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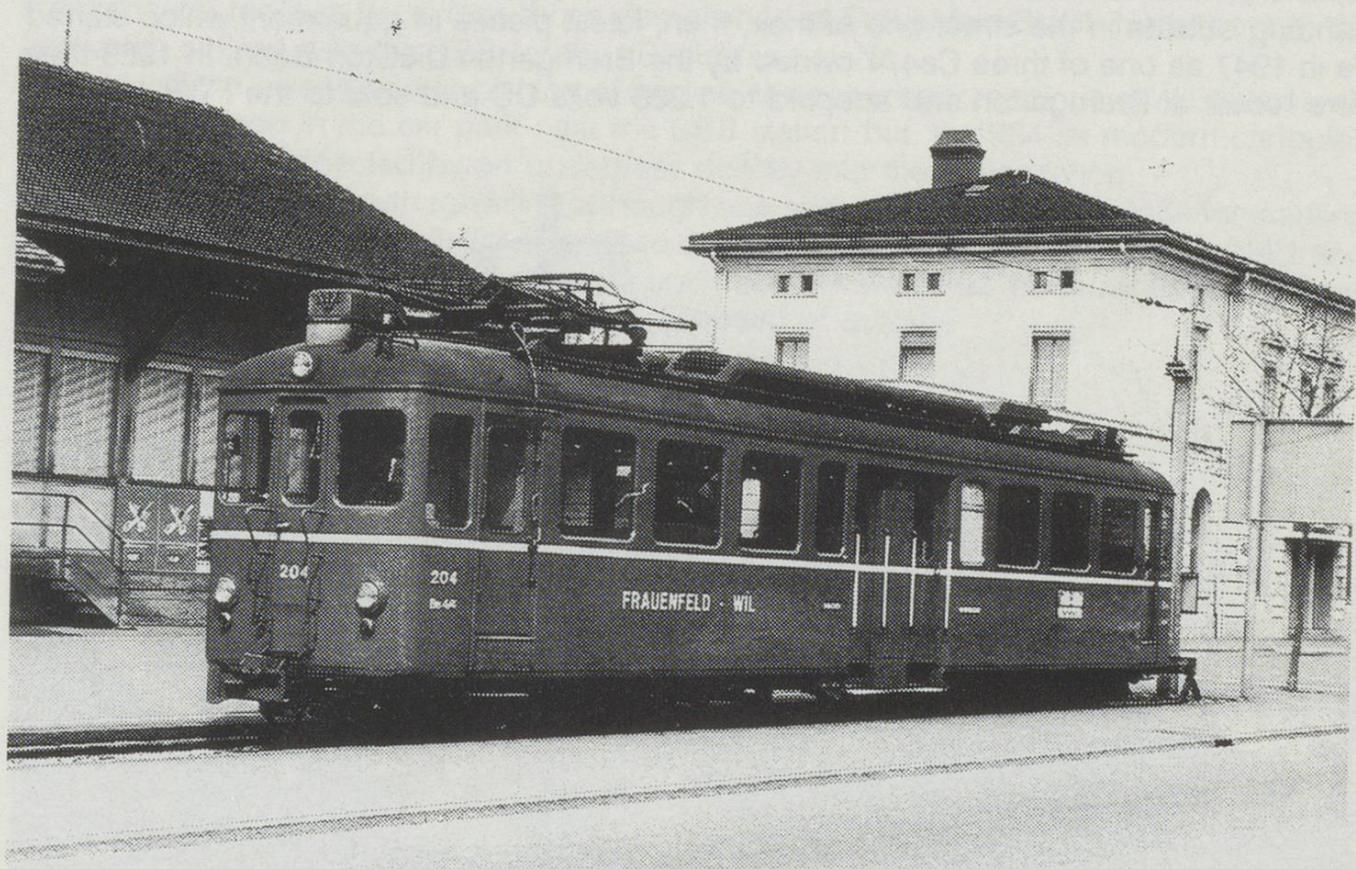
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Frauenfeld - Wil - Bahn.

Celebrated its Centenary in 1987.

By A. Pike.

Frauenfeld lies on the main line between Zürich and Romanshorn, and Wil is a busy junction on the line from Winterthur to St Margrethen and thence into Austria. Wil is served by the SBB and the Mittel Thurgau Bahn as well as the Bodensee Toggenberg Bahn, although the section from Wil to Wattwil is owned by the SBB.



Be4/4. No 204. at Frauenfeld Hbf. 1976.

Photo. A. Pike.

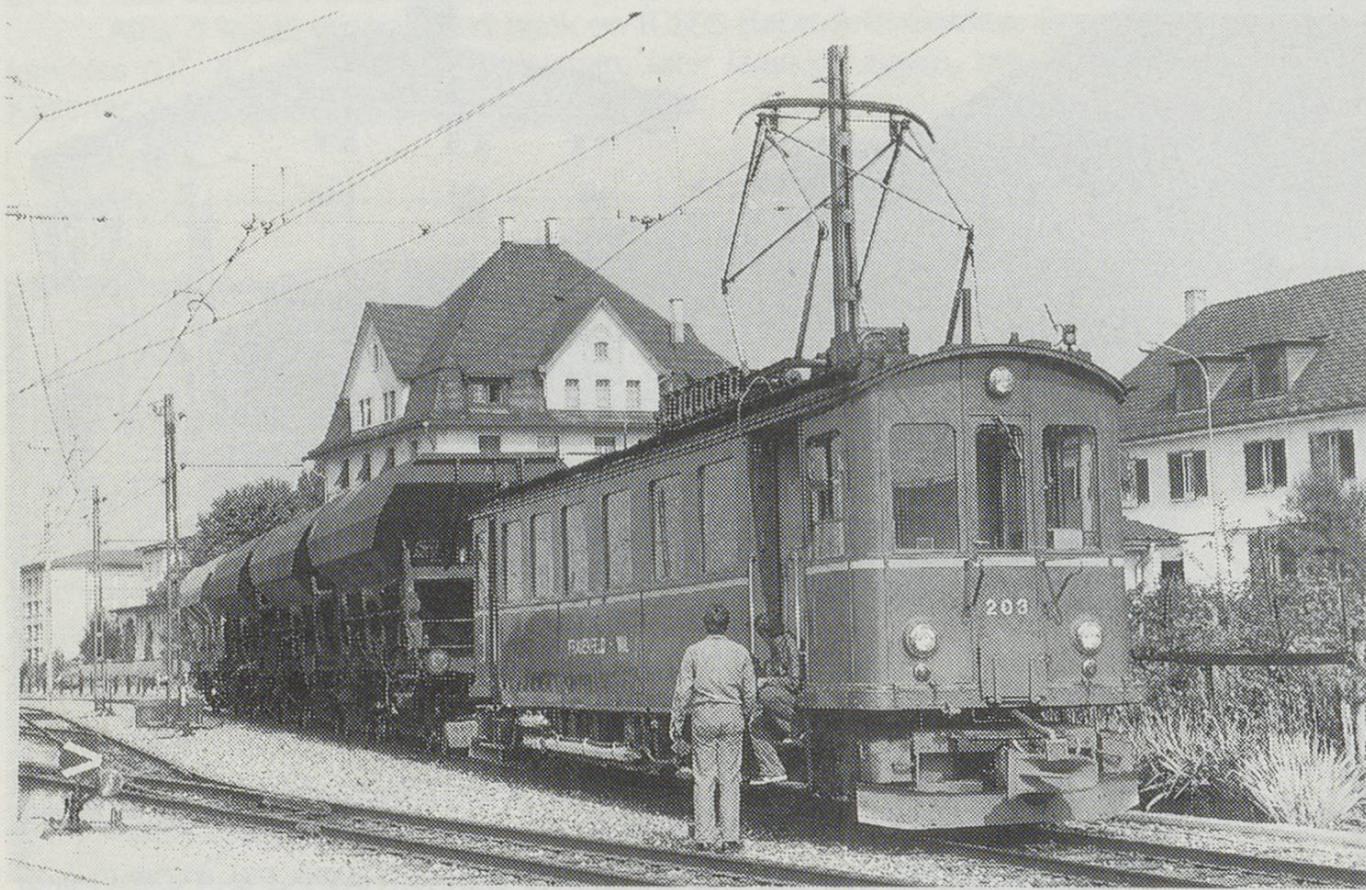
It was originally intended that the line should be standard gauge and would link Frauenfeld with St Gallen the 'Capital' of Eastern Switzerland. Even as far back as the mid 1880s the whole area was becoming industrialised and there was a need for good communication. For a variety of reasons, not least, money, the standard gauge project fell and proposals were made to adopt the same gauge as the Waldenburger Bahn, 75 centimetres. Ultimately, the metre gauge was chosen, and the line was opened on the 1. September 1887. Its 17.7 kilometre length (note 1) was electrified at 1,200 volts DC and electric services began on 20 November 1921. The move to electrification was precipitated by the price of coal which rose from SFr38 a tonne in 1915 to SFr240 in 1918.

The original railcars, Nos. 1 - 3, were remotorised in 1953 and in 1967, thoughts turned to renewal of fixed equipment and rolling stock. The 1973 oil crisis gave a boost to railways and, in 1974, an ambitious programme was started which involved, among other things,

raising the overhead line equipment and other structures so that standard gauge wagons could be carried on 'Rollböcke', and the strengthening of bridges.

'Rollböcke' traffic began in 1977 assisted by the arrival of ex Biel-Täufellen-Ins railcar No.207. In the 8 years to 1984, virtually 90% of the trackworks were renewed and, on 20 November of that year, the first of the new Be4/4" railcars with control trailers was introduced.

It is an essentially roadside line and has no significant engineering works. The maximum gradient is 1 in 22 (4.5%) and the minimum curve 35 metres radius. Until 1968 the livery was brown but it then changed to a bright red with a white stripe, colours which it carries today. I first came across the line in 1974. After arrival at Frauenfeld, a classic continental station where one still crosses the running lines to reach the trains, I found, standing outside in the street one of their, then, latest pieces of equipment which started life in 1947 as one of three Ce4/4 owned by the Bremgarten-Dietikon Bahn. In 1969 they were rebuilt at Bremgarten and adapted to 1,200 volts DC and sold to the FWB.



Be4/4. No 203 with Rollböcke freight.

Photo. F. Hornby.

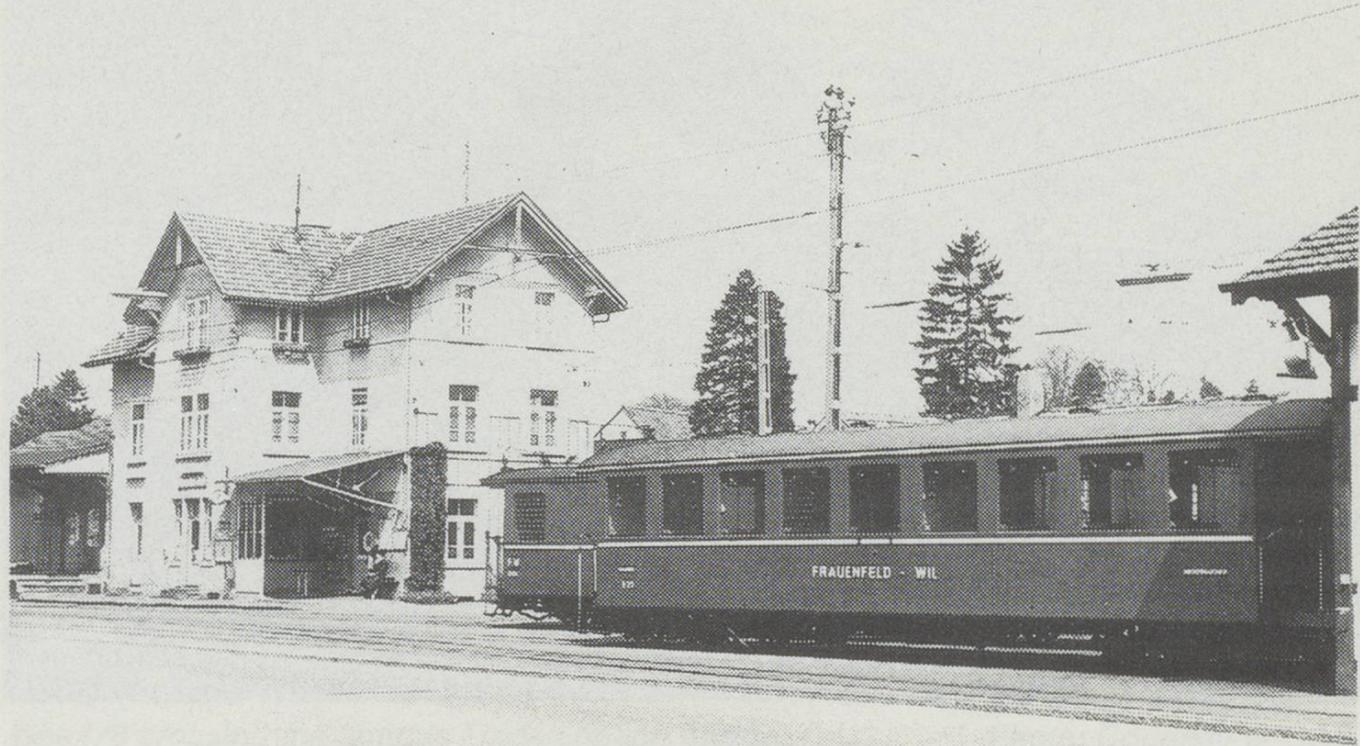
In due course we set off up the main street of Frauenfeld to arrive at Frauenfeld Stadt where, to the left, was a fine railway type station building with a small goods shed and platform and, behind, the main works of the line accommodated in largely wooden sheds. There was much of interest to be seen here, old rolling stock and the impedimenta and acquisitions of many years. Sadly for those who like things of the past, I found on a visit in March 1989 that the old works had been demolished and, while the original station building still existed, most of the tracks were being ripped up leaving virtually only a passing place. However, business seemed to be more brisk than had been in the past possibly due to the modern and very comfortable two car units.

The line keeps very close to the road most of the way to Wil and evidence of quite considerable freight traffic can be seen including 8 wheeled tank and covered wagons on 'Rollböcke'. Many of the factories near the line were rail served often across the busy main road and although a number were disconnected when the line was modernised, freight traffic appears to have been maintained at a reasonable level.

Nearly half way to Wil is Matzingen, one of the main towns along the route and a connecting point with the buses, where the station was modernised in 1980. Approaching Wil the track curves to the left away from the main road to pass through a busy area of sidings and depot buildings on the approaches to the terminus. Until recently, Wil was only a depot for traction purposes but there is now a modern shed and extensive repair and maintenance facilities to replace those demolished at Frauenfeld Stadt. Here too, are the exchange sidings with the SBB for the 'Rollböcke' traffic.

Until the extensive refurbishing of the line, the passenger terminus at Wil was merely a runaround loop in the car park near the SBB station but, in 1984 its modern canopied platforms were connected by an underpass directly into the main station.

It is a line well worth travelling although one should not go there to look for startling scenery. One might still be lucky enough to see one of the three Be4/4's built in 1921 and which ran most of the passenger services until 1969 but like most modernised private lines in Switzerland today, old stock is usually disposed of quickly.



Frauenfeld Stadt Station and Carriage sheds.

Photo. A. Pike.

NOTE 1: The Schweiz Offizielles Kursbuch, Table 841, shows the length as 25 kms. This is for charging purposes and is common with mountain and certain short lines.