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Track relaying on the MOB (Montreux-Oberland-Bernois)

by Les Heath Photographs by author

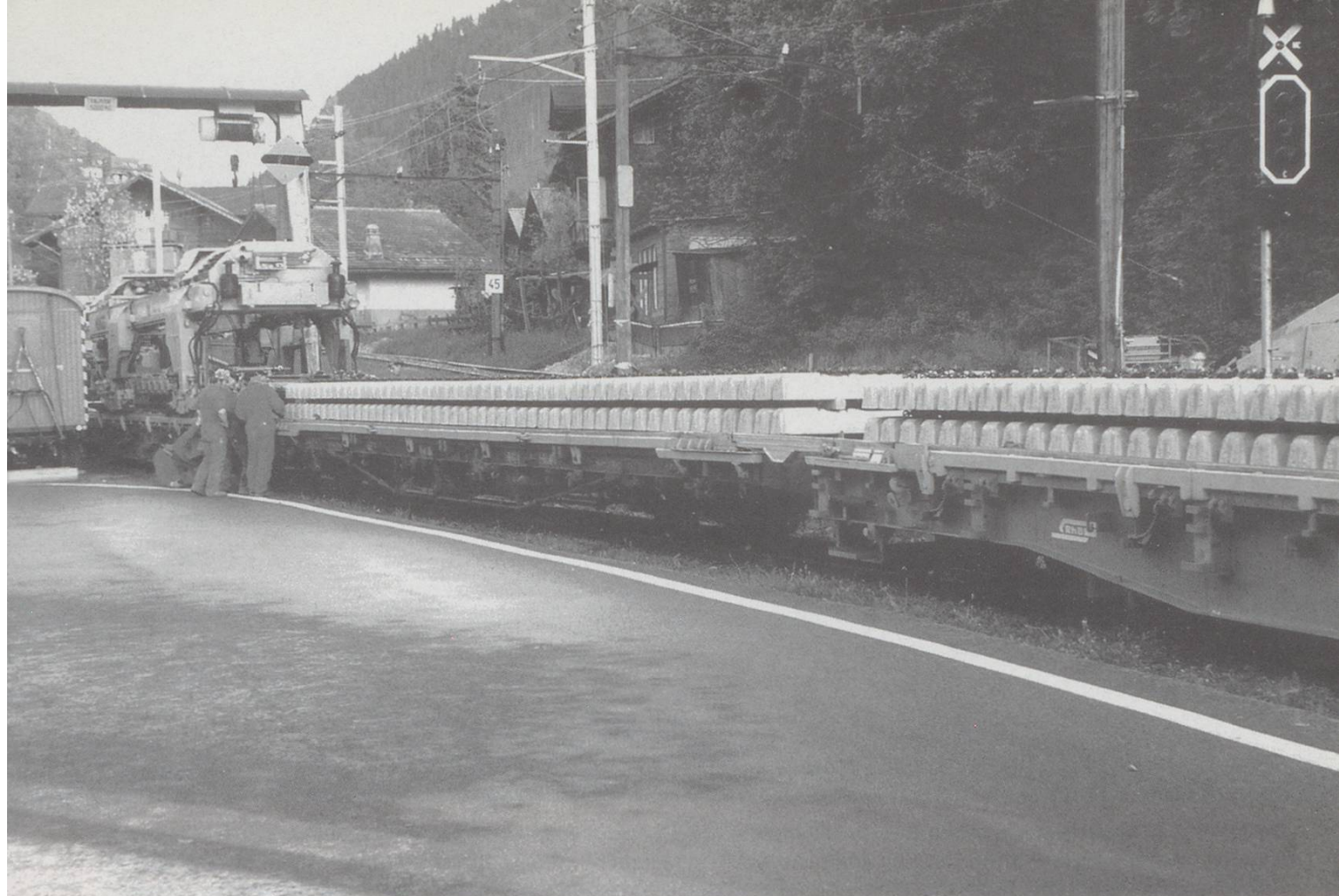
During a visit to Switzerland in October last year I telephoned Beat Feller, he his a driver for the MOB, to see if anything interesting was happening on the MOB. He informed me that if I travelled to Gstaad that evening I would be able to see the track being replaced between Gstaad and Schonreid. I drove over the Col de Pilon, between Villars and Gstaad, the weather was sleet and snow.

On arrival at Gstaad station at 6.30pm the first noticeable unusual rolling stock was nine bogie flat cars from the Rhb and FO plus an MOB flat truck, of the bogie wagons four were empty and four with concrete sleepers with track fixings in place. The ninth one had a moving crane assembly looking like a crab with a long spar hanging beneath it. Attached to rear of this wagon was in simple terms a small crane with wide caterpillar tracks, it was raised above the rails for transportation. At the other end of it was Ge4/4 8001 with the MOB flat wagon loaded with a skip full of gravel being used as ballast. This wagon has MOB couplings one end and RhB/FO

couplings at the other. The track laying train was hired from the RhB/FO and travelled from the RhB to the MOB on thirty-two rollschimmel wagons.

Just before seven o'clock the train moved out towards Schonreid. This evening the section of track from the girder bridge just beyond Gstaad back to Gstaad was to be replaced. Apparently the night before work was abandoned because of snow.

The train was pushed into position and the small crane dropped to ground level. The tracks of the crane are wider than the ballast trackbed. The train then moved back 15 metres with the spar unit suspended between the wagon mounted crane and the tracked crane. A welder then cut the two rails, the lifting spar was then lowered and clamped to the rails, the whole length of track with sleepers still attached was then lifted with the spar, this was then moved back under the wagon crane unit. The wagon crane moved down the length of the train lowering the track section onto one of the empty flat wagons. The



Opposite page: Ge4/4 8001 at Gstaad station with work train, the short 4-wheel flat has a Rhb coupling one end and a MOB the other, the skip is full of gravel to act as ballast.

Above: The new concrete sleepers in place on the flat wagons, on the edges of the wagons can be seen rails for the crane to move along the length of the train whilst carrying the old track sections / new sleepers.

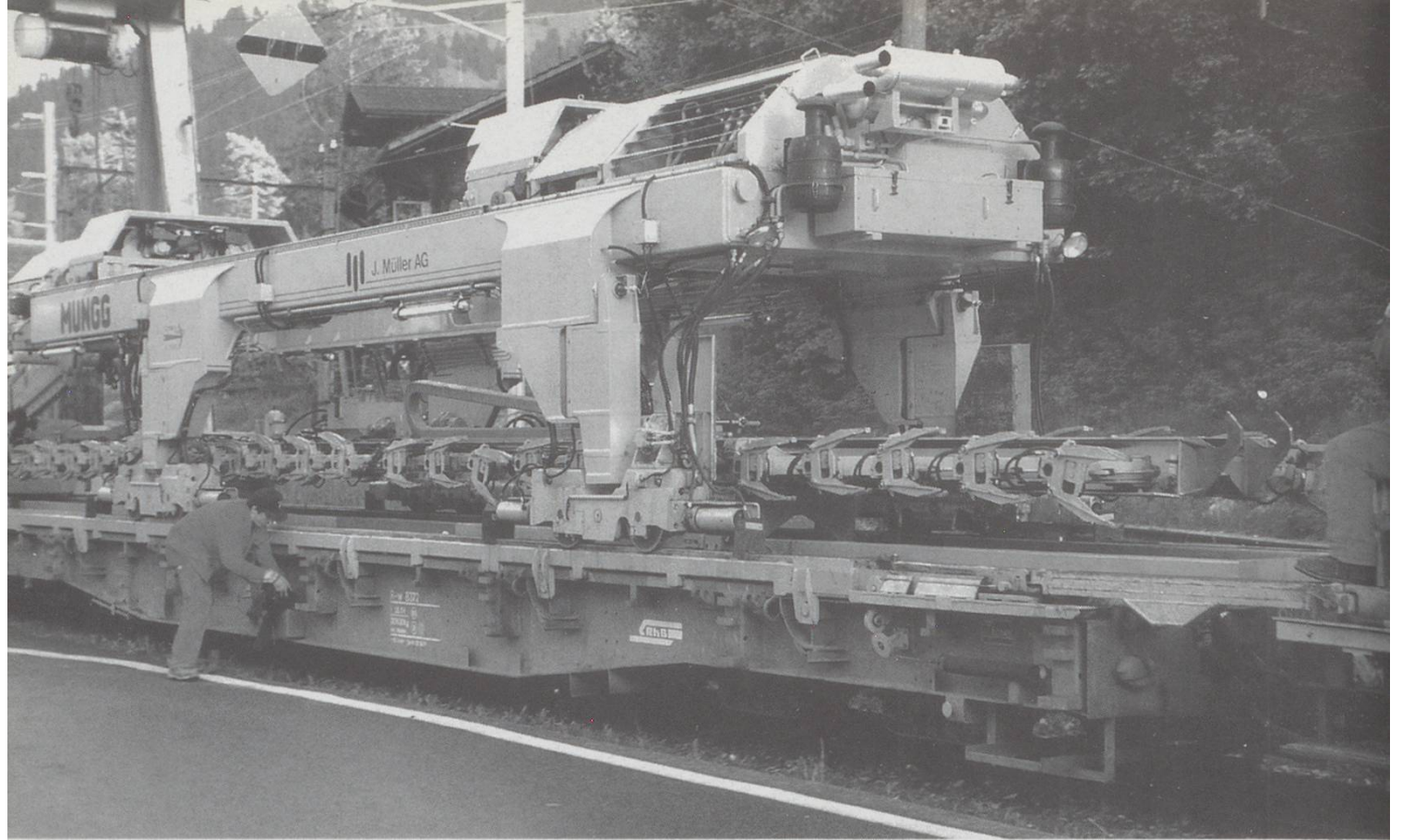
wagon crane was then positioned over the concrete sleepers the spar unit had claws that were turned down to pick up the individual sleepers. The crane moved to the rear where the spar was reattached to the tracked crane. The spar was moved out over the empty trackbed and lowered into place. Each sleeper was moved sideways by hydraulics to ensure that the curvature of the original line is maintained. Any misalignment would affect not only the clearances side to side but also the positioning of the overhead contact line with the pantograph. Having positioned the sleepers the whole train and tracked crane move down another fifteen metres and the process was repeated; cut, lift, move, replace.

Laying alongside the ballast was the new replacement rail sections in sixty metre lengths, this had been dropped off earlier in the week. The first part of the operation was very mechanised, all hydraulically operated machinery with many levers and much shouting, the next part was

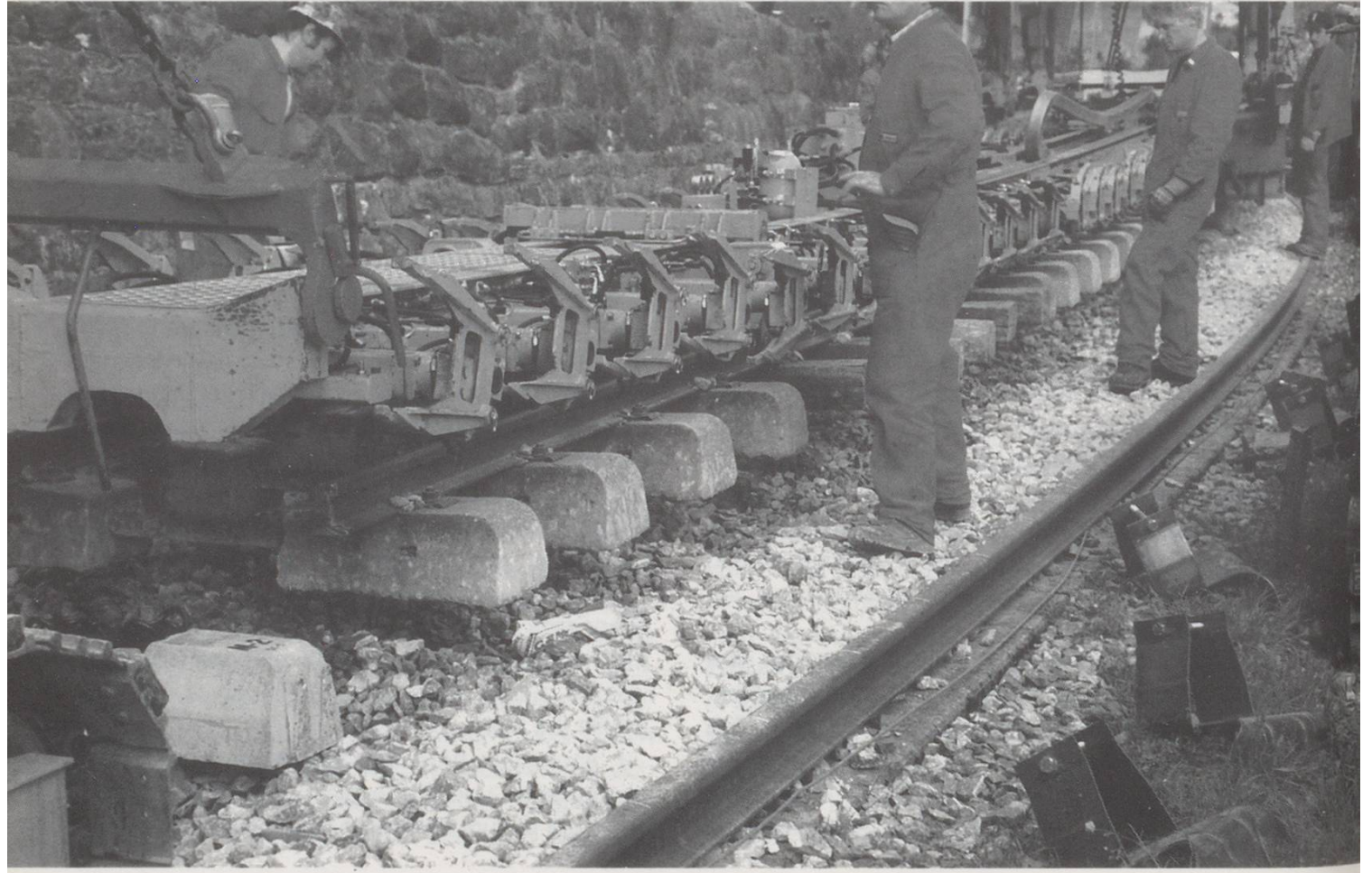
accomplished with a motley looking series of small machines that appeared to be precariously balanced on the track that had already been replaced. The placing of the new rail sections used a lot of manual pushing and lifting with large iron bars to manoeuvre the long lengths of rail into place, its surprising how flexible the rails appear to be. The small hydraulic machines lift and move the track to attain the correct distances from the retaining walls. Following along were two machines were used to tighten the bolts retaining the wire loops that hold down the rails. Finally the ballast cleaning train passes over the completed section settling the sleepers in place.

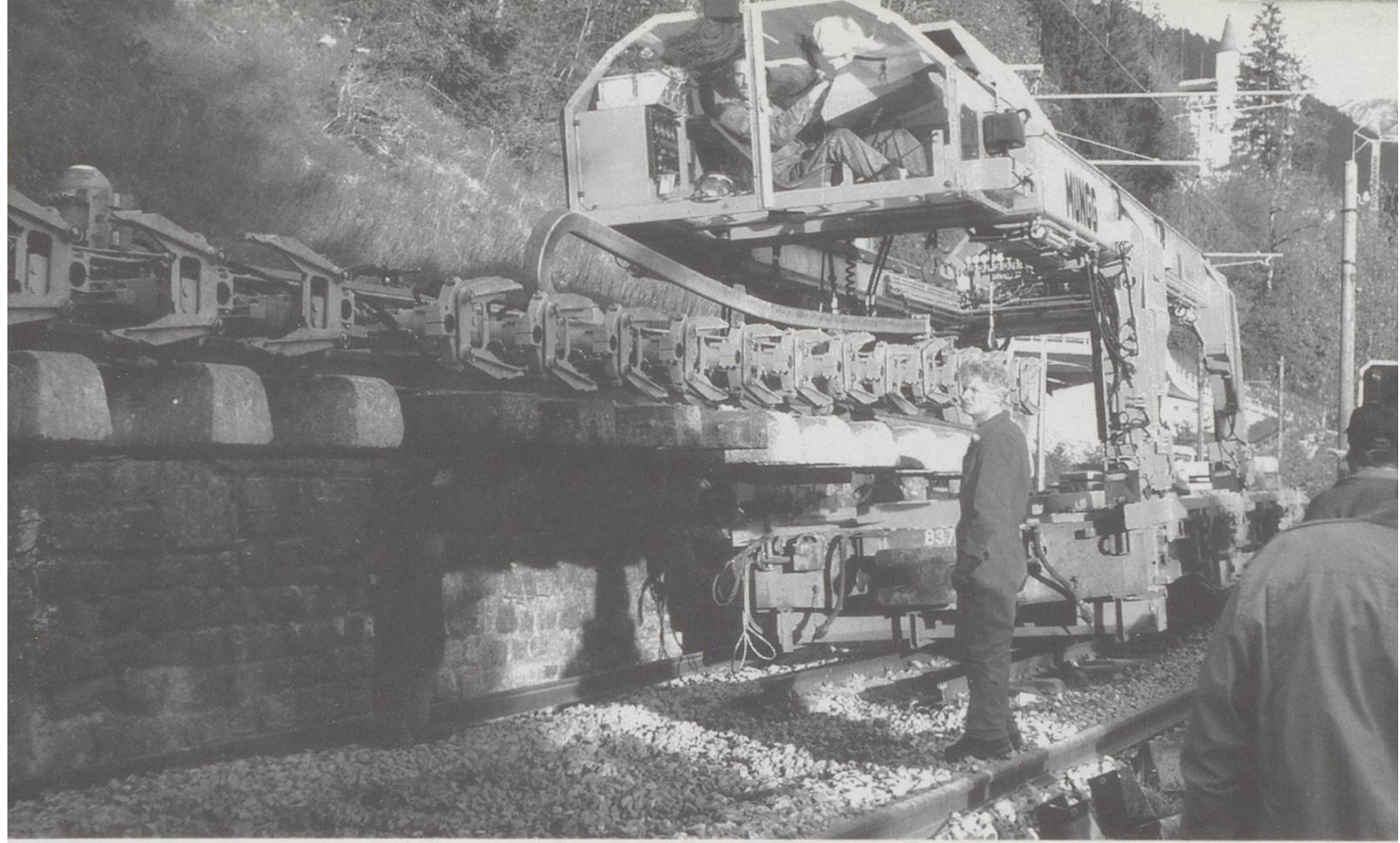
The rails are bolted together with fishplates every sixty metres initially, but the following week the fishplates were removed and the rails are welded, finally the rail grinding train is used to profile the track.

I apologise here for the large number of photographs used to 'explain' what I am talking about, "a picture is worth a thousand words"?



Above: The crane with the lifting spar the fork arms swivel down to pick up the new sleepers.
Below: An old section of track being lifted, the new replacement rail can be seen next to the ballast waiting lifting onto the new sleepers. The lifting spar is suspended between the tracked crane and the wagon mounted crane. Note the new sleeper on the left having been dropped with the previous section.

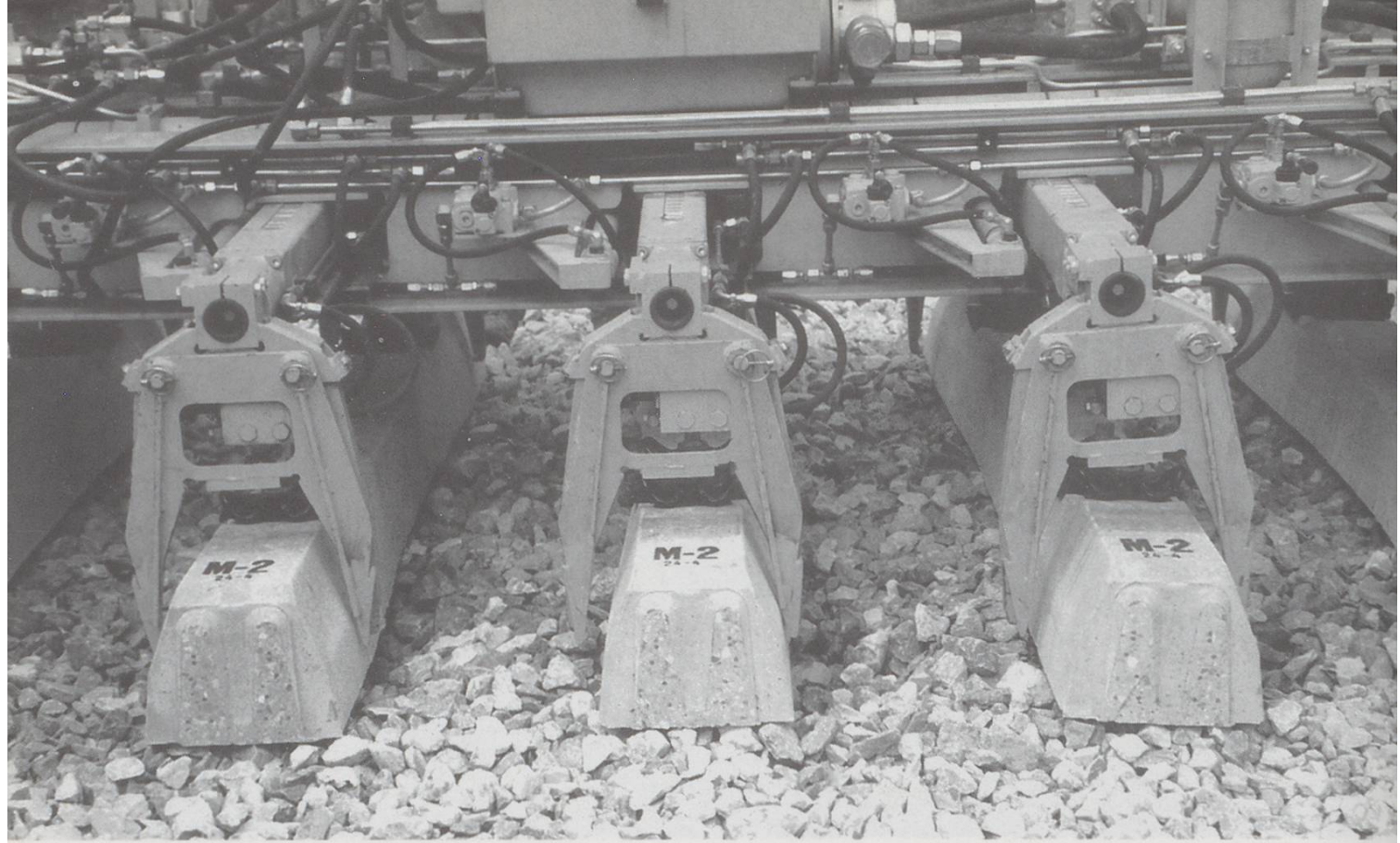




Above: The section of old track being manoeuvred under the wagon crane, to be carried along the train and placed onto one of the empty flat wagons.

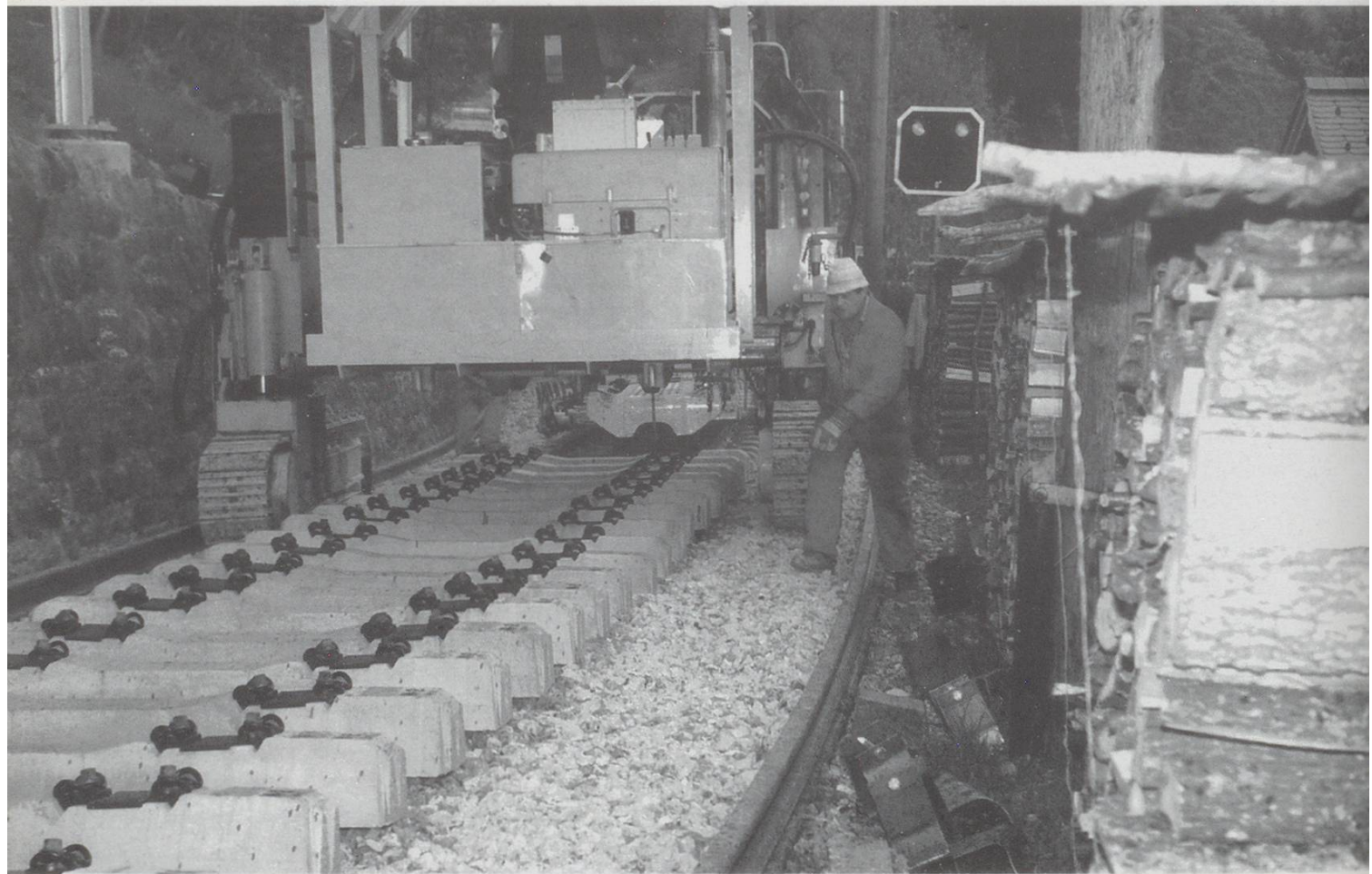
Below: A clear view of the tracked crane manoeuvring the spar under the wagon crane, the driver of the wagon crane is visible above spar in a semi-lying position, access is via the glass doors.

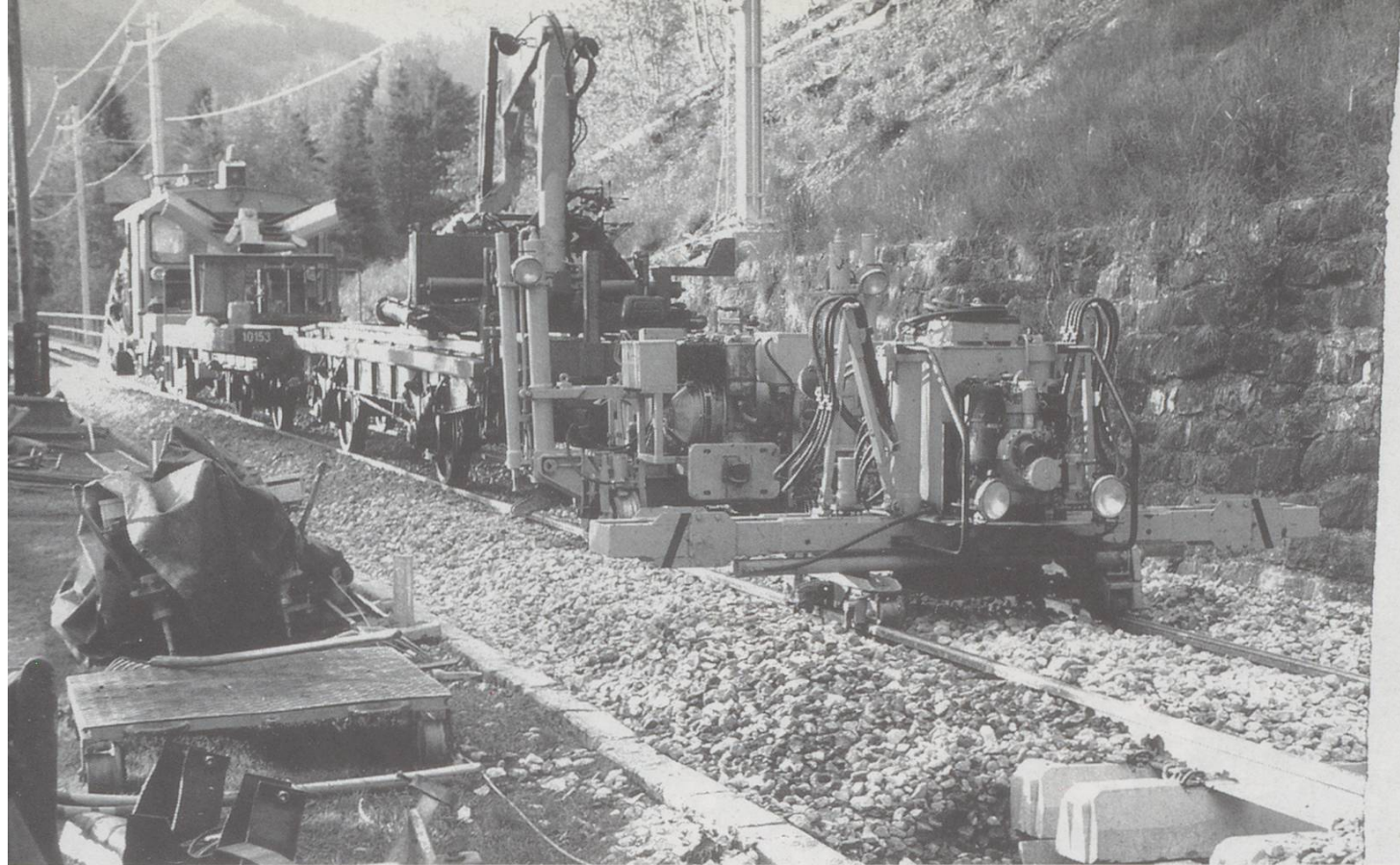




Above: The lifting spar with the new sleepers being dropped into place, the sleepers can be moved individually by hydraulics to shape the line.

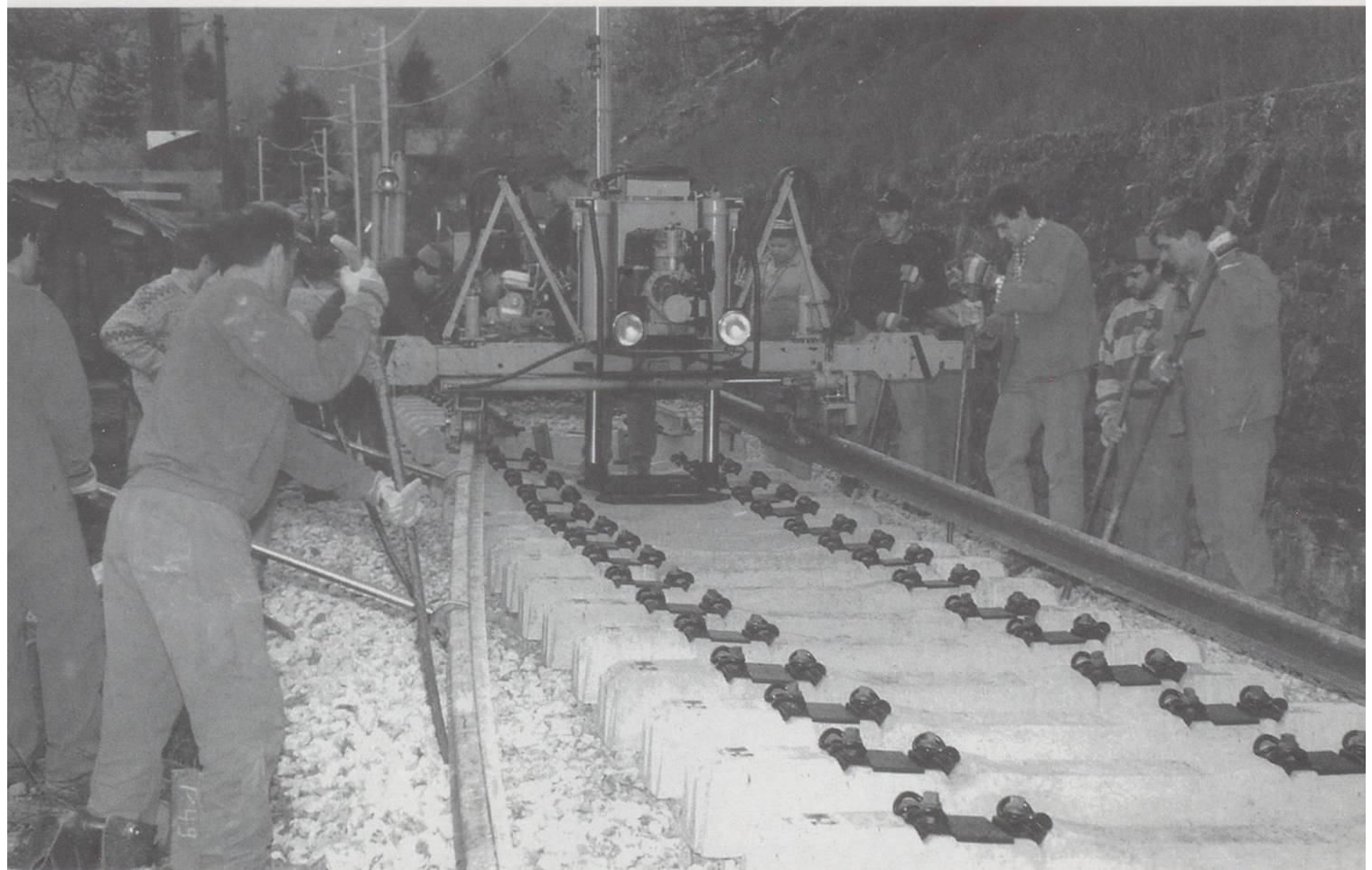
Below: The train and crane have moved further down the track, the new sleepers await the new track visible on the right next to the ballast. The tracks of the crane are wider than the sleepers allowing free movement.

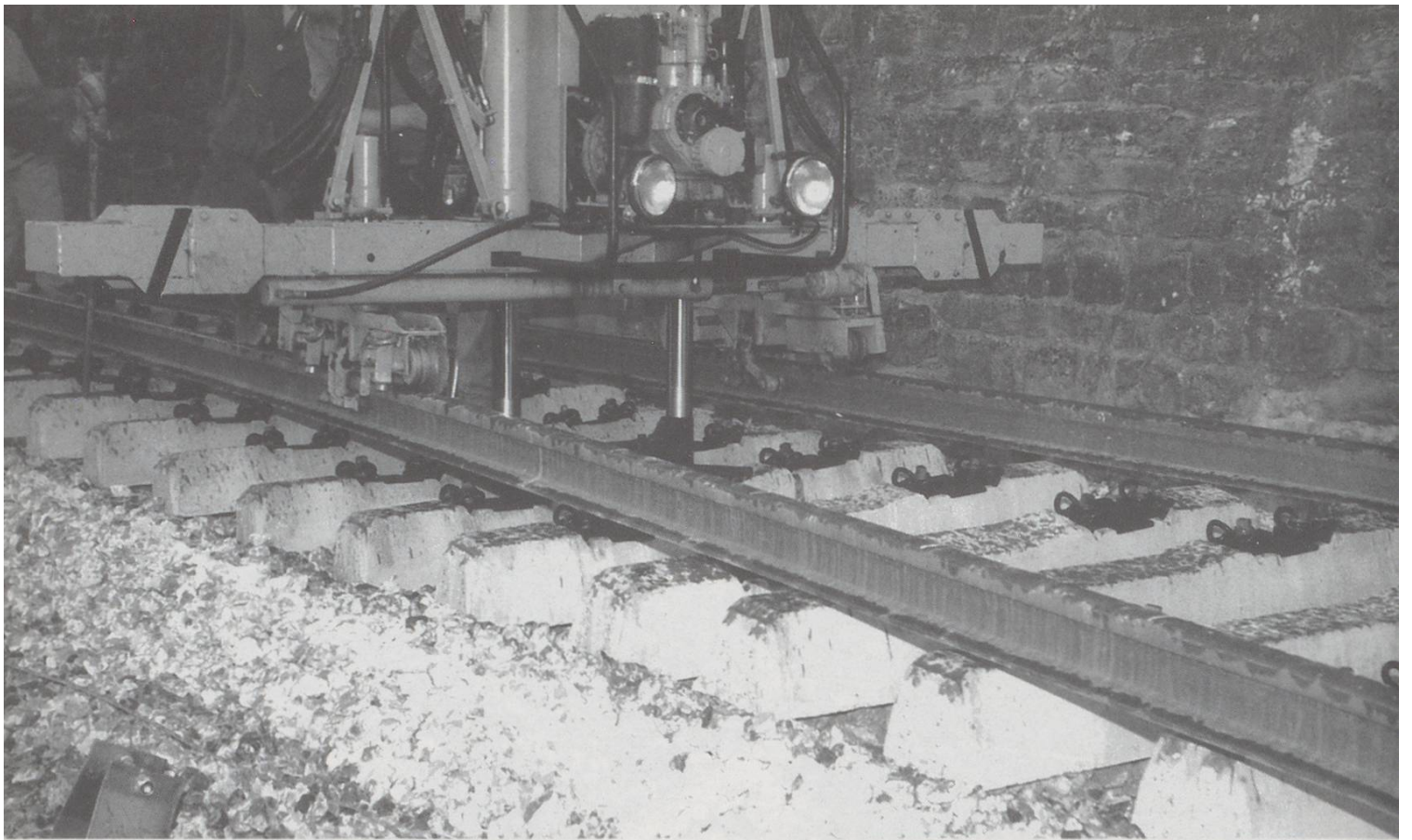




Above: The next strange looking collection of machinery awaits the cranes to move along laying the new sleepers.

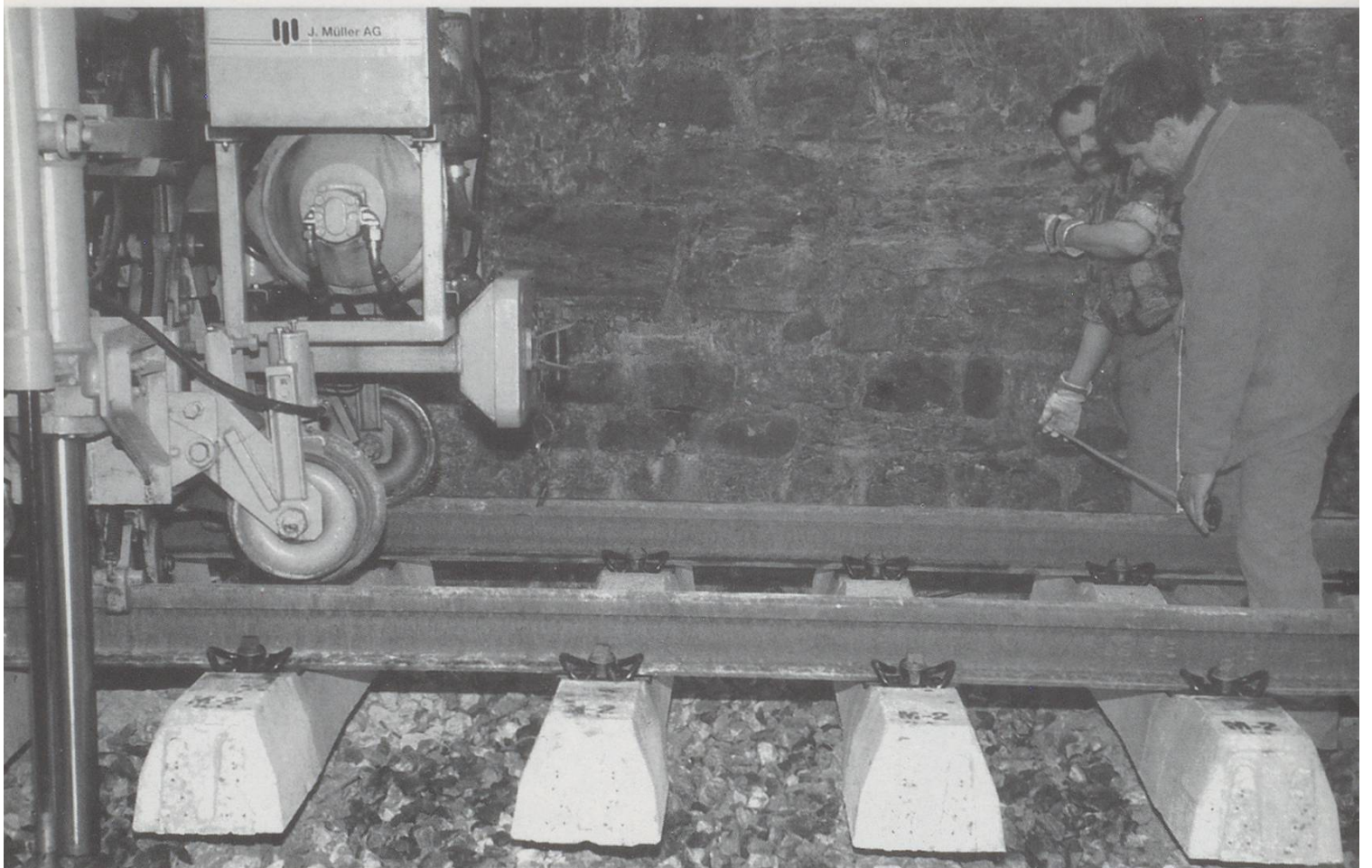
Below: The manual effort now begins, many long steel bars lift and push the new rails into position the small machine uses hydraulics to lift the rails onto the metal chairs.

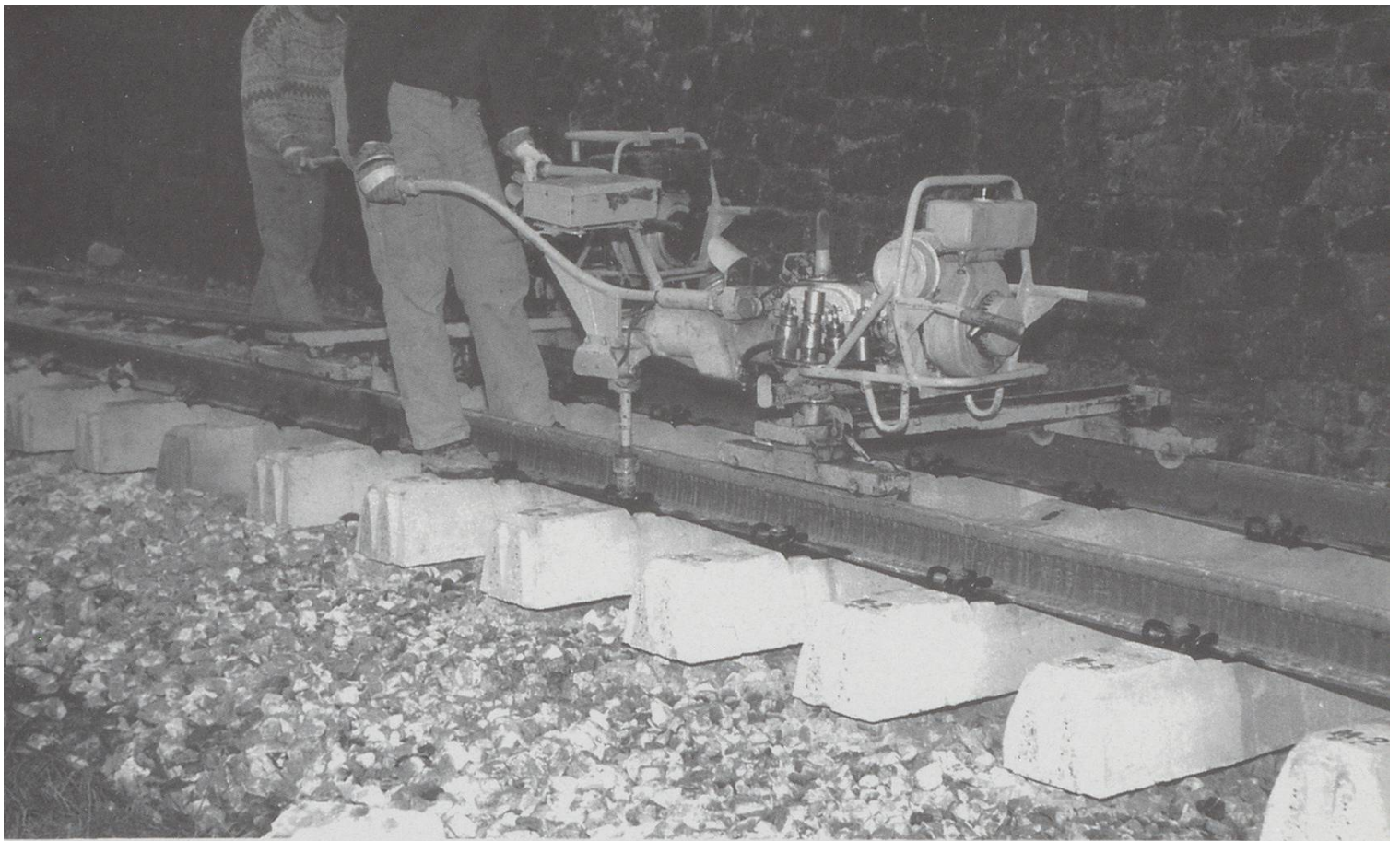




Above: The small machine uses hydraulics to lift the rails onto the metal chairs.

Below: The importance of placing the track back in exactly the same position as it came from not only affects the clearance from walls etc. but also where the pantograph connects with the overhead line.





Above: These two small machines move along tightening the bolts holding down the rails.

Below: The ballast cleaning and replacing train waits to follow on behind when the track crews have finished.

