

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2015)
Heft: 121

Artikel: 50 years of the Luzern-Stans-Engelberg
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853949>

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50 years of the Luzern-Stans-Engelberg Mario Gavazzi

On 19th December 1964 the first through service trains ran on the newly formed Luzern-Stans-Engelberg (LSE) line, after the completion of the link between Hergiswil and Stansstad that enabled trains from the former Stansstad-Engelberg-Bahn (StEB) to run through to Luzern along the SBB's Brünigbahn. The StEB was built as a metre-gauge line utilising sections of Riggensbach rack, opened in 1898, and was electrified (3-phase @ 800V) from the beginning. At the opening it was the longest electrified railway in Switzerland. The connection to the rest of the Swiss rail system was by steamer from its lakeside station at Stansstad to Luzern. However it was always its intention to have a physical link to the network, but it was only in 1956 that it obtained a Federal Concession to build this. After some years spent raising the necessary capital, work on the 1780m Lopper tunnel commenced in 1960 and this was completed in early 1964, along with the track to link the new line to the original at a relocated Stansstad station. The last StEB train ran on



the 27th August 1964 and in the next 3½ months the old section of line was upgraded to Brünigbahn standards, and the electrical supply was converted to the SBB standard of 15.000V, 16.7Hz. New rolling stock arrived to replace the original equipment that was still soldiering-on 66 years after the first opening of the line. The LSE remained an independent company until 2005 when it was merged with the SBB's Brünigbahn operation to become the Zentralbahn (ZB), in which the SBB has a two-thirds shareholding. The 50th anniversary of the opening of the LSE was celebrated by the ZB between 19th and 21st December with various events and decorated trains. On each day all passengers on the IR trains between Luzern and Engelberg were presented with a small book outlining the history of both the StEB and LSE, and ZB staff distributed jubilee chocolate and postcards of the rolling stock to everyone using the line. At Engelberg the cinema showed a special film about the development of the LSE. 

Photo: Mario Gavazzi

Puzzle picture on page 11 – an explanation

The third rail, inside the standard gauge running rails, is not a running rail but a check-rail. If a train or vehicle were to derail in the station, it might severely threaten the stability of the overall roof that is carried on the elderly cast iron columns shown in the picture. The check-rail is therefore a precaution. It could not be a narrow gauge running rail, as it is on the wrong side, and would remove a narrow gauge train from the platform face. No metre-gauge service was ever planned here. Thanks to Bryan Stone for this. 

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