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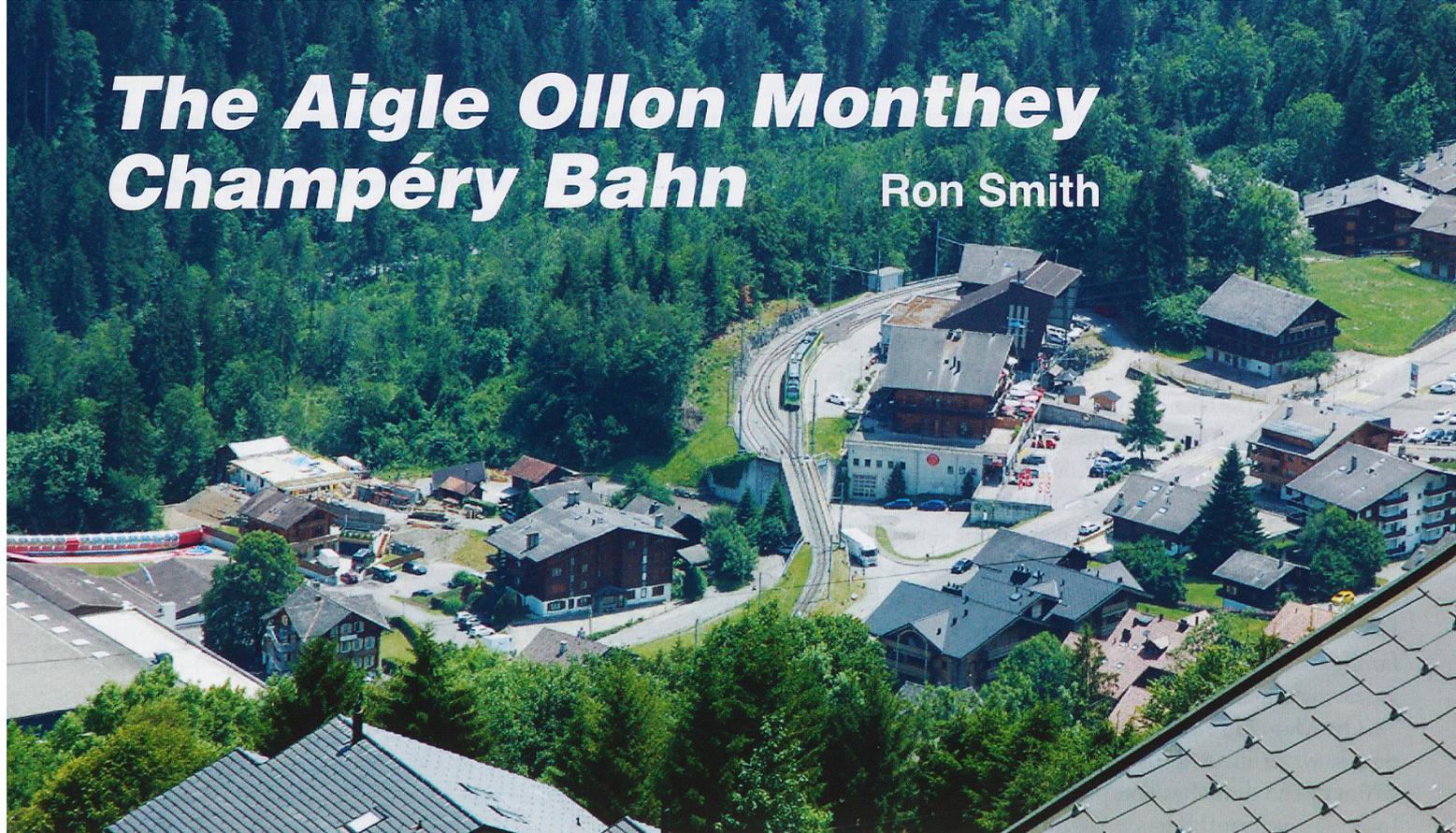
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The Aigle Ollon Monthey Champéry Bahn

Ron Smith



Looking down on Champéry railway station.

All photos: Ron Smith on June 22nd or 23rd 2017

When the railway line to the Simplon opened and passed through Aigle in 1857, it was natural that the people of the Chablais, on the hills above the Rhône Valley, wanted to be connected to this modern wonder that changed the whole way of life. As in most countries, there was a sort of railway mania, and many schemes were floated. However, it was not until 1905 that the parliament in Berne approved the Aigle – Ollon – Monthey (AOM) proposal. They also approved the Monthey – Champéry – Morgins (MCM) line, which would connect with the first line at Monthey. Progress was rapid. In 1907 the AOM started operation, and in 1908 the MCM also started, but only as far as Champéry... where it still terminates today. The railways were electrified from the outset at 850V, upgraded to 1500V dc in 2016.

Tourist traffic was curtailed significantly by the First World War and this severely impacted on both the railways, bringing them to their financial knees. Some essential renovation work was carried out in the 1920s, but road competition was beginning to bite into the revenues. By 1939

there were severe doubts that the railways would survive. The Second World War brought some relief, with a growth in military traffic, whilst civilian traffic also increased as fuel for road vehicles was rationed. However, the railway was still suffering from deferred modernisation and the need to reduce costs. In 1946 the two lines merged to form the Aigle Ollon Monthey Champéry Bahn (AOMC) - note that by now Morgins was no longer included in the full title. In 1946 the railway carried its most goods traffic ever, but over the ensuing 70-years this has declined to nothing at all these days.

In 1954 the essential new electric railcars arrived. This resulted in faster and more comfortable journeys which, as it always does, attracted more passengers. In 1958 a change in the law provided subsidies for smaller railways and this greatly helped the AOMC to continue to improve its infrastructure and rolling stock. One unusual result of this was at the station of Collombey, where the track was moved from one side of the road to the other, improving operating conditions. However, this leaves the station on one side of the road and the track on the other! Between 1966 and 1982 there was continual debate about whether the railway should continue or be replaced with buses. Thankfully, the railway survived and is today firmly established as an important public transport provider.

In 1977 consolidation arrived with the creation of the Transports Public de Chablais. The AOMC was combined with the Aigle Leysin line, the Aigle-Sépay-Diablerets line, and the Bex-Villars-Bretaye line, plus eight bus lines. In 2006 the revised layout at Aigle station was inaugurated. Now the three metre gauge railways have their own platforms next to the

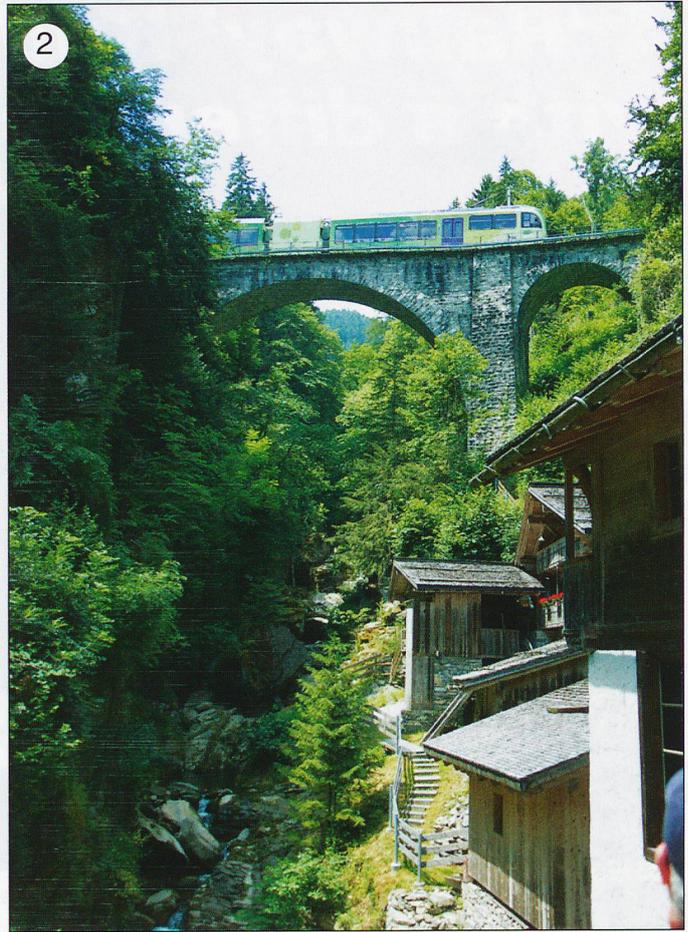
No.542 and No.541, at the half-way reversal at Monthey.



CFF/SBB ones. The AOMC now runs south alongside the Rhône Valley main line for over a kilometre, allowing the closure of no less than eleven level crossings! Another recent development has been the extension by 1km of the line at Champéry, bringing the train to a shared terminus with the cable car up to Coix-de-Culet (1945m). The track layout is interesting. It is on a curve with a loop and a siding. These curve round past the cable car and railway station building and point definitely onwards. A station Champéry-Village now exists at the location of the old facility that appears to have disappeared under a new road. In 2001 the TPC opened its new maintenance depot at En Châlex, on the outskirts of Aigle. This replaced the old depot at Monthey. This modern facility maintains all the rolling stock for the TPC lines based at Aigle, along with the associated bus fleet.

Rolling stock over the years has been varied, including second-hand cars from the SernftalBahn. Today bright green modern Stadler units, GTW Beh 2/6 delivered in 2016, with panorama windows, comprehensive information systems, and comfortable seating, run smoothly up and down the line, including the rack sections. These were converted from the Strub to Abt system at the same time as the new units entered service. The whole area is dominated by the mountain range known as the “Dents du Midi” – the teeth like range of high peaks (3257m). Each individual peak has had several names, but the current names are given to each of the units. On each cab side is a broad line of the outline of the Dents, with the particular one that the unit is named after highlighted, and the name is underneath.

It is a fascinating line to travel. Departure from the modern Aigle station is followed by swift running alongside fields with frequent “on request” stops. The line crosses the River Rhône, and the CFF/SBB line down the valley, and then runs across roundabouts and roads into Monthey. Here it reverses and curves away sharply to start climbing on the Abt rack (three sections totalling 3.7km) and the pure adhesion sections, to become a real mountain railway. It clings to narrow ledges on the hillside, twists and turns round very tight bends, to finally run smoothly into Champéry. Aigle is at 404m and Champéry is at 1,055m. In its 650m climb the 23.4km line has over 200 bridges, tunnels and embankments. Finally, I like the way that on its journey into the mountains the AOMC has used some of its structures in imaginative ways. Plain concrete has gained images of local personalities and supporting structures have been built as ‘climbing walls’ – no gym fees here! 



1. No. 541 at Aigle next to the main SBB line.
2. A train crossing Les Vieux Moulins de la Tine, Troitorrents.
3. No.547 approaches Champéry – not sure who the face is!
4. No.547 arrives Champéry at 16.30. Note the Climbing Wall.