

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2004)
Heft: [2]

Artikel: Walking the line : the Berner Oberland
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854777>

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WALKING THE LINE

THE BERNER OBERLAND

Pete continues his series describing the Berner Oberland from a new perspective, literally and metaphorically

Having spent much of 1946 in Adelboden, and probably 2 years of my life there, I feel that it's like returning home each time I get off the train at Frutigen for the pleasure of travelling up the Engstligental. If we spend a fortnight in Adelboden (we did so 9 years on the trot) we probably averaged 9 days shuttling back and forth to the railhead, never once getting fatigued with the trip. For the extent of this article I will concentrate on using Frutigen as a base (Adelboden is only 30 minutes away) except for the first three excursions. For self-caterers, both Adelboden and Frutigen have Co-op shops.

1. THE HAHNENMOOS PASS

A walk up to the Hahnenmoos Pass, straddling the Engstligental and Simmental, to Lenk is dominated by the mighty snow cornice of the Wildstrubel massif. From the centre of Adelboden one is spoilt for choice to get to the Hahnenmoos. One can get the bus to Geils, then the gondelbahn or a walk (1 hour) up to the Pass, or one can gondelbahn down to the Adelboden Mineral Water factory and a quick change for continuation up to Sillerenbühl which then has an hour's level walking to the Pass, or one can walk all the way into Lenk from Adelboden in around 4 hours. Paths are well sign posted as is the norm, and a straight walk up the Geilbach will take about 100 minutes up to Geils. Another alternative from Geilbach en-route to the Pass is via Aebi at the foot of the Albristhorn and Gsur, thence up to Sillerenbühl for the Hahnenmoos and this will

set you back 4 hours. From the Pass across the saddle to Bühlberg is 40 minutes, from where you get your first glimpse of the Simmental and the Wildhorn, with Lenk below only another 40 minutes away. From Lenk return to base, with your feet up, by train, via Zweisimmen, Spiez and Frutigen.

2. ADELBODEN TO KANDERSTEG

Another Pass crossing from Adelboden is that into Kandersteg at the head of the Kandertal. From the town, head down to the Oey bridge crossing the Allenbach before heading for Kummi on the Bunderalp (you pass very close to the Girl Guides World Chalet). After a gradual climb, the zigzag up to Kummi and on towards the Bunderchrinden will test your fitness over much loose scree and rock. The views from the Pass make it worthwhile, with Adelboden and the Albristhorn on one side and Kandersteg and Öschinensee on the other. After the effort in getting to this point on the Mountain Path it's an easier affair dropping down into Kandersteg. If one is reasonably fit, it should take around 6 hours. Return by train from Kandersteg to Frutigen, then the bus.

3. FRUTIGEN VIA THE CHOLEREN

It's a pleasant walk also from Adelboden into Frutigen. Leaving the former, head north for Ausserschwand, and take the path on the right down to the Choleren Gorge and Pochtenkessels (80 minutes). Climb up to the main road and continue a short way north



ABOVE: The Albristhorn and Gsür from the Silerenbühl gondolabahn terminus between Adelboden and Hahнемоos.

Photo: Pete Dyson

BELOW: The picturesque Lötschental valley.

Photo: ©Valais Tourism

until a road branches off right up to Elsigbach. From here it's a gradual downhill along the old road into Frutigen. It used to pass by Tellenburg Castle ruins—best place for viewing traffic over the Kander Viaduct but I don't know what effect the Base-Tunnel works have had on local Wanderwegs. Allow 4 hours, which includes a traverse of the Choleronschlucht.

4. THE LÖTSCHENTAL

On the other side of the Lötschberg tunnel lies Goppenstein at the bottom of the Lötschental. This is an unbelievably beautiful valley with scores of old chalets in the picturesque hamlets all the way up to Fafleralp at the foot of the Langgletscher. A very good bus service runs from the rail-



head to Fafferalp, whilst at Wiler, one can take the cablecar up to Lauchernalp. The advantage of this is to split the walk into two, one heading up the valley to Fafferalp, the other in the opposite direction goes via Kummenalp into Goppenstein. If one uses the cablecar, then

5. THE GEMMIPASS

It took many years to do the next walk because of heavy snow on the Gemmipass, but it was worth the wait. Travelling by train from Frutigen, get off the train at Goppenstein and transfer to the bus for Gampel-Steg, to

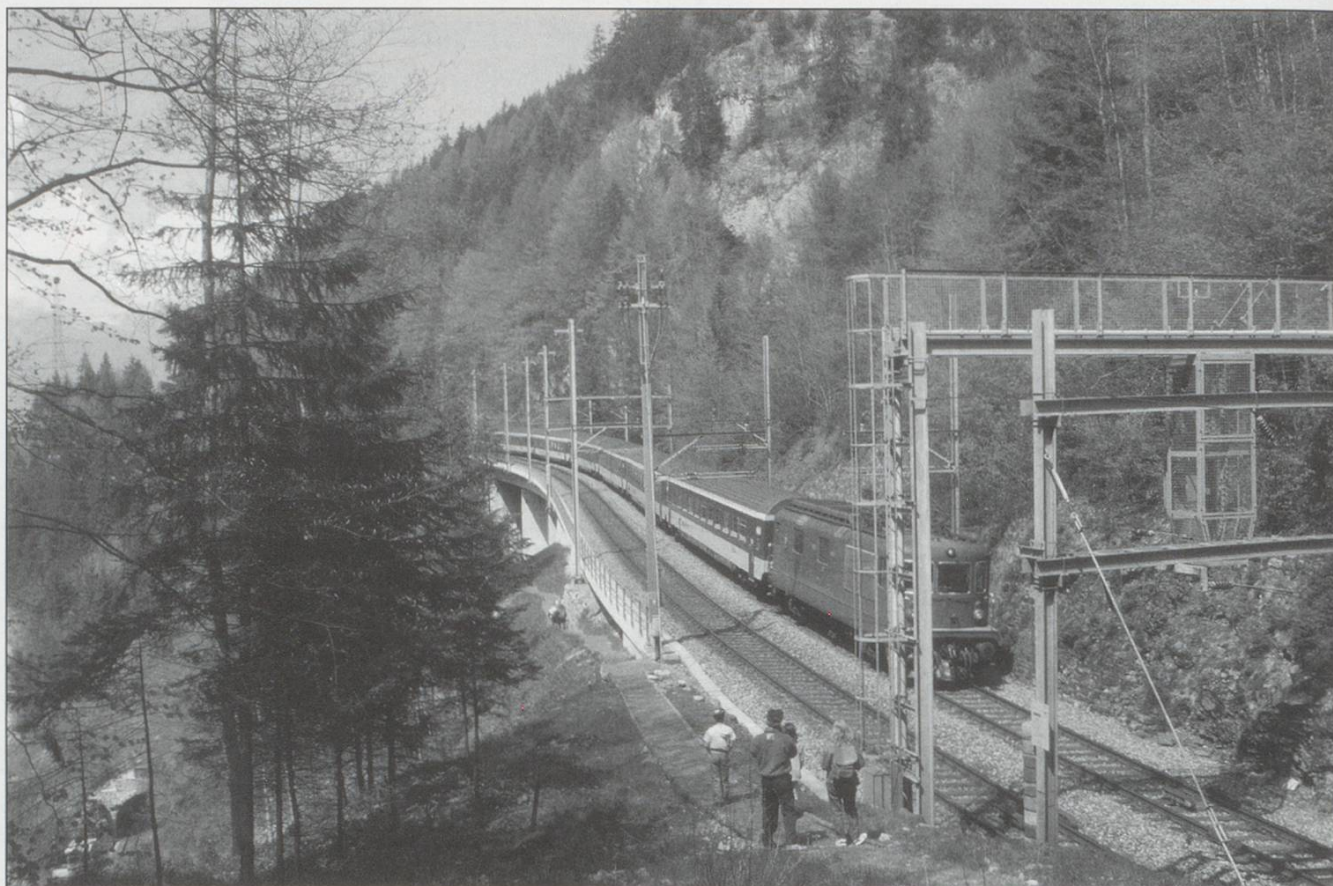


The classic hike over the Gemmipass, from Leukerbad in the canton Wallis to Kandersteg in the Berner Oberland, leads you gently for almost two hours down to Daubensee, past the 250 year old mountain hotel 'Schwarenbach' and the idyllic Arvenseeli to the Stock cablecar station at Sunnbüel.

©Leukerbad Tourismus

the walk towards the glacier has its obvious rewards. If one starts at Fafferalp its a nice steady gradual uphill venture but with the glacier behind one, so its swings and roundabouts. If you start from the west platform at Goppenstein, the climb - up the steepest zigzag path I have ever walked - onto Faldumalp has its rewards right from the start of a 6 hour delight, the only trouble being that you will miss exploring the hamlets in the valley - leave that to another day and hamlet-hop on the bus.

pick up the train to Leuk (it makes a change from going down the South Ramp into Brig). Another bus from here takes you into Leukerbad from where one can pick up the cablecar to the Gemmipass. It's a different world up here - barren and bleak we described it on first sight. The Daubensee was frozen over (early July) and the path beyond towards Kandersteg covered in snow in several places. Schwarzenbach en-route was a hive of activity round its hotel, a base for mountain pass users to the



A view close to Blausee on the North Ramp Path.

©BLS

various routes round the Wildstrubel. It takes only 2 hours to reach the Stock cablecar for its steep descent into Kandersteg before walking the 3kms or so (past the Boy Scouts base - the Bunderchrindepass keeps them away from the Girl Guides - sensible move!), for the train back to Frutigen.

6. THE NORTH RAMP HOHENWEG

The BLS path is a 6-hour steady, easy walk, which links the Kiental with Kandersteg. One gets the train from Frutigen to Reichenbach, transferring there on to the Griesalp bus. Get off at Kiental and transfer to the chairlift for Ramslauenen. You are now on the start of the BLS Nordrampe walk. The first section is (or possibly was after "Lothar") high forest and alpine pastures with views up the Kiental and Kandertal and over Thunersee. Then you're on the Wyssenmattealp overlooking Frutigen and Niesen as well as the Engstligental to Adelboden. Once, above Kandertal, forests

used to prevail. Blausee, the BLS spirals, the ruins of Felsenbergschloss are all below one and I fear for what I might see now after the hurricane - at least the BLS should stand out but at what cost? When we reached Kandersteg we decided to keep walking and made our way on the little used western path back into Frutigen, but another 2 hours might seem too much - the alternative is the train, or the BLS bus via Blausee-Mitholz which to us seems the pleasanter of the two.

7. THE SOUTH RAMP HOHENWEG

The southern BLS traverse will take another 6 hours off your holiday. After getting the train from Frutigen, get off at Hohtenn about 9 minutes beyond Goppenstein. This is the start of a fabulous craggy walk leading down to Lalden station, all above the Rhone valley, and believe me it gets very hot at times as the path criss-crosses the railway giving wonderful views of the BLS heading for Brig and beyond. Once you're on this path, like the Nordrampe, you are devoid of catering facilities. Stock up with plenty of liquids



one (guaranteed to get through a couple of rolls of film) has the railway in its sights practically all the way back to Brienz. You will probably take around 5 hours to walk down. Its very steep near the top and by the time you've reached Planalp you'll need refuelling as much as the locos on

- as always on these expeditions. You come across a rotary water spray for the crops near Eggerberg. Don't try to get past one as they rotate water quicker than you can run - we got drenched but luckily being quite hot in early afternoon we dried out quickly. Its surprising the amount of water that's sprayed. The return to Frutigen from Lalden has you switching from one side of the carriage to the other to see where you have just walked. Both North and South Ramps are well signposted, and at one location you climb up to the railway bridge by ladder and walk across to get to continue on the path. There are many small tunnels and avalanche galleries as well (over 25 I believe I counted) as well as bisses (aqueducts) taking mountain water to the fields below. It's a great path, don't miss it. If wet however, several sections would be highly slippery and so I recommend it dry underfoot.

ABOVE: The BLS South Ramp path.

©BLS

BELOW: View over Lake Brienz onto the Bernese High Alps. The BRB steam train is nearly at the summit.

©Switzerland Tourism



8. THE BRIENZER ROTHORN

Another favourite haunt. From Frutigen, by way of Spiez and Interlaken Ost to Brienz before getting the Brienz Rothorn Bahn, steam (hopefully), up to the summit. There are really two great walks from here. The first



View on the walk down from Rothorn to Brienz.
Photo: Pete Dyson

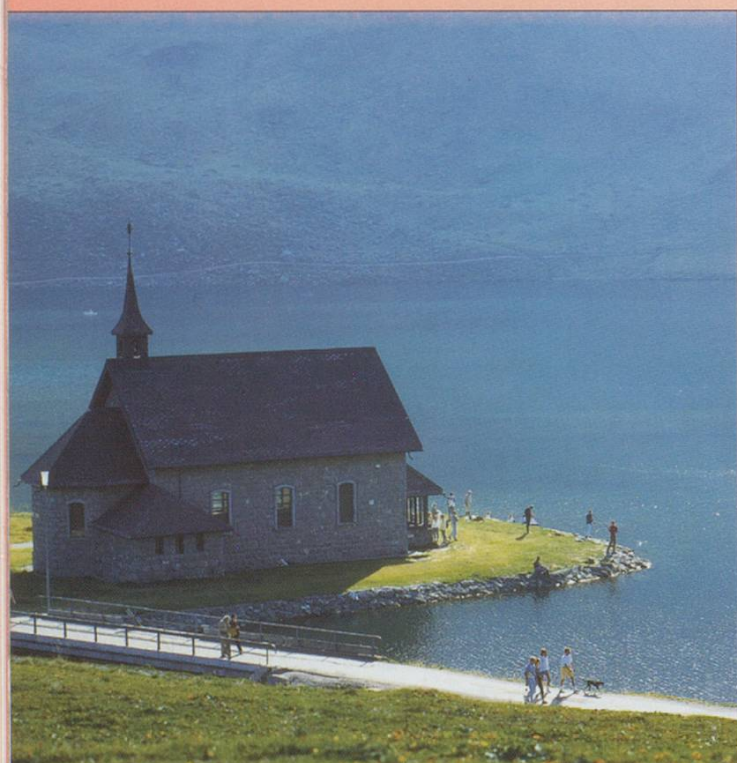
Wileralp keeping on the southern flanks with Brienz See below to the south most of the time below until you reach the welcome Tea Rooms at the Brünig Pass, but the last leg into Brünig is steepish.

their way up. From Planalp the path winds its way down to Brienz. The train does the long curves, while you can cut off the corners. Spot the gaps in the tunnels and hear the ghostly sounds of the trains through the woods - its magically haunting. If you make it back to Brienz in one piece, cruise back to Interlaken on the boat.

9. ROTHORN TO BRÜNIG

The other walk from the summit that we adored headed east to the Brünig Pass. This takes about 4 hours on the Hohenweg

The small church on the shores of Melchsee at Melchsee-Frutt.
Photo©Swiss Tourism



10. THE THREE LAKES

10. Another really good day excursion uses the rail over the Brünig Pass to Sarnen where we transferred to bus for Stockalp. From here it was up to Melchsee-Frutt by cablecar. Head east along Melchsee and Tannensee lying in an unspoilt grassy basin on the path to the Jochpass at the foot of the Titlis above Engelberg, and after 2 hours you arrive at Engstlensee. All the way the Titlis is in view. From here we caught the bus to Meiringen but getting off at Innertkirchen to walk through Aareschlucht (Gorge) back into Meiringen - another hour on your feet. Alternatively you could get the

Whatever one does on these day trips, especially those involving red / white mountain paths, please take note of the weather forecasts and advise locals if you are staying in a hotel what your intentions are, just in case you fail to return when they expect you to. Take adequate food and refreshments - that place where you had hoped for a drink might not be open, and take a whistle with you, for if you get into trouble that will be heard way over your voice level. Of course, being members of the Swiss Railways Society you will know all the transport times - won't you???