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The Schinznacher Baumschule Bahn

by Deryck Featherstone

Perhaps I am mistaken in thinking that this railway is almost unknown to British enthusiasts but I have not seen reference to it in any of the publications I normally take.

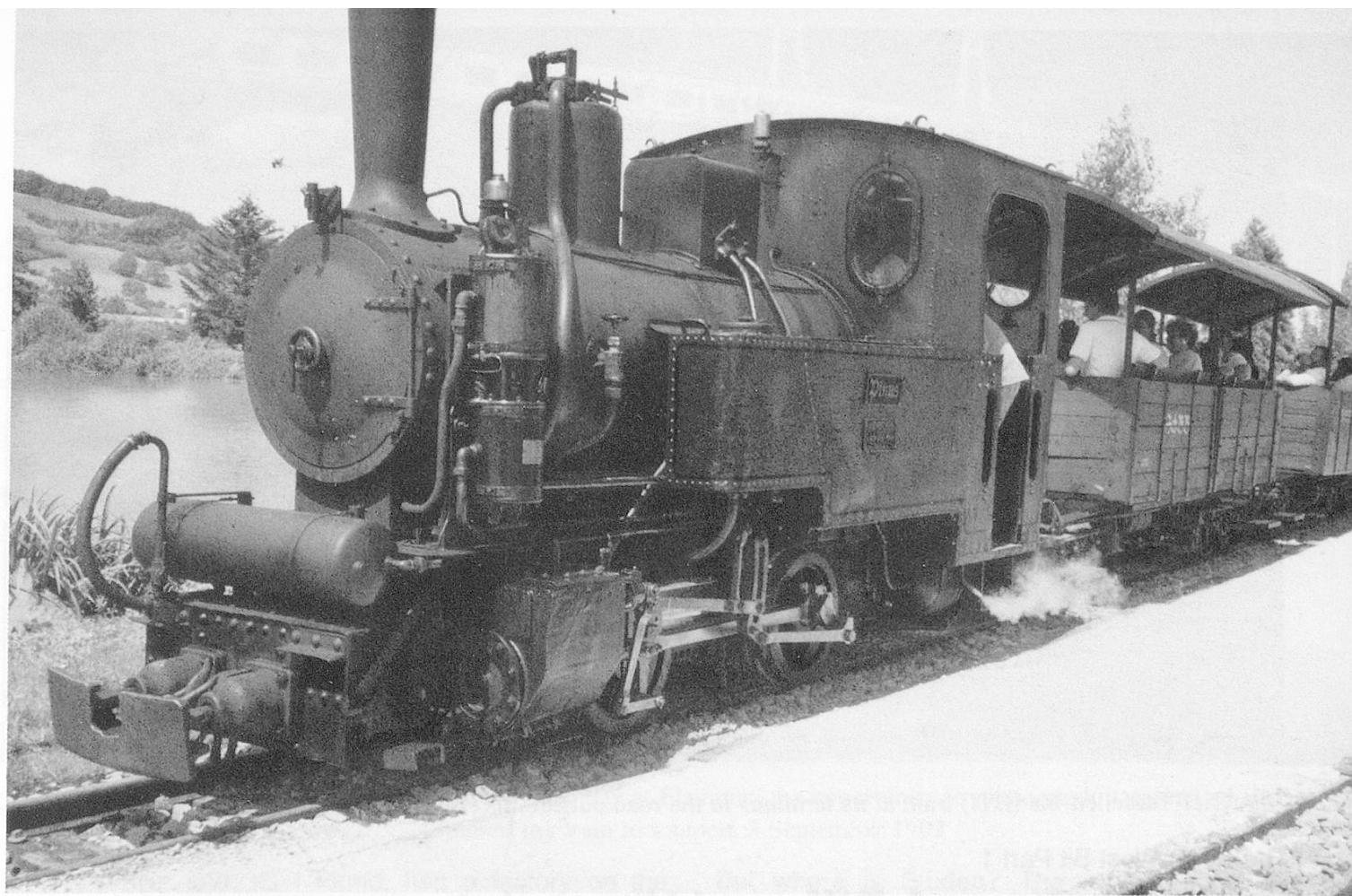
The workaday village of Schinznach Dorf lies on the back road between Brugg and Aarau, some 8 to 10 km from Brugg. This is an area west of Zürich which, by Swiss standards, is fairly thickly populated and industrialised but which contains many beautiful and historic towns which are worth more attention from British tourists than they seem to get.

The Baumschule, as its name implies, is a large nursery chiefly devoted to the raising of trees and shrubs. It is particularly famous for its enormous collection of indoor Bonsai trees which, in itself, is well worth a visit, if only to rouse visions of real, but very expensive, scenic effects on model railways!

However the chief attraction for railway enthusiasts is the internal rail system which is now owned and operated by a preservation society, the Schinznacher Baumschule Bahn. They are proud to claim the same initials as the

national system but, to avoid confusion have altered the SBB to the SchBB.

The nursery covers a large area and in 1928 a 60cm (nominal 2ft) gauge railway was laid to provide internal transport. The line is 3 km long and is in the form of a very irregular figure eight. It ceased to be used by the nursery, Herman Zulauf AG, in 1978 and two years later was bought by a preservation society. The track is well laid and maintained and I imagine some alterations have been made to provide a 'country' station and passing loop and to give a longer, continuous circuit. The journey through the areas of intensive cultivation is interesting, especially when it includes a free shower if the irrigation is working. Our 1992 visit was on the hottest day of the year, so this was very welcome. In the less cultivated area there is a lake, a longish girder bridge and some challenging gradients. Steam trains run on Saturdays and Sundays from late April until early October (except Whitsunday), with diesels on Wednesdays. Trains run at half-hourly intervals and the ride



takes about 20 minutes. In 1992 the adult fare was Sfr.5; entry to the Baumschule and parking is free.

The society has three attractive little steam locomotives in working order, a variety of open and closed passenger vehicles and a number of assorted goods vehicles as well as three small diesels. Not being an expert on Continental narrow gauge I cannot give details, but much of this equipment appears to be of historic interest. The Westinghouse air brake is used on passenger trains.

However the most fascinating exhibit is at present residing in the well-equipped workshop. This is a massive South African Beyer Garratt 2-6-2+2-6-2 of, I believe, class NGG16, one of the largest locomotives to run on 2ft gauge anywhere in the world. On our first visit, in 1990, it was stripped right down but in August 1992 re-assembly was well in hand and the engine stood over a deep well-lit pit into which visitors could venture for a fascinating underneath view. No work was going on at the time, needless to say. As one would expect, there was evidence of first class workmanship and the finished Garratt should be in 'as new' condition when she is rolled out for steaming in, I was told, 1994.

How the SchBB will stand up to this 50 tonne giant and how its 15 m length will cope with the sharp curves remains to be seen, but there are ten axles to spread the load and a feature of the Garratt articulated system is its flexibility. We have friends in Brugg who will keep us informed and the sight of this engine at work will be well worth making an effort to see.

We reached Schinznach by car, which is probably the easiest way, but the SchBB leaflet says it is a twenty minute walk from the SBB Schinznach Bad station, on the opposite bank of the Aare. There is also a Postauto service from Brugg Bahnhof. I have no idea of the frequency or convenience of either service.

The SchBB bears some slight resemblance to Alan Bloom's Bressingham Gardens Nursery Line, but without the razz-matazz of the rest of the steam museum. The atmosphere is friendly, informal and non-commercial (no plants on sale on Sundays), though refreshments are available. The Schinznacher Baumschule Bahn is worth anyone's visit and us definitely *Nicht nur fur Dampf-Freaks*, a delightful bit of Anglo-Deutsch which surely needs no translation.