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Archaeology in Thun

Bryan Stone recalls the Trajektschiff and an early route to Interlaken

ABOVE AND BELOW: The remains that are still visible at Thun.

Many readers will know the waterfront at Thun, as their lake ship (preferably the *ps Blümlisalp*) slips quietly out from the landing stage to start the next trip on Lake Thun. Like most passengers as we sit back for the agreeable trip, even those who think they know Swiss railways, can easily miss a historical survival on the western bank of the shipping channel. This piece of transport archaeology links us directly to the first days of railways in the re-

The ramp is where the little engine is shown on the model.

Photos: Bryan Stone

gion, when passengers and goods for Interlaken took the train to a steamboat, finally joining another train to reach their destination. Watch out, therefore, just there where the gravel heaps and crane beyond the SwissPost buildings make you think there is nothing more of interest. There is. This is the site of Scherzligen, the station that from 1863 to 1925 was where rail passengers took the boat onto the Thunersee.

Scherzligen station, and not Thun was, before nationalisation and the SBB, the end of the Swiss Central Bahn that reached here from Basel and Bern. It was here that the steamers waited for the hordes of tourists visiting the Berner Oberland, taking them, from 1863, to Neuhaus (2km west of Interlaken on the lakeshore), where in the season chaos reigned. From 1872 the local railway, the Bödelibahn with its little steam train complete with double-deck coaches, opened from a lakeside station at Därligen, to Interlaken some 4km away. Only from 1893, when the Thunerseebahn was opened along the south bank of the lake, connecting Thun via Spiez to Därligen and Interlaken itself, could the passengers enjoy the through trip to their

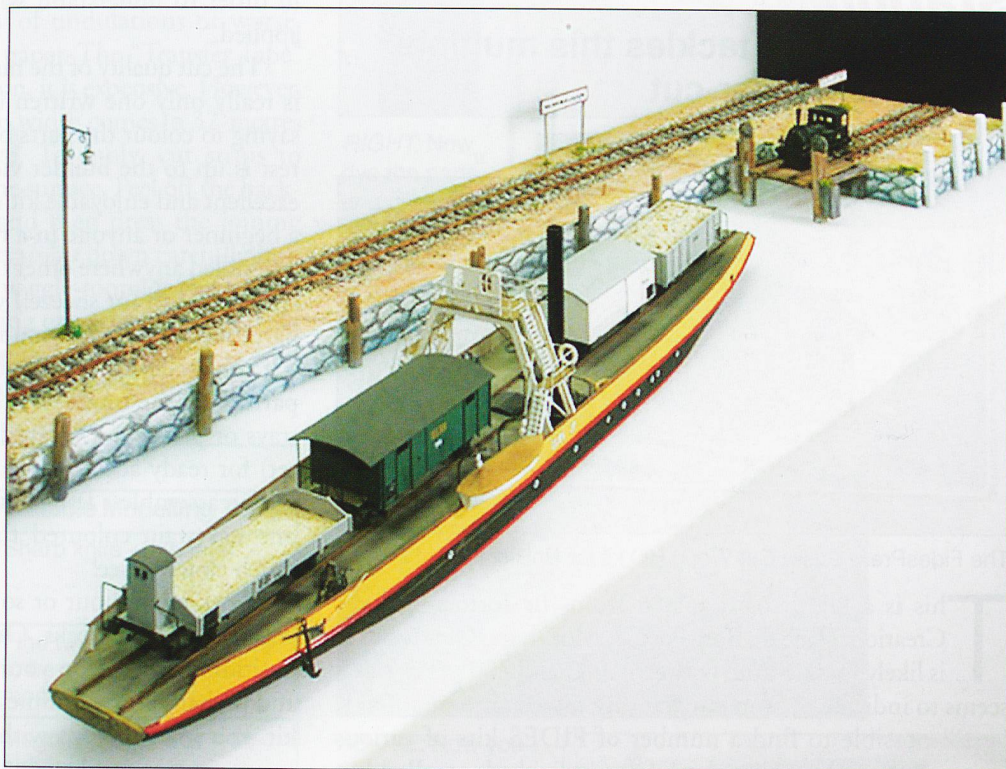



destination by rail with a lakeside ride. The new junction in Thun demanded a tight right-hand curve, as today, away from the ships leaving the old line to become a spur to Scherzligen and the ferry dock. On that curve, alongside today's SwissPost, was the demarcation between the SCB (SBB) and BLS – still the point where the BLS starts today.

The history of all this is complex; we however are today in Thun, leaving the current landing stage along the ship canal. On the bank to our right we see two cut off rails, and a small stone quay with a stop block. This is the ferry dock, where, from 1872 to 1893, the steam train ferries took on board freight wagons to deliver them to the Bödelibahn, for onward transit to Interlaken. During those 20 years all the freight for Interlaken took this route. The installation was simple with no link span as the stern of the ferry, which had come alongside the quay where the gravel now sits, simply butting onto the quayside rails at the black stop-block in our picture. Passengers arriving by train had their own landing stage at Scherzligen, which lay about 600m east of today's Thun station, and 100 m short of the train ferry quay. In 1872, the first Thun station was some 600m to the north of today's handsome building. The current structure was built by SBB in 1925, along with the ship canal allowing direct passenger transfer between main line train and ship to become normal. By this time the train ferry had been abandoned for 27-years, although the lake ships were still leaving from Scherzligen until the new building works were completed.

The train ferry quay at Scherzligen, however, survived, being far enough eastwards to avoid the turmoil of the canal building, and the new 1893 rail alignment of the Thunerseebahn that later became the BLS main line. Today you can still access

A model of a Trajektschiff at Scherzligen in the Thun Castle Museum.



Scherzligen, walking on the canal promenade from Thun station where the old rail alignment once went. When the wagon ferry operated there were two ships, both paddle steamers, each with a single line of rails and carrying 4 or 5 of the small wagons of that era. On closure in 1893 these vessels went to the Vierwaldstättersee (Lake Luzern) as powered barges. The 18km trip between Scherzligen and Därligen took about 100 minutes with a round trip that must have taken some 4 hours or more. There are no visible remains of the operation now at Därligen, though some relics may remain underwater. There are rumours that the BLS wishes to redevelop this quayside area, now used by a BLS tenant for storage of gravel, which is brought by barge from a quarry at Sundlauenen. Perhaps the remains of the train ferry pier will again survive. The time to see it is now, either from the ship, or from the landside, just 10-minutes walk from Thun station. The gravel company gives full access for the canal-side walk, and there are historical information noticeboards where Scherzligen once stood recalling, and describing, the train ferry (known as Trajektschiff) and its landing place. 

SwissTip: Boyd Misstear has supplied these tips regarding the Swiss Travel Pass

Swiss Travel Passes carry two “Stamp” locations – the “Issuing Stamp” which is located in the top right corner and the second one is the “Validating Stamp” located right middle. Depending on the type of Swiss Pass, for instance whether consecutive days or ‘X’ days in a certain period, and the issuing organization, when one receives the pass check to see whether both or just the issuing stamp is present. The issuing stamp might be simply computer-generated text like “REI CH date” and close by a long identification “CIV No”. If there is also present a similar REI CHI date “Validation Stamp”, there is NO NEED to attend the ticket office of the first station to have your pass validated. Simply fill in your Passport Number and add your signature. This could save you valuable time if there is a long queue at the ticket counter where you are commencing your use of the Pass.

If you have received your Swiss Pass and for whatever reason you have to alter your travel dates that have already been printed, but don't have time to get it reissued or want to avoid the cost, don't despair! A friendly approach to a ticket counter person at your starting point will likely result in manual revalidation at no additional expense! This has been put to the test at SBB Zürich Flughafen. 