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THE KRIENS LUZERN BAHN

- a follow-up

Ron Smith

COLOUR PHOTOS: Ron Smith
BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOS: Bernhard Stüder

I was saddened to read in Swiss Express 102 of the demise of the Kriens Luzern Bahn (KLB) originally conceived as an urban street tramway linking Kriens with its neighbouring town of Luzern. The standard gauge line had no major gradients (the height difference between the two towns is only 53m) and it was quickly constructed opening for business on 25th October 1886. Eventually it had 23km of track, but no bridges, tunnels or earthworks.

For the opening two 0-4-0 tram engines "Luzern" and "Kriens" were bought from Kraus of Munich, together with two coaches and a baggage van. A regular shuttle service started, with a journey time of just 12 minutes, but despite the initial optimism the line ran into financial difficulties and was sold, lock, stock and barrel, to the Luzern

Municipality in January 1899. A condition of the sale was that a minimum of two services a day should be run. In the event a 15-minute interval service was implemented throughout the day from 06.30 to 22.30 in summer, and 07.00 to 22.00 in winter, which for the 12-minute journey meant that the two locomotives were certainly worked hard.

In 1896 the locomotives were joined by the second-hand purchase of another 0-4-0T engine, from the Sud Ost Bahn, No. 51 a number it retained until it was sold to the St. Gallen gas works in 1912. In 1905 "Luzern" was sold to the Von Roll steel works at Berne, and in 1906 "Kriens" was sold to the Aluminium Gesellschaft, Chippis, leaving No 51 to soldier on alone until 1909. That year Maffei supplied 0-6-0T No.1, a third and

last new locomotive, which still exists today preserved on the Oensingen Balsthal Bahn (OeBB). In 1912 another 0-6-0T was purchased second-hand, this time from the Seetalbahn, and was renumbered as KLB No. 2.

While the KLB carried-on shuttling people between the two expanding towns by the 1920s Luzern was expanding its tram network and decided to extend this to Kriens. As the KLB was requiring some investment the opportunity was taken to re-lay all the track, installing a third rail between the standard ones for the metre-gauge trams. In 1926 the new electric tram service commenced and services from Kriens were linked into the existing Luzern network, rather than going to the Bahnhof. This had several repercussions on the KLB. It made sense to utilise the electric overhead power supply, so the two steam engines were sold to the SBB. A steeple-cab, 240hp, four-wheel electric locomotive was purchased (second-hand of course) from the Wohlen Meisterschwanden

Bringing an empty wagon from Co-op to Eichhof on 31.8.1993.



KLB no 1 at Balsthal on 20.3.2001.

Bahn to work off the 600V dc tram overhead wires. With the revised network, exchange sidings were required with the SBB. The SBB now had to provide a steam, and later diesel, locomotive to shunt wagons under the catenary. A new spur was built down to the SBB Luzern - Brunig - Interlaken line and so standard gauge rails were laid on either side of the metre gauge ones, and are still used today.

The KLB now settled down to a lengthy period of steady daily work





KLB V34 shunts at Kupferhammer in the 1970s.

moving freight on standard gauge wagons (it never owned any) from Kupferhammer up and down the street to Kriens, the site of the attractive depot situated behind the shops in the town centre. Then, in 1961, the trams were replaced by trolley buses which still ply Route No 1 today. The next major event was in 1968 when the motorway came to Luzern. This passes between the two towns, crossing the KLB, and necessitating an underpass and rebuilding of the road junction, taking the overhead wires away from the KLB. For many railways, particularly in the late 1960s, this would have been

No. 35 Stopping the road traffic on the way to the mainline on 18.8.1994.

the end. But not for the KLB! Once again opportunity was grasped and a new three-track goods yard built at Kupferhammer, underneath the motorway bridge! The venerable electric locomotive was sold for scrap, and a diesel shunter purchased. Again it was second hand, having been built in 1966 by MAK for

the Julicher Kreisbahn of Aachen. This small four-wheel 340hp locomotive No V34 continued working until 1979 when a more powerful machine was required.

After a search, the KLB purchased a "Typ. Faur 35" B-B locomotive, built in 1979 by the 23 August Werke of Bukarest, trading-in the old MAK loco. The Romanians would not provide a guarantee for



the locomotive's engine so the KLB replaced it with a Mercedes one, which they down-rated from 750hp. to 450hp. This smart orange loco, which retained the No.35 it had when it was bought, was probably unique, and certainly the only one in Switzerland. In 1998 it was sold and replaced with a Belotti road rail tractor No. 36. This lacked power, so the SBB shunter usually carried out the work. In 2008 it was sold to Josef Meyer Technology at Rheinfelden, where it works today, still carrying the KLB logo and number.

To celebrate its centenary in 1986 the KLB arranged with the OeBB for its former steam loco No.1, and an appropriate end balcony coach, to return to Kriens and amidst great celebrations to steam up and down the main street re-creating the sights,



KLB No. 36 at Kupferhammer on 27.8.1998. Note the road registration LU 376.

sounds and smells of the early days.

Unfortunately, over the next decades the world moved on. There were no longer wagons to be hauled for the PTT and the COOP. Eichhof's beer was dispatched by road. However, the cement traffic to Horw remained, has grown, and is now handled by the Zentralbahn.



The line up at Kriens for the 1986 centenary celebration.