

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: 4 (1994-1996)
Heft: 10

Artikel: Erlebnis-Pfad oder Lehrpfad?
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-855093>

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Erlebnis-Pfad oder Lehrpfad? by Denis Stevens

Treading slightly in advance of Mike Harris's "B...H..." expedition (Swiss Express 4/9 March 1995), I confess to having braved the open-air stairways of Part B (Blausee-Mittholz to Kirche Kandergrund) in the autumn of 1994. I was staying at Spiez, an admirable departure point for the BLS network since one is really in the middle of the system, with possible excursions to Zweisimmen, Lenk, Montreux, Bern, Interlaken and Brig.

Not having seen the BLS booklet about their Railway Adventure Trail, I had picked up a leaflet at the Interlaken BLS shop which sells everything from maps to T-shirts, rucksacks and railway videos. The leaflet's sub-title is "Hautnah", which could be translated "Eye-ball to Eyeball".

I had put in some homework hours with my trusty 1910 Baedeker which mentioned the Lötschberg Tunnel as being under construction and various scenic aspects of the Kander Valley viewed as a paradise for hikers. Although I had visited the deep blue lake in the woods many years previously when driving my family around Switzerland and had heard of the accidental destruction of Blausee-Mittholz Station in 1947, it was a joy to see it rebuilt and operating. On that same trip we stayed at a small hotel in Kandersteg, where the owner regaled us after supper with stories of the passes, particularly the Lötschberg.

His father had been a ski instructor and mountain guide, familiar with all the peculiarities and problems of the Gasterntal, situated directly above the Lötschberg railway. Meeting one of the surveyors for the projected tunnel, he warned him about the treacherous bed of the Upper Kander, and said in effect if the team went in a straight line, as planned, their work force would almost certainly experience a breakthrough earlier than expected and from the wrong direction!

The boffin, of course, turned up his nose at peasant advice. The company drilled in a straight line, and the whole river bed fell in into the would-be tunnel at 2.30am on 24th July 1908, killing twenty-five Italian workmen.

Motto: it is much more difficult to heed advice than to give it.

Someone advised me that the best way to tackle the BLS path was to start at Blausee and

walk down to Kandergrund, which I did by leaving a Brig-bound train at Adelboden and taking a BLS bus to Blausee. I walked to the station, now rarely used, across a field and up a few steps. There at last was the Eyeball-path, with an occasional Re4/4 or a new Re465 speeding by with goods trucks or passenger coaches. I followed the brown signs, trying to read as much as I could without a dictionary.

In contrast to Mike Harris, who made such a bold start at Kandersteg, I did not miss my Pfa. On the contrary it nearly missed me, for on leaving the first level bit near the line I found myself plunging downhill and across torrential streams, under railway bridges and (slowly, carefully) up the other side. I thought of the station sign with a smooth brown graded pathway sloping across its width. Never mind! This is an adventure path, I thought, so hey-ho for adventure!

Presently the path smoothed itself out: a surge of encouragement went through me, while the roar and whistles of locomotives resounded from below and above. This, I thought, is six-channel surround sound with Dolby! More revelations were to follow as the path petered out before a sheer rock-face, punctuated at apparently reliable intervals by a metal ladder. I gulped for joy when I recognized deep potato-cutter steps and strong handrails. Gingerly I went down one ladder, holding my briefcase in my left hand and holding the handrail with my right.

Oh - I forgot to mention that I am in my mid-seventies and always carry a briefcase for the sake of appearances. A couple of hikers ahead of me called back: Haben sie ein Problem? Looking surprisingly cheerful, I replied: "Danke schön, gar nix". At the bottom of the last ladder we were on terra firma once more, on a little path by the line near to Kandergrund church and its neat graveyard bedecked with autumn flowers. The way back to the bus stop (via a local inn) was a relief! But it was indeed an adventure, and a remarkable introduction to railway topography of a dramatic nature.

As to the Lehrpad that can be tackled, suitably clad, from Preda to Bergün on the RhB as you travel from Filisur to St. Moritz.

Another adventure path! Explore it yourself.



Above: Ae8/8 275, seen here at Frütigen, still in passenger service on 24th April 1996.

Below: Ae6/8's 206 & 208 and Ce4/4's 315 & 316, seen here at Spiez 16th January 1996. Photo Petyer Bowen.

