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Boudry bound TN Be4/4 No.506 on No 5 route at la Tuilière-Areuse, 24 March 1992

International Crossing 2

by Steve Horobin

Photographs by the author

This is an account of the second part of a round trip I made on 24 March 1992, the first part of which, my trip from Dijon, in France to Delémont over the now closed passenger line between Belfort and Delle was described in *Swiss Express* 3/6, June 1992.

I left Delémont on my way to Neuchâtel on a Basel to Genève IC. Shortly after leaving Delémont I passed through a gorge dominated by a steelworks. At Moutier, I caught sight of trains of the Solothurn-Münster (SMB), then entered the Grenchen tunnel, built and owned by the BLS. On emerging from the dark, a 90° change of direction took me towards Biel and along the lake side to reach Neuchâtel, where I alighted.

There is a trolleybus service down the steep hill to the city centre and the terminus at Place Pury, which has a very ornate ticket office and waiting area. Across the road is a

modern, but much truncated terminus for the trams of the Transports en Commun de Neuchâtel (TN). 1992 was the centenary year, but the once extensive network has been reduced to a single 7 km route that runs in the main on reserved tracks alongside the lakeside to Boudry.

I spent a couple of hours photographing the tramway and exploring Neuchâtel before returning to the CFF station and boarding a Bern-Neuenburg (BN) RBD4/4 railcar which formed the Bern - Le Locle train.

The line climbs steeply out of Neuchâtel to reach Chambrelieu, where a reversal of direction is made. Formerly, locomotives had to run round their trains, but the railcars make this unnecessary, saving considerable time. The train continues its ascent, providing magnificent views across the Lac de Neuchâtel with the Alps in the background.



TN Bt No 554 at Boudry, on the No.5 route to Neuchâtel 24 March 1992

We passed through two long tunnels to emerge at La Chaux-de-Fonds, where connections are made to two metre gauge lines, the Chemins de fer du Jura (CJ) and the Chemins de fer des Montagnes Neuchâtelais (CMN) as well as the CFF secondary line from Biel. A straight, slightly climbing run out of La Chaux-de-Fonds brought me to La Cloche, the terminus for the Swiss services.

Waiting in a bay at the west end of the station were a pair of X2800 SNCF DMUs which formed the 17:13 service to Besançon. I was one of the only two passengers for this train, the other being a Frenchman from Morteau who worked for one of the many watch manufacturers in this region of Switzerland.

Leaving Le Locle, the SNCF train ran through Swiss territory for about two kilometres before pausing at the Swiss customs post. It then entered the distinctive gateway of the 915m high Col des Roches, after which there was a long, steep descent on a ledge high above the Lac des Brenets before reaching the first village and French customs post at Morteau.

For two hours the train took me through sparsely populated countryside to reach the city of Besançon, from whence I eventually made my way back to Dijon, having completed a wonderful trip over two varied and isolated international crossings.

