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# OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

s'Murmeli



Thurbo GTW unit approaches Bad Zurzach in August 2011. The location is the same as the one below.

Photo: Jakob Jäger

I am aware that *Swiss Railways Society* members go to many nooks and crannies of our Swiss rail system. Rightly so - for these are as fascinating to us as to our visitors. In recent editions of *Swiss Express* there have been described developments on the oldest Rhein rail crossing, the lattice bridge between Koblenz and Waldshut (D), including the embarrassment to my colleagues that the rebuilt NPZ units (the 'Dominos') cannot easily use it. Now we have to warn readers: don't try it on your summer 2013 visit. In Nov 2012 the SBB gave notice that from July to October 2013 the line between Döttingen, Koblenz and Bad Zurzach will be closed for extensive renewals of track, signalling and platforms. These are still among the few stations left in Switzerland where passengers walk over boards and cross running lines on foot, to climb up into their train. This would be seen as nostalgic on a museum railway but it is less desirable on part of the Zürich/Aargau S-Bahn system - and the law says 55cm platform height. Also, the signal and points lever frame in Bad Zurzach is a 'Bruchsal G' installation of 1904, one of the last mechanical interlocking frames and the oldest on the SBB.



But it's more complicated. The lines through Koblenz are a historical tangle. First came the Rhein Bridge and the line between Waldshut (D) – Koblenz – Turgi that was built by the Nordostbahn in 1859 to secure the German traffic against Basel and the Centralbahn. This was followed in 1876 by the line from Winterthur to Koblenz, through Bülach, Eglisau and Bad Zurzach - a reluctant measure relating to the 'Nationalbahn Affair', something for a future article. Lastly, the Bötzbahn, a joint company of the Centralbahn and the Nordostbahn, which in 1875 had built the main line from Basel Pratteln to Brugg, opened the link from Stein-Säckingen to Koblenz in 1892. The lines along the Rhein's south bank from Stein to Eglisau were winding single lines, laid out for local needs. Waldshut to Turgi was however an important route, and for nearly 20 years carried the German north-south traffic, until the Rhein Bridge in Basel was built. Eventually the lines were absorbed into the SBB, and following electrification in the 1950s a direct 3-times daily fast service, utilising electric railcars, was initiated to run between Basel and Winterthur. This enjoyed some success, however it was replaced in the Taktfahrplan by hourly connections in Zürich. Since then the journey opportunities between Basel and Winterthur have been much more frequent, although it now takes some 15 minutes longer. Our Taktfahrplan does have some downsides! As the Swiss motorway network developed in the 1960s block trains of gravel from the extensive beds laid down over the millennia by the River Rhein originated on this route.

Then, with the transfer of regional service authority to the Cantons, another oddity arose. Turgi – Koblenz – Waldshut and Eglisau – Bad Zurzach – Koblenz became part of one S-Bahn network, Basel - Laufenburg part of another. This resulted in the 16km from Laufenburg to Koblenz becoming an orphan with no passenger trains, although a simplified track layout remained in place and is used by a number of scheduled freight trains between Basel and eastern  
Freight at Bad Zurzach behind a De4/4 in 1965. Photo: s'Murmeli

Switzerland. An hourly PostAuto service between Laufenberg and Döttingen replaced the passenger service. Despite the advent of the Aargau S-Bahn service the stations and installations on its route were still out of date, and plans had been made to improve them. As ironically happens at such times, with the scheme drawn-up and money approved, in 2011 a serious accident occurred in Döttingen on the Turgi line. A collision injuring eight passengers, and attributed to human error, showed up the insufficiency of the signalling system. Now the work to make these still rustic branch lines into an efficient S-Bahn is to be undertaken. There will be a replacement bus service from July to October 2013 between Döttingen and Bad Zurzach, although freight trains will still run through on simplified layouts. So if you want to see something of former railway operations in Switzerland book your trip to this area now.

Finally, another curiosity. Until the 1970s, a regular weekday service used to run between Zürich HB and Bad Zurzach, the stock spending several hours at either Bad Zurzach or Koblenz. My 1971 Kursbuch records these trains leaving Zürich at 08.09 and 13.19 and returning at 10.54 and 16.14 both services taking the route via Eglisau. Often it was operated by a 'Roter Pfeil', one of the seven Rae2/4 'Red Arrow' single railcars built for the SBB in the 1930s.



Red Arrow at Bad Zurzach in 1965.

Photo: s'Murmeli

The explanation was that this was the Badezug. It was the train to the Bad Zurzach spa facilities, and was a very important service for those who regularly took the waters. Unfortunately such trains are no more but the spa complex is probably more popular than ever with both indoor and outdoor pools, treatment facilities, and a modern fitness centre. Interestingly, although Zurzach is the site of natural hot springs (the temperature of the water is around 40°C) and has had spa facilities for many years, it was only in 2006 that

the small town adopted the prefix 'Bad'. This town and the surrounding area are off the beaten track for most UK tourists but are well worth visiting – even with the impending disruption this summer. ☒

*Editor's note. S'Murmeli (the Marmot) is the pen name of a Swiss railwayman who is a friend of the Society.*

TOP: Turbo GTW unit leaves Bad Zurzach for Winterthur.

MIDDLE: NPZ unit at Döttingen.

BOTTOM: Passengers board Turbo GTW RABe 526.788-5 'Romanshorn' at Bad Zurzach. All photoed in August 2011 by Jakob Jäger.



## ☒ *SwissTip* Good ideas and information about Switzerland from travellers.

Arriving at Zürich Airport with a short connection time from plane to train? As the ticket machines in Swiss stations are normally so numerous, and are fast and easy to use, most people do not bother looking into the online purchase option for trips within Switzerland. Online purchase could, however, be useful if you are arriving in Switzerland by air. At certain times long queues can form in front of both the SBB ticket windows and the SBB ticket machines so having a pre-purchased ticket could make the difference between catching or missing a train. ☒