

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2015)
Heft: 124

Artikel: 125 years of the Berner Oberland-Bahn : Glyn Jones reports on the celebrations
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853991>

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125 Years of the Berner Oberland-Bahn

Glyn Jones reports on the celebrations



Banner advertising the event above the doorway to Zweilütschinen depot. All photos: Glyn Jones, except the steam train

2015 is the 125th anniversary of the opening of the Berner Oberland-Bahn (BOB) and to celebrate this significant event the BOB had an open day at their works in Zweilütschinen on 29th June. Such events usually take place at a weekend but for some reason the BOB management had chosen a Monday for the open day – although there may have been a good reason for this as you will soon realise, and in true Swiss tradition it was advertised only by a banner above the workshop doors and an announcement buried deep in the Jungfrau Bahn website.

I was grateful to a member of the “Yahoo Swiss Rail Group” for spotting it so that I could add it to the “Swiss Events” page of the SRS website. As it corresponded with the first Monday of our holiday in Interlaken, we decided to make a visit.

According to the website announcement it was open from 09:00 to 20:00 with tours at 10:00, 16:00 and 18:30 so we caught the 09:35 train from Interlaken Ost ready for the 10:00 tour. Arriving at Wilderswil station we noticed a considerable number of school children waiting to board our train and wondered where they were all going. As we alighted at Zweilütschinen we were joined by the school parties along with about 40 other visitors. It was with some trepidation that we realised the school-children were going around the works as well; maybe this was why the Open Day was being held on a weekday. Later investigation revealed that 500 children from communities along the line had visited the open day. This is the way to get children interested in the railways from an early age. The adults were split from the children and we commenced our tour with a BOB guide, immediately realising that our knowledge of Technical Swiss German was zero. But we could always look, and try to understand as much as we could.

As is normal with Swiss railway depots it was spotlessly clean with most of the maintenance and repair functions being done

“in house”. We saw the machine shop (where each visitor was given a rather nice key ring based on a BOB wheel set). We also visited the carpentry shop and there was even a glazing area where there was a demonstration of replacing the broken glass in a coach interior door.



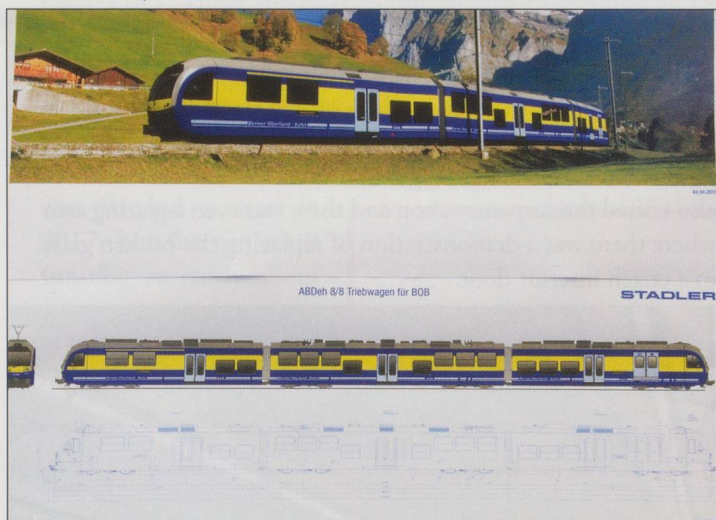
BOB machine shop.

There were three ABDeh4/4 treibwagens in the main workshop stripped down for a major overhaul, No. 310 originally built in 1979 and Nos. 311 and 312 from 1986. Two of these were having new powered bogies fitted and one of the bogies was jacked-up so that it could be demonstrated working.



ABDeh 4/4 No. 311 and the working bogie demonstration.

We were then shown the plans for extending the workshops and a display by Stadler (who was one of the sponsors of the event, along with Siemens), and given hand-outs on the new ABDeh8/8 train sets which are on order.

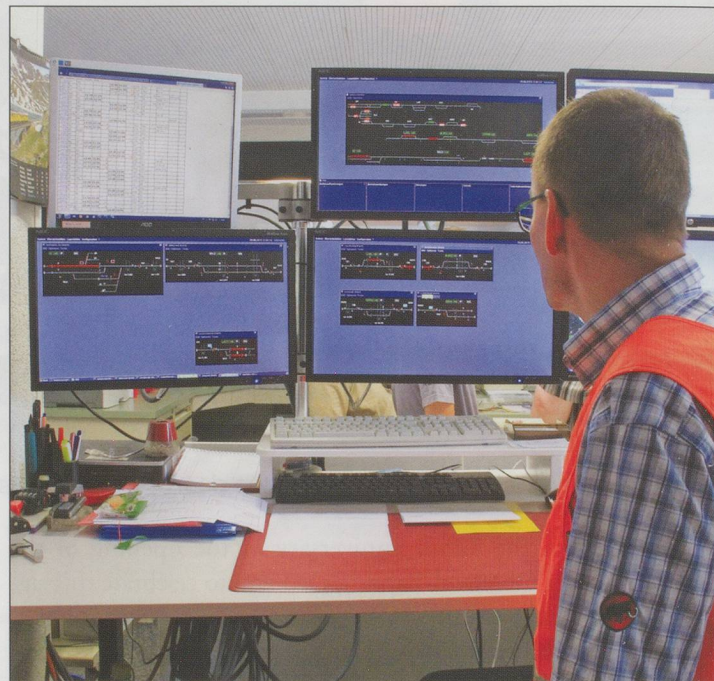


Drawings of the new ABDeh8/8 trainsets.

After studying the plans and accepting some freebies from Stadler, our guide invited us to see the interior of the refurbished treibwagen No. 312 with its new "customer information system" which will be installed in all BOB trains. This is the same system installed in the new Wengernalp Bahn trains with display screens giving station and time information. A nice touch is the Swiss station clock in the bottom right hand corner complete with its "stop-to-go" function.



After the completion of the workshop tour, we were escorted across the tracks to the station building to see the signalling control centre. Zweilütschinen houses the signalling system for the entire BOB network and uses software supplied by Siemens. It seemed identical to the system we had seen a few years ago on the Rhätische Bahn, the set-up similar to the much larger installation at Lanquart. It was interesting to note that the old Integrex control panel is not only still in-situ but is still in operational condition.



Zweilütschinen station signalling control centre.

From the control centre it was refreshment time. Catering was provided by the local model railway club (MEFEZ) who have their clubroom and layout within the workshop complex. They had set up tables and benches at one end of the depot that had been specially cleared for the purpose and had a varied menu on offer, plus packed lunches for the school parties.




ABOVE: The well-equipped field kitchen operated by members of the MEFEZ.

LEFT: ABDe 4/4 No. 312 which has been equipped with the new "customer information system".

It was planned that Ballenbergdamfbahn (BDB) steam loco. HG 3/3 No.1067 (ex. Brünig) with four BDB coaches would run extra trains between Interlaken Ost and Lauterbrunnen during the day. These trains were timetabled without any fare supplement. Unfortunately No. 1067 had suffered a bearing failure and is at the RhB depot at Lanquart for repairs, along with the BDB's other loco G 3/4 No. 208, which was damaged in the BDB's locomotive shed fire in November 2013.

Fortunately G 3/4 No.14 has been brought to Interlaken from the Appenzeller Bahn and will be available to the BDB for the rest of 2015. It was originally built for the Lanquart Davos Railway (forerunner of the RhB) in 1902 (SLM No.1479) and had been unused since 2003. It had the final work to bring it back to service completed in the BDB depot at Interlaken. It was originally un-named but has now been given the name 'Madlaina'. Although owned by a private association it will run on the Appenzeller Bahn under the management of the BDB. It is not, of course, rack equipped and so could only run between Interlaken Ost and Zweilütschinen, although we did see it, loaded with some of the school parties heading off in the direction of Grindelwald.

After refreshments it was time to leave and make further use of our Berner Oberland pass; they really are excellent value for money. 




G 3/4 No. 14 with BDB coaches leaving Interlaken Ost.

Photo: Ken Lowe



A novel use for the information system.

Gerald, who designs and produces *Swiss Express*, had a lovely surprise at his birthday party in October. Made by his latest daughter-in-law, Claire. 



Where's Heidi?

This is more a case of "Big Sister" watching you. But where would you be to see these eyes? Answer on page 41. 