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During a visit to Switzerland in the autumn of 1990 I decided to investigate one of the lesser known standard gauge private railways, the EBT. Until this time I knew little of the railway other than that its bright red carriages could be glimpsed from express trains whilst passing through such stations as Burgdorf and Thun. Examination of the Swiss timetable indicated that the EBT operates in close partnership with the SMB and VHB. The three railways operate over a triangular area bounded by Moutier in the north west of Switzerland, by Wolhusen in the east (close to Lucerne) and by Thun to the south. The tables by the windows in every carriage provide a diagram of the complex array of lines, complete with the names of all 86 stations.

A schedule was evolved to cover the entire system, starting and finishing at my holiday base at Faulensee on Lake Thun, in just over ten hours. Although this would entail taking 16 trains and involve many connections of less than ten minutes, it seemed a reasonable challenge for a country renowned for punctual trains.

Moutier was chosen as the starting point for travel over the EBT, this was reached through changes of train at Spiez, Bern and Biel. Moutier is unusual in that although the majority of its services are operated by the SBB, the station and the long tunnel between it and Grenchen Nord form an outpost of the BLS. The reason is historical, the tunnel being built by the BLS during the First World War in response to the need for a new line into France due to the German occupation of Alsace.

Departure from Moutier was aboard an RBDe4/4^{II} 2-car EMU and the run to Solothurn, through the edge of the Swiss Jura, provided the most outstanding scenery of the day.

At Solothurn I transferred to a similar unit bound for Burgdorf; although situated on one of the SBB north-south main lines, the only other train to be seen was an all-stations service to Herzogenbuschsee, hauled by Re4/4^I No.10040.

The line to Burgdorf is essentially flat and uninteresting, but a tendency to doze was soon counteracted by the arrival of a party of schoolchildren. Burgdorf is also situated on the SBB, but there was not time to view train movements as almost all of the six minute connection was devoted to finding track 21(!), tucked away behind the main station building, where the train for Wasen was waiting. This comprised a single driving trailer propelled by a De4/4 motor baggage vehicle. Somehow the school part had got there first! Shortly after departure from Burgdorf, beyond Oberburg station, a large maintenance depot was to be seen to the east of the line, with a variety of motive power just visible inside the main train shed.

At Ramsei the train reversed and at Sumiswald the branch to Wasen was taken. There was a genuine rural atmosphere; the train climbing amongst the hills, passing tiny but well appointed halts, the passengers greeting each other, with the elderly being helped on and off the train as if the schedule were of no consequence. Wasen was however reached on time and the same unit formed the return working to Ramsei. I detrained at the junction of

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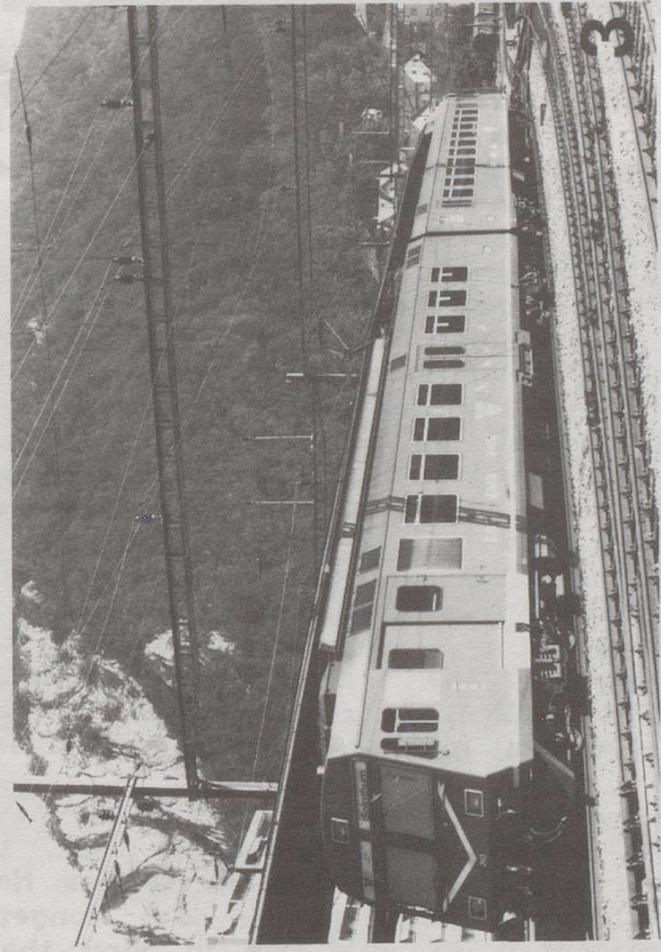
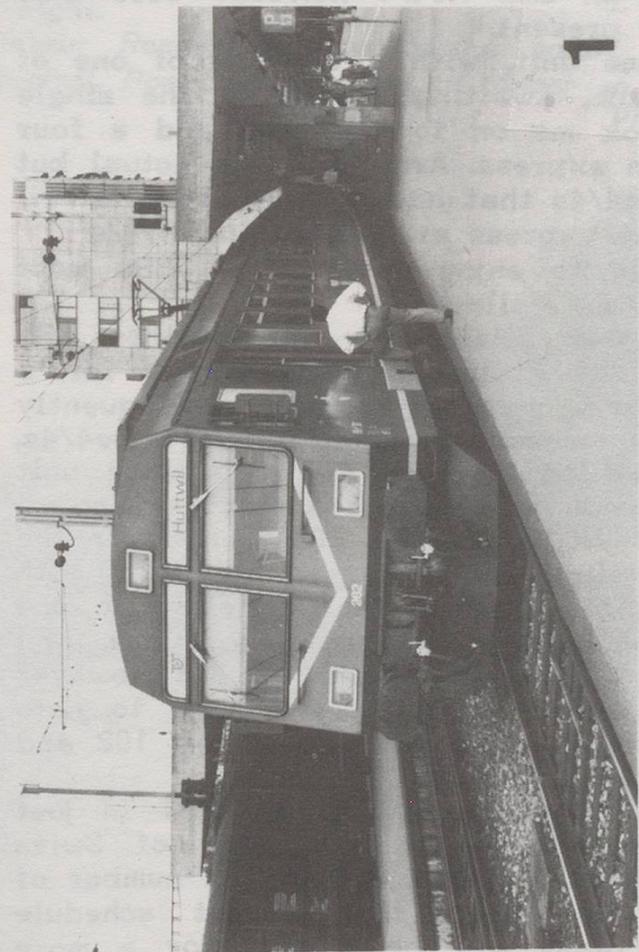
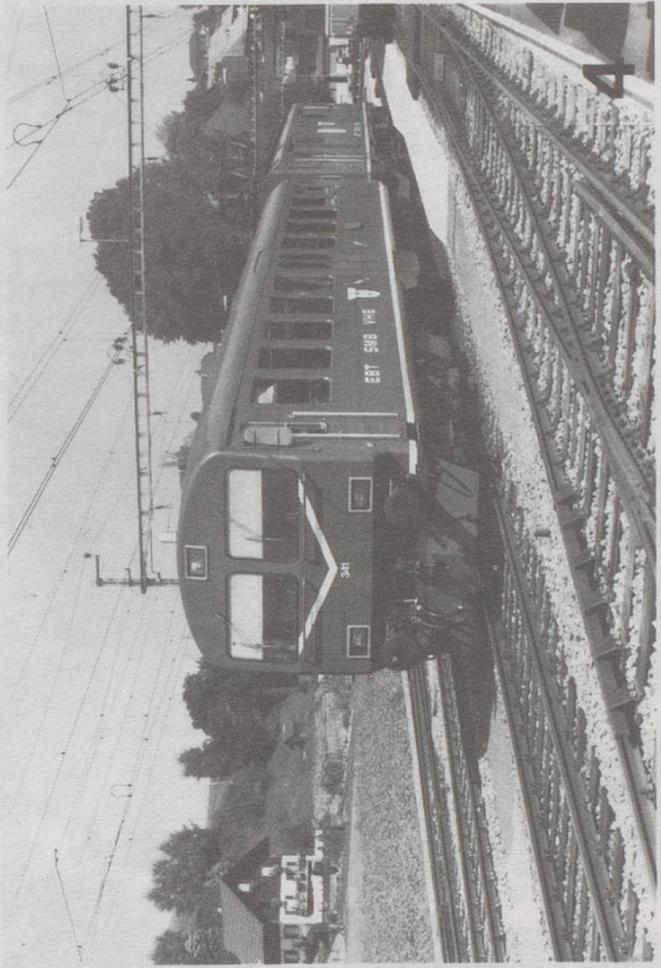
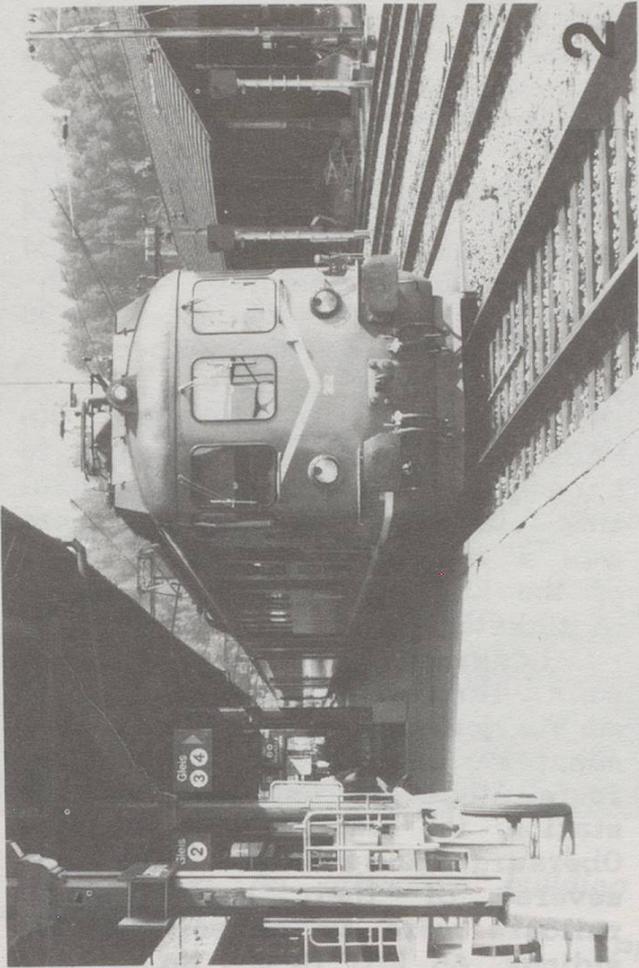
1: Langenthal. RBDe4/4^{II} No. 262 and Bt No.362 about to depart for Huttwil.

2: Langnau BDe4/4^{II} No.252 on the 16:05 for Burgdorf.

3: RBDe4/4^{II} No. 263 + Bt No.363 at Moutier.

4: De4/4 No. 267 propels driving trailer Bt No. 341 out of Sumiswald towards Ramsei.

Photos John Weaver





Sumiswald, little knowing that the same train would return from Ramsei 22 minutes later to form my onward train to Huttwil.

There was much to see at Huttwil during the 9 minute wait for the train to Langenthal, three of EBT's 1932-built Be4/4 locomotives were present, Nos.104 and 105 at the head of a south-bound freight, whilst No.106 waited in the yard. Unexpectedly, an SBB Re4/4^{II} arrived with a through train to Lucerne. An RBDe4/4^{II} took me on to Langenthal and, for the first time since leaving Moutier there was a ticket inspection; for most of the EBT system self-validation of tickets is the norm.

Langenthal is on the same main line as Burgdorf, a 17 minute journey on the SBB but 67 minutes by the circuitous EBT route that I had taken. The station is also served by the Oberaargau-Jura-Bahn (OJB) and several of their more elderly railcars were to be seen in the sidings. An EBT Be4/4, No.108 and an SBB Ae4/7 No.10997 were also present.

The return to Huttwil was on the same unit, with a sighting of one of the EBTs three Re4/4^{II}s, No.113 at Rohrbach, awaiting access to the single track with a freight train. A BDe4/4^{II} took me on to Wolhusen and a four minute connection with an SBB Lucerne-Bern express. Arrival was punctual but there was no time to photograph the two Be4/4s that had arrived from Huttwil and were busy remarshalling their train. The express arrived behind Re4/4^{II} No.11236 and for half an hour I was able to enjoy one of the SBBs most attractive lines as it followed the Kleine Emme Valley.

At Langnau there was a 5 minute connection onto yet another EBT BDe4/4^{II}, bound for Burgdorf. It stopped at Zollbruck long enough for a postal vehicle to be added to the three-car set, and I subsequently detrained at the busy junction of Hasle Ruesgau. Two of the EBT Be4/4s, Nos.101 and 103,were present, each marshalling a train and a tractor unit propelled a rake of wagons through the station on a yard transfer working.

An RBDe unit soon arrived for the final leg of the EBT tour, over the line to Thun. From Biglen onward this line loses height steadily, with extensive views, until the approach to Thun. There was a delay at one passing loop for one of the infrequent semi-fast trains to pass and consequently the arrival in Thun was a few minutes late. It did however coincide with the arrival of an express for Spiez, with just time to note the two remaining EBT Be4/4 locomotives from the day's travel, Nos. 102 and 107.

There was some satisfaction at covering the whole of the EBT in just under seven hours without a hitch, taking in a wide variety of Swiss scenery, train operation and stations. However it was clear that a number of the locations deserved a far longer stay than the present schedule permitted. It is with this in mind that plans are being laid for a more leisurely return in 1991 ☐



Facing page: An attractive building at Burghof, one of the small stations on the Wasen branch.

Photo John Weaver

Above: EBT Re4/4²² No. 111 at Huttwil with Wolhausen-Huttwil-Langenthal freight.

Below: Ramsei station looking south. Motor luggage van + control trailer for Huttwil. Post van attached to railcar on Langnau-Burgdorf service.

Photos Philip Elwin

