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Private Railways in Switzerland - 8

by Brian Hemming

Continuing the series, we have in this issue a selection of three metre gauge private railways. Two, the Regionalverkehr Bern-Solothurn (RBS) and the Wyental- und Suhrentalbahn (WSB) are lines serving the conurbations of Bern and Aarau respectively. They operate regular interval services and demonstrate the true worth of rail

transport in such a situation. The other line dealt with is the last of the Jungfraubahnen Group to be covered in this series, the Berner Oberland Bahnen (BOB). This line also carries local traffic, but this is far outweighed by the tourists who use the line for access to the whole of the Jungfrau area.

BOB

Berner Oberland Bahnen

After the opening of the Bödelibahn from Därligen to Bönigen in 1872 plans were put forward for its extension on a partially rack operated standard gauge line up the Lütschine valley. These did not come to fruition and it was not until 1886 that further plans were put forward which, after some modification, resulted in a metre gauge line, the BOB, being built not from Bönigen but the unstaffed halt of Zollhaus. This halt, which was renamed Interlaken Ost in 1892, came under the management of the BOB and remains as such today.

The BOB was opened throughout in 1890 and consists of an adhesion worked section from Interlaken Ost to Zweilütschinen. It then splits into

two branches, each of which has two rack sections, to Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen. A proposed extension from Lauterbrunnen to the Trümmelbach Falls did not materialise.

Although the rack and other systems of the BOB were standardised with those of the Brünig line, electrification which was introduced in 1914, was at 1500v DC rather than the Brünig voltage of 15kV AC. This meant that although stock was interchangeable only steam trains could be operated on a through basis.

The opening of the BOB acted as a catalyst for the construction of a number of other lines in the area which although making no direct



Previous page: ABDeh4/4 309 & 310 at Zweilütschinen, October 1995.

Above: ABDeh4/4^{II} 313 also at Zweilütschinen, October 1995.

Photos: Les Heath

connections with the BOB because of gauge differences offered connection facilities for passengers. These railways, the BLM (opened in 1981), WAB (1893) and SPB (1893) together with the BOB and Jungfraubahn are today all members of the Jungfraubahnen Group.

The passenger service on the line operates on a regular interval basis. Double trains leave Interlaken Ost containing portions for both Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen. At Zweilütschinen this train splits and each portion proceeds to its destination. In the reverse direction trains from Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen join at Zweilütschinen and proceed as one to Interlaken Ost. The company has a small amount of goods traffic but does maintain a shunter at Interlaken Ost. A steam locomotive, ex RhB, is kept for special operations.

Length: 23.61 km

Gauge: 1000 mm

Rack system: Riggenbach

Voltage: 1500v DC

Maximum gradient: 34‰ (adhesion), 120‰ (rack)

Depots: Interlaken Ost, Zweilütschinen

Works: Zweilütschinen

Nearest main line station: Interlaken Ost (shared)

Kursbuch tables: 311, 312

Powered Stock (livery: brown and cream)

Class	Numbers	Built
Ta2/2	1	1946
Xrote	5	1990
G3/4	11	1902
HGe3/3	24, 29	1914, 1926
HGm2/2	31	1985
ABDeh4/4	302	1949
ABeh4/4	304 - 308	1965
ABeh4/4	309 - 310	1979
ABeh4/4 ^{II}	311 - 313	1986



RBS

Regionalverkehr Bern-Solothurn

Above: Be 4/8 No. 81 at Worb Dorf, 25/10/96

Photo: Brian Hemming

The RBS was formed in 1984 by the merger of two railways, the SZB (Solothurn-Zollikofen-Bern) and the VBW (Vereinigte Bern-Worb-Bahnen). Although not the largest private railway in Switzerland, the RBS has the distinction of being the busiest with its annual passenger numbers exceeding those of both the BLS and RhB.

The SZB came into being in 1922 by the merging of the BZB (Bern-Zollikofen-Bahn) which had opened in 1912 and the ESB (Elektrischen Solothurn-Bern-Bahn) of 1916. The BZB ran between Bern Tierspital (later extended to Bahnhofplatz) and Zollikofen as well as between Worblaufen and Worblaufen Dorf. All these lines were electrified from the beginning.

The VBW came into being in 1927 by the merging of the BWB (Bern-Muri-Worb-Bahn) which had opened in 1898 and the WT (Worblentalbahn). The BWB which was steam operated until 1910 ran from Bern Kirchenfeld (later extended to Helvetiaplatz) to Worb Dorf via Gümligen. The WT, whose lines were electrified from the beginning, opened in 1913 from Bern

Papiermühlstrasse (later extended to Kornhausplatz) to Worb with a branch from Ittigen to Worblaufen Dorf. The passenger service on this branch was withdrawn in 1924.

Because the tracks of the VBW and SZB in the city area were shared with Bern tramways steps were taken from 1960 onwards to modernise both systems. A new four track underground terminal station was built at Bern main line station for the SZB in 1965 and in 1974 there followed a two track access line from Worblaufen. Meanwhile in 1969 the VBW restarted passenger working on the Ittigen to Worblaufen line and following the opening of the new line from Worblaufen to Bern SZB in 1974 closed the section from Ittigen to Kornhausplatz. At the same time the service on the original BZB line from Bern to Zollikofen was cut back to Unterzollikofen; Zollikofen then only being served by the Solothurn line trains.

With the opening of the new station at Bern the basis of the passenger service as it is today emerged. Trains generally run every 15 minutes from the underground station and fall into a pattern of 4 services carrying letter identification. These are:



S - Bern to Jegenstorf
 SE - Bern to Solothurn (express)
 W - Bern to Worb
 Z - Bern to Unterzollikofen

The express service from Solothurn is now largely operated by the new ABe4/12 units, but some of the older units with buffet facilities are used on peak hour services into Bern in the morning, returning in the evening. The remaining services are in the hands of railcars either operating singly or in multiples.

The remaining line of the RBS, from Helvetiaplatz to Worb carries the route indication G and continues to use the tram tracks within Bern. From 19th April it has been announced that the route will be extended to Casino-Platz in Bern. The new terminus will be known as Bern-Zytglogge. The rolling stock on this line is very similar to that used on the tramways.

Despite the density of its passenger service, the RBS also has significant freight traffic. There are exchange sidings at Zollikofen from where dual gauge track extends to Boll-Utzigen on the line to Worb Dorf. The RBS locomotives have special drawgear to handle this traffic. Special steam services operate from time to time using a Eurovapor owned Krauss-Maffei built locomotive.

Length: 53.7 km

Gauge: 1000 mm

Voltage: 1250v DC (Muri line 600v DC)

Maximum gradient: 45‰

Depots: Solothurn, Worblaufen, Worb (2)

Works: Solothurn, Worb (2)

Above: Be 4/8 No. 52 at Worblaufen 2/3/96

Photo: Alan Pike OBE

Nearest SBB stations: Bern, Solothurn

Kursbuch tables: 293, 294, 295, 420

Powered Stock (livery: red, grey & white; orange & cream; blue & ivory (Muri line); locomotives crimson or orange)

Class	Numbers	Built
BDre4/4	1, 3	1916, 1929
BDre4/4	4	1950
BDe4/4	6	1950
BDre4/4	21 - 23	1955
Be4/8	41 - 52	1974
Be4/8	53 - 61	1978
Be4/8II	62 - 64	1993
ABe4/12	65 - 72	1992
Be4/4	74	1961
Be4/8	81 - 89	1987-88
De4/4	101 - 102	1961, 1965
De4/4	103	1973
De4/4	105	1924
Ge4/4	111 - 112	1927
Gem4/4	121	1912
Xm1/2	151	1925
Tm	162	1932
Tmf2/2	165 - 166	1996

Notes

All electric stock is 1250v DC except 81 - 89 which are 600v DC for the Muri line and 105, 111 & 112 which are dual voltage locomotives.



Above: Be4/4 No. 23 at Menziken-Burg
25/10/96.

Photo: Brian Hemming

WSB Wyental- und Suhrentalbahn

Following the opening in 1893 of the standard gauge line in the Seetal from Emmenbrücke to Lenzburg plans were put forward for the development of branch lines for the upper Wyental and Suhrental. The first line was a metre gauge tramway, the WTB, (Wyentalbahn) which opened in 1901 from Aarau to Menziken-Burg. This was followed in 1904 with the opening of another metre gauge tramway, the AS, (Gesellschaft der Strassenbahn Aarau-Schöftland) from Aarau to Schöftland. From 1906 both lines ran into the Bahnhofplatz at Aarau and despite the fact they were under common management from 1906 onwards through running was not possible because of different brake and coupling systems being used. There was, however an interchange of standard gauge freight traffic which took place using rollschemelen, and latterly rollböcken. In 1924 both railways were integrated and a new station built for the WTB at the south side of Aarau main line station whilst the terminal for the AS

remained to the north side. The companies were merged at the beginning of 1957 when the WSB was formed. In 1967 a connection through a new tunnel was built from Aarau Buchenhof to the former WTB station which then became the terminal point for both lines as well as permitting through running.

Both lines of the WSB are very much urban in their nature and follow the main roads in their respective valleys. The services for each start from the WSB station at Aarau and the timetable is arranged to allow for either through running or convenient connections when travelling from one branch to the other. There are long stretches of roadside operation as well as there being some street running. The passenger service, which operates on a regular interval basis, is in the hands of a fleet of railcars including some modern Schindler/ABB units of similar design to those on the BD and RBS. The freight traffic is handled by electric locomotives and is largely carried in



Above: Be4/4 No. 32 at Menziken, 17/4/96
Photo: Alan Pike OBE

standard gauge wagons mounted on rollbocken with transfer being made to or from the Federal Railways at Suhr. Here the WSB uses a 1915 electric shunting locomotive which in itself merits a stop off to find and perhaps photograph. As well as the regular freight and passenger services the WSB operates special saloon trains for hire which are either hauled by a beautifully restored railcar (No.116) or a special liveried shunter (No.47).

Length: 32.2 km (Aarau - Schöftland 10.2km, Aarau - Menziken-Burg 22 km)

Gauge: 1000 mm

Voltage: 750v DC

Maximum gradient: 45‰

Depots: Aarau, Menziken-Burg, Schöftland

Works: Schöftland

Nearest SBB station: Aarau (4 minute interchange)

Kursbuch tables: 643, 644

Powered Stock (livery: red, grey & black or orange and cream; locomotives brown)

Class	Numbers	Built
Tm2/2	1	1969
De4/4	6	1947
Be4/4	9 - 14	1966
Be4/4	15 - 27	1979
Be4/8	28 - 34	1992
De4/4	43 - 45	1974
Te2/2	47 - 49	1954-7
Te2/2	50	1915
ASe4/4	116	1901