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Autor: Fisher, Martin
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NYON-ST CERGUE-MOREZ

Martin Fisher



Flights from the UK to Genève come in to Switzerland over the Jura and then turn right to follow Lac Léman down to Genève. A window seat on the right gives passengers a distant view of Nyon on the descent. INSET: The harbour and castle at Nyon. ALL PHOTOS: Martin Fisher

Many of us who travel to Switzerland by air through Genève Airport have then boarded a train beneath the terminal and been whisked along the northern shore of Le Léman to Lausanne and beyond without giving much thought to the smaller towns along the main line.

In fact, the area once benefitted from a number of local branch lines and street tramways. Nearest to Lausanne is the Bière-Apples-Morges (BAM) which has been the subject of a few articles in *Swiss Express*, most recently in issue No. 96 (December 2008). Between Morges and Nyon there were three metre gauge street tramways, all long since closed. The 9.9km Allaman-Aubonne-Gimel (AAG) opened between 1896-1898 and was closed between 1950-1952. It had seven trams; all were scrapped at closure. The Rolle-Gimel (RG) also climbed some 300m to serve the same community but over a

slightly longer (10.5km) route. It opened in 1898 and operated for 40 years. It had three passenger cars, one of which moved over to the AAG on closure in 1938. There was also the Gland-Begnins (GB), opened in 1906 and surviving until 1954. At 3.7km long this was the shortest of the three lines and only required two trams. A few photographs of these lines can be found by "Googling" the company names, a concept which would have seemed very far-fetched when the routes were in use.

Nyon was founded by Julius Caesar in 45BC. It is a pleasant town (as are Morges and Rolle, incidentally), with an attractive port and a 12th century castle which nowadays accommodates the town's museum. Nyon had a private standard gauge branch, running 5.9km to Crassier on the French border, but this closed in 1962. A 2.5km section of it still remains to serve industry at Eysins on the



TOP: View of St Cergue with Be4/4 202 shortly to return to Nyon, September 2008.

MIDDLE: A glimpse of NStCM ABDe4/4s 1 and 3, built for the opening of the line in 1916, at Cergue, July 1976.

BOTTOM: A composite coach of great character, recorded at St Cergue in 1976.

outskirts of the town. However Nyon retains a metre gauge adhesion branch, the Nyon-St Cergue-Morez (NStCM). This line opened in 1916 and originally ran for 39km through to Morez, in France, as the company name still suggests. The line was cut back to La Cure on the Swiss/French border in 1958, the surviving section being some 27 km long. Until May 2004 the line terminated in the street outside Nyon's CFF/SBB station where a short length of track remains to this day, and which serves to illustrate how congested the road must have been towards the end of street-running.

Nowadays, the NStCM terminates underground, pretty much at right angles to the CFF/SBB main line and in rather spartan surroundings. Leaving the station complex (at 406m high) a short sharp climb brings the two-car train out into daylight and the northern part of the community. After passing the main depot (on the left), the train is soon in open countryside, gradually climbing although with several 5% (1:20) sections towards more wooded terrain in the Jura hills. Beyond Givrin the course twists and turns, with a notably sharp bend through the station at Arzier. The main community en route is St Cergue where there is a depot. The line continues to climb to just after La Givrine (1208m) and then descends a little at 6.6% (1:15 – the steepest gradient on the route) to terminate at 1155m in La Cure. St-Cergue and La Givrine are said to be the nearest ski resorts to Geneva. The NStCM is electrified at 1500V and has a fleet of ten Be4/4 & BDe4/4 railcars, two of which are ex-Chemins de fer du Jura (CJ) and one came from the Lausanne-Echallens-Bercher (LEB). There is also a rotary snow plough in the fleet along with a Tm2/2 tractor.

As some of the photographs hopefully show, the NStCM – like other lines in the Jura – offers the tourist an interesting alternative to the better known, dramatic Alpine scenery. This is a gentler, quieter Switzerland, somewhat off the beaten track but well worth sampling.