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From Leuk to Leukerbad

Heidi Marriott

All photos: Heidi and Roy Marriott except where shown



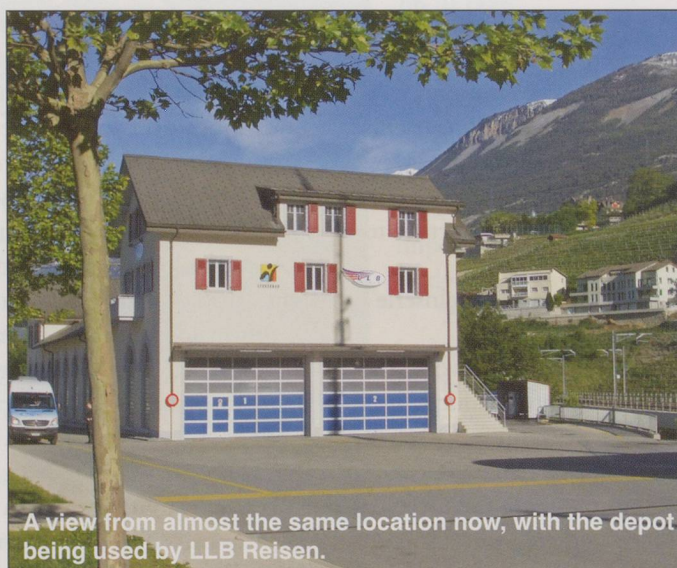
The old Leuk station with a Leukerbad train in the platform.

Photo: Bryan Stone

Getting to Leukerbad (Loèche-les-Bains in French) is an adventure in itself. The road winds its merry way up for 13km from Leuk, through picturesque mountain villages, clinging to the edge of the mountains and using numerous hairpin bends to gain the 1400m required. Looking, both down into the valleys, and up into the mountains, the scenery is stunning - however please ignore this if you are the person actually driving!

Between 1915 and 1967 the Company "Chemin de Fer Electric Leukerbad" operated a narrow gauge rack railway service to Leukerbad and evidence of the old railway line can still be seen. The railway station building at Inden is now the village store and higher up the valley are the old railway bridges. Part of the larger terminus station at Leukerbad is now a Ski School, although peering in the front windows you can still see the old ticket office. Some of the old rolling stock from this line can be seen at the Blonay-Chamby Museum Railway. The railway ran along the road in places and with the increased volume of traffic, and the need to upgrade the road, it was eventually replaced by a bus service. This is regular and efficient, and operated out of the old Leuk to Leukerbad Railway Depot next to Leuk SBB station, by LLB Reisen.

The railways initials of LLB actually stood for Loèche -Les-



A view from almost the same location now, with the depot being used by LLB Reisen.

Bains, the French equivalent of Leukerbad sounding posher in the spas of 1914 than the harsher German version. The meter gauge, 1500V dc, line left from the mainline junction and crossed the Rhône on a bridge, straight into the first Abt rack section for the short 1.3km run to Leuk Stadt. This was the winter terminus of the line until 1933 when all year round running to Leukerbad was started. It then ran on to the halt at Albinen, the village only being reached by wooden


ladders up until 1964! After Rumelung it joined the side of the tarred Leukerbad road for part of the journey, occasionally taking up all of the road on some of the tight curves and bridges. After a stop at Inden and Russengraben, Leukerbad itself was eventually reached after a trip of about 50 minutes. The requirement for new rolling stock and the costs of re-routing the line from its road sections meant that the required investment was too much and thus the line eventually closed on 27th May 1967.

Leukerbad, a stunning resort surrounded by imposing mountains, is most famous for its thermal baths and spas which utilize the hot spring water produced at up anything up to 51°C. One of the most prominent attractions is the Leukerbad Therme (previously the Burgerbad), which resembles a Butlin's waterpark, albeit in a far more picturesque setting than

Minehead! This is one of the biggest public baths, along with the Lindner Alpentherme which is a more tasteful building reminiscent of Roman Baths.

The resort itself is a contrasting mix of old and new with many typically Swiss, quaint, sunburnt wooden chalets, alongside larger, but sympathetically designed modern hotels and apartments (and some rather dubious looking buildings which give the impression the architect only had a rule and some 1980's fashion guides to work with). There is the obligatory Migros supermarket, numerous gift shops along with some very nice clothing stores and plenty of eateries of all types. The Tourist Information Centre is in the main street of the resort next to the bus station and has lots of useful leaflets on the area in English.

For the many visitors who enjoy hiking in the summer, or skiing in the winter, Leukerbad offers plenty of opportunities, with the added bonus of a long hot soak at the end of the day to revive any aching muscles. However, although the two of us are not hikers, we did venture up the Thermal Canyon Walk, a series of walkways, ladders and a steel cable bridge suspended from the Dala Gorge in a way that only the Swiss could. The slightly scary trail leads to a stunning waterfall and ultimately a beautiful (downhill!) walk back to Leukerbad through some lovely scenery.

We have stayed in Leukerbad twice now, both times in low season, and do so because the modern well-equipped apartment we rent is excellent value for money and the resort is beautiful and incredibly quiet. We make full use of our SwissPass to access the rest of Switzerland as the one thing Leukerbad doesn't have that we need is any second hand shops (Brockenhaus or Brocante), to enable us to purchase bargain items to expand our collection of Swiss souvenirs! 

1. The Leukerbad railway crossed the Rhone at Leuk at the location of this bridge.

2. LLB ABFe 2/4 No 10 of 1914 vintage is now at the Blonay Chamby museum. *Photo: Bremgarten*

3. Leukerbad station today is used as a ski school in winter.

4. The outdoor Leukerbad Therme has a mountain backdrop.

5. Just one of the magnificent views from the bus to Leukerbad.

