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ASD 100

Neil Wheelwright



BCFe4/4 No. 1 + B34 + B35 proceeding up the line with views of Aigle Castle in the background.

All photos: Neil Wheelwright

The weekend of the 5th & 6th July 2014 saw the centenary celebrations of the Aigle Sépey Diablerets (ASD) railway. Whilst the line had initially opened in December 1913 when it reached Sépey, it only opened fully for traffic on the 6th July 1914 having actually reached Diablerets four days earlier. The weekend also marked the reopening of the line after a couple of months' closure for some serious upgrade work, and the opening of the new Sépey station on 2nd July 2014. Along with the Aigle-Leysin, Aigle-Ollon-Monthey-Champéry and Bex-Villars-Brétaye

lines the ASD is now a part of the Transport Publics du Chablais (TPC) group.

I discovered Aigle and its narrow gauge railways in February 1983 during a brief stop on my way down the Rhône valley. My first ride on the ASD was in 1984 when I had a trip up to Les Diablerets through the snow on a cold March day in the original rolling stock, a very atmospheric and memorable trip. I have been back many times since and often base myself in Aigle for holidays. As such, I was very keen to visit the ASD for

any celebrations and the weekend of 5 & 6th July proved to be host to many events in the town. On the Friday there was a parade of school children with each class dressed to a particular theme. Over the weekend there was a 'Fête de Couleurs', which appeared to be a world music festival, and on the Saturday there was also the 3rd annual 'Mondial du Chasselas' wine festival held in the



ASD BCFé4/4 No 1 in grey & white 1940s livery at the old depot.

Aigle Chateau (which is also a museum of wine) celebrating the Chasselas grape and resulting white wine. Your intrepid reporter did visit this event, but only in the name of research for 'local colour ...'.

In practice the ASD100 events proved to be very low key, to the extent that there was not even any information available at Aigle station on the Friday afternoon! The celebrations had started on Wednesday 2nd July with an invitation-only special train to Sépey for the station re-opening ceremony - 100 years to the day after the station was officially opened - plus lunch at a hotel in Les Diablerets. This also launched the return of one of ASD's 'heritage' sets back in its original livery. The main public event was on Saturday 5th July, based around an open day at the original ASD dépôt on the eastern edge of Aigle. This is now the Permanent Way dépôt for the TPC group with all Aigle based stock now stabled and maintained in the new depot on the southern edge of town on the AOMC route, adjacent to the SBB main line.

The open day was very Swiss and very locally focused. There was a stage hosting various local bands through the day and which also accommodated the usual speeches from railway management and local politicians. There were some stalls from local railway groups, face painting for children, etc., plus an 'apéro' for all present in the morning. There was, of course, the usual food area, but with rather more wine & raclette in evidence given that Aigle is west of the 'Röstigraben'.

The star of the show was the train, BCFe4/4 No.1, plus trailer C34, which had been restored to its 1940s grey & white livery by the group ASD1914 (www.asd1914.com). The group had also commissioned some limited edition models of the original ASD stock (see same website) from Fulgrex, which were on sale at eye-watering prices. ASD1914 are still trying to raise funds for the equipment needed to make the stock compatible with the new signalling being installed on the ASD and so allow the train to run into the future. The TPC was very proud of the redecoration, inside & out, of its two 'salon' cars Arst 433 & Ars 421 which were launched during the day. The livery was designed by

ASD restored BCFe4/4 No 1 + B34 + B35 ascending through the vineyards above Aigle.



ASD Arst 433 in "Derib" livery at the old dépôt.

'Derib', a local illustrator of graphic children's books and the interior by local designers. Whilst the external design is eye-catching, the interior changes can perhaps be described as 'curiosities'. Of interest to the enthusiast was a free shuttle operating a couple of times per hour from the CFF station to the depot using the 'heritage' set BDe4/4 No.2 in its unbranded 'TransOrmonan' livery. This gave plenty of opportunities to photograph trains running through the streets. The weather played its part clearing up after some major thunderstorms the night before and the event proved very popular. Fortunately, given the crowds milling around the site, I had been able to get some photographs late on Friday afternoon as they finished laying out the depot site for the show. On Sunday, the restored train (BCFe4/4 No.1, with C 34, plus B 35 still in 'TransOrmonan' livery) worked a public special up to Diablerets for an anniversary lunch. This trip was captured by many photographers, including the local TV station, as it rounded the curves through



the vineyards above the Chateau.

Two books were published at the event, an official history (with which they were giving free copies of the 75 year anniversary book!) which is largely a 'life & times' book covering the line's sometimes precarious existence, plus a pictorial book produced by the ASD1914 group which, along with some superb photographs, contains a time-line history of the line and some rolling stock and railway information.

There is also an excellent exhibition '100 ans à la conquête de la montagne' being held in the Musée des Ormonts in Vers L'Eglise. The valley the ASD serves is known as the Ormont-Dessous and Ormont-Dessus. The exhibition is spread over three floors seemingly taking up most of the museum's exhibition space and is open until 10 April 2016; details can be found at www.museeormonts.ch. It looks at the story of the local area, the chequered history of the ASD, and is well worth a visit if you are in the area. Overall, the event was clearly aimed at the local community, understandably so as they are paying a substantial subsidy to keep the line open, with barely a nod to the railway enthusiasts. However, it was still an enjoyable weekend and a chance to see (and participate in) something of the 'real', local Switzerland rather than a highly organised high-profile event. 




TOP: BDe4/4 No. 2 on depot shuttle on the street near the depot.

BOTTOM: ASD restored BCF4/4 No. 1 + B34 + B35 ascending through the vineyards above Aigle.

Erratum

On P33 of the September *Swiss Express* in the article "DB diesels in Switzerland" by Doug Tompkins there was an error in the published text. It stated that Locomotives Nos. 220 013, 014, 015, 016, 017, 053 and 077

were built in 1968. These locomotives actually received the Class No. 220 in 1968, having previously been Class V200.0. Loco Nos. 013, 014, 015, 016 and 017 were built between July, August and September 1957 and 053 and 077 were built in June 1957 and June 1959 respectively. We hope that this is now clear. 

Swiss Tip Good ideas and information about Switzerland from travellers.

How many *Swiss Express* readers stop in Neuchâtel? It is a beautiful classic, but hilly, town with a Cathedral and University, and a commanding history. On a clear day there is a distant view of the Alpine panorama across the lake and there is also the innovative *Funambule*, a funicular from the station down to the lake. There was once a steam tram, but that was a long time ago. Along the lake shore to Boudry, southwest of the city, there is a busy 9km long suburban tramline, Line 5 - now to become Line 215 - run by Transports Neuchâtel (TN). The line was once bucolic and clumsy; it is now modernised and efficient. At Boudry you can stop and enjoy a quite different atmosphere. It is worth the detour. 