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The oldest station building in the world?

Ron Smith

Looking down on Grafenort as an Engelberg to Luzern train runs through. PHOTO: RON SMITH

INSET: The station in days gone by

I have always had a liking for the Luzern Stans Engelberg Bahn. It used to be the Stans Engelberg Bahn (StEB) that connected with the lake steamers to Luzern. Then a bridge and tunnel were built to connect it with the SBB's Brünigbahn at Hergiswil and so it could run to and from Luzern. Today it is part of the Zentralbahn, having merged with the Brünigbahn in 2005. It has always innovated and worked at serving its local communities, as well as tourists, very efficiently. The upper section of the route, between Grafenort and Engelberg, has always been a problem. The road and railway climb up the side of a very unstable mountain. This section has also needed rack assistance. Finally a new tunnel has been opened through the mountain, and trains now glide effortlessly upwards. In January 2015 I travelled along the line, but made a stop at Grafenort, now the last station before Engelberg. The current station is a long single platform with a "bus stop" type shelter with a ticket machine, to the north of a level crossing. This was built in 2011. The other side of the crossing is where the station used to be, with a siding and also a "Herrenhaus". This imposing building was built in 1690 by the enormous monastery in Engelberg. (There is a whole story about the founding of the monastery, and the Angel Mountain, but it's not relevant to the LSE). The Herrenhaus was used as a summer holiday retreat for the monks - today it is used for conferences, exhibitions, etc. - see www.grafenort.ch. The old StEB rented a room (or maybe rooms?) at the front right hand corner of this ancient building as a ticket office, waiting room and railway office. The area was entered through a small door cut into the old building where a window obviously once was. This window has now been reinstated as can be seen in the modern photo.



This must surely make it the oldest building ever used for a railway station in the world – doesn't it? If you know of any other, please let me know, via the editor. Maybe this is a candidate for the Guinness Book of Records?

I love Switzerland, as there are so many interesting little corners to explore and to discover things such as this. Incidentally at Grafenort, just across the road from the station, is an unusual little chapel that is well worth exploring. The keys for it are obtainable from the nearby hotel. This, along with the chapel, seemed to be all there is to Grafenort! In the hotel, where I had a very good lunch between trains for a very reasonable price, the proprietor offered me a room for just CHF58 per night, which he said was very competitive with Engelberg where, especially in the skiing season, prices could be as high as CHF200 per night – see www.gasthaus-grafenort.com. I made my way back down to the station to await the hourly "Luzern Engelberg Express" (Express because it does not stop between Luzern and Stans) and noticed in the shelter a notice saying that the SBB had increased the fare between Grafenort and Engelberg enormously, and if you also objected to this exorbitant increase contact the person on the notice who was organising a protest. Knowing the way that Swiss democracy works, if sufficient support is gained, I am sure that they will have their way and the fare will come down! 