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Autor: Jäger, Jakob
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LES CHEMINS DE FER DU JURA

Le train rouge qui bouge! – The red train that moves!

Jakob Jäger



*BDe 4/4 No.613 at snowy Pré Petitjean, 02/02/08.
PHOTOS: Bryan Stone unless otherwise credited.*

The predominately French-speaking Jura region of Switzerland is an area of the country that is often overlooked by many tourists. Yet its rolling hills, deep valleys and forested ridges offer a delightfully different, and essentially quiet, place to visit. The Jura massive runs along the whole of Switzerland's northwest border with France and parts of it are in several cantons. At its heart is Canton Jura, the last of the Swiss cantons to be created as it was only formed from Canton Berne on the 1st January 1979 following some 30-years of secessionist debate. It is the least densely populated

canton in the Confederation and, according to the Federal Statistics Office, it has the lowest per capita income in the country. It also has its own railway, the CJ - the Chemins de fer du Jura. Yes chemins, as the railway operates on both the standard and metre gauge. "Le train rouge qui bouge!" is their marketing slogan.

The CJ consists of 74km of metre-gauge line and 11km of standard-gauge, along with several bus routes and a small road haulage business, all operated by 149 employees. The CJ are doing very well having totalled 1.643 million passenger journeys in 2008. They have seen a 30% growth in passenger kilometres between 2004 and 2008 thanks to an enhanced timetable.

The 51km metre-gauge main line starts from a connection with the CFF/SBB at La Chaux-de-Fonds in Canton Neuchâtel. Crossing a narrow strip of Canton Berne it enters Canton Jura running through Le Noirmont and Saignelégier to Glovelier where it links with the

Saignelégier and Noirmont trains connecting at Le Noirmont, 1968.



CFF/SBB standard gauge line from Delémont to Delle (France). There is a 23km long metre-gauge branch from Le Noirmont that climbs over a ridge of the Jura and runs down to Tavannes in Canton Berne. The main workshops of the CJ are located on this route at Tramelan. These lines were originally two separate light railways built between 1884 and 1913. At Tavannes there is another connection with a CFF/SBB standard-gauge route. The section of the metre-gauge main line from Saignelégier to Glovelier was originally built in 1904 to standard-gauge and was converted to metre-gauge in 1951-53. At Combe-Tabellion on this section it has a most unusual feature, a reversing station, one of only two in Switzerland. This is sited on a 2.5% (1:40) gradient whilst on sections of the Tavannes line the gradient is up to twice as steep at 5.0% (1:20). These lines are both electrified at 1500v and are operated by a varied collection of EMUs that work from Dépôts at Saignelégier, Le Noirmont and Tramelan. The principal units in the CJ fleet are four ABe 4/6 Stadler GTW articulated units that arrived in 2001.

The 11km standard-gauge line of the CJ is electrified at the Swiss standard of 15000V 16.7Hz and starts from Porrentruy some 12.5km north of Glovelier on the CFF/SBB line to Delle. This short branch runs to Bonfol, where the CJ has its Dépôt, and it is the remains of a through route that went on to Pfetterhouse and Dannemarie in France but was closed to through traffic in 1970. It is referred to in the article on historic railways around Basel that was featured in the September 2009 *Swiss Express*. The passenger timetable on this section is being improved to provide better services and more capacity, whilst a "Kolibri" EMU has been acquired from CFF/ SBB to help cope with the demand.

CJ is very much in the freight business. From 2010, for a period of four years, some



TOP: At Tavannes, on the street, before station rebuilding, 1968.

MIDDLE: ABe 2/6 'La Gruère' No.633 on the street at Glovelier station, 24/05/08.

BOTTOM: CJ unit 102 at Bonfol. PHOTO: Gerlad



35,000 tonnes of chemical waste will be transported annually from Bonfol to sites in Germany and the Benelux countries. On its metre-gauge lines CJ carries 35,000 tonnes of household rubbish each year to an



TOP: ABef 4/4 No. 642 on a rubbish train in Tramelan yard, 07/05/09.

MIDDLE: ABe 2/6 'La Gruère' No.633 + trailer leaving Combe-Tabellon for Glovelier, 24/09/08.

BOTTOM: La Traction Mallets 0-4-4-0T No.164 & 2-4-6-0T No.206 at Combe-Tabellon, 24/09/08.



incinerator at La Chaux-de-Fonds plus 20,000 tonnes of cargo, mostly timber, on behalf of the SBB. Transfer facilities to enable standard-gauge rolling stock to ride on metre-gauge wagons are located at Glovelier, Tavannes and La Chaux-de-Fonds. A speciality of the road haulage side of the CJ is the collection of milk from over 200 dairy farms in the area. Their five specialist tanker-trailer units operate 365-days/year moving some 20,000 tonnes of milk from producers to the processing plant.

As well as hauling these tonnages of cargo, unusual today on many Swiss metre-gauge routes, the CJ are very active in the leisure market especially "Green Tourism", offering walking tours, hire of bicycles (including electric ones), canoes, etc. Most stations give access to the network of footpaths that traverse the area, so apart from its core business of providing transportation for local people it is healthy, suntanned Swiss hikers that can be seen on CJ trains

rather than the regimented groups of jaded overseas visitors that are only too common on many Alpine lines. CJ also work closely with 'La Traction', a private society that owns two former-Portuguese Mallet compound steam locos. These are stabled at their workshops at Pré-Petitjean east of Saignelégier and work on regular excursions along the metre-gauge main line.

See www.la-traction.ch for more information on this active organisation.

Chief Engineer of the CJ is Theo Stolz and he and his team are prepared to tackle projects at the Tramelan Works that other small railways may not contemplate. When the Rhätische Bahn was disposing of two former Arosa Line railcars, Nos. 487 & 488, he brought them to the CJ and converted them to become freight haulage units. Now ABef 4/4 Nos.641

& 642 they are to be seen at the head of trains of domestic rubbish rather than carrying tourists up the Schanfiggtal.

The CJ also see opportunities to expand their business arising from the opening by the SNCF in 2012 of the new high speed Rhin-Rhône LGV through Belfort, which will be accompanied by the reopening of the French line to Delle with its CFF/SBB link to Delémont. They plan to install a third-rail on the standard-gauge line between Glovelier and Delémont, the Cantonal Capital, so their metre-gauge trains can better connect into the Swiss main line system there. The first part of this project commences in 2011 when the curiosity of street running outside Glovelier station will cease and with a rebuilt approach the CJ's trains will terminate alongside the SBB tracks at the west end of the station. Other projects include the complete automation of their network, and either the elimination of, or the installation of barriers at, all the level crossings on their lines by 2014. This year the CJ celebrate 125 years since the opening of its earliest constituents and are looking well set for the future.

The author gratefully acknowledges the invaluable contributions of both Ron Smith and Bryan Stone in the development of this article.



TOP: ABef4/4 No. 641 on the buffer stops in Tavannes station, 07/05/09.

BOTTOM: ABef4/4 No.641 on a domestic rubbish train at Tavannes. BDe 4/4 621 in the background. Metre-gauge transporter trucks in foreground, 07/05/09.

WHY SWITZERLAND?

It all started with my first holiday in Switzerland in 1960. I was then in my late teens and was looking for an alternative to BR steam, other than Germany. On that visit I saw Ae4/7s; various Crocs; Ae4/6s; Ae6/6s, etc, what wonderful sights. Around that time I also became very interested in modelling Swiss railways, something I am still doing now. Switzerland is a lovely country with its wonderful scenery, food, beer, etc, and the people are so friendly. My two favourite lines are the Gotthard and the Lötschberg. In the years between 1960 and now I have spent countless hours observing trains and noting their formations so that I can reproduce them in model form. Another favourite is the RhB, then, of course, there are the paddle steamers. To sum-up Switzerland has a highly efficient transport system that is clean and generally totally punctual – long may it be the case.

Roy A. Dunglison – SRS Joint President and Founder Member