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Autor:	Gatehouse, Don
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SOUTH WEST SUGAR BEET

Don Gatehouse gives us an insight into the associated SBB Cargo traffic



Re 4/4" 11231 had just arrived at Ependes to collect loaded sugar beet wagons for transfer to Yverdon-les-Bains, October 2012.

All photos: Don Gatehouse

Zuckerfabriken Aarberg und Frauenfeld AG produces, processes and refines sugar in Switzerland. The company was founded in 1912 and is based in Aarberg (BE), with an additional facility in Frauenfeld (TG). During the seasonal 'Campaign' from the end of September to late December, typical daily rail deliveries of about 8,500t of sugar beet tubers to Aarberg will be processed to produce approximately 1,000t of crystal sugar, 200t of syrup, 200t of molasses, and as a by-product, about 2,000t of the pressed remains that are used for animal fodder.

Cantons Vaud and Fribourg have large areas of farmland allocated to sugar beet production and during each annual 'Campaign' there is considerable activity associated with the timely harvest and transport of the tubers to the allocated railhead for loading. Previous features in *Swiss Express* [Issues 105 and 113] have provided an outline of operations based mainly on the metre gauge BAM and YStC lines, but the bulk of the region's sugar beet production delivered to Aarberg by rail is handled through the various locations served directly by SBB Cargo. Within the area under review, Payerne and

Yverdon-les-Bains act as hub locations for the local distribution of empty wagons for loading as well as the consolidation points for block trains for onward movement to the allocated processing plant. Certain other locations have the capacity to produce a trainload of sugar beet and each normally receives and generates a direct trunk service. The on-line Graphic Charts produced by SBB each December provide a good measure of information about the numerous sugar beet train moves, and have enabled me to better understand the associated pattern of these seasonal operations.

Not only does Payerne have a dedicated loading point equipped with conveyor apparatus that is sited just north of the station, there are further loading programmes based at nearby Cugy and Granges-Marnand that are served from Payerne as required on allocated loading days. In addition, Saturday loading of sugar beet will at times be undertaken at Estavayer-le-Lac. In each case, empty and return loaded Eaos open wagon trip movements are handled through Payerne, where the block trains for Aarberg are marshalled. Prior to the 2012 'Campaign', loading conveyors sited at Domdidier and Avenches stations were operational on allocated mornings and a diesel shunting locomotive and crew from Payerne would be assigned to service the wagon moves and to marshal the loaded wagons at Avenches. They would then be collected either by the mid-day or late afternoon trunk service from Payerne to Aarberg. In 2012, a new purpose-built out-of-town loading facility to the north of Domdidier, using existing rail infrastructure was commissioned, that enabled the former two smaller capacity operations to be confined to history. Associated access and exit roads for tractors and a larger traffic handling area were The late afternoon collection at Yvonand was being performed by 610 482 'Delémont', September 2010.



provided to enable an efficient loading operation to be completed to produce a full train consignment of wagons. Alas, from a rail enthusiast's point of view this development has removed the ability to record the associated rail operations during daylight hours as the delivery of the Domdidier wagons is completed in the early hours of the morning and the subsequent collection for movement to Aarberg, in the late evening.

The loading operations at Cugy utilise the station car park and in anticipation of the annual 'Campaign', notices are posted confirming the dates when the car park will be closed. In 2012, there were 16 allocated days for the sugar beet loading operations, the majority of which were in early November and December. Mobile conveyor equipment is used for the Cugy operation and this apparatus may well be used also for the Saturday loading operations undertaken at Estavayer-le-Lac. In both cases, sets of wagons are moved from and to Payerne, when required. Further west, sugar beet loading at Yvonand uses the conveyer structure located to the east of the station. With empty wagons delivered in the early morning, tractors hauling loaded trailers will start arriving at first light and will shuttle to and from the loading point well into the afternoon. Normally, loaded wagons are collected at lunch time and in the late afternoon and taken back to Yverdon, but I have observed the lunchtime collection made by the Aarberg trunk service en route to Payerne.

Sugar beet loading conveyors are sited adjacent to the station at Yverdon, Ependes, Chavornay and Cossonay. The Ependes operation will normally require a mid-morning collection of loaded wagons, with the same locomotive returning from Yverdon within the hour to position the next set of empty wagons. The final collection of the day from Ependes is scheduled for about 18:00 and the wagons are taken to Yverdon to be included in a later Aarberg block train move. An early morning delivery of wagons to Chavornay direct from Aarberg could well include some wagons loaded with the animal fodder by-product of the sugar refining process and once emptied, the Eaos open wagons will in turn be loaded with tubers for a return working. Wagons are also taken to Orbe for loading and in the evening, the trainload of sugar beet will be collected by SBB Cargo and worked direct to Aarberg (or sometimes, Frauenfeld), as required. During the 2012 'Campaign', I did



TOP: SBB Class Em 3/3 18818 was allocated to the Avenches sugar beet duties when recorded in October 2010.
MIDDLE: The newly commissioned sugar beet loading site at Domdidier, October 2012.
BOTTOM: Class Bm 4/4 diesel 18403 arrives at Payerne with a consignment of sugar beet tubers from Granges-Marnand, October 2012.



note loading operations underway at Cossonay on weekdays and further loaded wagons parked close to the Holcim works at Eclepens. The latter wagons were moved to Yverdon in the early evening but as with the Saturday loading operations, Cossonay will normally produce a trainload consignment for a direct evening trunk service.

To the east of Lake Geneva, Roche (VD) has a loading conveyer, and a further loading facility is located near St Triphon Yard. That said there are no dedicated sugar beet train services listed in the SBB Graphic Charts, so I assume any associated rail operations are worked on a local control basis with wagons routed via Lausanne Triage Yard. Nyon is the furthest location to the west where there is a dedicated early hours trunk service delivery of wagons from Aarberg and an evening return loaded service scheduled. As with all aspects of SBB Cargo's operations, there has been a good measure of streamlining of the seasonal sugar beet services in the last few years but certain locations do produce associated daylight moves of wagons to add to the day-to-day domestic freight activities. 

TOP: The loading operations at Yvonand, where not a single sugar beet tuber is wasted!

BOTTOM: The late afternoon collection at Yvonand was being performed by 610 482 'Delémont', September 2010.

Bex Town Tram

Many members will know the BVB (Bex–Villars–Bretaye) metre-gauge railway, between the towns of Bex and Villars-sur-Ollon and its extension to the Col de Bretaye in the Chablais region of southwest Switzerland. However they may not be aware of an unusual little operation on the lowest section of the line on weekday mornings. Analysis of the timetable shows a basic hourly service throughout the day on the core Bex – Villars section of the line, but also reveals a weekday mornings only single round trip from Bevieux, where the BVB's main depot is located, to Bex CFF station at 06.58, returning at 07.12. This section of the line is primarily street-running through Bex town centre and this unique



Sam Dixon

service is usually worked by a tramcar of 1948 vintage. I made an early morning visit to Bex in September 2013 to ride this service, and Be2/3 tramcar No.16 emerged from Bevieux depot building a few minutes before departure time. It slowly filled up at each halt as it rolled through the narrow streets of Bex town centre, resulting in a full load of passengers being deposited

in the main square in front of the station to connect with the CFFs morning peak services. The return working ran empty, except for me, and the tram disappeared back into the depot – its day's work done after just 26 minutes of revenue earning service! 

TOP: No 16 at Bex station.

LEFT: No 16 at Bevieux Depot.