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Touring the Borders

by Nick Freezer

All photographs by the author

The genesis of this particular tour came early in 1994 with the publication in *Eisenbahn Amateur* of a report on school trains in Kreis I, the Lausanne division, with particular reference to the midday service to Le Locle Col des Roches. This, added to the virtual disappearance of services beyond Boncourt on the Ajoie line, indicated that a visit to the Jura would be advisable in the summer of 1994.

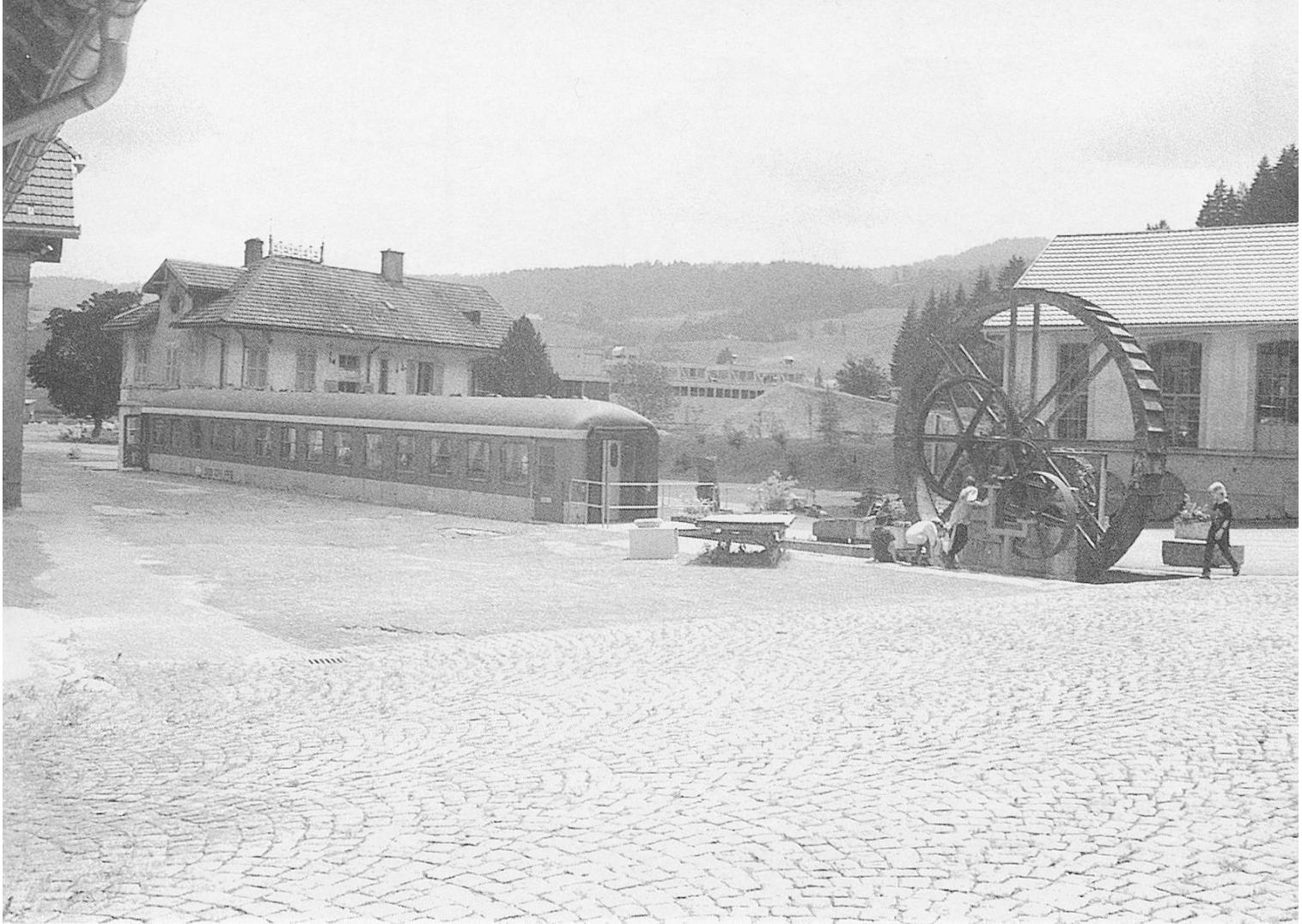
Once in Switzerland, the new Kursbuch was probed for a sensible way of reaching both termini in the same day. The middle of the day was worked out while based in Lausanne, but leaving Delle at 17.00 isn't that convenient for a relatively early meal by Lac Leman (although it would give an arrival time of 19.48 there), so it was postponed.

A week later, the plan came to fruition. We were now staying in Luzern, the journey was worked out in advance and, unusually, written down: I should have realised this wasn't a good

Le Locle, 28 June 1994. The cross platform connection from the Bern train to XABD 2824 on the 12:02 to Besançon is lightly used.

move! Departure was made on the 08.46 to Basel, a through IC from Chiasso, which was turned round in 3½ minutes after getting delayed on the single track sections between Arth/Goldau and Luzern via Rotkreuz. Arriving at Olten in good time for my forward connection, the chance was taken to raid the Aperto shop on the station for a couple of cans, since the schedule included a lot of regional trains. The next train was the Brig semi-fast via Solothurn to Biel, with a scheduled arrival time of 10.33 for the 10.37 local to La Chaux de Fonds.

The Genève connection was waiting at Biel, a complete DB rake on its outward working as IC 616 to form the EC 106 *Mont Blanc* to Dortmund. No time appeared available to photograph this train in track 5 as my connection was over on track 1; what I hadn't spotted was that the trains from Neuchâtel were late. Departure of the various WB trains



was about 4 minutes late, my *Kolibri* leaving at 10.42 for the Jura. This journey was fairly uneventful, but with a shortage of on-train announcements. This may have caused two other first class passengers who wanted the Tavannes line not to change at Sonceboz; one, who was bound for Tramelan, was redirected to St. Imier and a CJ bus connection!

At La Chaux de Fonds there was a short break before the Bern - Locle train arrived. This allowed me to take a quick glance outside the station, photograph the odd trolleybus and confirm that refreshment facilities in the area were patchy! Returning to the SBB platforms, the Col des Roches train, an Re4/4^{II} on two EWI B's, was waiting on track 3, with its return working to St. Imier already up on track 4. Going out to Le Locle on the through train allowed me to watch the Besançon connection leave. The SNCF X2800 railcar and trailer carried an estimated 7 passengers on departure, far less than on the CMN motor and trailer forming the train to Les Brenets. I don't know what the complaint is about the frequency on this line - on the two occasions I've been at Le

Locle Col des Roches. The unchanged side of the *Buvette des Moulins* museum in the forecourt.

Locle, there's always been a SNCF train there!

Fifteen minutes later, the school train pulled in to take me down the hill to Col des Roches. The station is at the foot of a steep bank, with a level yard to the east. Westwards, the line disappears into a tunnel. With 30 minutes to kill, I wandered along towards the border, spotting just ahead both a roadside cafe/bar and, on the other side of the line, the salt mines museum. This was obviously once rail connected, my attention was caught by a carriage parked at a loading dock. Investigation revealed that this did duty as the *Buvette des Moulins*. Repainted on the public side, the other side still carried faded SBB red and white livery and number SRm 51 85 84 34-700, albeit on a typical DB coach. John Jesson suggests that it is the ex Apfelpfie saloon. Its stock in trade was somewhat limited, with only drinks and pastries available.

Returning to the train, I was somewhat



puzzled by the differing destination plates; while the front coach showed "St. Imier", the rear one carried "Le Locle". Back at La Chaux de Fonds, all was revealed when the train divided - the rear coach would form another extra back to Le Locle! Now at the back of the train, a different perspective was available on the line, such as at Le Creux where the long-disused link to Convers remains visible as the halt's siding.

There was only a short wait for the forward connection at St. Imier, just sufficient for the engine to run round. This is now the far terminus for the Jura local service from the Ajoie for much of the day, and the St. Imier school train provides a rare direct connection from La Chaux de Fonds. Surprisingly, there wasn't a suitable connection over the CJ line to Glovelier, which has very few through trains these days. Setting off down the valley, the train reversed at Sonceboz, where the Bienne connection filled the train up somewhat. Most of these alighted at Tavannes where two CJ trains were present. Outside Court station there was a short delay while the level crossing was

Bonfol 16:00. BDe4/4 101 and the SNCF open wagon look towards France as the children collect their bikes. On the stub is ex-DB OLE tractor No.182.

made to work, but we were back on time by Moutier for the run through the scenic Choindez gorge, notable for the lineside Von Roll steelworks. At Delémont, the train had a booked 15 minute stand for connections, giving the opportunity for another refreshment break.

The IC connections duly arrived on time, Delémont providing Re460 021 for the Genève train, and we set off for the north west. Beyond the CJ junction at Glovelier, the line uses tunnels to dive into and out of the spectacular Doubs valley at St. Ursanne before reaching the rolling plateau around Porrentruy, capital of Canton Jura. Here, as I was running an hour early for the first Delle train, the standard gauge line of the CJ to Bonfol beckoned.

With a departure time of 15.40, the two coach train mostly carried schoolchildren, with a fair turnover at the two intermediate stations. The ultimate arrival at Bonfol was slightly delayed by a SNCF Eaos (bogie open) wagon



parked in the middle of the platform; the driver coupled up, pushed his way into the station and finally released the doors.

Bonfol has a typical rural station, well out of town. The line, which disappears onwards round a corner, used to continue to Pfetterhouse in France. After a short break, it was time to return to Porrentruy and find a train which would actually reach French soil.

The scheduled wait at Porrentruy for the next train north allowed a quick look round the station area. The southbound train left on time, formed by the *Kolibri* which had brought me from St. Imier with three strengthening coaches on the back. The departure was on time, through the rolling countryside of the Ajoie, reminiscent of southern England. Border formalities at Boncourt were non-existent, and we continued to the very shabby station at Delle. Here, the large exchange station and sidings is disappearing under weeds. Only one track remains in use, next to the station and customs post. The line to Belfort has been disused for the last two years, and the remaining three trains a day can't last long. The timetable dictates a short layover, so at 16.59, four minutes later, we set off back over the border.

Delle 16:57. *Kolibri* 2113 stands by the imposing station and customs building. The overgrown yard can be seen to the right.

At Boncourt, funny things started to happen. The local Ee3/3 attached 3 coaches to the train, not allowed for in the scheduled station stop. The run down to Porrentruy, where we recovered the lost time, was uneventful, but at the next station at Courgenay we were signalled through despite a booked cross. The next station is St. Ursanne, busy with hikers returning home. We had to wait a further three minutes for the NB train to put in an appearance. I was getting mildly concerned about the reduced connection time at Delémont. Passing through Glovelier, with both CJ train and bus present, a check outside Delémont meant that we eventually rolled into the station at 18.02; the Basle connection was due to leave at 18.04.

Delémont presented an unexpectedly quiet scene. The only trains present were the 18.02 direct for Glovelier and Porrentruy, suspiciously minus any first class accommodation, and the 18.05 local to Boncourt. Neither express had



put in an appearance. Making my way to track 3, I caught an announcement that these trains were running 15 minutes late. The wait was broken by the train from Delle shunting its strengthening coaches onto the back of the Porrentruy train, quite a sight when carried out by a *Kolibri*!

Eventually, a train arrived from the Basel direction. Headed by Ae6/6 11487, its first two coaches were a LS A and a plug door EWI B. As the *Kolibri* "station pilot" returned to its original platform the train from Genève ran in alongside it at 18.15. Instead of the booked IC rake, it was a four coach EWII rake. Suspicions were now high, but no clarifying announcements were made so I joined the Basel train. This left at 18.21 (-17 late) and ran perfectly normally to the only intermediate stop at Laufen, arriving at 18.33. Here, all became clear. A station announcement told passengers for Basel to alight and make their way to the station forecourt for a substitute bus service, as the train would be returning to Biel.

I didn't hurry to leave the train and wandered over past the station building towards the

Basel Bhf 19:01. Overloaded BVB bus No.80 sets off on its journey to Laufen.

bus stands. These were full with the local postbuses and a milling horde of passengers. A quick survey revealed one green BVB bus looking rather full and no sign of any others, so I went into London commuter mode, walked straight up to the middle doors and discovered that there was still some floor space available. 30 seconds later, at 18.38, the doors closed and the bus set off towards the north.

The journey into Basel, half an hour along normal roads and autobahn, allowed time for a little reflection. The train from Delémont to Laufen seemed to be formed from the normal Delémont - Porrentruy rake, explaining the earlier perambulations at Delémont; the other set being a scratch formation supplied by Biel. The bus carried a route diagram for BVB route 37, and could carry 50 passengers. We drew up at Basel Hbf just behind another full bus waiting to leave. A quick check revealed that

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Seen at Einsiedeln

Above: Departing driving trailer leaving Einsiedeln on 5 August 1993, train locomotive Re4/4^{III} No.41. In the background the hired DR loco 143 922-3 carrying Sudostbahn branding in addition to its

original DR insignia. This loco is stabled here for the afternoon Zürich set. A Roco HO gauge model is available.

Below. The Modelleisenbahn-Club-Einsiedeln meets in this 2-axle balcony-end coach parked on a dead end in the station.



1995 Annual General Meeting

Nomination of Society Officers

Nominations for the following posts are invited:

President, Vice-President(s), Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Editor, Publicity and Exhibitions Officer, Sales Officer and four other members of the Committee.

Nomination forms are available from the Society Secretary, Mr. P Dransfield, 10 Beechwood Road, Mirfield, WF14 9JX and should be returned to him **not later than 15 February 1995.**

Motions for the AGM

Motions for the 1995 Annual General Meeting should reach the Society Secretary before 15 February 1995.

1994 AGM Minutes and Accounts

The Audited Accounts for 1993, together with a copy of the Minutes of the 1994 AGM and amended Rules and Constitution of the Swiss Railways Society will be found included with this issue of *Swiss Express*.

In accordance with the Rules and Constitution and as agreed at the 1992 AGM, the Management Committee will circulate with the June 1995 issue of *Swiss Express* a list of names and addresses (not telephone numbers) of those members who have indicated a wish to be included.

The AGM Photographic Competition

This will again be held, members can submit one entry in each of the following four categories:

- Railway Slides
- Non-Railway Slides
- Railway Prints
- Non-Railway Prints

ie, up to four entries per member.

All slides must be mounted for projection in 50mm square mounts, each carrying the member's name for identification. Prints must be unmounted with a maximum size of 7" x 5", ie standard prints as provided by processing houses. They must carry the member's name on the back. Prints do not have to be in colour.

Entries must be booked in to the organisers

by 14:00 at the latest and collected by the end of the meeting directly after the conclusion of the AGM and not later than 17:00. Although every care will be taken, the organisers cannot accept responsibility for prints or slides not collected by then or for entries which do not bear the member's name.

All entries must be of Swiss subjects, but can have been taken in any year - in other words, if you've not been to Switzerland lately, look out your old photos.

Results will be announced at an appropriate moment, hopefully during the AGM, if not then, during the Dinner, and will be published in *Swiss Express*.

Touring the borders

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the buses were displaying circuit numbers 7 and 1, indicating a 10 minute service interval and an unsurprisingly low capacity of 500 passengers per hour.

Making my way into the station, I found a lot of confused passengers and no centralised information. Some of the TV monitors said that the line to Laufen was blocked by an "Anfall", the departure monitors struggled to give any sensible information. Deciding that trying to find something reasonable to eat in the area was a lost cause, I grabbed a hot dog and beer and headed for the overnight train to Roma Termini via Luzern on track 4, joining the rear Swiss EWIV A. Its location adjacent by the cross passage leading to the street allowed the bus service to be monitored; a 10 minute late departure meant that we didn't quite connect from the 18.55 bus from Laufen. Rolling out towards Muttenz, another packed bus passed on the autobahn, the fourth after my train had arrived!

The train rolled into Luzern still 10 minutes late. As a matter of interest, I finally found a hot meal in the subway station buffet at Luzern before wandering along to the Alpenquai to watch the DS *Uri* come in off the "sunset" working, but that is another story.