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SBB corridor coaches at Belfort, SNCF; 24 March 1992
photo by Steve Horabin

Belfort to Delémont

International Crossing

by Steve Horabin

A few weeks before a planned holiday to France in March this year, I learned of the impending closure of the SNCF line from Belfort to Delle to passenger service. Although this route only sees two through services in each direction a day, the line is a vital short cut for those citizens of the Swiss Jura who wish to make connections with the SNCF main line services at Belfort. Hence, the threatened closure is being vigorously opposed by the Swiss.

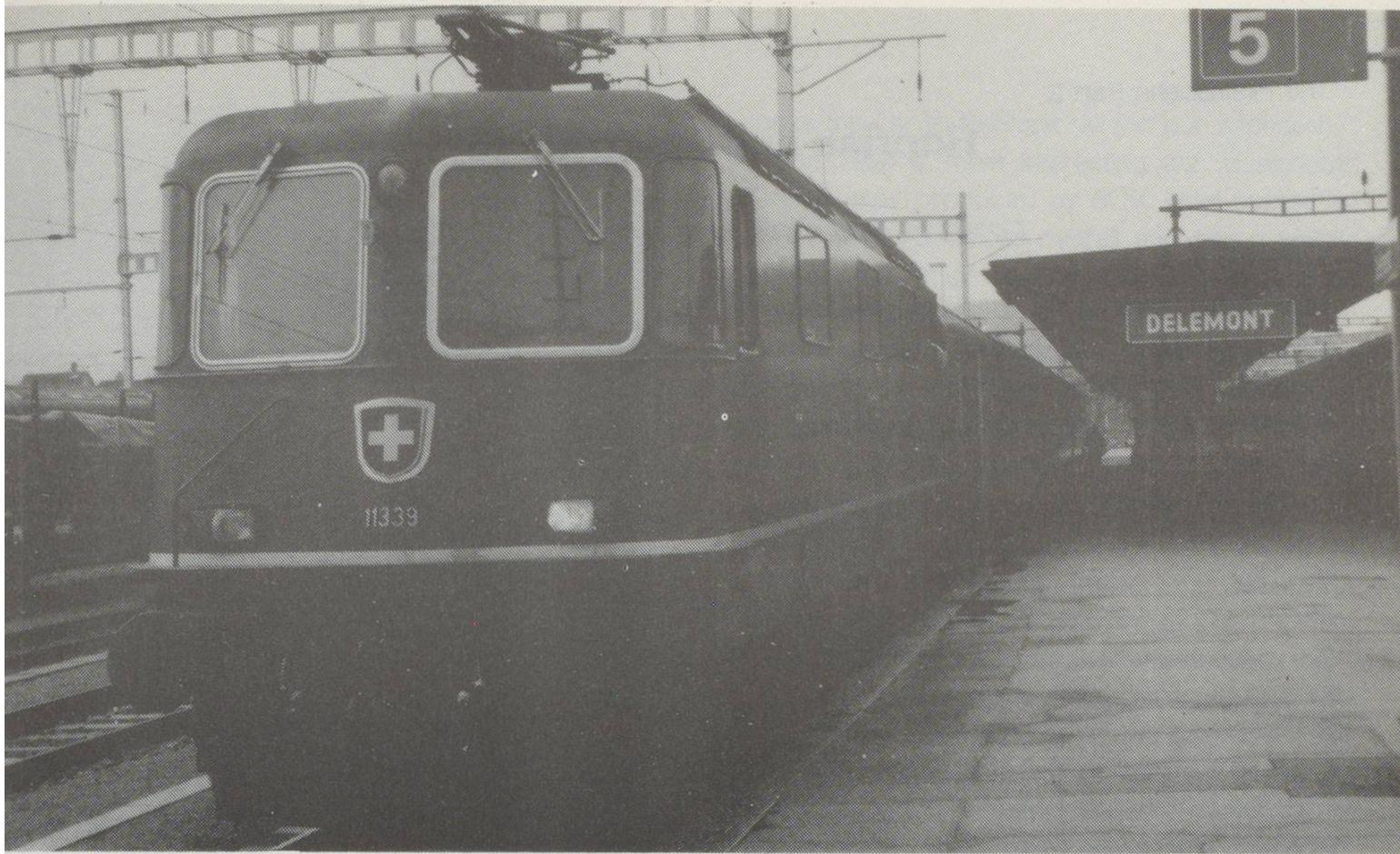
Naturally, as I was staying so close to Switzerland at Dijon, I had to traverse this line before any possible closure. So, making my way through the snow on a Turbo train via Besonçon in the French Jura, I arrived at Belfort with plenty of time to observe the French railway scene before the Tuesday morning 11:19 train to Delémont was due to depart.

Two Swiss corridor coaches, carrying destination boards for Delle and Delémont were

waiting in the side platform A. At 11:12 the Eurocity express, *Le Corbusier* arrived from Paris and about 20 passengers made their way to the Swiss coaches. With so light a loading, the French authorities appeared to have a point, but I did notice that there were still a number of reservations in place for the earlier working from Delémont. An SNCF class BB7200 was attached and, at 11:19 we duly set off.

The line climbs slightly out of Belfort into wooded countryside and passes through a few small hamlets that last saw passenger services in the 1950s. There was some freight traffic to be seen, mainly made up of Gaz tank wagons. At the border station, Delle there are extensive sidings where freight is held for customs examination before crossing into Switzerland.

At Delle we reached the overhead wires of the SBB; our SNCF locomotive was detached and replaced by Re4/4" 11339 and an additional standard passenger coach was



Re4/4" No.11339 at Delémont; 24 March 1992

photo Steve Horabin

attached. After the Customs and Passport officers had walked through the train, we set off into Swiss territory through Boncourt, the first Swiss station. It was immediately apparent we were in Switzerland.

The line passes through the foothills of the Jura before arriving at Porrentruy where a brief stop allowed hordes of schoolchildren to invade the train. We then continued on our way, paralleling the standard gauge Chemin du fer du Jura (CJ) line to Bontol for a short distance before heading straight towards a chain of mountains to enter the long tunnel under the 804m high Mount Terri. We then emerged onto a ledge high above the Ursanne valley, passing through St.Ursanne station, above the village of that name.

After descending through a second tunnel we reached G洛velier, where the the metre gauge CJ line to La Chaux-de-Fonds terminates. There are plans to extend this line to Delémont, but these are meeting with some local opposition. We did not stop, continuing on our way through open countryside before reaching Delémont at 12:26.

The trip was interesting, with lots of variety, passing through one of the more remote corners of Europe. It is a great pity that it may no longer be possible to make this particular international crossing.

