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Stopping Train Switzerland

Rob Morrey



"Train des Vignes" at Chexbres (1999).

All photos: Rob Morrey

Way back in 1984 I ventured to Switzerland for the very first time and became aware of the 'Eighth Wonder-of-the-World', viz the SwissPass. In each succeeding year I have returned, but have tried to avoid the temptation always to travel the full length of all the many scenic railway lines. I have discovered that there is so much to see by stopping off along the way to find the attractions so many tourists tend to overlook. After all, some of the final destinations of the trains are less than compelling. St Moritz, for all its international reputation, seems to me to lack both charm and character (though the lakeside location of the station is tremendous). Tirano has little to recommend it –

apart from the first train back to Switzerland. And I have never heard a good word said about Chiasso. Ever.

Sisikon, though, (Kursbuch Table 600) is a wayside stop that has it all. A continuous procession of trains (some of which call), mountains, picture-postcard buildings, a lake, and boats (some of which call). It really does not get any better than this, yet so many whizz through, unaware. At the other end of the country, the area bordering Lake Genève has so much to offer. Chexbres Village (Table 111) is high above the lake and the little yellow train will take you there to enjoy the breathtaking views and delightful walks – all downhill! – to the villages Rivaz and

St-Saphorin (both Table 100). The station at the latter is almost on the lake. A little further east, above Montreux, is the station at Glion (Table 121) on the line up to Rochers de Naye. The view over the Château de Chillon and the eastern end of the lake is second-to-none. There is also the automatic funicular down to Territet, which adds to the appeal of this quite wonderful location.

The lines radiating out of Agile are justifiably popular but there are again some interesting places to see along the way. The hamlet of Vers-l'Eglise, near Les Diablerets (Table 124), is worth seeing –



Lakeside halt at St Saphorin (2003).

a lovely, peaceful setting, ancient church, village pub! The AOMC line to Champéry (Table 126) passes through the charming village of Val-d'Illiez – much more peaceful than Champéry itself – and are buses from there that take you even further off the beaten track of the tourist. A gem. Another station perched on a ledge above a valley is Finhaut (Table 132) on the line from Martigny to Le Châtelard and Chamonix – a spectacular setting on a spectacular railway, which uses both overhead wires and third-rail, though not at the same time! Perhaps a little more out-of-the-way (to tourists) is Echallens, the headquarters of the LEB (Table 101). Handily placed for photographers, the depot is alongside the station, and the occasional steam train operates from here. The town is attractive and its architecture emphasises its location in French-speaking Switzerland. Also not to be missed is the 'Maison du blé et du pain' (house of wheat and bread), a splendid museum with an excellent Café that has some tempting tea-time-treats produced in-house. Then there is St-Ursanne, on the line from Delémont to Porrentruy (Table 240), a drop-dead- gorgeous old settlement in a beautiful river valley. No wonder it appears in many a Swiss calendar. Charm and more charm.

Of course, the MOB line's (Table 120) which climb up out of Montreux have the wow-factor (best appreciated through the opening windows of a stopping train). One or two halts have views to die for – the tiny halt of Châtelard (VD), close to an old château, and Sonzier are my personal favourites. I for one, never cease to gaze in awe at the houses on this mountainside. To wake up every morning to those views... Heading further east, the line from Visp to Zermatt (Table 140) is a must. One should not ignore the delights of the intermediate stop of St Nicklaus. As far away from the bustle of Zermatt as you can get – unless you stop-off on December 6th, the writer added cryptically. Still further east, I am always impressed by the bleak, dramatic splendour surrounding the station at Oberalppass (Table 143) on what I shall always think of as the Furka Oberalp. I have never been here in the winter, but have nonetheless seen the area buried in snow in June. Impressive and forbidding in any weather.

The town of Appenzell attracts scores of visitors to its cute centre, but I always make for Gais (Tables 855 & 856) – lovely village centre, big loco depot, 180° curve that is even tighter than the famous one at Alp Grüm, and the junction for the spectacular rack line down to Altstätten – a ride not to be missed, especially when operated with open-top stock at certain times in the summer.

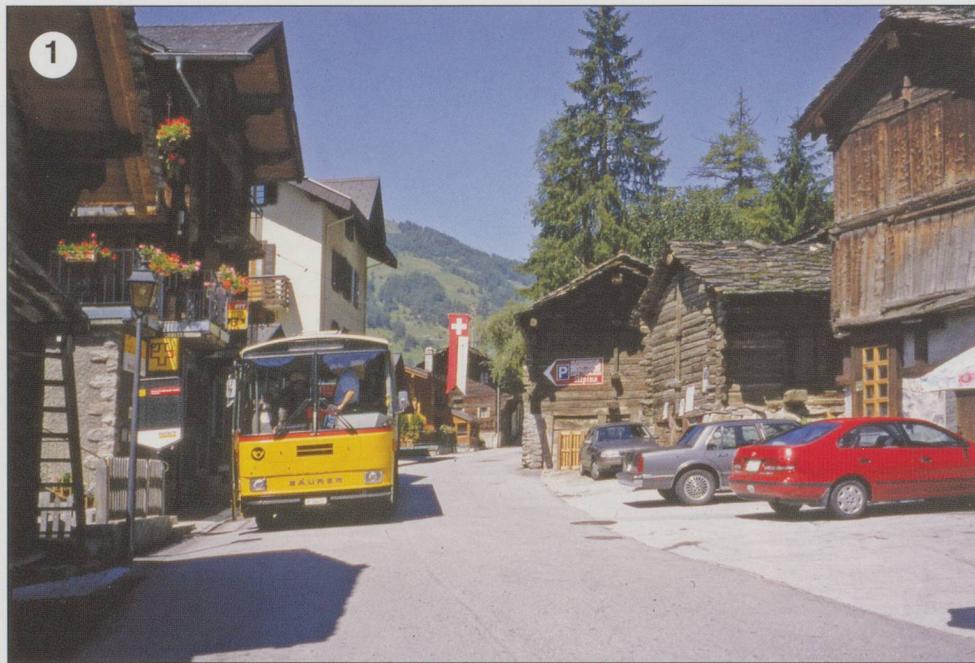
Châtelard (MOB) request stop (2009).



Looking east from Glion (2004).

And finally. My absolute favourite is Ospizio Bernina (Table 950), which I came across rather by accident on my first trip to Switzerland. Some of my friends have difficulty passing pubs; I have problems passing this truly wonderful station beside the lake. It's magical! The footpath to the





isolated station at Alp Grüm through some very inhospitable, bleak scenery is simply unforgettable, with no uphill walking at all – which is another bonus! Lake, trains, mountains. The Swiss Alps in a nutshell.

Those then, are the places I've chosen to visit and enjoyed visiting, none of which are at the end of the line. Swiss transport being what it is, if you are not impressed with what is on offer at your port-of-call, you can at least be sure that there will soon be another train along to take you onward. The opportunities are endless, and I could also suggest the following:

- 1 – To Wiedlisbach by ASm train from Oensingen or Solothurn (Table 413);
- 2 – To Evolène by PostAuto from Sion (Table 12.381);
- 3 – To Leymen by cross-border tram from Basel (Table 505);
- 4 – To Riffelalp by Gornergrat Bahn from Zermatt (Table 139);
- 5 – To Murten by train (Tables 255 & 305);
- 6 – To Simplon Dorf by PostAuto from Brig (Table 12.631);
- 7 – To Intragna by FART/SSIF train from Locarno (Table 620);
- 8 – To Au by boat from Murg (Table 3901).

Gute Reise! 

1. PostAuto to Sion at Évolène (1997).

2. The sheer beauty of Val d'Illiez (2004).

3. The gem that is Sisikon (2006).

4. Ospizio Bernina – transport interchange! (1990).

5. Train but no people at St Niklaus - it's not December 6th (1997).