

A railway history of Switzerland. Part 7, The smaller SBB constituents

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The Smaller SBB Constituents

by Giles Della Gana

Concluded from page 27, Swiss Express Vol.3/8, December 1992

We are now nearing the end of our look at the development of the SBB system. This article will take the form of a review, travelling from west to east, of the short or minor lines that have been absorbed.

The line from the border, at La Plaine, into Genève, was opened on 18 March 1858 by the Lyon-Genève, which became part of the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée (PLM) on 1 January 1862. The Swiss section passed to the SBB on 1 January 1913. As it is used by Genève bound SNCF trains the line has retained French signalling and in 1956 was electrified at 1500 volts DC. Local services are worked by suitably adapted SBB stock.

The Jura-Neuchâteloise (JN) was opened as the Jura-Industriel (JI) between Neuchâtel and Le Locle in the following stages; La-Chaux-de-Fonds to Le Locle on 2 July 1857, Convers to La-Chaux-de-Fonds on 27 November and Neuchâtel to Les Hauts-Geneveys on 1 December 1859, the final section between Les Hauts-Geneveys and Convers opening on 15 July 1860. The line included two tunnels, the 3259 m Loges and the 1354 m Mont-Sagne, which proved most difficult and therefore costly to build. The JI company went into liquidation at the end of 1860 and was for two years operated in succession by the Receiver, the Government and the creditors. In 1865 the creditors formed a second Jura Industriel company to work the line. In the long run this suffered the same fate as its predecessor and the line passed to the Jura Bernois (JB) (see part 5) on 1 May 1875. Following a referendum, the line Neuchâtel to le Locle, together with the extension to the border at Le Locle-Col des Roches, opened on 4 August 1884, was purchased by Canton Neuchâtel, passing to them on 1 January 1886. The Canton transferred the railway to the JN on 1 January 1900. The by now very run-down railway finally passed, by purchase, to the SBB on 1 July 1913.

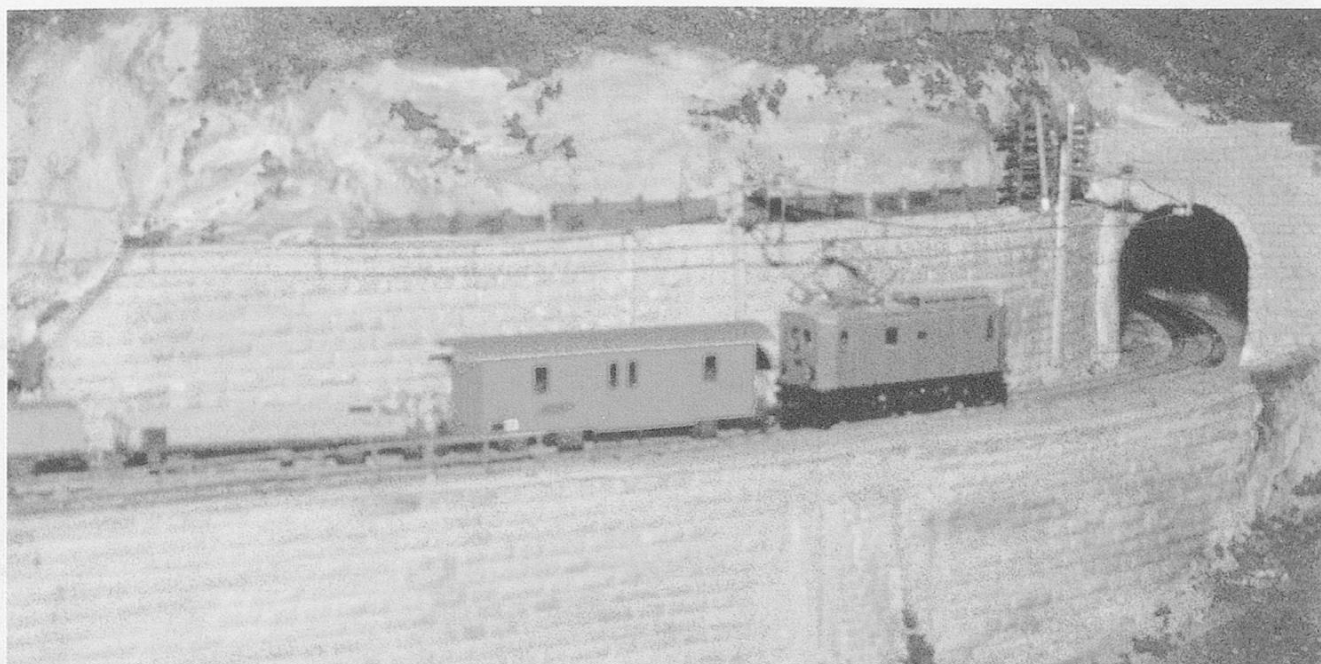
During the 1850s a rail route through the Seethal linking Germany with the

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Vierwaldstättersee and the Gotthard pass was proposed. In the event the Schweizerische Centralbahn (SCB) was built via Zofingen and Sursee (see part 2). In 1871 a committee obtained a concession for a line from Lenzburg to Luzern but could not raise the necessary finance. The Zürich engineer, Theodor Lutz proposed a money saving method of railway construction, namely the laying of the rails along a suitable road, thus avoiding expensive land purchase. There was still no interest shown in Switzerland but in England the cut-price project was presented as a major feeder, passing through an important tourist area, to the Gotthardbahn which was then under construction. The *Lake Valley of Switzerland Railway Company* was thus founded in London in 1881 with a share capital of £150,000.

The line from Beinwil am See south to the junction with the SCB at Emmenbrücke opened on 3 September 1883, the rest of the main line north from Beinwil to Lenzburg opening on 15 October of the same year. A branch was opened from Beinwil to Menziken on 23 January 1887, being extended to Beromünster in 1906. In 1894 a Swiss company took over and extended the line from Lenzburg Spitzkehre to Wildegg on 1 October 1895. The years from the turn of the century up to World War I were most successful and the railway showed a handsome profit, so much so that in 1910 it was able to find most of the cost of electrification at 5,500 volts ac, from its own resources. This was to prove a sound investment as during World War I the Seethalbahn, as the company was now known, was able to increase its freight services at a time when other Swiss railways were cutting theirs back, owing to the shortage of coal. The Seethalbahn was bought by the SBB, passing to them on 1 January 1922. The line was converted to the by then standard system of 15,000 volts AC at 16²/₃ HZ in 1930.

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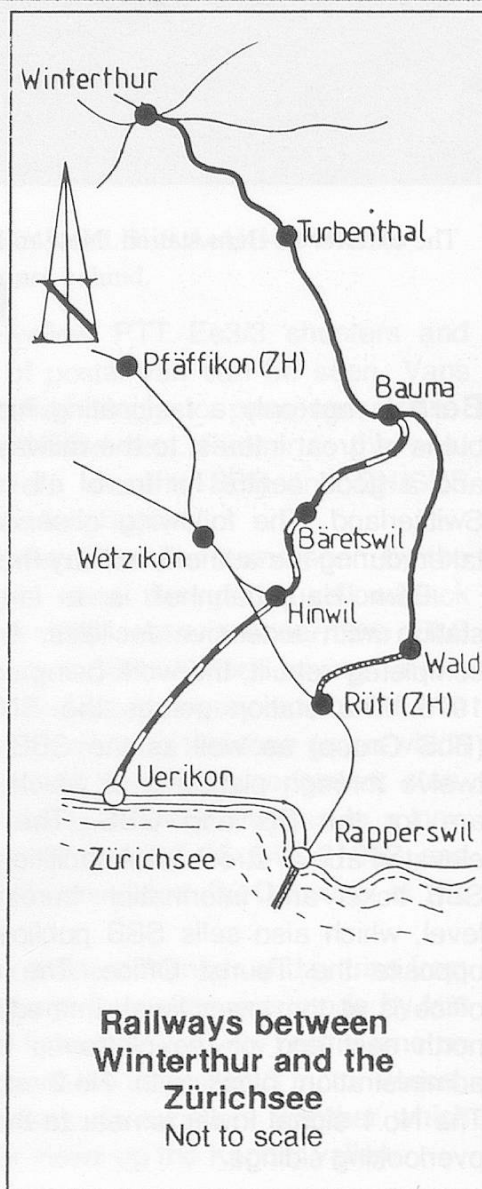


Ge2/4 No.222 approaching one of the tunnels at the head of a freight train *Photo P.Ramsay*

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Over the years the SBB purchased three short lines in the area lying east of Zürich between Winterthur and Rapperswil (see map). The Wald-Rüti-Bahn (WR) was opened on 29 September 1876, passing to the SBB on 1 July 1902. The Tossthalbahn (TTB) opened between Winterthur-Gruze and Bauma on 4 May 1875, being extended to meet the WR at Wald on 15 October 1876. The TTB passed to the SBB on 1 January 1918. The Uerlikon-Bauma-Bahn (UeBB) opened via Hinwil on 1 June 1901. It passed to the SBB on 3 October 1948 and the section between Uerlikon and Hinwil closed the same day. The remainder of the line faired somewhat better, being electrified in 1947, though SBB passenger services were withdrawn on 31 May 1969. The Dampfbahn-Verein Zürcher Oberland (Zürich Oberland Steam Association), or DVZO, established a depot at Bäretswil, between Bauma and Hinwil, operating to Bauma since 1978 and through to Hinwil from 1980.



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