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DECEMBER CHANGES

Der Beobachter



A former LSE Unit awaits departure for Engelberg at Luzern.

The introduction of the 2010/2011 timetable on the 12th December brought some substantial changes to many operations. Apart from the changed service to accommodate the Zentralbahn's new tunnel on the Engelberg line (more later) and the new metre gauge Aarau to Suhr line of the WSB (see *Sidetracks*), there are a number of other changes around Switzerland.

For example between Lenzburg and Gexi 2km of third running line has been completed and brought into service. Gexi, SE of Lenzburg, is the location of a strategic junction between the Aargau Südbahn to Rotkreuz, and the fast lines

towards the Heitersberg tunnel and Zürich. This was a difficult and long-overdue relief of a double track bottleneck on a 1 in 100 gradient, and should substantially relieve delays to S-Bahn and freight traffic by giving a conflict-free route from Lenzburg onto the Südbahn and return. As a result there are many changes to connections and services in this complex area of junctions and lines.

Another change, many years overdue, came with the reconstruction of Meiringen station on the ZB. The old turntable has been removed (it will appear again elsewhere) but the major change is that the Innertkirchen trains of the

MIB now run from the main station with a claimed 1 minute connection time to ZB trains and PostAutos. The connection time between the ZB and the old MIB terminus 300m distant was always optimistically quoted at 4 minutes, but most people never believed it. You had to know the exact location of the MIB platform, then it was a fast walk in all weathers including crossing a sometimes busy road. The reason was that the MIB was never built as a passenger railway, but as an industrial line to serve the power station in Innertkirchen, and its siding out of Meiringen yard was originally adequate. That was no longer the case; a half-hourly service on the MIB, together with active marketing of



The old MIB terminus at Meiringen. The connection to the ZB station is in the foreground.

through combined tickets to the Aare gorge (using Switzerland's shortest station – Aareschlucht Ost), resulted in the poor connection being a problem. However, different electrical systems and a road crossing all imposed issues to be resolved. Now the level crossing has barriers and the curve leads off Platform 3 where the MIB railcar stands at the east end, segregated by signals from the ZB (for power and safety reasons), but in sight and easy reach. It appears that the MIB pays rental, and a per trip charge, to the ZB who funded the work out of their Meiringen renewal budget. If you want a blockhouse, the small log shelter at Meiringen MIB is being offered to the best bidder – buyer collects!

In Graubünden, on the RhB Davos – Filisur line, the station at Wiesen, perched between tunnels and the spectacular Wiesen Viaduct, has become a victim of politics. As the Commune of Wiesen has been merged into Davos the station has been renamed Davos-Wiesen matching the others along the valley. That's a warning if you look at the timetable index. It's still there, of course, on Table 915. A good Wanderweg (hiking trail) leads from the station right over the viaduct to Filisur and, at the viaduct end, it passes the last in-situ preserved example of a Hall-type Disc and Crossbar signal, now however no longer in operation.



BLS unit at Moutier on a Solothurn service. These GTWs will be transferred to the SBB.

Further to the agreement between BLS and SBB to exchange certain routes, the line from Konolfingen to Luzern, built by the Jura-Bern-Luzern Bahn and long part of the leisurely main line between Bern and Luzern, is now in the tariff and business competence of the BLS. For some time the BLS has operated the regular semi-fast through trains, often with 465 class locomotives. If you are in a hurry, you now take the more roundabout, but faster, route via the high speed line and Zofingen. In return the BLS has ceded Solothurn West – Moutier, the route of the former SMB and part of Regio Mittelland (now BLS) to the SBB. This has the curious effect of again isolating from the parent system the BLS Jura outpost of Moutier – Grenchen Nord (through the Grenchenberg tunnel) built to give the BLS direct connection to France via Delémont and Delle. The SMB line had in recent years been a kind of umbilical, although never more than a very rural branch.

Returning to the ZB and the Luzern – Engelberg route. Many readers will have followed this story, with its new



Class 110 001 at Meiringen between Interlaken workings.

tunnel at 1 in 10.5 to replace the 1 in 4 grade of the old, rack assisted, round-the-mountain climb. Untold difficulties including a severe flood and greatly increased costs have delayed this project for years, but on Dec 12 the new route opened. Trains now take 47-min. instead of 61-min, but the biggest gain is in capacity and the ability to use some of the Class 101 class locomotives, up to now confined to the Brünig line. Engelberg is an active mountain resort, and the Titlis enjoys great popularity especially with Asian guests. The Engelberg Commune was increasingly desperate to market its all-year rail connection in order to avoid becoming a car-dominated environment and the rebirth of the line has coincided with the best Christmas/New Year snow for decades. The rolling stock situation will not stabilize for a couple of years until new units coming to the Brünig route release more 101s. The former LSE railcars are still in service on local Luzern suburban trains. As for the Brünig 'oldies', the last Class 110 and 120 survivors, watch out for them in Luzern, Stansstad and Meiringen as they won't last long however 110 022 was out this winter working on the Meiringen – Interlaken section. And the old line? With typical Swiss efficiency, within three weeks of the new line opening the track, rack and catenary on the old alignment had been removed for re-use elsewhere on the ZB system.

Finally – ducks into swans. A timely warning that the standard gauge, rustic connection of the GFM between Bulle and Romont will operate only until July 10th 2011 in its present form. After that date buses will take over while the line is rebuilt into a smart new S-Bahn line for Canton Fribourg. 

ZB 101 962 in Engelberg.

PHOTO: Bryan Stone.

