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Smiles all round as the train arrives at Morges.

All photos: Bob Medland

An unexpected trip on the 'nowhere' line

Bob Medland

Not having a great interest in trains as such, I write this short article for 'Swiss Express' with some trepidation. However, having worked in railway property management on-and-off for some 40 years, I have had much involvement in railway history and buildings. The combination of my interest in Swiss Postal History, and role as librarian of the Helvetia Philatelic Society of Great Britain, provides the link for this article.

Last May we stayed with friends living near Rolle, mainly with the intention of visiting the various 'Caves Ouvertes'

around the local vineyards - which is another story! At some stage I mentioned to our friends that, on a previous visit to that part of Switzerland, I had been startled by the sight of a small green and white train passing through the middle of farmland, seemingly going from nowhere to nowhere. Was there a chance of finding it again? The next thing we knew, the following day was all planned out for us: a short trip on an SBB train from Rolle to Morges; change onto the metre-gauge line up to Bière and then walk back down to Allaman for the SBB back to Rolle. The perfect cure for an anticipated hangover!

The next morning, an engineering train in the bay platform at Rolle station held some fascination for me, then it was an uneventful trip on a double-decker train to Morges where the Bière-Apples-Morges (BAM) train arrived on time. At this stage I should add that the BAM is now part of the Transports de la région Morges-Bière-Cossonay (MBC) that operates the metre-gauge line, along with local and regional bus services and a funicular. The MBC has adopted the railway's green and cream livery for all its operations. However I shall continue to refer to the railway as the BAM. It's nicer. Leaving on time, of course, the little train with modern coaches, although I have learned that the motor



SBB Tm 234-136-0 on an engineering train at Rolle.

coach dating from 1981 – the Swiss keep things in excellent condition – veered sharply right and up the slopes away from Morges and the littoral of Lake Geneva. In no time we were passing through the arable countryside of Canton Vaud, not all green as you might imagine, but large parts of it a vivid yellow from the rapeseed fields in flower. At one stage the railway swung sharply to the left, providing fine views of the dramatic castle at Vufflens-le-Château. Not quite so imposing, but equally surprising, were the various halts with tiny waiting shelters along the line, in the middle of nowhere – such as Chigny and Reverolle. They reminded me of GWR structures on the old Didcot-Newbury line (that I walked along in the 1960s) and the Newquay branch in Cornwall.

Apples station is the junction for the BAM's branch to L'Isle-Mont-la-Ville. A connecting train awaited our arrival, although I understand this lightly-used service is sometimes operated by a MBC bus. After Apples the scenery is pretty uninteresting but before reaching the end of the line a spur branches off to the left to a large, strategic army depot in the forest, the traffic from which apparently being one of the main reasons for the survival of the railway. Apparently the BAM is unusual in that, thanks to the Swiss Army plus the need to move the vast quantities of sugar beet grown in the area, and hauling timber, it makes more money from freight than passengers. Finally we reached the terminus at Bière, an inauspicious little town in the middle of nowhere, where we had lunch before a long and delightful afternoon's walk through fields and woodland back down to the lake where, having just missed the train back to Rolle from Allaman station, we caught the local bus. Tant pis! A fine day out using a commercial narrow-gauge line: just think what it would be like in this country had Colonel Stevens's meandering rural lines somehow survived. 

Editor's Note. I understand from Bob that a philatelic colleague of his has some fine examples of early mail posted on travelling post offices on the BAM. Hopefully he will try and persuade him to write a follow-up article to this one.

TOP: The castle at Vufflens-le-Château.*

MIDDLE: Chigny station.*

RIGHT: Reverolle station.*

BOTTOM RIGHT Former YStC unit at Apples still in old livery.*

BELOW: Hm 2/2 No 11 on the train at Bière.

* Photos through the train window.

