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Château d'Oex

Richard Parker reports on the complete rebuild of this station



A 2 car early GTW unit normally used on the Montreux-Les Avants service. Note the new electronic sign in the roof of Platform 2.

All photos: Richard Parker

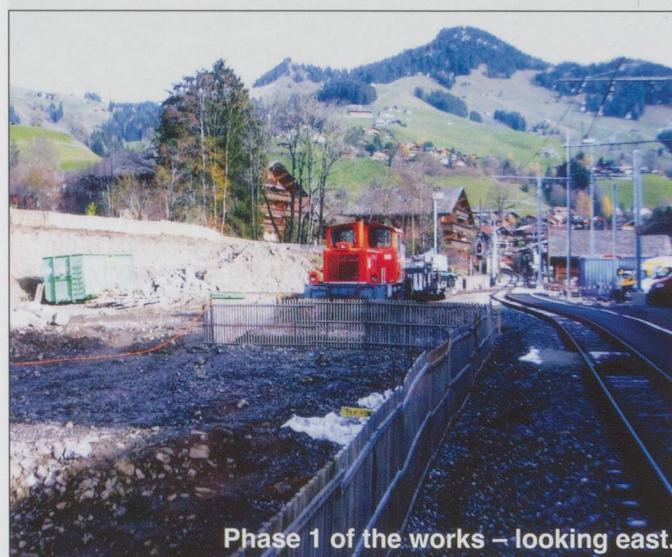
Over many years I have been fortunate to be a regular visitor to this charming community in the Pays d'Enhaut region of Canton Vaud. Today, for many people this village is best known as the home of the annual hot air Balloon Festival, that has been held during the last week of January every year since 1979. Seventy-five years earlier it was the arrival of the Montreux Oberland Bahn (MOB) in 1904 that turned this local centre of a rural area into a thriving summer resort that became popular with the British. Now, in addition to continuing to offer a welcome to summer visitors, it has a thriving winter sports scene that is augmented by the Balloon Festival.

The delightfully rustic, chalet-style station at Château d'Oex had remained unaltered since it was built in 1903 as part of the construction of the MOB line, but by the 21st century it had become an operating anachronism for various reasons. In 2013 the MOB commenced work on a complete renovation of the entire station area at a cost of some CHF22m, with CHF15m coming from the Canton and another CHF1m from the Commune. This last sum was

specifically earmarked to provide a subway under the line to assist in linking the two halves of the village, which are split by the railway, together. The rebuilt station now has five tracks serving conventional height platforms provided to ease boarding and alighting of trains, especially for those with mobility impairment. Steps, ramps and lifts link the platforms with the new subway that is quite spacious and has been decorated with murals by artist Franck Bouroullec on a theme recalling the personalities of the region. Amongst those featured is a very lifelike image of the actor David Niven who was a long time resident of the village. His best selling autobiography was entitled '*The Moon's a Balloon*' and, perhaps because of this, I recall that he was invited to open the first Balloon Festival thirty-seven years ago.

In the rebuild the platforms have been lengthened to some 220m in order to cope with the introduction in 2018 of the new Montreux – Interlaken through services that will use the innovative variable-gauge bogies developed by the MOB. It was decided that the original station building had to remain unaltered in appearance, but within it a new open-plan booking hall and waiting room have been provided, similar to Gstaad. I am pleased that adjacent to the original building an extended canopy has been built almost up to the Buffet de la Gare (owned by the MOB), with supports that match the century-plus wooden originals. The whole station area has been completely re-signaled and the track layout simplified so there is now no provision for freight to be handled. However the small engine shed, once the haunt of some of the MOB's most decrepit old railcars, has been rebuilt.

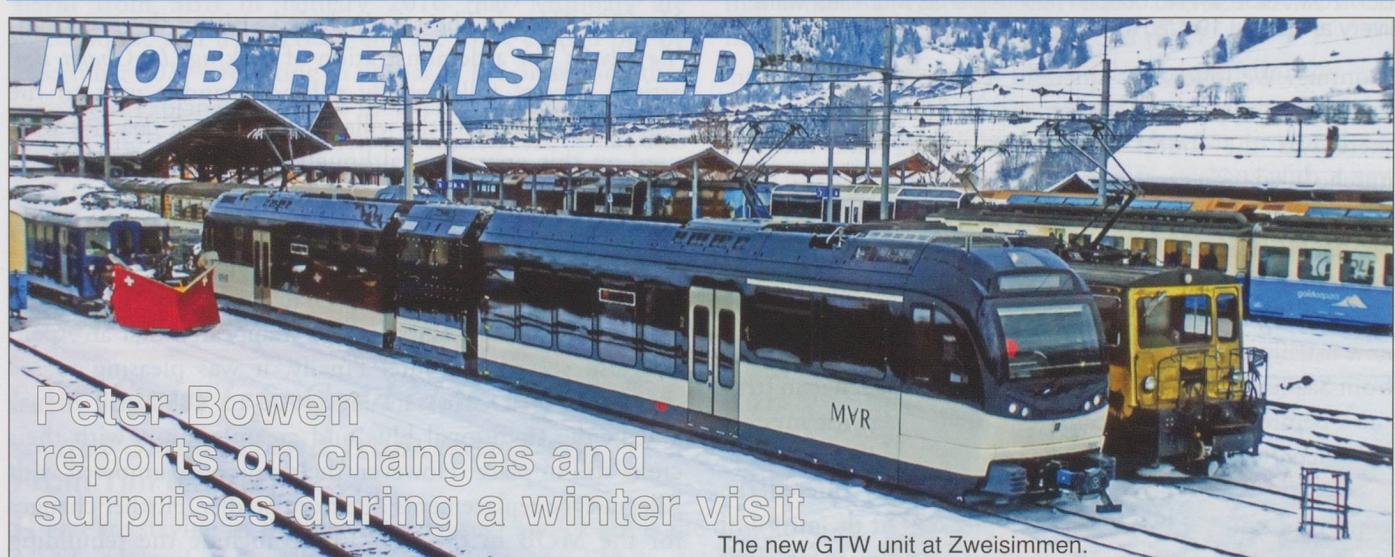
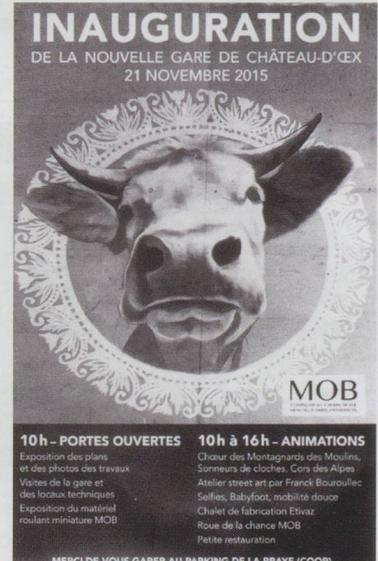
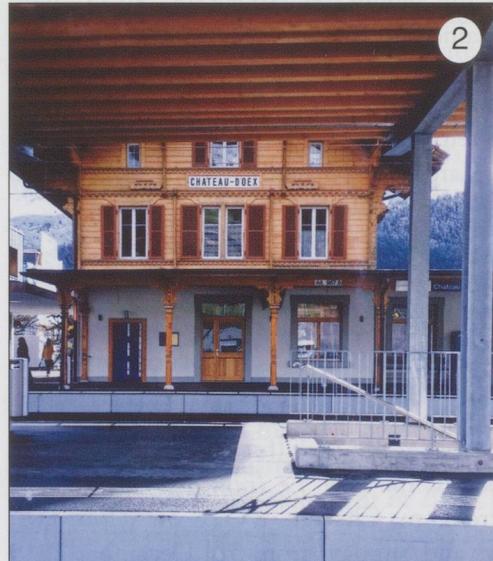
The work was completed last autumn and officially opened on 21st November. The publicity that was circulated regarding the opening, somewhat strangely used an image of a slightly 'snooty' cow that was taken from the mural in the subway. Canton Vaud has a policy of encouraging the use of public transport and it is understood that their aim is to double the frequency of local services such as those through the rebuilt station. Currently the basic service on this section



Phase 1 of the works – looking east.

of line remains hourly, however from last December the Canton has arranged with the MOB for later departures to run from Montreux on Friday and Saturday nights with the last train for Zweisimmen now leaving at 23.50 – with a 00.43 arrival in Cd'O for Night Owls! Between last December and April the MOB also ran ‘Le Train du Fromage’ which consisted of an additional coach(s) being attached to a regular service train and detached at the new station enabling passengers to visit a nearby hotel for a demonstration of cheese making and enjoy a lunchtime fondue followed by time to discover the village. This operation uses the rebuilt elegant saloon coaches that form ‘Le Train du Chocolat’. This popular trip runs May to October from Montreux to Gruyères, and on to Broc for tours of the Cailler chocolate factory. Let us hope that the winter version will prove as popular as the summer one, and to the benefit of Château d’Oex. 

1. Rebuilding of the new platforms almost complete – 25/9/2015. 2. The window on the right is of the refurbished booking hall of the original 1905 building. 3. Entrance to new subway visible on the right of platform 1.



Last January my wife and I returned to Gstaad for the anniversary of our wedding in the village. As always the MOB/‘goldenpass’ had surprises for us, and having plenty of fresh snow and sunshine there were ideal walking conditions for using the excellent winter paths, many with



views of the railway.

On our first trip, from Gstaad to Saanenmöser, the first coach was Panoramic As111 showing-off the new dark blue and white livery complete with new branding. This livery has also appeared on one of the second-hand railcars used for