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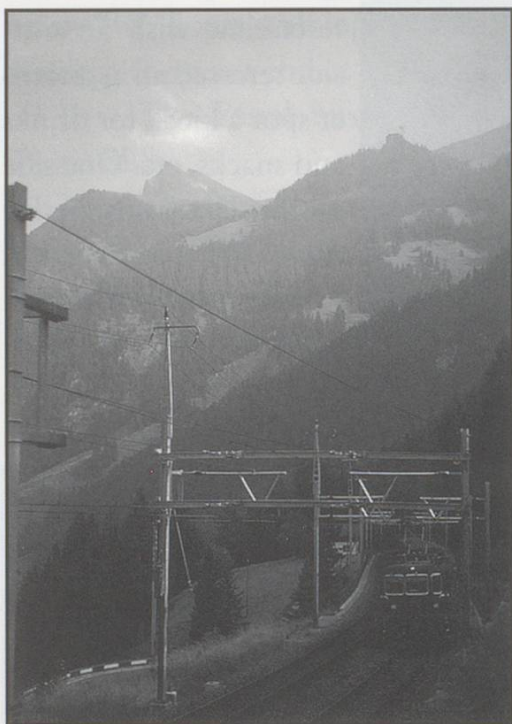
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HÖHENWEG NORDRAMPE BLS Along the Northern Ramp High-Level Path



The start of the walk, just off the main road on the outskirts of Kandersteg. September 1989.

Photo: Richard Pinner

The railway line through Kandersteg is one of the two main transalpine railways in Switzerland. It belongs to the BLS Company (Bern Lötschberg Simplon). Starting from Thun it leads to Spiez, then up the Kander Valley to just beyond Kandersteg, through the nine mile long Lötschberg tunnel, and finally through the Lonza gorge and along the southern slopes of the Lötschberg down to Brig in the Rhône Valley, where it connects with the main line through the Simplon tunnel to Italy.

With the help of the BLS, two high-level paths were established, one on the North side of the tunnel, from Kandersteg to the Kiental (Kien Valley), the other on the South side of the tunnel between the stations of Hohtenn and Lalden. These two paths are not only wonderful rambling paths; they give deep insight into the engineering marvels of the railway.

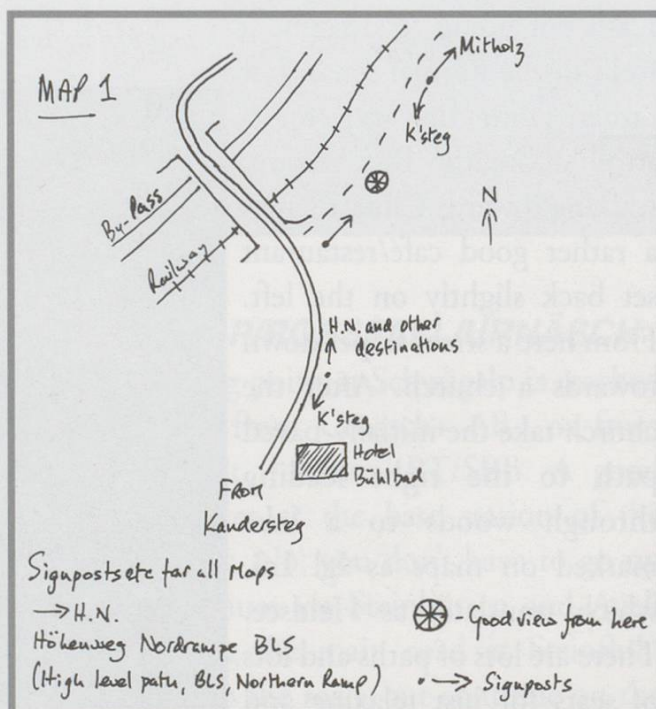
The path on the North side is called 'Höhenweg Nordrampe BLS' and these are the words you will find on all signposts. It leads along the right hand slope high above the Kander Valley and finishes above the entrance to the Kien Valley. The full length would take you about six hours, but you can come down from it to the villages of Mitholz or Kandergrund or the small town of Frutigen and return from there by bus or train.

For the purpose of this article the walk is described as far as Mitholz; if you feel fit and more adventurous, you can of course continue along the path and finish at Kandergrund or even Frutigen.

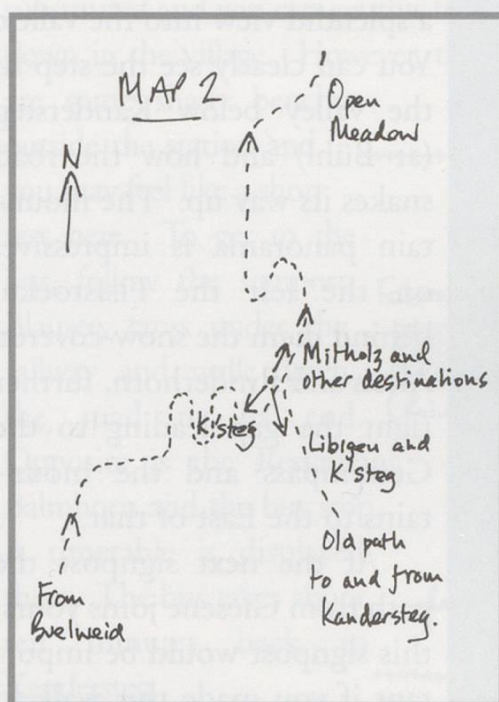
MAP 1.

Starting from Kandersteg, walk along the main road northwards, right out of the village past the last buildings until you come to Büel where the road starts to descend in large hairpins. Incidentally, you will find two spellings used on signposts and maps: Büel and Bühl. The signpost gives you about ten destinations pointing North; the important ones to you are 'Höhenweg Nordrampe BLS' and, where used, 'Mitholz' or 'Blausee-Mitholz'. Here you turn off the road to the right, following the narrow path along the railway.

You have a splendid view down the Kander Valley from here, as far as Frutigen and the Niesen in the distance. (The Niesen is the big, triangular peak you see so well from the Lake of



Thun; from here you see its other side and that it is really part of a long chain. A railway goes up to the summit, from the station of Mülünen, between Frutigen and Spiez.).



MAP 2.

You soon climb up a slope and join the older path from Kandersteg (via Libigen). Turn left here; a signpost directs you to Mitholz. For some time you will walk slightly downhill through woods; look for yellow paint marks on trees to show you the correct way. The woods are followed by open meadows, and these by woods again.

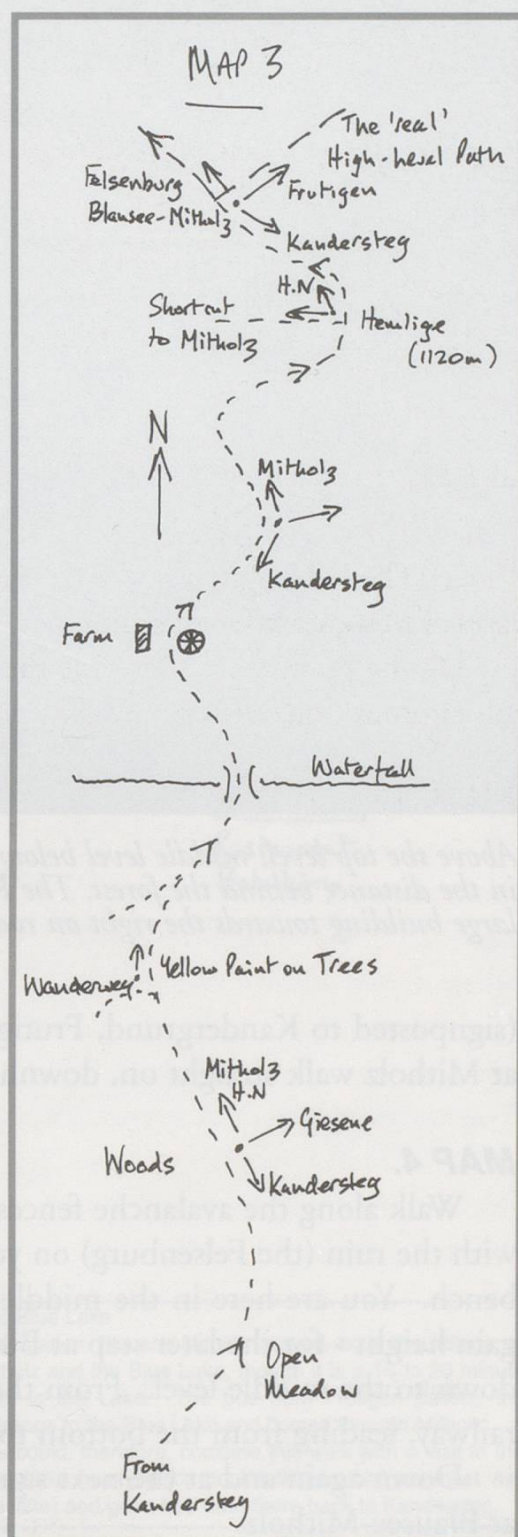
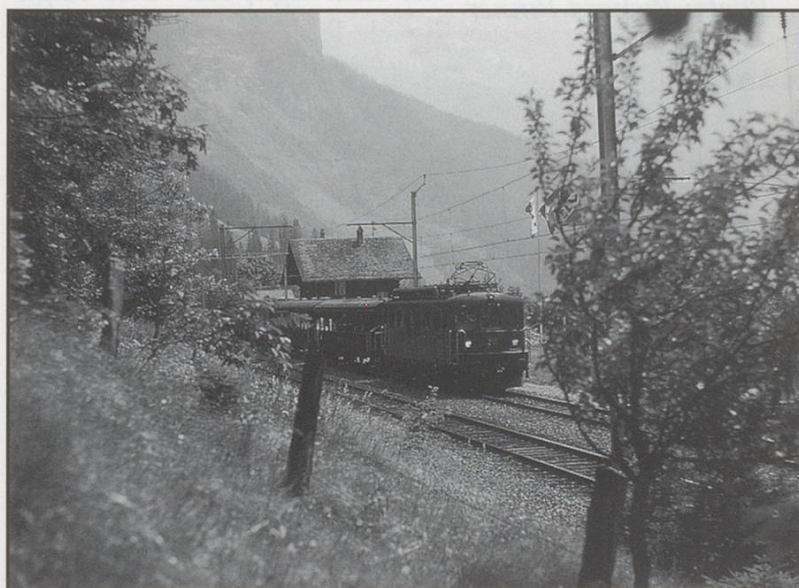
MAP 3.

At a signpost do not take the way to the right (to Giesene) but keep straight on; it is again signposted 'H ö h e n w e g

Nordrampe BLS'. You come to a fork; do not go down on the left; walk straight on. Yellow paint on some trees and the sign 'Wanderweg' (Rambling Path) will help you to find the correct way. At the next junction, again, do not turn left, but to the right; once again yellow signs will help you. You climb uphill for some time and then come to a stream which you cross by a new bridge (shown on the map with the word 'Waterfall' - this is just above the bridge).

On the top level near 'Wärterhaus'. July 1963.

Photo: Richard Pinner





Above the top level, middle level below (with train), bottom level in the distance behind the forest. The Restaurant Balmhorn is the large building towards the right on road. July 1963.

Photo: Richard Pinner

(signposted to Kandergrund, Frutigen and Rams-lauenen). If you decide to finish the walk at Mitholz walk straight on, downhill.

MAP 4.

Walk along the avalanche fences, cross under the railway, walk down across the meadow with the ruin (the Felsenburg) on your right, bear left down the meadow and you come to a bench. You are here in the middle of the great double loop the railway makes in order to gain height - for the later step at Bühl. You have crossed under the top level and are coming down to the middle level. From the bench you have a good view of the bottom loop of the railway, leading from the bottom to the middle level.

Down again and at the next signpost turn right along the road to the now closed station at Blausee-Mitholz.

Again, follow the yellow signs; you come to a farm building from where you have a splendid view into the valley. You can clearly see the step in the valley below Kandersteg (at Bühl) and how the road snakes its way up. The mountain panorama is impressive: on the left the Fisistöcke, behind them the snow-covered Altels and Rinderhorn, further right the gap leading to the Gemmipass and the mountains to the East of that.

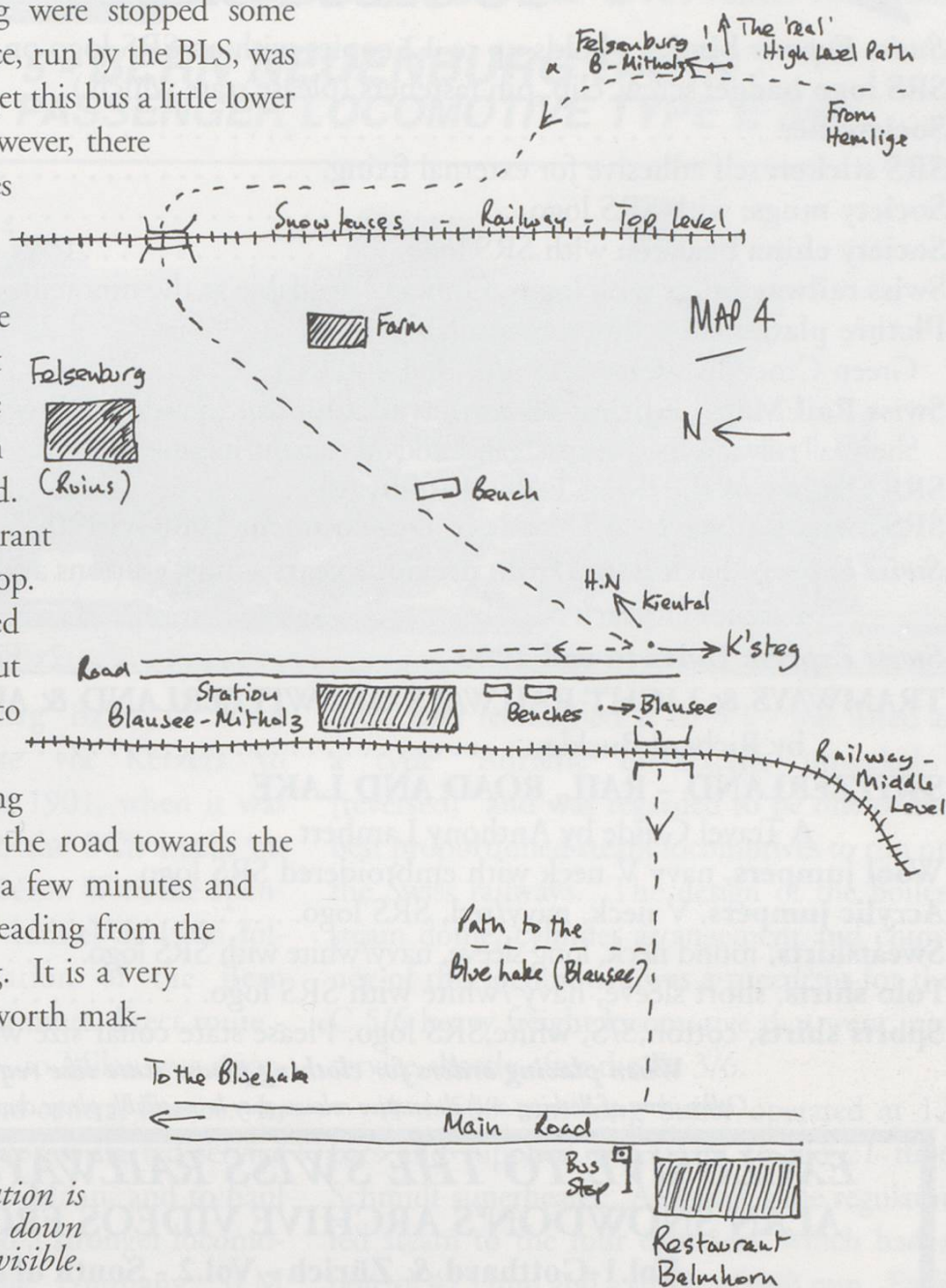
At the next signpost the path from Giesene joins yours; this signpost would be important if you made this walk in the opposite direction as it would show you the correct way towards Kandersteg.

You walk downhill again until you come to the signpost at 'Hemlige'. To your left are a line of avalanche fences protecting the railway. A path to the left leads down to Mitholz and you could take this if you want to finish the walk now.

But, if you can, carry on to the next signpost. The High-Level Path now turns right

Unfortunately the local trains between Frutigen and Kandersteg were stopped some years ago, but a bus service, run by the BLS, was substituted and you can get this bus a little lower down in the village. However, there are some shady benches outside the station and you may feel like a short rest here. To get to the bus, follow the signpost Blausee, cross under the railway and walk down the road to its end. Opposite is the Restaurant Balmhorn and the bus stop. A timetable is displayed there. The bus takes about ten minutes back to Kandersteg.

If you feel like walking back, you could follow the road towards the Blue Lake (Blausee) for a few minutes and then take the footpath leading from the Blue Lake to Kandersteg. It is a very pleasant walk and well worth making..



At Mitholz. The old station is in the centre. The path down from the ruin is clearly visible. May 1976.

Photo: Richard Pinner



The Blue Lake

The station Blausee-Mitholz served both the village of Mitholz and the Blue Lake, though it is a 15 to 20 minute walk to the Lake. The bus from Frutigen passes the entrance to the Blue Lake and comes through Mitholz. You could, therefore, combine this walk with a visit to the Blue Lake (every guide book tells you that you must visit this lake) and get a bus from there back to Kandersteg.