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The BLS Erlebnis Pfad

(Experience/Adventure Path)

by Richard Pinner

In September, during a holiday stay in Kandersteg, I walked alongside this new path, opened by the BLS, which gives splendid opportunities to learn about the railway line. At some places you walk right along the tracks at others you have excellent views down to the valley and the bottom level; chances to film and take photographs abound.

All along you will find plaques on station walls, fences and retaining walls - over 40 of them - with information about the geology, the building, layout and maintenance of the line, the signalling and electronics used, the power supply, the locomotives and trains and diagrammatic timetables. However all texts are only in German.

The full walk leads from Frutigen station to Kandersteg Station. It consists of three parts:

1. Along an existing path from Frutigen station to Kandergrund.
2. The new central part from Kandergrund Church to the now unused station at Blausee-Mitholz.
3. Along the existing path *Höhenweg Nordrampe BLS* (High-level path, Northern Ramp BLS) from above Blausee-Mitholz to Kandersteg.

It is a mountain path and labelled, by the BLS, as unsuitable for small children, dogs and wheelchairs. The reason for this is that in one place you have to climb from the bottom level to the middle level of the line up a vertical rock face with the help of a series of metal staircases, similar to fire escapes. There are rails to hold on to, but you can look through the steps straight down, several hundred feet, to the valley below. Of course, if you make the walk from Mitholz to Kandergrund, you descend these staircases.

About halfway along is a resting place with benches right beside the tracks. There are also benches in other locations, one of them with a marvellous view to the bottom level far below and another is below the railway line where you can only hear the trains above your head, but have a lovely view down into the valley. The

path is signposted throughout on brown signposts with the words *BLS Erlebnis Pfad*.

The full walk would take at least five hours, not counting rests and stops to take photographs, but the main, central part would only take just over one hour's walking time. To get to this central part, use the BLS Bus Kandersteg - Frutigen - Reichenbach to either Kandergrund Altels (Restaurant) or Mitholz-Balmhorn (Restaurant).

I would strongly advise the wearing of proper mountain boots; trainers are *not* suitable.

A more detailed description of the walk follows, in the South to North direction (down the valley).

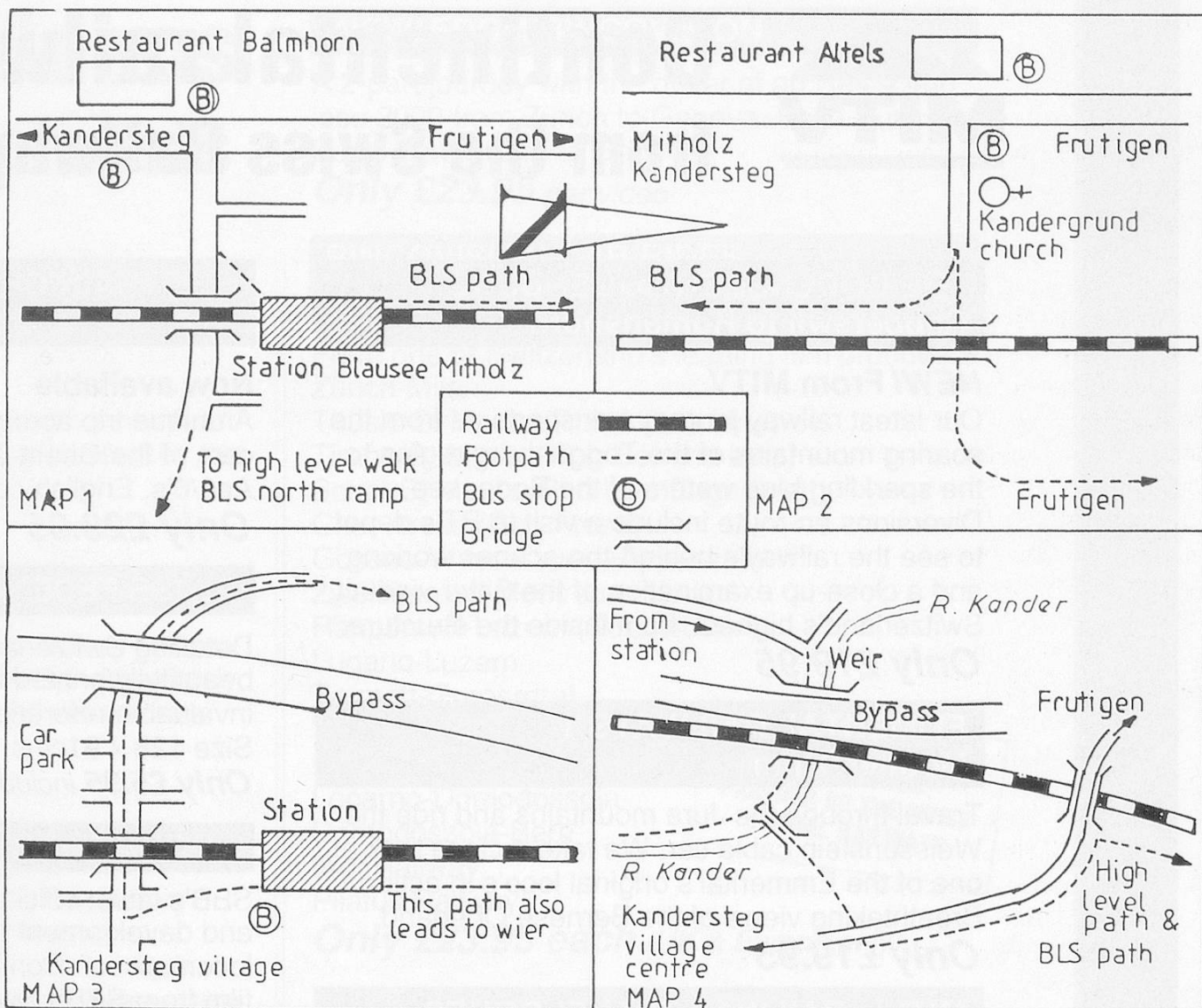
The Central Section

Take the bus to Mitholz-Balholm restaurant, about a ten minute's journey from Kandersteg. Walk up the lane to the station and climb up the bank to the platform. This is the platform used at one time by the trains travelling South towards Kandersteg, not the one in front of the station building. (See Map 1). Walk along this platform and you will find the start of the path at the far end. You cannot really go wrong thereafter; at any fork you will find signposts, but there are hardly any paths leading off. After walking along the middle level, you eventually come to the top of the staircases, on which you descend to the lower level. These are at the side of the *Stützpfeiler* (supporting pillar), a huge concrete pier supporting the rock.

You then walk along the bottom level and, finally, turn left and walk to Kandergrund Church. Just beyond, on the main road, is the Restaurant Altels and the bus stops. If you want to continue on to Frutigen, turn right, under the bridge and follow the signposted path. (See Map 2).

The Top Section

If you want to walk from Kandersteg, you follow the existing path along the Northern Ramp for about 1½ to 2 hours; this is described in full in my book *Easy Walks from*



Kandersteg, except for the beginning. For the walk along the Northern Ramp you either start along the main road, or follow the path along the Kander. For this BLS walk you start at the station, where you will find the first of the plaques on the wall of the building. You then cross to the other side of the railway, under the bridge, and walk, not along the by-pass, but along a small road at its side. At the BLS transformer station there are more plaques. You walk along the railway to the weir, where the Kander is regulated and part of the flow is led off in tunnels to the power station lower down the valley. (See Map 3). Across the bridge and meadow, you come to the main road (Kandersteg - Frutigen) and join the High Level Path a little further down the road (See Map 4), where the hairpin curves down the

Buel step start. You walk along beside the railway line and come to a bench, from where you will have an excellent view down to Frutigen and the mountains beyond. This is also an excellent place from which to photograph trains: this spot was described in *Swiss Express* 3/3, September 1991, page 12. You now have to climb up, well above the top level: along this section you will not see a lot of the railway. Eventually you come down, under the top level, to Blausee-Mitholz station (signposted). To get to the central part of the BLS path you have to walk under the bridge to the other side of the embankment, as you cannot cross the rails at the station (See Map 1). If you make the walk from Kandergrund, up the valley, you can finish by coming down from the platform walking along the short road to the Restaurant