

The smallest daughter of the SBB celebrates a jubilee : 100 years of the Brunig railway

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THE SMALLEST DAUGHTER OF THE SBB CELEBRATES A JUBILEE

100 YEARS OF THE BRÜNIG RAILWAY

Press release from SBB, translated by Rico Signore. SNTD London.

It is now 100 years since the first train of the then Jura - Bern - Luzern Railway steamed from Alpnachstad over the Brünig Pass to Brienz. This was the first step for a modern, efficient link between the two tourist centres of Luzern and Interlaken; a courageous step pointing to the future.

The earliest date for a railway across the Brünig dates from 1853, when the engineer Ernst Heinrich Michaelis of Aarau planned a line from Luzern via the Brünig to Meiringen. The continuation was to have been over the Grimsel Pass and the Greis Pass to Northern Italy, thus forming an actual transalpine link. With the building of the Gotthard Railway the Grimsel link was never started but even today it still fires the imagination of the planners. Last century, bold builders of railways did not only earn praise, as the inhabitants of the alpine valleys feared that their habitat could be damaged by this "modern machinery of the devil". There was no stopping progress: With the introduction of the Federal Railway Law of the 23rd December 1872 the granting of concessions became a federal matter. This precipitated events. While still a point of discussion in Obwalden whether narrow or normal gauge was preferable, the licence was already granted to the Jura - Bern - Luzern Railway. In the summer of 1887 the track between Meiringen and Brünig was completed, with a gradient of 120 permille - necessitating a rack rail - and on the 19th May 1888 the first trials took place between Alpnachstad and Brienz. The 14th June 1888 was the big day, when the inaugural train opened the 45 Km long track. In Brienz the train raised steam to travel to Meiringen, being jubilantly received by the inhabitants of the Haslital, where the programme included speeches by the Federal Councillors and a great procession. After negotiating the Brünig Pass one festival engendered another, and the inhabitants of Obwalden celebrated their "Iron Ribbon" into the Bernese Oberland.

A year later the connection from Alpnachstad to Luzern was added. Only after the nationalisation of the Brünig Railway in 1903 was the continuation to Interlaken Ost considered, and completed in 1916 in the middle of the First World War, thus the 73.820 Km long track was completed. Around 12% of the narrow (metre) gauge track is fitted with a rack rail of the Riggerbach type, a peculiarity of our Federal Railway, as the Brünig Railway is its only narrow gauge line. It needed 13 tunnels and 22 bridges to conquer the territory. In 1941 electric locomotives took over from the 23 steam engines.

On boarding the fast train in Luzern for Interlaken Ost and leaving the strands of rail of the shunting yard behind, one perceives the beautiful landscape of Lake Luzern; Pilatus and the Bürgenstock rising high, then the train vanishes into the Lopper tunnel, 1186 metres in length. Now the scene is the Alpnacher Lake with the mighty Stanserhorn as backcloth. The train stops in Alpnachstad, the starting point of the Pilatus Railway with its steep ascent. On to Sarnen via Sachseln, following the shores of Lake Sarnen. Giswil the termination point of the valley railway, and the start of the ascent to Lake Lungern and on higher still to the Brünig Pass at 1007 metres above sea level. Then through the mountain forests the Brünig line snakes its way down to Meiringen, 412 metres lower, arriving only 15 minutes later. Here the Haslital valley starts its journey to Brienz, and in quick time the train reaches Lake Brienz, flanked by rockstrewn slopes of the

Schwarzhorn and the Wilerhorn. Wild waters rush towards the young Aare river. After Brienz the track swoops elegantly along the romantic shore of the transparent lake. The journey, through beautiful landscapes, took barely two hours to arrive in the Interlaken Ost station of the Bernese Oberland Railways. Here the passengers change trains to travel to Grindelwald, Wengen, Mürren, or the Jungfrauoch, and some carry on towards Spiez and Berne or Brig.

The Swiss Federal Railways are very much aware of the unique beauty of their Brünig line. Thus to celebrate the Jubilee year, four Panoramic and one bistro carriages are being built. Extra trains with Oldtimer carriages round off the festive scene.



HGe 4/4II at Meiringen

Photo: Editor

For the harsh day to day running the jubilee line is also getting prepared. With the modern electric loco of the type HGe4/4II, the partly overage locomotives are being relieved. Just in time for the centenary, the first of eight such examples of top products of the Swiss industry will be available, following very good results from the two prototypes. The data of the high powered loco is outstanding: on adhesion tracks, it can move trains of 400 tonnes at 100 Km/h, on the rack section 120 tonnes uphill and 170 tonnes downhill at 30 Km/h! The engine will be used mainly for through working from Luzern to Interlaken Ost. The portions Luzern - Giswil and Interlaken Ost to Meiringen, which serve as commuter services for either valley, will for the time being be run with the existing rolling stock, which will be replaced in the foreseeable future with modern shuttle units.

What about the future of the Jubilee line? Rail 2000, accepted by the Swiss Population in December 1987, provides for a doubling of the track between Luzern and Hergiswil, and a double track section between Meiringen and Brienz. Both ventures, in conjunction with the modernising of the rolling stock, guarantee that the Brünig railway will be competitive far into the next century.