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Luzern to Lenzburg

by Ronald Smith

Luzern station is always busy with bright metre gauge trains shuttling in and out to Interlaken or Engleberg, multi-coloured lengthy international trains, airport shuttles, and amidst all this prestigious activity, a dowdy local train sneaks into a central platform. This is the hourly service to Lenzburg, over the Seetalbahn.

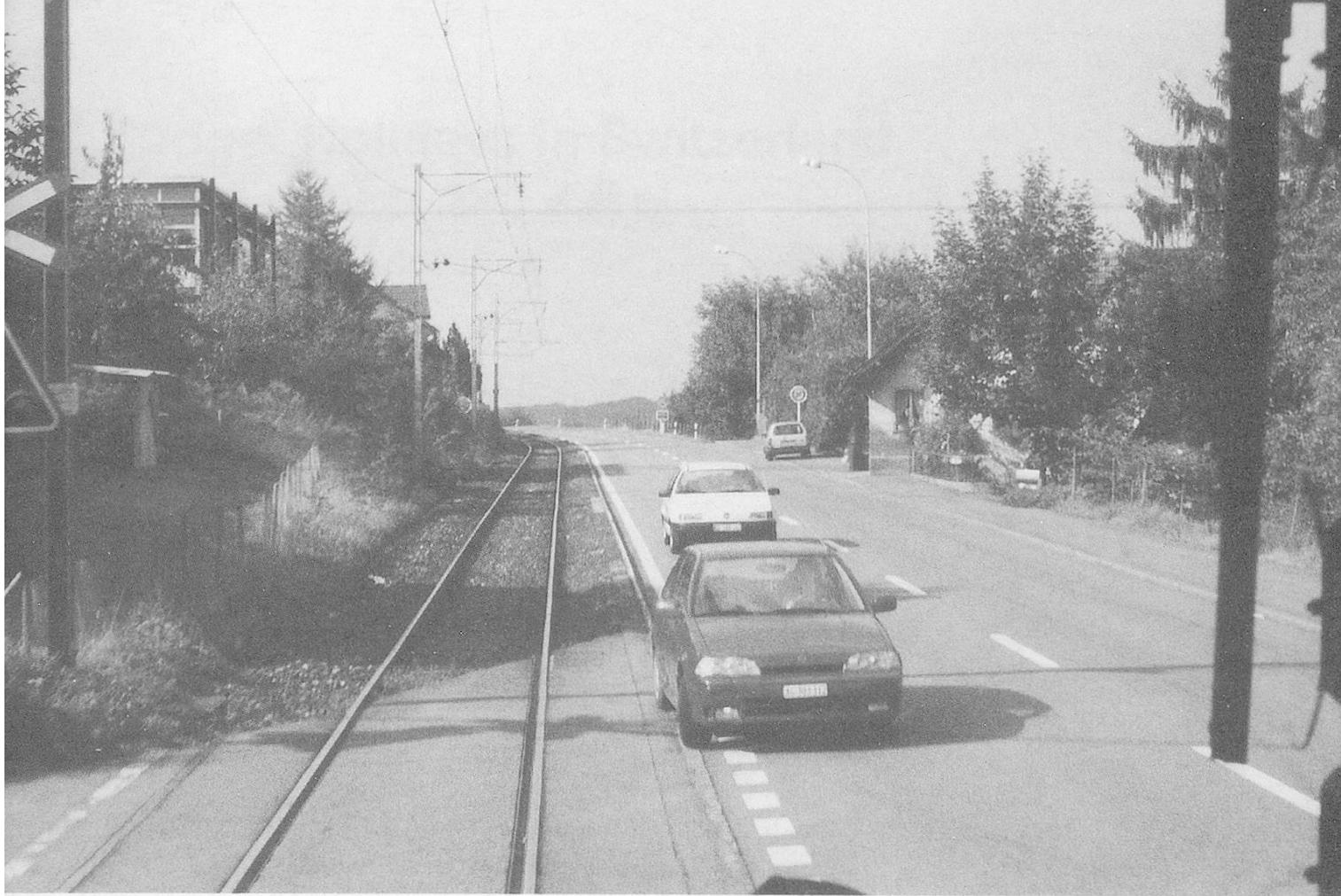
The normal power unit is one RBe4/4 motor coach. Numbers 1401 to 1406 have been specially adapted for working this line and are based at Luzern. They are coupled to a trailer coach which carries the blue and light grey livery, and contrasts with the driving van which makes up the third and last vehicle, which has a garish orange and yellow "dayglo" cab end, which is useful for this particular line. The RBe4/4's cab is, in contrast, just red.

This line has been threatened with closure several times, and for several reasons. Patronage is light, particularly over the central section of the central section of the line. The

Above: Hochdorf station the Ee3/3is just visible

majority of the route runs alongside the main road with which it has to compete. In many places there are houses all along one side of the line, and the road on the other. Each house has its own open level crossing to get to the road! It is no wonder that there are frequent, and sometimes fatal, accidents, and that the line speed is necessarily low, which accentuates the unattractiveness of the service.

Determined to experience this, I joined a train at Luzern. We pulled out and rattled along the main line as far as Emmenbrucke. Here we reversed back out, across all the tracks and the freight yard, and curved off towards the industrial and shopping centre. The RBe4/4 is normally at the Luzern end of the sets, so I took the opportunity to move to the seat beside the driver, as you will see from the photographs. What a contrast to the main line. There was grass growing between the tracks, and we were constantly overtaken by road vehicles. The



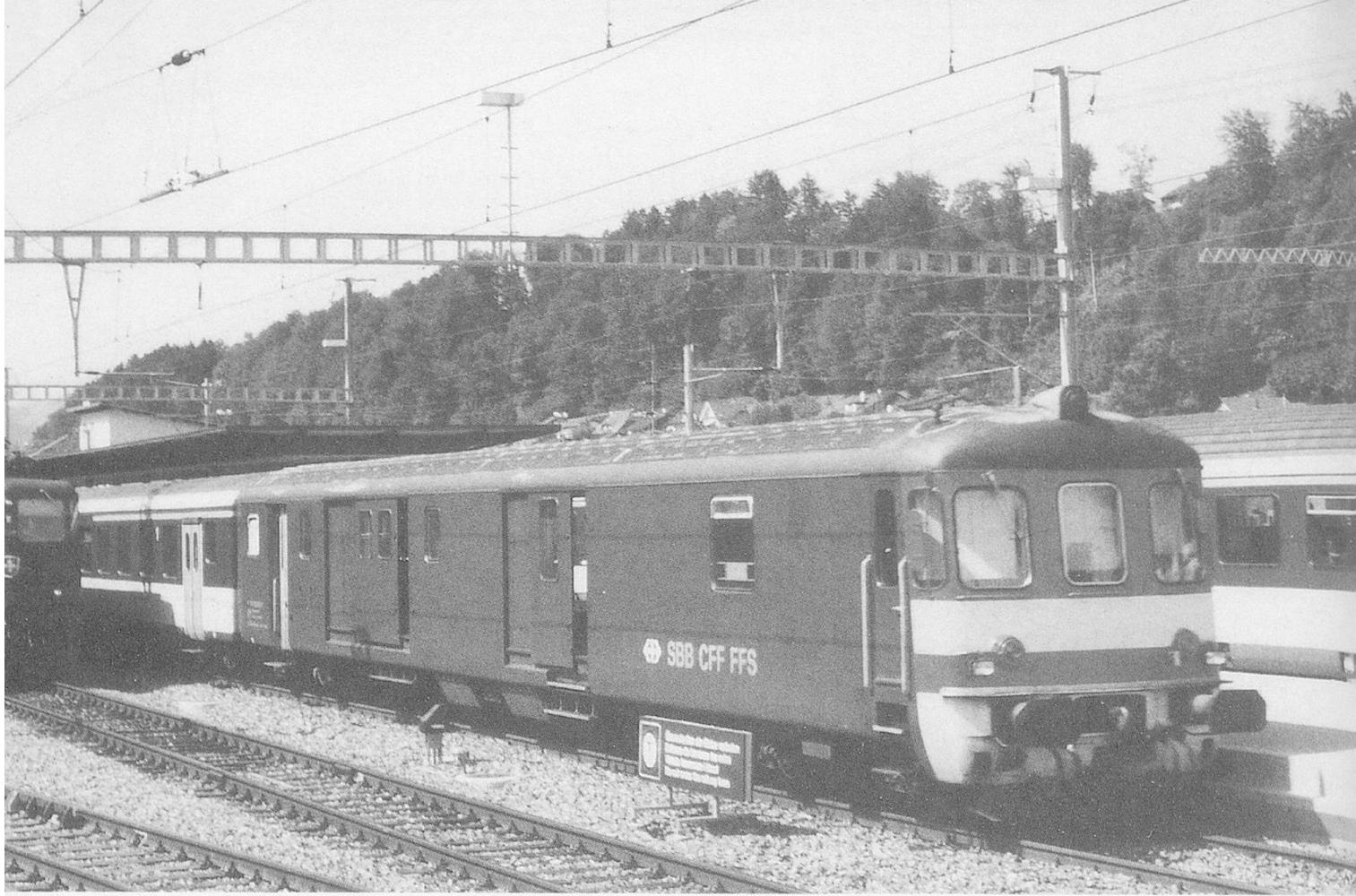
Above: The incident with the red car, showing how near the road and railway get, notice the unguarded crossing .

journey is fascinating. Over the 47 kilometres (29 miles) of the line there are 17 intermediate stations, one of which is a request stop. The again reduces line speed. This journey takes 79 minutes, which works out at an average speed of only 22 m.p.h. There is an hourly service of 16 through trains in each direction per day, with another 4 trains going part way.

Most of the stations are mere wayside halts, with a variety of different styles of small shelters. Tickets are purchased on the train. At Beinwill a PTT bus service connects with every train to run to Beromunster. This replaces a branch line of 8 kilometres with three intermediate stops which has only recently been closed and the bus substituted. Hochdorf has an impressive large station with a huge modern office block built over the platforms. There is quite a busy freight activity here, sufficient to justify an Ee3/3 shunting loco to be based there. Freight wagons were in evidence at most stations along the line, and although not dense, such traffic would justify one or two pick up goods trains each day. Ae6/6 11507 "WILDEGG" was seen at Hochdorf

waiting for the crossing of passenger trains before it could continue with its train towards Lenzburg.

Following the contours of the road provides some interesting views, alarming humps and tight curves, particularly on the approaches to towns where the railway sharply deviates from the road, twists around and in between houses to the stations. The problems encountered were evident on my trip. At one place a large articulated lorry was delivering plant to a building site, and to straighten up the low loader, had pulled forward onto the railway line, and parked there! Furious sounding of the horn and braking by the train driver resulted in a hurried withdrawal of the lorry. At a road junction a lady in a red car was turning right across the tracks. She saw the train and stopped - leaving no clearance for the train! More action by our driver caused the flustered lady to reverse a little, but then she was obstructing the road, so she compromised and



Above: Ebikon station, photo to illustrate front of these units and the second coach in blue and grey, train is a Luzern - Flüelen shuttle

pulled forward again. We slowed to a crawl and eased past, our driver using his retractable mirror to watch carefully as we skimmed down the side of the car. The driver's language broadened my minimal knowledge of German.

Arriving finally at Lenzburg, we squeezed through houses and back gardens to emerge alongside a road, across the other side of which is the SBB station. We continued to run slowly along past the station, over a level crossing and into the rudimentary platform of this line. On the other track Ae6/6 11504 "LE LOCLE" was waiting with two old green coaches to form a local to Beinwill.

Lenzburg SBB is very busy and quite a contrast to the rural Seetalbahn.

The future of this line is looking brighter. Typically Swiss, the line is going to be repositioned on the other side of the road, where possible, to segregate it and improve line speeds. Evidence of the construction work was apparent on my trip in August 1994.

I saw one service made up of a Kolibri set, and presumably when upgrading of the line is

completed, these modern emu's will replace the elderly RBe4/4's and be much more cost efficient.

To see this road side line with all its charm, and views over the two lakes that it passes, and even semaphore signals, I urge you to take the trip before it is too late, and the character disappears under the, albeit vital, modernisation and upgrading.

SNTO News:-

At the end of March 1995, Urs Eberhard became the new Director of the Swiss National Tourist Office in London. We welcome him to the appointment and wish him a successful and enjoyable stay in the UK.

Mr. Eberhard is well known to many of our members who will remember his unfailing and cheerful help when he was in the management of the Arth-Rigi Bahn.