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CLEARING-UP ON THE CJ



The gales, snow storms and exceptionally cold weather of last winter, which lasted from December to February, caused more havoc and at repeated shortly spaced intervals, than has been the case in Switzerland for a long time. A number of the incidents have been reported in Swiss Express, but there were many more. The main causes were snow slides, fallen trees and wash-outs, but many sections of mountain line were closed with avalanche warnings. On Christmas Day, an avalanche caught an MGB local above Andermatt, however one of the most troublesome incidents was far from the major resorts in the Alps but high on the Swiss Jura.

The route of the metre-gauge Chemins de fer du Jura (CJ) between Tavannes and Le Noirmont runs through some lonely and bleak countryside either side of Tramelan, at 888m high the only major town en-route and where the CJ has its main Dépôt and engineering workshops. This is the high plateau of the Franches Montagnes where the line rises at grades of up to 4.9% (1:20) as it climbs to its summit of 1050m in the small community of Les Breuleux. This is an area quite unlike the Switzerland most incoming tourists know, and during the night of Friday 16th December a fierce gale swept across it. In the pre-dawn darkness of the following morning lightly loaded CJ Train 112 left Tavannes

at 06.30 for Tramelan and started to climb, at the line speed of 70kph (40mph), the 3% (1.33) gradient up the side of the valley of the La Birse stream. At a point 6.5km from Tavannes, a lonely spot some 875m high and surrounded by forest, it hit the crown of a fir tree which was lying across the single track. The ABe 2/6 GTW articulated railcar No 631 'Pouillerel' ramped off the track to the right, and down a bank, with just the



TOP: The crane recovering the front section during a snow storm.

Photo: Theo Stolz

LEFT: This cab shot shows the bleak nature of this line in winter.

Photo: Jakob Jägetz

rear end still remaining on the alignment. Traction current failed as the train took a supply mast with it. The driver and two of the twelve passengers were just slightly injured, a minor miracle, and all were quickly evacuated from the precariously balanced unit. The breakdown train with a team of CJ staff and the emergency services set-off from Tramelan just 3km away, headed by CJ Gem4/4 No.401 a dual-power diesel and electric unit, and dropped down the gradient to the site and re-railed the rear end of No. 631. Then it started to snow. The recovery of the leading car and the central power section of the GTW which were down the embankment needed the use of heavy lifting equipment. A massive crane mounted on a 5-axle truck was brought-in to undertake this task. It had to reverse in heavy snow for over 1km along the railway alignment, straddling the track and avoiding the overhead (but not live) power cables, from the nearest road crossing. By 18.00 on Saturday it had completed its work and the three parts of No 631, all damaged to a greater or lesser degree, were in Tramelan yard, and the road crane had returned to its base. On Monday, in the deep snow, repairs began to the track; supply mast; catenary; signal cables; etc whilst many trees, heavy with snow, were cut back. Traffic resumed with the first train on Wednesday. In the meantime the new snowplough of the CJ had been hard at work elsewhere on the 72 km system that supplies the main transport links in Canton Jura. It was a busy, cold, wet and sleepless few days for the dedicated CJ workforce during the pre-Christmas week. 🇨🇭

The editorial team would like to thank Theo Stolz, the Chief Engineer of the CJ, for his help in compiling this article.

TOP: The rear end of ABe 2/6 No. 631 following the incident. *Photo: Theo Stolz*
 MIDDLE: The rescue loco Gem 4/4 No. 401 waiting at Saignelégier with a works train on a warm day in August 2011. *Photo: Jakob Jägetz*
 RIGHT: Another cab shot of the CJ line through the Jura forests. *Photo: Jakob Jägetz*

