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The Jura-Simplon

by Giles Della-Gana

Although the shortest lived of the major railways, the Jura-Simplon had the greatest route mileage of the SBB/CFF constituent companies. It also had, in the writer's opinion, the most involved development. There are enough crises and take-overs to do justice to a British company rather than a Swiss one.

The first lines in Western Switzerland were opened by the Compagnie de l'Ouest des Chemins de fer Suisses (OS) between Bussigny and Yverdon on 7 May 1855 and Bussigny and Morges, via Renens, in 1 July of the same year. The company had strong British financial connections and its chief engineer was Charles Vignoles.

A branch from Renens to Lausanne was opened on 5 May 1856, being extended along Lac Lemán to Versoix in April 1858. Genève itself was reached via the Versoix-Genève (VG), opened on 25th June 1858, where a connection was made with the Lyons-Genève (to be covered in another article). A line along Lac Neuchâtel, from Yverdon to Vaumarcus, was opened on 7 November 1859, connecting with the Franco-Suisse company (see below). A line, separated from the main system, was opened from Villeneuve, on Lac Lemán, to Bex on 10 June 1857 and extended to St.Maurice on 1 November 1860. Villeneuve was linked to Lausanne on 2 April 1861.

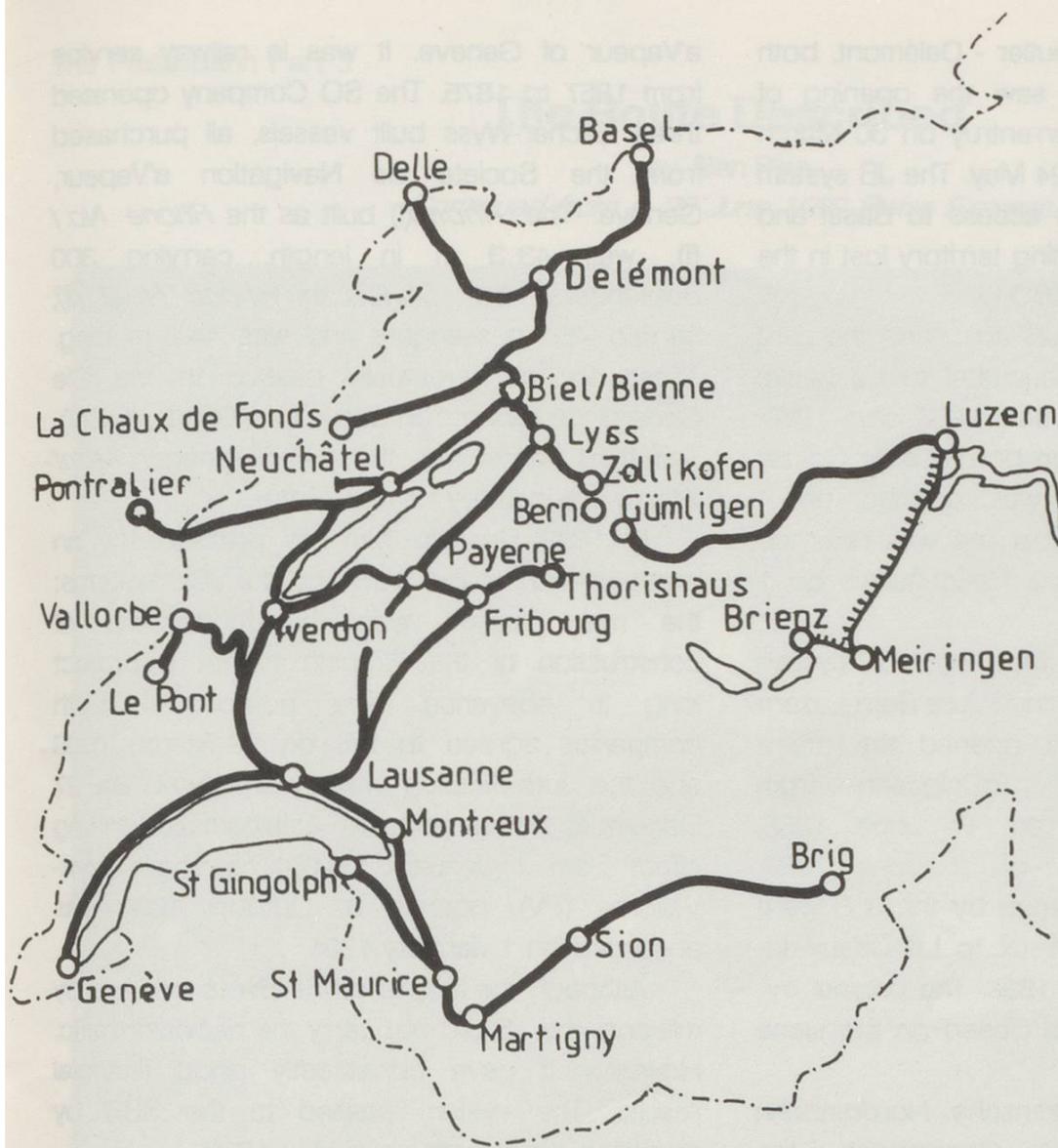
The Societe ou Compagnie Franco-Suisse (FS) began life as a satellite of the Paris-Lyon-Mediterranee (PLM). The company was granted a concession on 6 February 1854, an agreement for the line to be worked by the PLM being made in 1856; the chief engineer of the PLM being appointed to the FS board. A line from Vaumarcus, via Neuchâtel, to Neuveville on the Bernese border was opened in 1859. A branch from Auvèrnièr to Les Verrieres, forming a route to France, was opened on 25 July 1860. The agreement with the PLM brought French trains to Neuveville.

The Lausanne-Fribourg-Berne (LFB) opened between Balliswil, near Fribourg, and Thorishaus, where it made an end-on junction with the Schweizerische Centralbahn (SCB), on 2 July 1860. It was extended to Lausanne, via Romont and Oron, on 4 September 1862. This section was only built after disputes over the route had led to Federal intervention. During 1858 the LFB took over the VG. Political rivalries amongst the Cantons obstructed the development of connecting lines and traffic. Canton Fribourg, heavily committed financially to the LFB, was obliged to take over control in 1864.

Beset with difficulties these three companies formed a working agreement on 8 April 1864, effective from 1 January 1865, under the name Chemin de fer de la Suisse Occidentale (SO), complete amalgamation taking place on 7 August 1872. In 1865 the SO took over operation of the line between Les Verrieres and Pontarlier in France and on 1 July 1868, that of the independently promoted Bulle-Romont (BR). On 1 July 1870 the Jougne - Eclépens Company opened a line from Cossonay to Vallorbe, extended to Jougne on 1 July 1875. The line passed to the SO on 20 December 1876. Two separately promoted lines were taken over by the SO prior to completion, the Broye Longitudinal from Palezieux to Frâshels at the Bernese border, where it joined the JB line at Lyss, opened 1876 and the Broye Transversal from Fribourg to Payerne, opened 25 August 1876 and extended to Yverdon on 1 February 1877.

In 1856 a company with the fantastic title of the Chemin de fer de la ligne d'Italie par la vallee de Rhône et la Simplon (LI) was formed in Paris to build a railway linking France and Italy via the Rhône valley and a Simplon tunnel. The first section was opened on 14 July 1859 between Bouveret and Martigny, being extended to Sion on 10 May 1860. However, poor equipment and

The Jura-Simplon Bahn



form the Suisse-Occidentale-Simplon (SOS). In 1 June 1886 a short connection from Bouveret to St.Gingolph and along the French coast to Evian was opened. The Neuveville-Bienne line was opened on 3 December 1860 by the Ost-Westbahn to extend the Lausanne - Yverdon - Neuveville line to meet the SCB. It was bought on 1 June 1861 by the Bernische-Staatsbahn (BSB), who extended it to Zollikofen on 1 June 1864. The BSB also opened an

disagreements over management led to the intervention of the Canton of Valais and the company was placed in the hands of a receiver in April 1865. An extension from Sion to Sierre, already begun by the original LI, was completed and opened on 15 October 1868.

All was still not well however, and the line was once again placed in the hands of a receiver, this time by the Federal Authorities. On 16 May 1874 the railway was transferred to a consortium composed of the SO and the Vaudoise Finance Company for a nominal sum, on condition that it was brought up to a proper standard and extended to Brig by 1 July 1878. Although the SO was to work the line, the new company took the name of the Simplon Railway Co. The line was extended from Sierre to Leuk on 1 June 1877 and arrived at Brig in 1 July 1878. After some internal disagreements the two systems amalgamated on 28 June 1881 to

form the Suisse-Occidentale-Simplon (SOS). In 1 June 1886 a short connection from Bouveret to St.Gingolph and along the French coast to Evian was opened. The Neuveville-Bienne line was opened on 3 December 1860 by the Ost-Westbahn to extend the Lausanne - Yverdon - Neuveville line to meet the SCB. It was bought on 1 June 1861 by the Bernische-Staatsbahn (BSB), who extended it to Zollikofen on 1 June 1864. The BSB also opened an isolated section from Gümligen to Langnau on the same day. On 1 August 1875 this section was transferred to the Bern-Luzern-Bahn (BLB), who opened an extension from Langnau through to Luzern on 11 August 1875 in anticipation of the construction of a Gotthard line. The BLB was worked by the BSB. The remainder of the BSB became part of the JB (q.v.) on 24 May 1877. The Jura Bernois (JB) obtained a series of concessions in 1870 to build a number of lines in north West Switzerland. Its lines from Bienne to Convers and Sonceboz to Tavannes opened on 30 April 1874. Vallorbe to Pontalier opened on 1 July 1875 and Delémont to Basel on 25 September the same year. In 1876 the JB bought the line from Delle to Porrentruy, built and worked by the PLM, which had opened on 23 September 1872; other lines opened were between Delémont and Glovelier on 15 October and

Tavannes - Court and Moutier - Delémont, both on 16 December. 1877 saw the opening of lines from Glovelier to Porrentruy on 30 March and Court to Moutier on 24 May. The JB system provided the French with access to Basel and Western Switzerland avoiding territory lost in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1.

On 1 May 1875 the JB absorbed the Jura Industriel (JI) line from Neuchâtel to Le Locle, opened in sections between 1857 and 1860. An extension to the French border at le Col de Roches and Besançon was opened on 4 August 1884, but the whole line was returned to local control as the Jura Neuchâtelois on 1 January 1886.

On 1 July 1884 the BLB/JB system changed its name to the Jura-Bern-Luzern (JBL). Under this title it opened the metre gauge rack equipped Brünigbahn from Alpnachstad to Brienz on 14 June 1888, extending it to Luzern on 1 June 1889. Standard gauge lines opened by the JLB were a direct line from Le Creux to La Chaux-de-Fonds on 17 December 1888. The original link to Convers on the JI was closed on the same day.

As with the Schweizerische Nordostbahn and the Schweizerische Centralbahn, the western railway companies undertook the operation of lake steamers. The ambitions of the LI seem to be reflected in the names of its two vessels. The 50.5 m, 700 passenger *Simplon(I)* was built by Miller and Rawenhill of London as the *Aigle* for the Societe de l'Aigle of Geneva in 1842 and served with the railway company from 1860 to 1874. The *Italie(I)*, 42.9 m long with a passenger capacity of 200 was built by Chantiers de Lyon in 1854 as the *Ville-de-Nyon* for the Societe Anonyme de Bateaux

a'Vapeur of Geneva. It was in railway service from 1857 to 1875. The SO Company operated three Escher-Wyss built vessels, all purchased from the Societe de Navigation a'Vapeur, Geneva. The *Rhone(I)* built as the *Rhone No.1 (I)*, was 43.3 m in length, carrying 300 passengers., the *Chillon, ex Rhone No.2 (II)*, carried 450 passengers and was 44.7 m long. These vessels eventually passed to the Cie General de Navigation Sur le Lac Lemman (CGN). The third vessel was the 150 passenger *Mont-Blanc(I)*, previously named *Dranse*.

In 1889 German bankers pressed for an amalgamation of the SOS and the JBL systems; the main reason was the furtherance of construction of the Simplon tunnel, a project long in abeyance. The boards of both companies agreed to this on 12 March 1889 and the Jura-Simplon was incorporated on 27 December of that year, the amalgamation taking effect from 1 January 1890. The short Pont-Vallorbe (PV), opened 31 October 1886 was absorbed on 1 January 1891.

Although the largest of the Swiss railways by mileage, the JS did not carry the heaviest traffic. However it gave consistently good financial results. The system passed to the SBB by purchase agreement on 1 May 1903.

Note

Completion of what we now call the Simplon route had to await the opening of two tunnels into Switzerland. The Simplon I, together with the line from Iselle di Trasquera to Domodossola opened on 1 June 1906 and the PLM cut-off from Frasnè to Vallorbe on 16 May 1915. The Brunig was extended along the shore of the Brienersee to Interlaken by the SBB, opening on 23 August 1916.

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