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Autor: Jäger, Jakob
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THE SCHOOL BUS

Jakob Jäger



BDeh 2/4 No. 74 arrives at Blonay from Les Pléiades.

All photos: Jakob Jäger

I am always interested in anomalies. Why, for example, when trains normally leave Blonay for Les Pléiades on the hour, does one leave at 15.10 on weekday afternoons? With time to spare in Vevey one cold, wintery November day I caught the 14.40 departure to Blonay to try and resolve this particular anomaly. The Transports Montreux-Vevey-Riviera line, that was formerly the CEV (Chemin de fer électriques veveysans) and since 2001 has been under the MOB umbrella, leaves from the northernmost platform of Vevey's CFF/SBB station and immediately turns through a tight 90° bend more reminiscent of a tramway than a railway,

as it starts its climb up the valley of the La Veveyse river. The land on the opposite side of the valley, now redeveloped, used to be the site of the ACMV railway works taken-over, then closed, by Bombardier. The metre-gauge line climbs by adhesion up through the suburbs of the lakeside town on a 5% (1 in 20) gradient soon reaching St-Légier-Gare one of two stations in this smart community. Until 1969 another CEV line continued from here up the valley of La Veveyse to a junction with the TPF metre-gauge line at Châtel-St-Denis. Apart from the station at St-Légier-Gare the trains operating the half-hourly service, stop on request at seven other halts on their 5.7km trip to Blonay where passengers for Les Pléiades have to change. Although sharing the 900Vdc electrical supply the route now climbs 728m in just 4.8km from Blonay, requiring powerful units fitted with Strub rack equipment to handle the continuous 20% (1 in 5) gradient. These units do work down to Vevey, where the MVR has its depot, but services on the lower section are apparently normally covered by the "early-GTW" Be2/6 Stadler

BDeh2/4 No.74 waits with the yellow school building behind it.



units Nos. 7001- 4.

Alongside Blonay station, which also is the western terminus of the Blonay-Chamby Museum Railway, there are two large, modern, yellow buildings. These are the community school and at the end of lessons at 15.00 pupils streamed out of the buildings, many heading through an underpass beneath the station. Most went into the village, but almost 30 came into the station area to board the waiting BDeh2/4 No.74, that had arrived down the hill at 14.55. This was the reason for the timetable anomaly I had noticed, as the 10 minutes later departure allowed these children to board the service, which was also patronised by a few other passengers as well as myself. The well-behaved children were obviously regular travellers, as the driver did not bother with a ticket check, even for the grown-ups. As we left the level station area the railcar immediately connected with the rack, and began the noisy grind up through the upper residential areas of Blonay into a low cloud base that quickly turned into wet snow. All the seven simple halts on the route to Les Pléiades are request stops and we stopped at them all as we climbed the hillside. Once past the passing-loop at Les Chevalleyres, where all bar one of the other adults left the train, the almost suburban nature of the line changed to woodland, fields and scattered chalets, yet children, carrying their large school bags, alighted at Fayaux, that has another passing loop (both are needed to cope with the enhanced service in the winter sports season), and the other three halts up as far as Lally. From here there was the driver and me for the final 0.7km, plus a lone man in a business suit carrying a Migros bag and an umbrella. Having pulled into Les Pléiades this person left the station and walked off along a farm road into the snow and gathering gloom, quickly disappearing. After a cursory look



TOP: A Stadler Be 2/6 GTW unit waits to return to Vevey from Blonay.

MIDDLE: The electricians load-up at Les Pléiades.

BOTTOM: Snow and low cloud at Les Pléiades. Not skiing weather.



around the immediate area, bleak on this pre-season day, I gratefully re-boarded the warm train. Here I was joined by two MVR electricians, complete with ladder and tools, heading home after apparently doing some re-wiring around the station. It was a slightly quicker trip back down to Blonay, as it was not until Les Chevalleyres that any other passengers joined the service. This then was rail equivalent of the School Bus for the children who live in the homes dispersed over the hillside below the Les Pléiades resort area. In the morning an equivalent train leaves Blonay at 07.31 returning from the top at 07.51 getting the children to school for an 08.30 start. Looking for anomalies can lead to some interesting trips, and I still wonder what happened to "The Man with the Migros bag" – it could be the title of a mystery novel! 

TOP: "The Man with the Migros ba"
MIDDLE: Les Pléiades traditional station building.
BOTTOM: Former MOB van used as a ski hire store.
BELOW: Going home.



Swiss Tip Good ideas and information about Switzerland from travellers.

Want to sample an unspoilt medieval town? St Ursanne, set in the steep sided valley of the River Doubs in the Jura, is one of the unspoilt gems of Switzerland. The old town is tiny but very well preserved within its original defensive walls. It does attract tourists, and there is the usual mix of hotels, cafes and craft shops, but they do not unduly distract from the overall 'niceness' of the place. Be warned though the town is around 1km from, and a few hundred metres below, its station. There is a PostAuto service up and down the hill but it does not connect with all trains so check your Kursbuch. The walk down is easy – the bus back up is almost essential! 