

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: 2 (1988-1990)
Heft: 11

Artikel: Rail-in 88. Part 2
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-855334>

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Rail-in 88

by Peter Kloss

Part 2

Continued from page 17 June 1990 issue

Wanting to escape the continuing damp, we planned on Tuesday to take the 'big trip', the Centovalli circular trip to Locarno. Booking the night before, we staggered out early on the 07.25 local to Spiez. Our plan was to go via Spiez, Brig, Domodossola, Locarno, Lucern and thence via the Brunig back to Interlaken, arriving at 20.25.

Whilst passing Interlaken West goods yard we noticed that the RATP unit had been shunted back there and had not gone to Paris after all. Near Spiez a wiring train was installing overhead wires on the recently doubled section from Faulensee. We changed here onto train 499 with the Ostend couchettes and Bern-Ventimiglia portion on which we had arrived. This was pretty full, but we just managed to get a window seat on the West side of the train.

This gave a good opportunity to see the double tracking works on the Lotschberg South ramp. At Brig the rear four coaches of our train, (the Ventimiglia portion) were detached by an SBB Ee3/3 shunter and pulled back onto the BLS Rhone bridge. Meanwhile, an express from Lausanne arrived behind Re4/4^v No. 2000. Our coaches were then attached to the train to continue on into Italy.

At Domodossola there was just time to photograph No. 2000 before diving into the subway to find the Centovalli train. When we got down the stairs and along a short corridor we found ourselves in a very Italian crowd, jostling for place on the two-platformed subterranean station with no sign of a train. When the train did come in, it was a rush to board but somehow we managed to get seats right in front of the articulated power car (ABe8/8) which like the good old BR DMUs, have a forward view.

We left at least 10 minutes late, taking it easily along the plain, but soon came to the zig-zag climb up the valley side. We were amazed at the sharpness of the bends, which seemed equal to those on the MOB's descent to Montreux and gave the line a "toy train" appearance.

It was obvious that money was being sunk into the line's infrastructure, one of the summit tunnels was being re-lined in sprayed concrete and avalanche defence works were being built. Beyond S.Maria Maggiore the line crossed to the other side of the valley over a long concrete viaduct that looked fairly new and then ran on a concreted ledge alongside the river, which at that time of the year was mainly boulders with a small stream running in the middle. A hazardous environment for bridges!

Just before the Swiss border, at Ponte Ribellasca there were passport checks, which we didn't get on the Simplon. The Swiss owned track seemed in better condition and had fixed colour light signals.

The train terminated at Ponte Brolla, here, after a brief glimpse of the depot, with several blue and cream Italian Centovalli articulated units and one of the Swiss owned SIG two-car units, we were carried off in buses for the centre of Locarno. The trackbed of the railway was easily visible, with most of the track lifted. The Centovalli station at the West end of Locarno (San Antonio) looked in fairly good shape and one couldn't help wondering why the train service didn't terminate there since there seemed to be plenty of room for arranging the train-bus connection. There was a lot of rusty track around and a huge sign proclaiming the start of the new tunnel to take the Centovalli under the centre of Locarno.

However, despite the sign and the beginnings of a trench, not much really seemed to be happening. The road we followed was obviously the street route that the railway had taken, with plenty of tramway track in the road centre. Eventually we arrived at the SBB station and got out at the stand where the Centovalli used to terminate. We then spent a rather nice couple of sunny hours on the lake shore before coming back to the station to catch the 13.58 train, an Ae6/6 hauling EWII stock which, it transpired, was a



*Ret4/4 in Bahn 2000 livery at Domosodola, at the head of the Geneva - Milan express, with Bern - Ventimiglia portion, 09.55 23.8.88.
Photo Peter Kloss*

through service to Luzern and Basel. We then had a memorable ride, looking out for all the spirals and loops en-route and enjoying the route's very spectacular scenery and engineering. At Bellinzona we passed an express of MkIV stock with a MKIII restaurant car, we also passed a couple of freights, one a Hugepack.

After the Gotthard tunnel we stopped at Göschenen, where we waited for a Chiasso-Zurich-St.Gallen express, mainly MKIVs, to connect with our train and then overtake. On the descent past Wassen there was little sign of the huge washout that occurred a year ago. Our train called at Brunnen, Schwyz and Arth-Goldau. Here we saw the Rigi mountain railway and a dark blue Sudostbahn local train bound for Rapperswil. On to Lucerne, where we arrived about 10 minutes late, passing on the way one of the MKIII push-pull sets.

Lucerne station was in the middle of reconstruction, with a large office block almost complete on the south side, the underground shopping mall partially open and the overall roof being renewed. Two of the standard gauge platforms were closed for roof renewal works.

Before leaving the station we went to the Brunig line platforms to check the departure time of our train and saw a Brunig train arrive behind one of the HGe4/4" locomotives, (contemporary with the FO build) of which the SBB only has two. It was intriguing to see this, since in all our time in Interlaken we had never seen one.

We had arrived at Lucerne during the rush hour and were quite amazed at the number of people about. As well as the sights, we saw several of the "bendy" trolley buses in addition to the normal sort.

We went back to the station for the 18.12 Lucerne-Interlaken Ost to find that the HGe4/4" was our train loco. It turned out that only the front three coaches went beyond Giswil, so as we were in coach No.6 we had to rush forward after Sarnen. At Brunig-Hasliberg station we passed the other HGe4/4" going back to Lucerne!

Our HGe4/4" unusually ran round the train at Meiringen and then took it out to Brienz. We were decanted onto a bus at Brienz because of



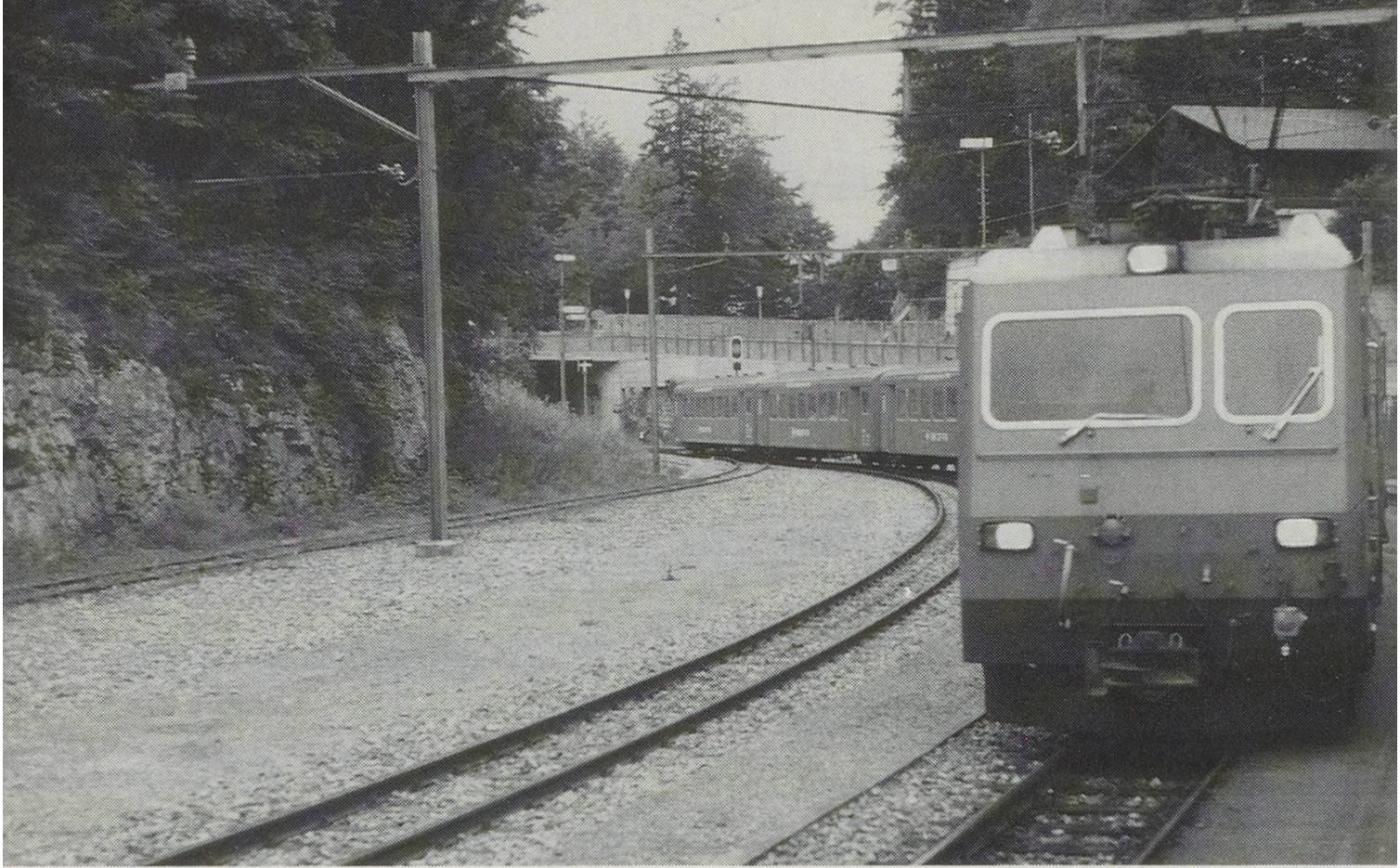
Centovalli ABe8/8 and FART SIG built Be4/8 at Ponte Brolla, 23.8.88
Photo Peter Kloss

engineering work between there and Interlaken Ost., which had the rather nice touch that the driver dropped us off in Goldswil, about a hundred yards from our apartment, and saved us the walk uphill from Ost.

On Wednesday we took our last free day on the Regional Season tickets and decided to go up to Schynige Platte. However, disaster struck on the way up when the lead train broke down and was unable to move. It took about an hour for the rescuing locomotive to come up and collect the errant locomotive and bring it back down again. We arrived at the top about an hour and a half late. When we came down again we decided to get our money's worth and from Wilderswil went up to Kleine Scheidegg, returning via Grindelwald. At Lauterbrunnen we got onto one of the WAB's new units, No 131, which gave a very impressive ride up to Wengen.

Time to go home! On Thursday we left the apartment just before 12 noon and took the BLS bus from Goldswil down to Interlaken West. After having a last look round Interlaken we caught the 14.47 boat from West to Thun. At Thun station we squeezed our luggage into a locker and then looked round the station. The main (Brig) portion of the southbound EC6 "Lotschberg" had just stopped. It was formed of blue and cream DB airconditioned stock, apart from a DB restaurant car in the middle and, at the head, the BLS Jubiliäumswagen, the 75th anniversary special bar car.

In the sidings at Thun there were no less than three SBB Ae4/7 electric locos dating from 1927. A BLS Ae8/8, with a long freight, was waiting on the road to Bern. Thun is also the terminus of the Emmental-Burgdorf-Thun Bahn (EBT), and one of their red EMUs departed while we were there. There was also an EBT branded green Re4/4 in the sidings. We then went for an early evening stroll around Thun. We returned to the station at about 20.00 and decided that, rather than waiting there for train 498 (conveying our couchette for Ostend), that we would take the next train into Bern. We had a quick look at the town centre, and a spy at the station which has a vast underground passageway containing most of the station facilities. We looked down some steps to the four platform underground terminus of the metre gauge VBW/SZB railways, which held a red SIG unit and some green and cream SZB coaches. At the main platform level, while we were waiting for train 498 to arrive, an SBB special containing



Brunig HGe4/4 at Brunig-Hasliberg on 23.8.88, taken from the Meiringen bound train hauled by the other HGe4/4".

Photo: Peter Kloss

two of the special conference MKIV coaches passed through and an Ae4/7 appeared hauling a freight.

We departed from Bern on time at 21.50. Only dozing en route to Basle, I managed to be sufficiently alert to watch the shunting of the overnight services there. We were detached from the rest of train 498 in the Swiss platform and drawn by an SBB shunter out to the north. We were then pushed back into the Swiss side to collect other couchettes/sleepers. Finally, we were drawn out to the north again, passing an SNCF BB20201 waiting to back down, and were propelled into the French side of the station. Meanwhile, another SBB shunter propelled BB15042 and a yellow French postal van onto the train for Paris Est. The shunter retreated and, a few minutes later, presumably after voltage changeover, 15042 departed. At 00.20, after our SNCF locomotive had coupled up, we departed for Luxembourg as train 298.

STEAM NEWS

The preserved Eb2/4 5469 (Built 1891 by Maschinenfabrik Esslingen for the Jura-Simplon Bahn) was in service over the Easter period on the Wutachtalbahn in Southern Germany. Transfer to and from Basel was made via Koblenz, under its own power, with two B coaches. The question is, did it use the Rhine bridge between Koblenz and Waldshut (DB) over which only DB railbuses are permitted to work.

The Wutachtalbahn is the old German "strategic" line, built to enable the operation of military trains across Southern Germany. Closed for some years, part of it is now operated by Eurovapor with predominately Swiss stock. It boasts Germany's only true spiral as well as several spectacular bridges and must be unique in that its schedule does not appear in the national timetable of the country in which it is situated but features in the Swiss International Timetable, Table 3245.