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The exterior of Bern station. Note milk churns embedded in the pavement, symbols of Bern's past trade.

Bern as a Base

by J.E. Daboo

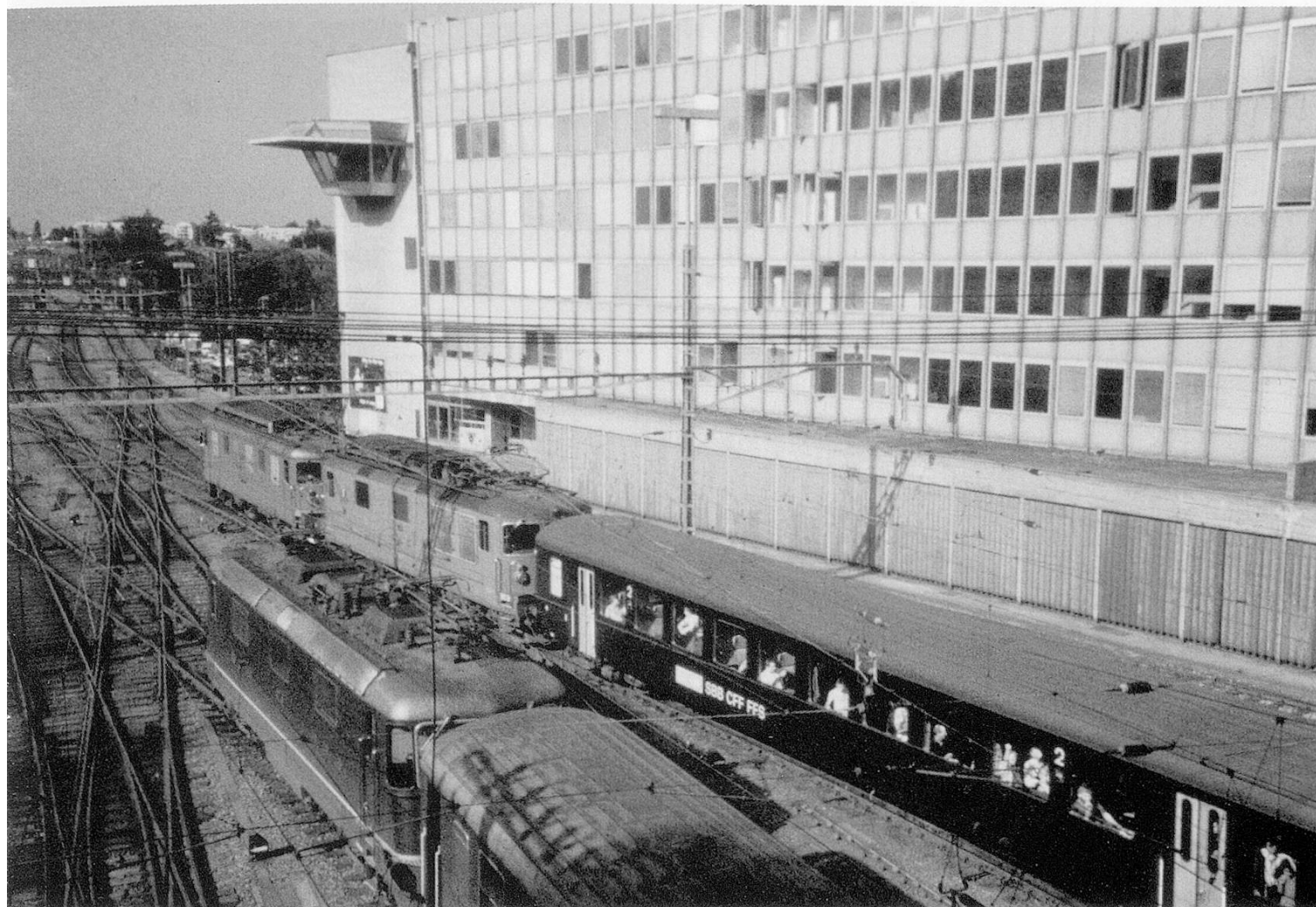
Bern is not only a fascinating historical city, but is of great interest to the railway enthusiast and a good centre for travel all over Central Switzerland. The following observations were taken during the author's holiday there in 1989.

Bern Hauptbahnhof is a large modern station with extensive facilities. It has been completely rebuilt, the work being completed in 1975. The station serves the BN and GBS (BLS Group) as well as the SBB. There are twelve through platforms of which 11 and 12 are for the BN and GBS. The tracks are elevated above street level; facilities include an SBB ticket and information bureau at street level, which also sells SBB publication and is opposite the Tourist Office. The main ticket office is at the lower level. Immediately to the north east end of the platforms is the large administration block with No.2 signal tower. The No.1 signal tower is near to the west end, overlooking sidings.

There are good views of the station approaches and sidings from the bridges crossing the tracks at both ends of the station and also from the levels of the multi-storey car park above the station.

The station forms part of an integrated transport system. At a lower level in tunnel are the four platforms of the metre gauge RBS, which is one of the largest private railway systems in the country. The large square outside the station has trams, trolleybuses and PTT buses which run to other parts of the city and to neighbouring towns and villages as well as Belp airport.

There is always much interesting activity to be seen at the station. Bern is on a major trunk routes with many international trains, including some composed of DB carriages. The TGV and Talgo trains may also be seen. Many trains approach from the north east over the magnificent 4-track Lorraine Bridge across the River



Two trains leaving the north east end of Bern, headed by SBB Re4/4II and BLS Ae4/4+Re4/4. The Administration buildings and No.2 Stellwerk are behind.

Aare, and reverse to depart in the same direction. Trains proceed in this direction for the Lötschberg, and may have SBB or BLS locomotives (Re4/4II and Re6/6 of the former, and Ae4/4 and Re4/4 of the latter). Other trains depart westward, such as those to Genève Aeroport, which are composed of EW3 coaches with driving trailers and Re4/4I or Re4/4IV locomotives arranged for pendulzug working. BN trains to Neuchâtel and GBS trains to Thun or Schwarzenburg also leave westward, these train sets comprising ABDe4/8 or the more modern RBDe4/4 motor coaches.

Shorter distance SBB trains consist of *Kolibri* NPZ. These BLS and SBB sets are seen throughout the region, as are EBT group units with RBDe4/4I and II motor coaches. There is considerable shunting activity in the sidings, performed by the ubiquitous Ee3/3 in bright red livery. Ae4/7 (eg 10959, 11017) and Ae3/6I (eg 10679) locomotives are also used for shunting and a few trains. Some of the sidings and one track adjacent to platform 1 are used by the

PTT. Purple/yellow PTT Ee3/3 shunters and many types of postal van can be seen. Vans may be attached singly to passenger trains, including the *Kolibri* sets. Further to the west and south there are the SBB and BN/GBS depots and the freight yard.

Amongst the unfamiliar items seen by the writer at Bern were the garish yellow/black *Chäs-Express* SBB restaurant car; the BLS *Resto Bar* car; SBB *Kolibri* having motor coaches in standard blue/grey combined with carriages in the prototype two-tone green which by now should all have been repainted; standard 2-axle sliding sidewall wagons in a new variant Hbiqss-tz (nos.21 85 248 0 032 and 047) and SBB articulated D2-D2 vans at the PTT sidings.

The writer made a number of day trips from Bern. A journey to Interlaken was made by fast train to Thun, followed by a very restful time on the lake on board the largest BLS motor vessel, the MS *Blumisalp*, in excellent weather which provided clear views up the Kander valley.



North east end of Bern, with Re4/4^{II} and Re6/6.

Two other relaxing trips by water were made from Biel/Bienne. One was an all-day cruise on the three lakes of Biel, Murten (Morat) and Neuenberg. Both Murten and Neuenberg are of historic interest and well worth exploring. The return from Neuenberg to Bern was made on the BN over the long and high Saaneviadukt near Gümmenen. The other trip was an afternoon cruise on the River Aare, which involved descent through a lock. The return from Solothurn to Bern was on the RBS, which provides an interesting alternative to the SBB line. The RBS station at Solothurn is adjacent to the Feldschlössen Bier depot, which had a number of white 2-axle refrigerator vans outside. Shortage of time did not permit further exploration. At the station was the orange/green RBS/PTT driving trailer van Zt No.262, with its driving cab like that of the latest RBS driving trailer coaches. The RBS depot is close by.

A visit was made to the Stockhorn. The train from Spiez to Erlenbach by the SEZ took us up the narrow valley between the Stockhorn

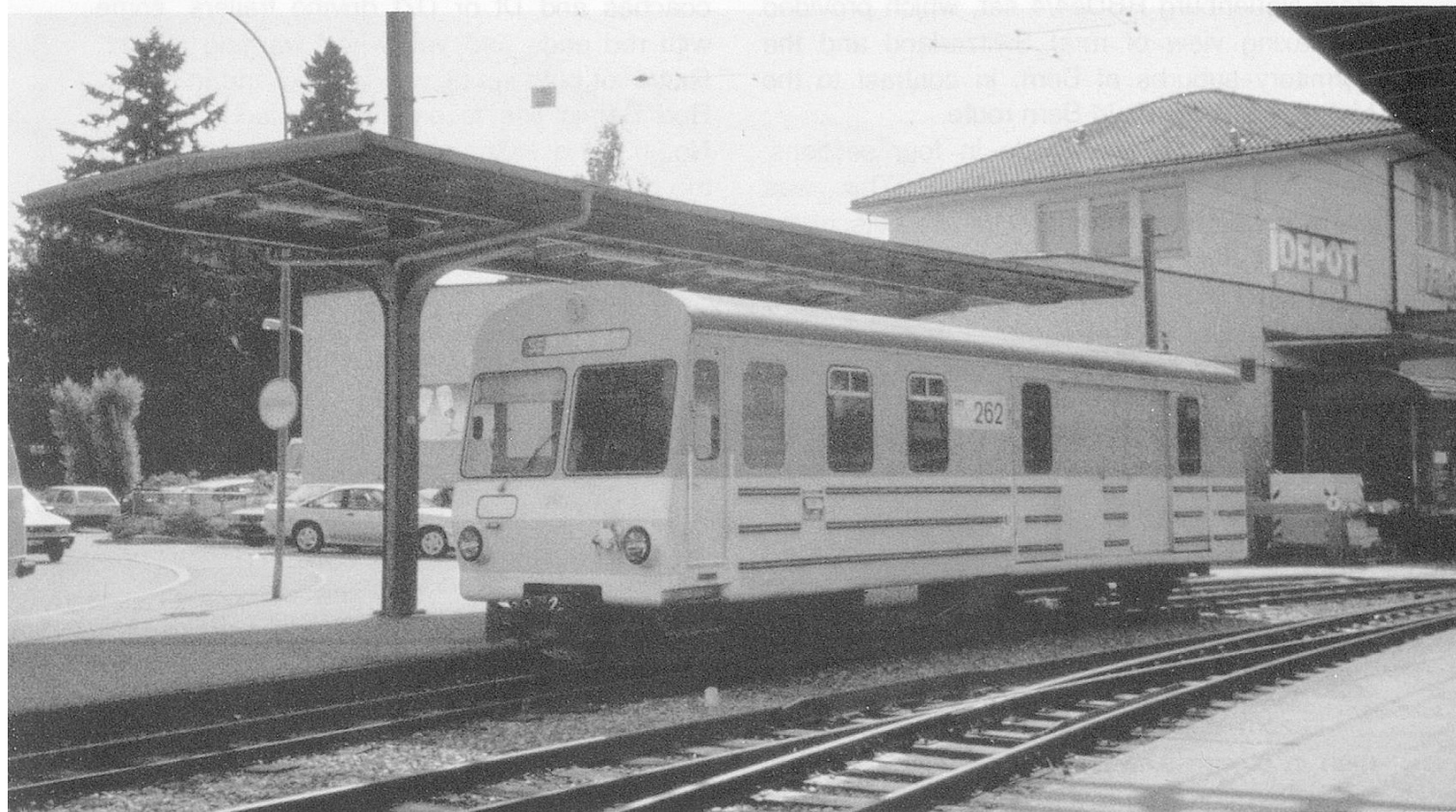
and the Niesen. There trip by cable-car up the Stockhorn was through hill-farming terrain and provided a sight not previously encountered by the writer; the cable car stopped at one of the tall intermediate pylons and a passenger stepped out onto the platform at the top of the pylon and proceeded to use the stairway down to the foot in order to reach his isolated farm. Because the thick cloud completely restricted visibility higher up, we terminated the cable car journey at the halfway station. The early return provided us with more time at Spiez and Thun.

As always, Spiez was interesting with its intensive and varied traffic together with the Works and Depot. At Spiez were two BLS Ae6/8 locomotives, Nos.205 and 206, the latter hauling a lengthy mixed freight. There is a continuing trend towards more colourful freight wagons; for instance some 2-silo wagons, type Usc, had fresh bright yellow paintwork whilst others had a shiny grey-black finish. Parked at Thun were Ae4/7 Nos.10939 and 10947, and also the 57 year old SMB locomotive Be4/4 No.172. The return to Bern was made by a



Above: SBB Ae4/7 Nos. 10939 and 10947 at Thun, 3 July 1989

Below: RBS PTT Zt driving trailer No.262 at Solothurn, 4 July 1989. To the right is the Feldschlössen Bier depot with Hbis 21 85 225 0 420-6.





Luzern, 2 July 1989, with Brünig line Hge4/4^{II} No 1951 and Deh4/6 No.903 in platforms 12 and 13.

Bern Neuenburg RBD4/4 set, which provided a relaxing view of rural Switzerland and the dormitory suburbs of Bern, in contrast to the high-speed SBB Thun-Bern route.

A round trip was made in four sections; Bern-Brig-Göschenen-Luzern-Bern. This was the writer's first encounter with the Lötschberg and the Furka-Oberalp; both were every bit as exciting as expected, with remarkable scenery and engineering. The Lötschberg still had at the time a few sections of single track remaining. The FO through train to Göschenen was headed by a Deh4/4^{II} with comfortable modern carriages - a far cry from the days of small 4-wheel locomotives on the Schöllengasse! The Schöllengasse gorge was far more impressive than can be conveyed by any photograph. The Furka tunnel showed the new Ge4/4 locomotives, car transporter trains and Panoramic coaches.

Luzern station, despite the reconstruction then in progress, was as busy as ever. Many trains were push-pull with RBe4/4 motor

coaches and Dt or DZt driving trailers, some with red ends and yellow/red warning stripes. Re4/4^I of both series were in red and in green. Red Brünig line locomotives included Deh4/6 No.903 and HGe4/4^{II} Nos.1951 and 1952, at the head of red and green carriages. Sensetalbahn coaches had blue/grey livery and some were included in SBB *Kolibri* formations.

One long day's journey was made to the sunny south on Lake Maggiore. Travel both was on the Inter City *Monteverdi*, in the comfort of Eurofima coaches. At Brig we saw two Re4/4^{IV} locomotives, but the highlight of the day occurred on the return trip, an excellent dinner in the restaurant car with the magnificent Rhone and Kander valley scenery passing by in the cloudless evening sunlight.

Other members of the family undertook long day trips from Bern to the Jungfrau and also to Grindelwald which still had its delightful chair-lift to First.

All in all, Bern proved to be an excellent base for a railway holiday.



Above: BLS Ae6/8 No.205, the only one with the railway name in full, at Spiez, 3 July 1989.
Below: SBB Re4/4^{IV}s at Brig, 5 July 1989

