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# Private Railways in Switzerland - 2

by Brian Hemming

In this issue we have a random selection of Swiss private railways with no common theme other than perhaps with one exception, the Wengernalpenbahn, they do not seem to receive much attention.

In the last issue of Swiss Express we dealt with three constituents of the TPC (Transports Public du Chablis). The fourth member of the group is the Bex-Villars-Bretaye (BVB - not to be confused with the other BVB - the Baseler Verkehrsbetriebe). The street running section is Bex is particularly attractive and presents many photographic opportunities. It appears that in recent months a modified livery style is being introduced and reports have been received of some new items of rolling stock.

The Dolderbahn is a unique line, having been converted from a funicular to a rack railway. It is now part of the Zürich transport system, and can be reached by catching a number 9 tram from the square over the river bridge from Zürich Hbf. This journey, and that on the Dolderbahn is covered by the Swiss Pass and makes an interesting evening excursion.

The Chemins de fer du Jura is one of the largest private railways in Switzerland and has much to commend it from both the railway and

scenic points of view. The major drawback is the remoteness and length which requires a full day to do the system justice. Care should be taken to avoid the partial 'bustitution' on the Glovelier-Saignelégier section.

Despite a history of apparent lack of success, the Sennetalbahn has survived. Despite a regular interval service being provided, it sees little passenger use other than at peak times. However freight traffic is heavy, mainly coming from Neuenegg and Laupen. The old 1938 railcars are worth seeing as are the steam specials in late spring and early autumn.

The Wengernalpbahn is worth visiting at any time, but in winter is something special if only for the welcoming glass of Glüwein obtainable in the buffet at Kleine Scheidegg. If one ventures outside the railway shows itself as an efficient organisation well able to cope with operation in all weathers. An added bonus of a journey on the line is the opportunity to return from Kleine Scheidegg down to the valleys by a different route.

*Below:* Part of the street running through Aigle of the BVB  
Photo: Les Heath





## BVB

### Chemin de fer Bex-Villars-Brétaye

BVB HGe4/4 31 seen here at the Depot at Bevioux

Photo: Les Heath

The route from Bex to Villars was built in three sections between 1898 and 1901 as the Chemin de fer Bex-Gryon-Villars (BGV) to be followed in 1906 by the building of a 1.3km extension to Chesières and the renaming of the Company to the Chemin de fer Bex-Gryon-Villars-Chesières (BGVC). In 1913 a new company built an entirely rack operated railway (the VB) from Villars to Col de Bretaye. Both companies merged in 1943 to form the Chemin de fer Bex-Villars-Bretaye (BVB). Since the openings of the various constituents the lines have been electrically operated with power supplied from the Company owned power station at Sublin The line from Villars to Chesières was closed in 1963 and the service replaced by Company owned buses. In 1975 the BVB joined the TPC (Transports Publics du Chablis) together with the AL, AOMC and ASD. The route from Bex to Col de Bretaye is divided into a number of sections. Bex to Bévioux carries a local service operated by blue painted tram style single railcars. These are interspersed by the red four axle rack fitted railcars operating an hourly service from Bex to Villars which includes a steep rack section between Bévioux and Gryon. The line from Villars to Col de Bretaye is wholly rack operated and although a connection exists at Villars, the passenger service operates as a separate entity. The mainstay of the services is in the hands of rack fitted railcars supplemented on the upper

rack section by two locomotives with baggage space. Still in stock is one of the original locomotives supplied to the BGV (He2/2 No.2) and a 1911 shunting locomotive (Te2/2 No.42) which was rebuilt in 1948. In order to maintain an all year service snow clearing stock is kept at both Bévioux and Villars.

Length: 17.1km  
 Gauge: 1000mm  
 Rack system: Abt (part)  
 Voltage: 700v DC  
 Maximum gradient: 57‰ (ad.) 200‰ (rack)  
 Depots: Bévioux, Villars Works: Bévioux  
 Nearest SBB station: Bex (adjacent)  
 Kursbuch tables: 127, 128, 129  
 Powered Stock (maroon & yellow or blue & white livery)

| Class   | Numbers | Built       |
|---------|---------|-------------|
| He2/2   | 2       | 1900        |
| Be2/2   | 8       | 1907        |
| Be2/2   | 9       | 1915        |
| Be2/3   | 15, 16  | 1948        |
| BDeh2/4 | 21-26   | 1940-1945   |
| HGe4/4  | 31, 32  | 1953, 1964  |
| Te2/2   | 42      | 1898 (1948) |
| BDeh4/4 | 81, 82  | 1977        |
| BDeh4/4 | 83      | 1987        |
| Xrote   | 313     | 1952        |
| Xrotm   | 320     | 1971        |
| Xe4/4   | 1501    | 1987        |



BDe4/4<sup>II</sup> 613 at La Ferrière on 10th August 1995.  
Photo: Brian Hemming

## CJ

### Chemin de fer du Jura

The Chemins de fer du Jura consists of a metre gauge network and a separate standard gauge branch line. The original constituent of the metre gauge network was opened in 1884 between Tavannes and Tramelan (TT). This was followed in 1892 by the SC which ran from Saignelégier to La Chaux-de-Fonds. The two were connected in 1913 by the opening of a line from Tramelan to make a junction with the SC at Noirmont. In 1900 a standard gauge line, the RSG, was opened from Saignelégier to Glovelier. The Porrentruy to Bonfol standard gauge line, the RPB was opened in 1901 but an extension to Pfetterhouse opened in 1910 lasted only until 1976. At the instigation of the Confederation all these railways were amalgamated in 1944 to form the Chemins de fer du Jura (CJ).

Poor traffic levels meant that there was little investment in the Company until 1949, when with the support of public funding the Saignelégier to Glovelier section was converted to metre gauge, and all metre gauge lines were standardised at 1500v DC. The Porrentruy-Bonfol section was electrified in 1952 to the SBB line voltage of 15kV AC.

Services operate on a regular interval basis from both La Chaux-de-Fonds and Tavannes (with reversal at Noirmont) to Saignelégier, and on the Porrentruy-Bonfol branch. In addition there is a through service from La Chaux-de-Fonds to Glovelier. Freight traffic is usually handled by the De4/4 locomotives. Rollschemel are used to convey standard gauge wagons on the metre gauge system as well as the transfer to standard gauge company stock to the main works at Tramelan. Well publicised steam specials operate from time to time using ex Portugese Mallet locomotives and vintage stock.

Narrow Gauge 1000mm

Length: 73.7km

Voltage: 1500v DC

Maximum gradient: 50‰

Depots: Noirmont, Saignelégier, Tramelan

Works: Tramelan

Nearest main line stations: La Chaux-de-Fonds, Glovelier, Tavannes (all shared)

Kursbuch tables: 236, 237

Narrow Gauge powered (red & white livery)

| Class                | Numbers   | Built     |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| BCe2/4               | 70 (pres) | 1913      |
| De4/4                | 401-403   | 1952-1953 |
| Tm                   | 501       | 1967      |
| Te                   | 504       | 1913      |
| Gm4/4                | 508       | 1950      |
| Xm                   | 509       | 1985      |
| BDe4/4               | 601-602   | 1953      |
| ABDe4/4              | 603       | 1953      |
| BDe4/4               | 604-608   | 1953      |
| BDe4/4 <sup>II</sup> | 611-614   | 1985      |
| BDe4/4               | 621       | 1947      |

Standard Gauge

Length: 13.61km

Voltage: 15,000v AC 16(Hz)

Maximum gradient: 28‰

Depot: Bonfol

Works: Tramelan

Nearest main line station: Porrentruy (shared)

Kursbuch table: 238

Standard Gauge powered (red & white livery)

| Class            | Numbers          | Built |
|------------------|------------------|-------|
| BDe 4/4          | 577.401 (ex 101) | 1952  |
| BDe 4/4          | 577.402 (ex 102) | 1953  |
| De4/4            | 587.451 (ex 111) | 1980  |
| Tm <sup>IV</sup> | 237.481 (ex 181) | 1971  |
| Xm1/2            | 077.491 (ex 182) | 1961  |



## DB Dolderbahn

BHe1/2 No. 2 at Waldhaus

Photo: Alan Pike OBE

The original company operating on the Dolder was opened in 1895 as an 816m long funicular line to connect Römerhof in the suburbs of Zürich with the Waldhaus Dolder Hotel on the developing area of the Adlisberg. From here an electric tramway, which lasted until bus substitution in 1930, was opened in 1899 to connect to the newly opened Grand Hotel Dolder and the developing recreational facilities. The original concession expired in 1972 and consideration was given to replacing the railway with a bus service. This was not proceeded with due to the difficult local road conditions and hence proposals for conversion to a rack operated railway and the extension of the line by 500m to the Grand Hotel were adopted. Due to the public service nature of the line the city of Zürich participated in the cost of the conversion and extension on a 50/50 basis through a joint company Dolderbahn-Betriebs AG. Since 1989 the railway has been integrated in the Zürich Verkehrsverbund. The reconstructed line opened on 30.9.73 using the von Roll plate rack system

and two large capacity single cars. The line is single track with a passing loop at half distance and is operated on a regular interval basis. Passenger traffic has increased from ½ million at the closure of the funicular line to 1.3 million in 1994. This increase has been largely brought about by the increased use of the Dolder as a leisure area.

Length: 1.3km  
 Gauge: 1000mm  
 Rack system: von Roll (plate)  
 Voltage: 600v DC  
 Maximum gradient: 196‰  
 Depot: Dolder station  
 Works: Dolder station  
 Nearest SBB station: Zürich Stadelhofen  
 Kursbuch table: 732

Powered Stock (red livery)

| Class  | Numbers | Built |
|--------|---------|-------|
| Bhe1/2 | 1, 2    | 1973  |



## STB Sensetalbahn

The Sensetalbahn was built between 1902 and 1904 to connect the Bern-Neuenberg-Bahn (BN) at Gümmenen with Flamatt on what is now the SBB Bern-Fribourg line. From the beginning the line suffered losses and only became profitable after it came under the management of the Bern-Worb-Bahn in 1909. The effects of the first World War, and the closure of a Nestlé milk processing plant at Neuenegg resulted in further losses. In 1922 the Company decided to resume management of the line and further economies were implemented. The Company's fortunes were helped by the reopening of the former Nestlé plant in 1928 by Wander for 'Ovomaltine' production. Due to the increasing cost of coal the line was electrified in 1938 whilst in the period 1963-74 a number of modernisation schemes were carried out including the building of new concrete bridges over the rivers Saane and Sense.

The section from Laupen to Gümmenen was closed to regular traffic at the end of the 1994/95 timetable, although the trackbed remains intact. The Laupen-Flamatt line has an interval service with the original 1938 STB railcars on local

Above: The latest in technology Tm 238.111-9 is Radio Controlled by the driver standing at the side of the track.  
Photo: Brian Hemming

services and SBB pendelzugs operating through to Bern. The Vereinen Dampfbahn-Bern (DBB), which keeps its locomotives at Laupen, also operates steam trains on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of May, June, September and October. Freight traffic provides two thirds of the railway's revenue with both Laupen and Neuenegg being important railheads. Of interest, the shunting of the Wander traffic at Neuenegg is carried out by a radio controlled locomotive.

Length: 11.4km

Gauge: 1435mm

Voltage: 15,000v AC, 16 Hz

Maximum gradient: 36%

Depot: Laupen

Works: Laupen

Nearest SBB station: Flamatt (shared)

Kursbuch table: 257

Powered Stock (railcars - green and grey livery, shunters - red livery)

| Class  | Numbers          | Built |
|--------|------------------|-------|
| Tm2/2  | 238.111 (ex 11)  | 1969  |
| BDe4/6 | 578.102 (ex 102) | 1938  |
| BDe4/6 | 578.103 (ex 103) | 1938  |



## WAB Wengernalpenbahn

After various early proposals for rack and cable railways over all or part of the distance between Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald, a plan was adopted in 1890 to build between the two a rack railway of 800mm gauge. The gauge was chosen to enable as small a radius as possible on curves, whilst the rack system was a form of the Riggerbach modified by the engineer, Pauli. The line was completed throughout in 1893 and initially operated by steam locomotives pushing carriages and goods wagons. The line was electrified throughout firstly from Lauterbrunnen to Kleine Scheidegg in 1909 and a year later onward to Grindelwald. In 1910 a new and less steep section of line was opened from Witimatte up to Wengen and this is used by most regular trains. However the old line was retained and is still used mainly for freight and works trains. The Company is a member of the BOB Group.

Electric locomotives, pushing trains up the incline, were used until the railcars began to appear in 1947 and these have now taken over the passenger services completely. Freight traffic is in the hands of the old, and original electric locomotives. Wengen has no motor vehicles and hence all freight in and out of the resort, including rubbish, is carried by rail via Lauterbrunnen.

The passenger service is operated on a regular interval basis from both Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen to Kleine Scheidegg where a

He2/2 No.65 seen here at Wengen with a short goods waiting for the up 'Tourist' BDHe4/4's

Photo: Brian Hemming

change can be made for the Jungfraubahn (JB). Because of the very steep inclines all trains have the powered vehicle at the lower end of the train. If necessary trains can be turned on a triangle provided at Kleine Scheidegg. At busy times, particularly in the winter sports season, trains run in blocks of up to three in both directions.

- Length: 19.1km
- Gauge: 800mm
- Rack system: Riggerbach-Pauli
- Voltage: 1500v dc
- Maximum gradient: 250‰
- Depots: Grindelwald Grund, Lauterbrunnen
- Works: Grindelwald Grund, Lauterbrunnen
- Nearest main line station: Interlaken Ost
- Kursbuch tables: 311, 312

Powered Stock (green or green & cream or green & yellow livery)

| Class   | Numbers | Built      |
|---------|---------|------------|
| Xrote   | 11, 12  | 1928, 1945 |
| He2/2   | 51-54   | 1909       |
| He2/2   | 61-63   | 1912       |
| He2/2   | 64      | 1926       |
| He2/2   | 65      | 1929       |
| BDhe4/4 | 101-118 | 1947-1964  |
| BDhe4/4 | 119-124 | 1970       |
| BDhe4/8 | 131-134 | 1988       |