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The ASD at Aigle, 28 July 1990; ABFe No.2 with trailer and goods van

Photo Tour on the ASD

by Steve Horabin

Photographs by the author

During July 1990, when I was in Switzerland with the Swiss Railways Society 10th Anniversary Tour, having spent five days at Spiez and three at Vevey, Saturday 28th July was the final day.

It had been a most enjoyable and successful tour, as many members will have already seen (Swiss Express **www** and **xxx**, 1991). However, the tour itinerary was by no means compulsory so I decided to go my own way and travel on the line between Martigny and Le Châble to complete the Martigny Orsières network, having traveled over the route to Orsières in the Summer of 1989, then join up with the main group to visit the Blonay Champéry museum later that afternoon.

I caught the 08:45 train out of Vevey and, with plenty of time in hand, I made the snap decision to break my journey at Aigle to see what was going on in front of the CFF station

where three of the four metre gauge railways of the TCP group meet.

On leaving my train I rushed to record the number of the locomotive, a Re4/4, before it continued its journey up the Rhone valley to Brig. Turning my attention to the metre gauge, immediately before me was ASD ABFe No.2 in red and cream livery with an orange coloured passenger coach and a single goods wagon in tow.

Both railcar and coach dated from 1913. This was a pleasant surprise, but I was even more surprised when the driver dismounted from his cab and shook hands with me, then joined with me in taking photographs of his train, which was soon joined alongside by the more modern railcars of the Aigle Sepey les Diablerets (ASD), Aigle Leysin (AL) and Aigle Ollon Monthey Champéry (AOMC).

After a little while a group of about twenty



At Le Sépey, 28 July 1990. ABFe No.2 shunting

people, obviously railway enthusiasts, arrived and proceeded to photograph everything in sight before climbing aboard ASD No.2. The doors closed, the train moved forward for about ten metres and stopped, the doors reopened and a bearded gentleman shouted something to me in French.

"Non comprenez pas, je suis Anglais," I replied, this being about the extent of my French.

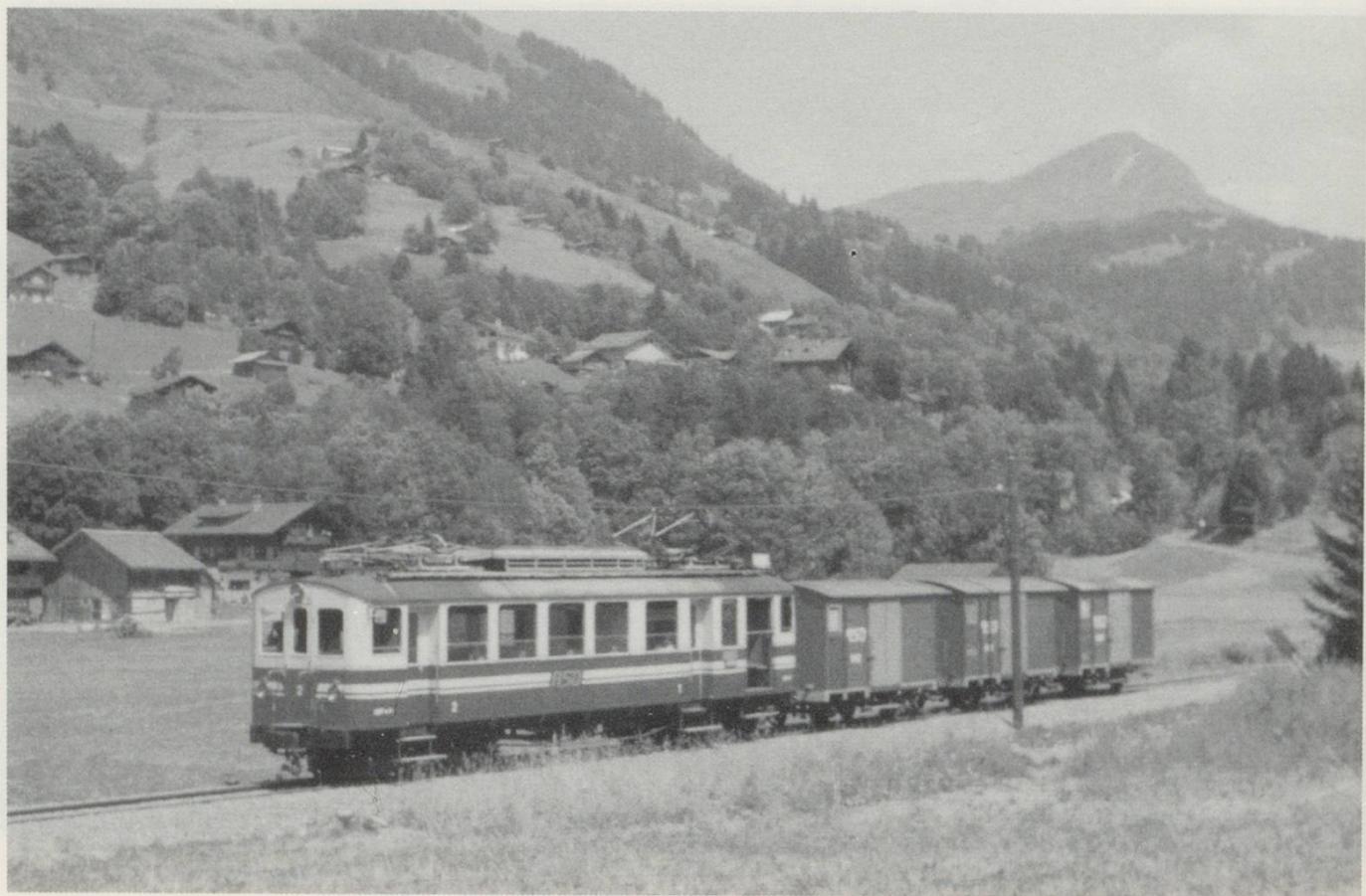
"Would you like to come with us?" he then said, in perfect English. I thought for about two seconds and agreed.

To be honest, I hadn't any idea what I'd let myself in for, I had one roll of film, one bottle of fruit juice and the weather was extremely hot. The bearded gentleman came and introduced himself as Serge Wolte of the *Trains Photogroupe Eisenbahnfreund* and, as joint organiser, explained that the train had been chartered for a photo-stop tour of the Aigle-Sépey-Les Diablerets line to coincide with the retirement of the guard on the train, Mons. Charles Gross.

Any apprehension I had about being an intruder was soon put to rest. As the train stopped my new friends shouted "Come on", and we jumped down onto the ballast to race away from the tracks through the vineyards and around a bend to photograph ABFe No.2 in front of the Chateau Aigle, with the Dent du Midi as a backdrop. The driver was waved on and brought the train to a stop in the exact position for photography.

We reboarded and proceeded to our next stop, the 76m long, 104m high Le Pont du Vandel, one of the two major structures on the line, the other being the Viaduc de Planches which unfortunately we were not scheduled to stop at, as the overgrowth makes photography difficult.

The Aigle-Sépey-les Diablerets is 23.3 km long and, as well as the two massive viaducts, incorporates six tunnels and seven smaller bridges and has a ruling grade of 1 in 16. At les Planches there is a short spur over the viaduct to Le Sépey, where we shunted our passenger coach into a siding and collected two more



An idyllic scene on the ASD. ABFe No.2 with three van trailing load

goods wagons, whilst running round the train for the final stretch to the terminus. All these shunting manoeuvres were thoroughly recorded on film before returning to Les Planches, where we took the other route to Les Diablerets. I was told that this was the first time in twelve months that goods wagons had been on this part of the line. At Vers l'Eglise we waited for a regular passenger train to pass before continuing on to Les Diablerets, where we arrived some two hours after setting out, an hour and four minutes more than the scheduled service.

After a two hour lunch break we set off back to Aigle, making several more stops which gave us good shots of the Ormont mountains in the background. At Le Sepéy, where the three goods wagons were left and the orange passenger coach re-attached. We then descended on a ledge high above the Grande Eau, with the village of Leysin on the mountainside opposite, with the brown and cream trains of the AL clearly visible.

At Verchiez the passenger coach was again detached and shunted next to an equally old looking coach, in need of repair. Verchiez station - or halt - consists of one wooden hut and a timetable board. It is some 50 minutes walk from the village above, this emphasises the problems facing the ASD, for although, as reported in the February 1989 *Swiss Express*, the number of passengers rose in 1987, they have been falling ever since, putting the future of this line once more in jeopardy.

We were now approaching the end of our journey. We stopped at the depot and a bottle of champagne was cracked to drink the health of Mons. Gross, our guard. We arrived back at Aigle station at 16:30, where we shook hands and said our goodbyes.

I would like to thank the members of the *Trains Photogroupe Eisenbahnfreunde* who were so hospitable to a foreigner and to the crew of ASD ABFe No.2, who did everything asked of them and more to make this a marvellous, memorable day.