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100+ AND STILL GOING STRONG

No 54 is working on the WAB at Lauterbrunnen .

Photos: Bryan Stone

It would be interesting to learn how many of the thousands of people who use the Wengernalpbahn Bahn (WAB) from Lauterbrunnen to visit the eponymous resort, or ride up to Kleine Scheidegg and down to Grindelwald, realise that some of the motive power keeping this 800mm-gauge rack railway operating is over 100 years old. At Wilderswil some of the same family of engines are still running on the Schynige Platte Bahn (SPB). See *Swiss Express* No.108.

Although dating from the electrification of the WAB and SPB in 1907 and 1908 respectively a number of the box-like 4-wheel rack locomotives developed by SBB and Alioth (later part of Brown Boveri), are still at work. They have become almost ubiquitous with their mountain lines. Travellers are so used to seeing them that their extreme technical and historical interest is overlooked. Number 54, one of the very first batch of eleven locos for the WAB, spent last summer as the Lauterbrunnen station shunter. One or two others may be spotted around on works trains and in the depot at Lauterbrunnen, where No.65 (the youngest from 1929) was to be seen in early July 2011. There is now seldom one at Grindelwald Grund, and except for being scheduled on very occasional snow-plough work they are also rare at Kleine Scheidegg (where one always played at station pilot). With a maximum speed of 12kph the six remaining are now too slow to fit into the regular timetable (the modern units can operate at 28kph), but a tip is that they usually have to turn out on the day of the Lauberhorn race. See the June 2011 edition of *Swiss Express.*

Quite different is the situation at Wilderswil where the four SPB originals (Nos. 11-14, and the WAB 'cast-offs' (Nos.16-20 & 61-63), run the entire service. This corresponds to a specific decision by the joint management of the Jungfrau Railways that the SPB is the 'Nostalgic Line'. Since it only runs during the summer (it can hardly afford to do anything else) this is a good idea that has engendered a good public response. The SPB is also very close to Interlaken hence lending itself to half-day excursions. In the back of the depot at Wilderswil is H2/3 No. 5 built in 1894, the SPB's last steam engine that is similar to the veterans of the BRB. It is still steamed up once a month for a public trip up to Schynige Platte, and it is also the loco which powers the works train that erects and dismantles the overhead cables each spring and autumn. But although No.5 is a splendid engine, it is the fleet of truly ancient four-wheel electric engines which, together with the nostalgic rolling stock, makes the SPB special. Just catch the driver oiling round on a hot day, with a curiously prickly electrical smell and a humming noise around the great motors and cogwheels housed in the casing, and you will understand. A standing joke for tourists is that they have to order specially the 'old electricity' which these veteran engines need. On the descent a surprise for the un-initiated is when the pantograph goes down. The train is being held by a resistance brake, and the heat shimmers over the roof as the little engine joggles over the short rails - on hot days the drivers run with all the doors open!

An SPB engine and its train at the summit at Schynige Platte.