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**Autor:** Harris, Mike

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## **The BLS Eisenbahn Erlebnis Pfad or B.... H.... It's icy cold and er; where's the footpath** by Mike Harris

On a trip to the Bernese Oberland in May 1995, having figured out what the Maibummel Karte was all about (see Dec. S.E.) we decided to take the opportunity of walking the BLS Company's Railway Adventure Trail. For those of you who may have read my previous item, yes I had picked up another leaflet.

We took the 09:22 from Wilderswil to Interlaken Ost, changing for Spiez where we changed again on to the 10:54 train towards Kandersteg. At Reichenbach, as the train no longer serves all the communities along the line, this privilege being given to the post bus service, it was all off and on to the bus for Kandersteg via Frutigen.

The route by bus seemed almost as pleasant as the railway and the tight curves and gradients of the road on the approach to Kandersteg made a change to the smooth graded approach of the railway.

There was plenty of action at Kandersteg Station with what seemed like a major face-lift in progress, most of the frontage was behind scaffolding and screened off from view. Incidentally there is plenty of work going on down the valley with works to both the road and rail systems in evidence.

The moment we stepped off the bus in the station forecourt it started to snow, only light snow but snow nonetheless. I decided to go in and request the free translations of the sign boards for the walk and came out with a small well presented book (now sent to all SRS members I believe). It was still cold when I emerged from the Station but we thought that as the walk was supposed to be for all abilities and we were well equipped we would probably be alright so set off to find the first board.

Whether it was the snow which had started again or downright bad navigating we didn't find the first few boards but at least we had a good look around the station and saw the car transporters stacked up along the line awaiting their loads. I was also intrigued by the Swiss ideas on signal boxes which seem to be to keep everyone together and incorporate boxes into the stations proper. This is a long way from the box at Worcester where "Grandad" Mailings used to be "in charge" of his own little empire!

There were, however plenty of the dark brown Erlebnis Pfad signs around and these lead you off along the riverside meadows going gently downhill. The snow had stopped but it was still chilly as we got to Board number 7 and a great

view down the valley across the railway and the road. The former being about four metres below ground level, although what was ground, ledge or bridge got very confusing. It was at this stage that someone in a car shouted something which probably translated as "Don't do it you foolish people", a little later we were to find out, that if that was what had been said, then they were probably right. An equally good and unusual view was the sight of a loco hauling its rake of coaches just a few feet below us. Great sounds and pictures...if only I had the video camera running at the time.

The walking was relatively easy going with views of the valley opening out both in front and behind us. Above us on our left hand side there was a line of pine trees on the edge of a precipice which were frozen solid and white, a very unusual effect. We could see clearly all the way to the fends at Mitholz and watched the trains moving up and down the valley as we sat eating lunch, trying to spot where they would appear next and marvelling at the engineering feat of not just boring a tunnel but one that has a critical curve and a gradient too.

The sun had begun to put in an appearance, making sunlit sections of the path very warm and illuminating the remains of the Felsenburg which was now below us. Those of you looking at the BLS leaflet may now be wondering how it is that we were walking the rail path but are above Felsenburg? Well let me tell you so were we (and I still am)! I guess that I must have missed one of the small brown signs in all the excitement of the views. Anyway the paths were good, we had a decent map with us so we decided to carry on towards Frutigen following the Nordrampe (Hoheweg) footpath.

This next section increased in severity partly due to the weather which had turned cold again, partly to the time of year which meant we may have been the first along the path since 1994 and part to the elevation which meant steep climbs were now frequent. I do not recommend being the first to travel this way after the winter, we suffered from trees across the path at several points, fast flowing water at the stream crossings, indeed some of them were washed away completely. One section of the path here is around a rock bluff and takes you on a narrow

ledge with a stainless steel rope rock bolted on to stop you from falling ten metres or so in to the trees below. Very exciting if you don't mind heights. This part of the path peaks at about 1400 metres before dropping downhill and on to the wonderful alpine meadows full of flowers and goats at Halfis. The views from here are superb, down to Frutigen which looks so close and onwards towards Reichenbach. The air here is so clear that you can both spot the trains in the valley below visually and audibly a very strange feeling, eerie you might say.

Having taken a more adventurous route than anticipated time was running out to catch the bus which gave us rail connections back to Wilderswil. We arrived at a footpath sign saying Kandergrund 35 min one way and Kandergrund Inn 25 min the other, it was tempting to take the longer which looked shorter on the map but we erred on the side of caution and took the path to the Inn. On the way down to the road we passed the end of the Erlebnis Pfad, very ironic I thought!

So what did we make of it all? Well; the boards we did see were well presented and clear even though we did have to refer to the translation booklet (which I find interesting in its own right), the route is well marked although I missed a sign. My recommendation (with hindsight) is, if following the path from Kandersteg go down towards Blausee following the brown signs and you should stay on the Railway Trail.

If you feel like a more energetic day out with high level views and all the rest, then follow the Nordrampe which is equally well signposted but make sure that you have map, compass, warm clothing and food with you as parts of the route are remote.

Both paths are the subject of leaflets by the BLS company which detail the walks, the Nordrampe leaflet even having an extract of the Swiss Landeskarte map for good measure...but don't rely on it for the walk.

For us, we shall just have to go back next year and see what the rail side walk is really like. If it is half as good as the views from the Nordrampe it will be well worth it (especially on a Maibummel Karte) even if you don't get to see the trains bursting out of the tunnel entrances at close quarters on the lower path.

Have fun trying the walks but do take care.