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The Black Forest, Basel, and all that jazz...

Malcolm Bulpitt



The Big Band in the Marktplatz - with the trams still operating to the last.

Famously Basel sits at the junction of Switzerland, France and Germany and it is the wooded hills of the Black Forest that form the northern boundary of this tri-nation agglomeration. There is a lot of necessary co-operation in this area between administrations, and as an example it is the SBB that run many of the local rail services in the German suburbs and beyond. The principal SBB operated route follows the Wiesental north from Lörrach, through busy Schopfheim to the undistinguished

small town of Zell in the foothills of the Black Forest. The 28km Wiesentalbahn was opened from Basel to Schopfheim in 1862, on to Zell in 1876 and in 1913 was one of the first lines to be electrified in Germany. Having moved to SBB operation in 2003 the line was almost totally rebuilt over the next three years, with a number of new stations being opened to serve the increasing urbanisation of the valley, today resulting in the RABe 521 Stadler FLIRTs that operate the service stopping at 15 locations en-route, (Kursbuch Table 501).

Until 1967 Zell was the southern terminus of the 18.75km metre-gauge Zell-Todtnau Bahn (known locally as *s'Todtnauerli*) that was operated by the Süddeutsche Eisenbahn Gesellschaft (SEG). This heavily graded line (2.86% - 1:35) climbed the upper valley of the Wiese to Schönau, and the attractive small resort town of Todtnau located in a bowl in the hills and frequented by walkers in the summer and skiers in the winter. Passenger services finished in 1966, with a freight service lasting another year. The gradient of the route required powerful locomotives and two Mallet tank engines, 0-6-6-0T No.104 and 0-4-4-0T No.105 were in operation at closure. Whilst No. 104 was built by Hanomag in 1925 for

A DB Rhein Valley service arrives at Basel Bad Bhf.



the line, No.105 was built for the German army in 1918 by Maschinenbau-Gesellschaft Karlsruhe, and acquired after the end of WW1. Both of these are now preserved in Switzerland at the Blonay-Chamby Museum Railway although only No.105 is currently operating. The track bed of this line is now a walking and cycling trail, giving an off-road route from Zell into this beautiful area that is less than one hour by public transport from the bustle of Basel. Buses of Südbadenbus (Service 7300) now meet the half-hourly trains (on weekdays) from the city at Zell and shadow the route of the old railway, climbing up through charming small communities to Todtnau. One trip an hour is extended on to the major resort of Titisee (in another ticket zone), with a further railway connection on to Freiburg.

Public Transport access to this scenic forested area comes cheap, certainly by Swiss – and UK – standards. For just €15.50 (£12.60/CHF18.70) the red DB ticket machines at Basel Badische Bahnhof (that are far more user friendly than their Swiss equivalents) will issue a ‘TeamCard24’ ticket. This gives 24 hours unlimited travel for 5 people by rail and bus over the whole of the RVL (Regio Verkehrsverbund Lörrach) area that takes in much of the southern Black Forest. It also includes the short rail-link through Switzerland to Basel SBB.

Having spent much of Friday 22nd August on this excursion to Todtnau, we returned to the city to get involved in Basel’s 31st annual ‘Em Bebbi sy Jazz Festival’ night. This is one summer evening of music mania in the Innerstadt. During the afternoon many streets had been closed to traffic (but not to trams!) and cafes and restaurants had set-up tables and chairs outside, whilst impromptu bars and wurst stands had been erected outside shops. A major covered stage to accommodate a ‘Big Band’ had been erected in the Marktplatz, and at 30 other on-street locations small covered stages had appeared. As the publicity put it - in a 700m x 700m area 70 bands with some 500 musicians would be playing all forms of Jazz from around 7pm to 1am, with a break around 10pm for bands to change over, although some venues would host three sessions. On this fine summer evening the Police estimated that over 80,000 people thronged the streets, enjoying the totally free festival that was sponsored by a diverse number of organisations including the City, banks, insurance companies, MIGROS, etc. Meals were consumed to the sounds of New Orleans; beer drunk to Ragtime, and



TOP: Z-T No.105 at the Blonay Chamby. Photo: Bryan Stone
MIDDLE: 1925 built ex-SEG, Mallet type, 0-6-6-0T Compound at the Blonay Chamby railway. Photo: Bryan Stone
BOTTOM: A SBB FLIRT enters Basel Bad Bhf from the Wiesental line.

wine enjoyed to Modern Jazz. Private spaces off city streets not normally accessible were opened for some sessions where smaller ensembles played, whilst the bigger and more raucous bands played in the larger open areas. We moved, often with some difficulty, through the crowds around a number of locations enjoying different sounds and savouring the atmosphere - as well as the wide range of beers and food on offer. One of our favourites was 'Gleis 4'. Not a railway platform - but four German female saxophonists playing Modern Jazz in the courtyard of a small museum (www.gleis4-saxophon.de). These women were one of eight German jazz groups amongst the seventy. One band was from France and the rest came from across Switzerland with 24 from Basel alone. It is not just railways that the Swiss do well - jazz is up there as well. Next year's 'Em Bebbi sy Jazz' is on Friday 21st August. Book your hotel in advance, or stay out of town - the trains and trams run late! 



TOP: Crowds in Basel's Rumelinplatz.
 ABOVE: SBB RABe 521 008 waits at Zell to return to Basel.
 LEFT: Crowds enjoying Jazz in the Schnabelgasse.

Express Parcels! Keith Scotland recounts a student prank that went wrong

During the night of the 16/17th May 1950, eleven students left the Gasthof Sternen at Muri, near Bern. Being very happy after a night's drinking, they had a bright idea to hijack some horses to get back to Bern. This was 65-years ago and at the time this area was still quite rural. But, of course, there were no horses about; however there was a motorised parcel van Fe4/4 No.25 of the Bern Worb Bahn sitting in the station after the last BWB service train had long since departed. The students couldn't persuade the van to move, even though they managed to raise the pantograph to the overhead contact wires, and tried to activate the controls. What they did not realize was that the BWB switched off the power overnight. Having failed to find some transport they set off to walk back into Bern, having no idea of the potential consequences of their actions. Next morning, when the power was switched on, van No.25 set off all by itself along the first part of the route to Bern that is flat, and as early in the



morning in that era there was little road traffic about, the road crossings at Burgenziel and Thunplatz were luckily crossed without problems. However, the line then descends Thunstrasse on a downward slope and the No.25 gathered speed. The parcel van, already over 40-years old was theoretically limited to a maximum of 50kph, but at this point it was estimated that it was doing some 70kph. Its progress was summarily halted at the then terminus of Kirchenfeld, (the line is now extended across the bridge into the City Centre), as it derailed at the entrance to the station, hit a tree, scraped along the station building and finally came to a halt by crashing into the fountain at the telegraph monument. The "fourgon" was beyond repair and was scrapped, whilst the fountain was quickly repaired. It is understood that the members of the student association were prevailed upon to subscribe towards a replacement vehicle for the BWB. History does not recall if they did. 