch or photograph the trains and to appreciate the scale of the gorge.

1. From Goppenstein:

Leave the northern end of the station by the section marker "B" and after turning left, follow the signposted way for about 15 minutes. Do not follow what looks like the main path curving to the right which is marked Höhenweg, but keep straight on via a grassy path which is signposted "Jeizinen". This is the route to the point marked "A" on the map. The path is now on a level with the car loading ramp and it is a good point to observe and photograph the proceedings there, or the trains coming out from or entering the gorge. A little further along the path the steep ascent of 1000 feet begins, but if one is not properly equipped with correct style boots etc, go back. The path zig zags up a verticle rock wall and is extremely exposed.

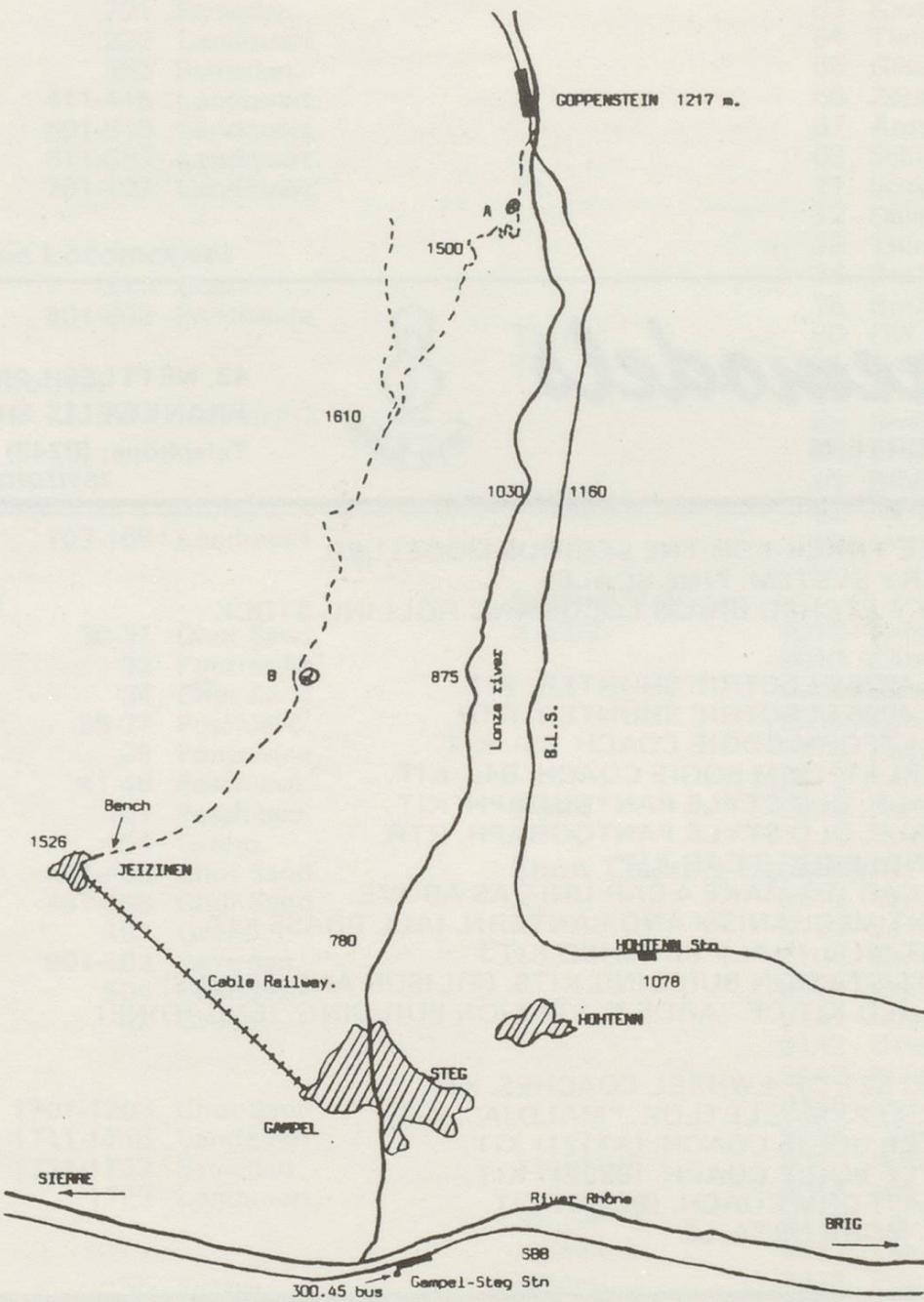
2. From Jeizinen:

At the exit of the Lonza river from the gorge are two villages which the river separates, they are "Gampel" and "Steg" which have a common SBB station called Gampel-Steg at which only the stopping (Regionalzüge) trains will call. It is not far from either Brig or Sion and the bus service 300.45 which comes down the Lötschen Valley from Fafleralp continues down from Goppenstein and through the gorge to Gampel village and the SBB station. In the western outskirts of Gampel, just 25 minutes walk from the SBB station or 10 minutes from the bus stop at the Gampel Post Office, is the Cable Railway to Jeizinen.

Jeizinen is a small, simple village without "tourism": no hotels are here but there is a good Cafe at the Cable Car station. Walk up the only road from the station and turn right by a signpost to Goppenstein, and after going uphill for a little while one comes to a bench from where there is a superb view down into the Rhône Valley and the high Alps

beyond. It is far better than from Hohtenn as, being higher, one looks across the lower mountains with the Weisshorn — 15,000 feet — standing out in the distance. Climb above Jeizinen and gradually all the great peaks from the Simplon to Mont Blanc become visible.

Beyond the bench, one turns into the gorge on a path which is practically level, and after passing the "Parcours" the gorge gradually narrows. Walking for 20 minutes one gets to a point marked "B" on the map where one can see the bottom of the gorge, 2500 feet below, the mountain wall opposite rising 3500 feet above your present position, and the BLS on the open stretch of line just before entering the long Hohtenn tunnel. It is possible to really appreciate the size of the gorge from this point. If tempted, one can continue along the path; it is signposted but eventually the steep and exposed section down to Goppenstein will be reached. Even without mountain experience it is more than worth-while to walk as far as points "A" and "B" from Goppenstein and Jeizinen and then to return. Either could be done as an excursion from anywhere along the BLS, or from the Rhône Valley.



Bern pioneered the use of Restaurant Trams using a 1936 bogie power car and trailer set. This works mainly on private hire and appears to provide only cold snacks, unlike some of the new normal service buffet trams in Germany.

Another curiosity is the Loeb's Märlitram. This is used as a playtram for children whose parents are shopping in that department store during the run-up to Christmas. The vehicle sports a special livery consisting of cartoon style characters.

SVB has recently experimented with both a Zürich 'Tram 2000' and the Genève prototype car as a base for future orders. It appears that the TPG car was preferred although the order is expected to be for a double articulated version.

Traffic levels, and thus frequency, are high, helped by the recent introduction of an environmental season ticket. Although there are currently no plans to extend the network due to the high costs involved, the tram network is safe. More recently, investment has gone into opening new trolleybus routes and the three closed trams routes, although not all originally so replaced, are now trolleybus routes.

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