

HEAD FOR THE HILLS

A PHOTOGRAPHIC TRIP TO THE BERNER OBERLAND

SWITZERLAND 10 - 15 JULY 2013

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A
RAILOGRAPHY
PRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

Above:

Schynige Platte Bahn No.19 descended the mountain near Breitlauenen on 14 July 2013.

The mountain railways around Interlaken have long been popular with tourists but are ignored by the majority of railway photographers. Despite a lack of loco haulage on most lines, the stunning locations and great variety of traction and liveries make a visit worthwhile. I visited the area for six days in mid July 2013 but found the lure of the main lines irresistible and spent a good proportion of the trip photographing BLS Re4/4s and the rapidly fading ZB class 110. The mountain lines weren't completely ignored, with productive photo sessions on the Wengeralpbahn, Jungfraubahn and Schynige Platte Bahn. All the photos in this report were taken during the trip.

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Flights from Heathrow to Zürich and back were with SWISS and accommodation was arranged through booking.com. I stayed at the Hotel Bel-Air Eden, a couple of minutes walk from Grindelwald station. With the north face of the Eiger outside my bedroom window and breakfast starting at 06:30, I couldn't have had a better base for the trip.

I used a first class Berner Oberland Pass to get around while in Switzerland, buying normal tickets from Zürich to Luzern at the beginning of the trip and from Bern back to Zürich at the end. The price reduction on the pass for holders of Halbtax (half price) cards was almost as much as the cost of a monthly Halbtax card itself and when the saving on the normal tickets was factored in, it was clearly the most economic option. I bought the Zürich to Luzern ticket on the web and printed it before leaving home, avoiding the need to queue at the ticket machines at Zürich Flughafen, well worth it as it turned out.

Below:

Zentralbahn's 110.003, built in 1941, approached Meiringen with IR2223, the 13:04 Interlaken Ost - Luzern, on 14 July 2013.

The pass covered the BLS lines between Bern, Brig, Zweisimmen, Interlaken and Luzern, the Zentralbahn between Interlaken and Luzern, all the Jungfrau region lines, except the Jungfrau Bahn itself, and also the Briener Rothorn Bahn. It also covered various boats, cable cars, funiculars and buses and was good value by Swiss standards, particularly when the fares the mountain railways normally charge are considered.





FROM BERKS TO BERGS

Above:

Jungfraubahn BDhe4/8 EMUs 214 and 211 worked the third section of train 543, the 09:30 Kleine Scheidegg - Jungfrauoch, up the grade towards Eigergletscher on 13 July 2013.

After only having a couple of hours sleep the night before catching the 06:00 Swiss flight from Heathrow to Zürich, I didn't really notice a lot on the journey from Zürich Flughafen to Luzern on Wednesday 10 July, just 460s and various types of EMU.

It was a relief to find the 10:55 Luzern – Interlaken IR formed of proper coaches and waiting to leave behind a class 101. The new EMUs that were expected to take over these trains started to arrive last autumn and there was a risk that loco haulage might have finished already. The Engelberg IR on the next platform was a push-pull set with a class 101 at the country end. Local services seen between Luzern and Giswil were all worked by class 130 or class 160 EMUs. At Meiringen, 72 year old 110.003 was waiting to take my train forward to Interlaken.



Zentralbahn's 110.003 approached Niederried with IR2226 from Luzern on 12 July 2013.

Almost all the photo locations along this scenic stretch of line have been ruined by additional poles.

ZB INTERLAKEN - MEIRINGEN

In addition to travelling over this part of the metre gauge Brünig route on the way to Interlaken on the Wednesday, I spent much of Thursday, a couple of hours on Saturday evening and all of Sunday afternoon on this section of line.

The hourly local service between Meiringen and Interlaken Ost was being worked by class 130 EMUs, with 130.001 and 130.010 sharing the duties for the duration of my stay.

The situation with the Interlaken – Luzern InterRegio service was more complicated. All four of the new class 150 seven-car EMUs were on the line but 150.101 was filled with sandbags and parked at Meiringen on the two occasions I

saw it. That left three units in traffic, covering three of the five turns, for most of my visit.

The departures from Luzern at 05:38, 08:55, 10:55, 13:55 and 15:55 and from Interlaken at 08:04, 11:04, 13:04, 16:04 and 18:04 were still formed of conventional coaches and hauled by a class 101 from Luzern to Meiringen and v.v. and by a class 110 from Meiringen to Interlaken Ost and v.v. The timing of the hauled trains was such that a single loco (or motor luggage van to be strictly correct) could handle all the runs between Meiringen and Interlaken and 110.003 performed these duties throughout my visit. Three other class 110s were visible at Meiringen, 110.001, out of traffic, 110.021, clearly still in use

but never seen to move off the depot, and 110.022, parked behind the shed but possibly still in service as it didn't have the "Ausser Betrieb" stickers that usually adorn withdrawn stock on the Zentralbahn.

On the Sunday, 150.104 was also parked up at Meiringen and the 11:55 from Luzern and 14:04 from Interlaken Ost were worked by 101.967 on an Engelberg push-pull set. The loco was at the Meiringen end of the set as would be expected.

No freight traffic was anticipated or seen.

PHOTOGRAPHY

I'd travelled over the Brünig twice before, in 1975 and in 2000 but hadn't managed to identify any good photo positions between Luzern and Meiringen. This trip was no different, lovely scenery but nowhere seemed quite right for a

picture. The Meiringen – Interlaken section is less spectacular but far more photogenic and was where the rarest traction was to be seen. I'd found some superb positions around Niederried in 2000, looking out over the Brienersee to the mountains behind, and looked forward to doing those shots with a class 110 on the IRs. Unfortunately the overhead equipment has been reinforced since then with most of the gaps between poles being filled with other poles, leaving very few gaps through which to take a picture. The one spot that remained completely clear was attempted on three evenings but was clouded out on each occasion.

Further east, between Brienz and Meiringen, the light was better behaved and several pleasing shots of 110.003 were obtained, complementing those I got of 110.021 and 110.022 last October. Apart from the persistent evening cloud around Niederried, there was a lot of sunshine and most trains passed in good light.

New Order on the Brünig: A ten coach formation comprising 150.103 and 160.001 accelerated away from Meiringen with IR2224, the 12:55 from Luzern to Interlaken Ost on 14 July 2013.





110.003 scurried east from Brienz with IR2223 on 11 July 2013.



130.010 set off from Meiringen for Interlaken on 14 July 2013.



101.967 was a pleasant surprise on IR2225, seen approaching Meiringen on 14 July 2013.

BLS INTERLAKEN - SPIEZ



BLS Re4/4 195 passed Faulensee with RE3127, the 15:08 Interlaken Ost - Zweisimmen semi-fast on 15 July 2013.

Casual observers could be forgiven for not realising that this was a BLS line. The most prominent services are SBB's InterCity trains from Interlaken Ost to Bern and Basel SBB, formed of class 460s at the west end of push-pull rakes. A surprising number of DB ICEs also work services on the route, some only running as far as Basel, while others go as far into Germany as Berlin. Their use on internal Swiss services is presumably to equalise mileages with the SBB stock used on the Zürich - München and Zürich - Stuttgart routes.

BLS operates regional services over the line using four-car class 566 EMUs on the hourly all

stations trains, although one was seen formed of a pair of class 525 "NiNas". Some RE services also run but they're unusual in starting fairly late in the day. The first train from Interlaken Ost leaves at 09:08 and the next at 13:08, then they're two-hourly until 17:08. The first train from Spiez doesn't leave until 12:25 and they then run two-hourly until 18:25. These trains are through services to/from Zweisimmen, worked by BLS Re4/4 "Brownies" at the west end of 6 or 7 coach push-pull sets. The unusual timings are because the primary purpose of these trains is to bridge the gap between the ZB and MOB portions of the Luzern – Montreux Golden Pass route.

Freight traffic is handled by a couple of pick-up goods trains on Mondays to Fridays, worked by an SBB Cargo Re6/6. The main source of traffic appears to be the Rigips plant west of Leissigen, which sends out gypsum in Fals bogie hoppers and very smart red or white tank cars. The afternoon working is due to leave Spiez at 15:19 and arrive back at 17:00 and was seen on a couple of occasions. Although timings varied considerably from day to day, the return working always ran earlier than scheduled.

PHOTOGRAPHY

This was limited to two visits to Faulensee, the classic location a couple of km east of Spiez, on the Wednesday and Monday afternoons. Few trains stop at Faulensee, so the most practical way to get there is a 20 minute walk from Spiez, passing the BLS shed on the way. SBB and BLS push-pull trains run with the loco at the west end, ideal for the afternoon shot with the Thunersee and mountains behind. Otherwise the line is difficult for photography, squeezed into a narrow, crowded corridor between the lake shoreline and the mountains.



SBB Cargo's Re6/6 11625 climbed past Faulensee with the afternoon freight from Leissigen on 15 July 2013.



195 rolled along rural Simmental near Boltigen with RE3119 from Spiez to Zweisimmen on 12 July 2013.

BLS SPIEZ - ZWEISIMMEN

The Zweisimmen branch runs along Simmental from the main line junction at Spiez to an end on connection with the MOB at Zweisimmen.

Train services consist of hourly locals and two-hourly REs. Most locals were worked by class 535 "Lötschberger" EMUs although a couple of trains operated with either a pair of 535s or a 535 and a class 525 "NiNa" in multiple. At Spiez the units from Zweisimmen were combined with RE services from Brig, also worked by 535s, and ran through to Bern.

RE services run two hourly for most of the day. A handful of early or late trains were operated by class 566 EMUs but most were worked by BLS

Re4/4 "Brownies" at the west end of 6 or 7 coach push-pull sets. A number of these trains run through from Zweisimmen to Interlaken or v.v. linking MOB Golden Pass services with ZB trains to Luzern.

There is some freight traffic on the line but not a lot. A freight is booked to leave Spiez for Zweisimmen around 13:00 on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, arriving back around 16:00. The train was seen three times, always towards the west end of the line, and on each occasion consisted of an SBB Cargo class 843 diesel hauling a single bogie flat loaded with domestic waste containers. There was overnight track work on the line at the

time of my visit and a number of daytime positioning moves were seen, taking track machines or ballast wagons to where they were needed next. Two centre cab B'-B' diesel locos were being used, sometimes double headed, a BLS class 843 and a class 847 (CFD Montmirail 2004) belonging to Bussigny based track contractor Scheuchzer.

PHOTOGRAPHY

All day Friday and Monday morning were spent on the line. A number of good locations were

found with the best around Weissenburg, Boltigen and Grubenwald. As usual, a fair bit of walking was needed to get to the photo locations from the nearest station, or in the case of Grubenwald, a halt with a poor service, the next to nearest station. At least the network of footpaths made the walks relatively pleasant, away from the worst of the road traffic.

I'd last visited the line in 2000, when the last Ae4/4s still worked some passenger services. As well as the change to Re4/4s the locos are now at the opposite end of the push-pull sets, opening up a completely new range of possibilities.



167 crossed the Buuschenbachbrücke west of Weissenburg with RE3123, the 13:08 from Interlaken Ost to Zweisimmen on 12 July 2013.

Top Right: 566.235 substituted for a failed Re4/4 on RE3115, the 09:08 Interlaken Ost - Zweisimmen on 15 July 2013.



Main Picture: 195 passed Grubenwald with RE3119, the 11:36 from Spiez to Zweisimmen on 15 July 2013.

Lower Left: Lötschberger 535.116 approached Grubenwald with train 6228, the 16:00 Zweisimmen - Spiez stopper, on 12 July 2013

BLS BERN – BRIG

A few trains on this route were seen passing Spiez. Passenger services were entirely predictable with class 460s and push-pull sets on IC workings and class 535 “Lötschberger” EMUs on Bern – Brig RE services. ICs to or from Basel appeared to run with the loco at the north end, just like the Interlaken - Basel ICs, while those to or from Zürich or beyond had the loco at the south end. A couple of EC services were seen, worked by the wrong kind of 610s, ETR610 tilting EMUs, not the almost extinct Ae6/6 electric locos.

Freights were more interesting with SBB Cargo Re6/6s and Re10/10s, BLS classes Re4/4 (425), 485 and 486 and Crossrail class 436 being seen. Of particular note were 436.111, a loco that had been out of traffic awaiting repairs for some time, on a northbound intermodal and Re6/6 11646, one of the last in green livery with round headlights, on the Leissigen goods.

Below:

SBB Cargo's Re6/6 11646 passed Spiez with the afternoon freight to Leissigen on 10 July 2013, overtaking BLS 485.008 on a southbound Ralpin RoLa service.



BOB BERNER OBERLAND BAHN

This metre gauge line is owned and operated by Berner Oberland Bahn AG and runs 8km south from Interlaken Ost to a junction at Zweilütschinen where the branches diverge to Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen, a further 11 and 4km respectively. There are rack sections on both branches but the main line north of Zweilütschinen is adhesion only.

Trains are operated by motor coaches hauling push-pull sets in the southbound direction and pushing them northbound. Services run combined from Interlaken to Zweilütschinen where they split and continue independently to Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen. Each train has its own driver all the way from Interlaken Ost and the operation to combine or split them is very slick, taking only a matter of seconds to complete.

The trains themselves are very impressive for a short metre gauge line, consisting of seven coaches each, including the motor coach, making the combined trains fourteen coaches long. Each seven coach set consists of a mixture of conventional metre gauge rolling stock and modern, boxy, three-coach articulated sets. Two classes of motor coach are in use, both classified ABeh4/4, with six units built in 1965 and three to a more angular, modernised design dating from 1986. There didn't seem to be any pattern to whether old or new units were used on any particular service and, if anything, the old units worked more than their fair share of trains.

PHOTOGRAPHY

There didn't appear to be many photo positions on the line and I had other priorities so didn't actually take any pictures on the BOB line. The older motor coaches are quite photogenic as is the BOB's blue and yellow colour scheme so I'll have to work on that one.



Wengernalpbahn motor coach 107 climbed through the woods above Wengen on 13 July 2013.



WAB EMUs 142 & 141 approached Kleine Scheidegg with train 439 from Grindelwald early on the morning of 13 July 2013. The Mönch (4107m) and Jungfrau (4158m) dominate the view.

WAB WENGERNALPBAHN

The Wengernalpbahn is a 19km, 800mm gauge rack line running from Lauterbrunnen to Grindelwald. The summit is at Kleine Scheidegg, approximately halfway along the line, 2061m above sea level and at the lowest point on the ridge between the Eiger and the Lauberhorn. The WAB is effectively operated as two separate sections with no regular through running between one side and the other at Kleine Scheidegg. Trains connect with BOB services at

Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen and with Jungfraubahn services at Kleine Scheidegg.

One interesting and unusual aspect is the operation of convoys of trains. Each service indicated in the timetable could operate as one or more separate trains, running at very short headways without the benefit of signals to keep them apart. I can only assume that radio was used to prevent collisions. The trains always ran in their convoys at half hourly intervals, even

when one or more was empty stock or a special for a tour group.

Four generations of rolling stock were in use, ranging from 1947 built motor coach plus trailer sets to three-car articulated EMUs dating from 2004. Three long trains covered the basic half-hourly Grindelwald – Kleine Scheidegg service, two formed of pairs of 2004 built EMUs and the third of a pair of 1988 built 2-car EMUs with a two-car trailer set. When extra capacity was required, one or more of the 1947 motor coach plus trailer sets would be turned out and run in convoy with the newer units. The older units

always preceded the newer ones whether going up or coming down.

There was also a half hourly service on the Lauterbrunnen side but it tended to operate with more, shorter trains than on the Grindelwald side. There would always be a relatively modern unit, either one of the 1988 built 2-car EMUs or a 1970 built motor coach, propelling two trailers and occasionally one but usually two of the 1947 motor coaches, each propelling two trailers. The line from Lauterbrunnen has a ruling gradient of 19%, as opposed to 25% on the Grindelwald side, hence the ability to take additional trailers.

1970 built motor coach 120 propelled a pair of trailers up the hill from Lauterbrunnen on 13 July 2013. The Schilthorn (2970m) can be seen on the extreme right with the 3436m Gspaltenhorn the highest of the mountains on the left.





Above: The oldest motor coach on the WAB, 1947 built 101 descended from Kleine Scheidegg with a couple of trailers on 13 July 2013. This empty stock working was the first of three trains running in convoy as train 342, the 10:31 to Lauterbrunnen.

PHOTOGRAPHY

I only spent the Saturday on the Wengeralpbahn so traffic levels may be different on other days. The impression I got from seeing trains arriving and leaving Grindelwald during the rest of my visit was that the line was always busy in good weather in midsummer.

A few good photo spots were found on both sides of the summit at Kleine Scheidegg and I'm sure there are more, for instance on the initial

part of the climb from Grindelwald Grund. This is definitely wide angle lens territory with most of the shots seen here taken at focal lengths between 30mm and 40mm on a full frame DSLR. Even so, it can be difficult to keep the mountain tops in the frame at all times.

The best positions were just below Kleine Scheidegg on the Grindelwald side in the afternoon with either the Eiger or Wetterhorn in the background, depending on where you stood. Unfortunately the clouds prevented me from

getting these shots at their best, despite spending four frustrating hours trying.

On the Lauterbrunnen side there's a pleasant 3-arch bridge not far below Kleine Scheidegg but you have to go a fair distance below Wengernalp station before finding a well lit shot with a good jaggy mountain background. Both these positions are good for the light mid to late morning. The line then goes into forest for most of the rest of the way down to Wengen.

Well signposted footpaths parallel both lines, making access to the line fairly straightforward. The paths are very steep for much of their length

and even going downhill is hard work in places. Fortunately the surfaces are quite good, which helps enormously. Starting at the bottom and working your way up is not recommended unless you're ultra fit. Far better to let the train do the work up the hill and then walk down.

Despite the lack of loco haulage, the superb scenery, good morning light and variety of traction made this a very enjoyable and rewarding line to photograph. I will certainly be going back for more, particularly the Eiger and Wetterhorn shots that escaped this time round.

Below: 1988 built 2-car EMU 131 descended the 19% grade between Wengernalp and Baarwald with the third section of train 344, the 11:01 from Kleine Scheidegg to Lauterbrunnen on 13 July 2013. Convoys always ran with the older units leading and the newest unit at the back.



JB JUNGFRAUBAHN

Despite being under the same ownership as the Wengernalpbahn and being reliant on it for connections to the outside world, the Jungfraubahn has a different track gauge (metre vs 800mm), a different rack system (Strub vs Riggenbach) and a very different electrical system (1125 volt 3 phase AC vs 1500 volt DC).

The line runs in the open for the first 2km, climbing steeply to Eigergletscher before diving into a tunnel for the remaining 7.3km up to Jungfrauoch, located at 3454m (11332ft) above sea level in the saddle between the peaks of the Mönch and the Jungfrau. Jungfrauoch's claim to fame is being the highest station in Europe, although it's still a little way below Tanggula (5068m) on the Qinghai - Tibet Railway in China.

Trains operate on a similar basis to the Wengernalpbahn with a basic half hourly service provided by convoys of two or three individual trains. As on the WAB the older motor coaches, dating from 1955 and each coupled to a single driving trailer, lead the convoy, followed by a pair of 1992 or 2002 built 2-car EMUs bringing up the rear.



Above: One of the Jungfraubahn's 1950s built motor coaches, 204, propelled the second section of train 541, the 09:00 to Jungfrauoch, away from Kleine Scheidegg on 13 July 2013. The first section can just be seen at the extreme left of the picture, running through the snowsheds below Eigergletscher. The Jungfrau itself fills the top of the frame.

Two of the JungfrauBahn's modern EMUs, 216 and 215, worked the third section of train 539, the 08:30 to Jungfrauoch, up the ramp between Kleine Scheidegg and Eigergletscher on 13 July 2013. Above the train towers the peak of the Silberhorn, at 3695m, one of the lower summits of the Jungfrau massif.



PHOTOGRAPHY

There are a few good locations on the open air section of the Jungfraubahn but the lighting is difficult as the line heads north-south and the jaggy mountain backgrounds are straight into the sun for much of the day. A footpath runs parallel to the line from Kleine Scheidegg to Eigergletscher and gives access to a couple of good early morning shots. Afternoon pics look more difficult as the land drops away steeply on the west side and the inevitable afternoon cloud made it pointless to try anything on the day I visited.

***Below:** Some of the 1950s designed motor coaches have been modernised and painted in the JB's current smart red and yellow livery. Motor coach 202 worked the second section of train 545 up the grade from Kleine Scheidegg on 13 July 2013.*

The Jungfraubahn is one of the few lines still using a three-phase electrification system. There are two overhead wires in parallel and each pantograph has two collectors, side by side. The third phase is provided by the running rails.

In the days before power electronics, three phase systems had some advantages over conventional DC or single-phase AC systems, particularly on steeply graded lines, but quickly fell out of favour on the main line, except in Italy where the system lasted into the 1970s. Ironically many modern electric locomotives and EMUs have three-phase traction motors, fed from a single-phase AC or DC supply via variable frequency inverters.



SPB SCHYNIGE PLATTE BAHN

The SPB is a 7km 800mm gauge, 1500V DC, rack line running from Wilderswil, on the BOB line 3km south of Interlaken Ost, to a station near the summit of the the Schynige Platte, a 1987m high mountain at the west end of the ridge that runs along the south side of the Brienersee. The line is owned by Berner Oberland Bahnen AG.

Unlike the other lines in the Jungfrau region, the SPB uses locomotives, tiny 4-wheel electrics built as early as 1910 and substantially in original condition after a century of service. The oldest locos are former WAB machines, transferred to the SPB at various times between 1964 and

1996, while the newest were built for the SPB at the time of electrification in 1914.

One interesting feature of the SPB is that trains run downhill with the pantograph lowered. It is assumed that some form of rheostatic braking is used as friction braking would be hard pressed to cope with the demands of a line with 1 in 4 gradients. There was a hatch on the roof of each

Below: Locos 12 and 13 approached Breitlauenen with the second and third sections of train 640, the 10:21 from Schynige Platte, on 14 July 2013. In the background the Thunersee can be seen with Faulensee and Spiez visible in the distance.



Loco 13, a mere 99 years old, descended to Breitlauenen with the third section of train 640, the 10:21 from Schynige Platte on 14 July 2013. Note the open cover on the loco roof and the lowered pantograph.



locomotive that always seemed to be closed when going uphill and open when coming down and that may be where the braking resistors are located.

Trains are formed of a loco, at the downhill end, plus two coaches. The locos are single ended with a cab at the downhill end. The conductor has a cab at the uphill end of the the lead coach and is in radio communication with the driver on the loco. There is no physical control from the conductor's cab. Trains operate at 40-minute intervals from early morning to late afternoon. As on the other mountain lines, convoys of two or three trains operate whenever demand exceeds the capacity of a single train, which appeared to be most of the time on the sunny Sunday morning when I visited.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The best shot on the line is a late afternoon picture just below Schynige Platte with the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau behind but, as the four previous afternoons had been cloudy in the mountains, I didn't even attempt it. Further down the hill, near the intermediate station of Breitlauenen, there were some excellent morning shots looking down over the Thunersee and Brienersee.

Like the Wengernalpbahn, the SPB is paralleled by footpaths but they don't follow the track closely and are very rough and steep in places. Trips and falls are a distinct possibility if you don't concentrate on where you're putting your feet.

BRB BRIENZ ROTHORN BAHN

The BRB is a 7.6km long, 800mm gauge rack line and is unusual among Swiss mountain railways in not being electrified. Diesels were introduced in the 1970s but didn't prove popular with visitors so the line bought four modern, 0-4-2 rack tanks in the 1990s. These are remarkable locomotives, designed to be thermally efficient and capable of operation by one-person crews. They are, arguably, the most advanced steam locos ever to get beyond the experimental stage and into normal traffic. The new steam locos work the majority of services on the line but a couple of the older steam locos and the diesels are also used at busier times.

The line is also unusual for not adopting a regular interval timetable, although departures from Brienz aren't far from hourly. Services don't connect very well with ZB trains at Brienz either. Many of the BRB arrivals miss the connection to Luzern by less than ten minutes, entailing a wait of almost an hour.

Like the SPB, locos push two-coach trains up the hill and run in convoys when demand warrants it.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Although I travelled over the line with one of the new engines on the Thursday morning, it soon became obvious that it wasn't the time of year for photography. The reason was an almost complete lack of exhaust. Even on the upper levels, where it was cool as well as humid, there was no condensing steam to be seen, only the

very lightest oil-smoke haze coming from the chimney.

I had thought that efficiency would mean no noise either but I was very wrong. The new locos have a very sharp and rather loud exhaust that sounds particularly fine echoing off the mountainsides. And it's solid thrash all the way to the top!

There are a number of potential photo positions on the climb but possibly not as many as would be expected. The line climbs towards the north so the best views are looking straight into the sun for much of the day and there aren't many trains in the early morning or late afternoon when the light is at its best.

This is another line that's worth a second visit, probably in September or October when the air should be cooler and there might even be an exhaust from the engines. I'd certainly recommend taking a sound recorder or video camera, which would be able to cope better with noisy but clagless engines than a still camera.

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www.railography.co.uk

BACK TO BERKS VIA BERN

The journey back to the UK involved another first for me, my first ever trip on a DB ICE set. ICE 1082, an Interlaken Ost - Basel SBB service, was taken from Spiez to Bern. From Bern, an SBB IC took me directly to Zürich Flughafen. IC735 (Genève Aéroport - St. Gallen) was itself unusual, consisting of two push-pull sets coupled driving trailer to driving trailer with a class 460 at each end, delivering between them slightly more power than a single DB class 103.

A Siemens Vectron was parked in the stabling sidings at the north end of Bern station, with a class 540 motor coach alongside to provide a contrast between old and new. A single grubby

green Ae6/6 was stabled at the east end of RB Limmattal, the only one seen all trip, and a modern SBB Cargo loco, probably a class 482, was waiting at Altstätten with a string of stone hoppers.

The remainder of the journey was uneventful, with the SWISS flight to Heathrow departing and arriving on time. Even the queues at UK passport control were refreshingly short.

Below: DB ICE set 401.078 was photographed at Faulensee on ICE277, approaching the end of its long journey from Berlin Ostbf to Interlaken Ost. This was the set I caught from Spiez to Bern just over an hour later.





Not quite the oldest traction unit photographed on the trip. SPB's No.20 was built in 1911, a year after No.16, which was also photographed on 14 July. The veteran electric is seen here propelling away from Breitlauenen with the first section of train 641.

COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this trip was to broaden my coverage of Swiss railways to include some mountain lines. I picked the Berner Oberland area as there was plenty of variety of traction and liveries, amazing mountain scenery and a ticket that covered everything I might want to do, including escaping to photograph some main line action if I got bored with the mountain railways. As it turned out, there was nothing boring about the mountain lines and even the WAB's boxy modern EMUs looked good against a rocky mountain backdrop.

At the time the trip was conceived, I'd assumed that the new class 150 and 160 EMUs that were being delivered last autumn would have taken over the entire Luzern – Interlaken service and the 70-year-old class 110 motor luggage vans would have been retired months ago. A few days

before leaving it was reported that three of the five turns were still being covered by loco and coaches with class 110 haulage between Meiringen and Interlaken. Then there was the realisation that the use of BLS Re4/4 "Brownies" on passenger trains might also be short lived due to the delivery of new EMUs. The last two passenger duties for the class were on RE trains between Interlaken and Zweisimmen. I couldn't visit Interlaken and ignore what might be a last chance to photograph these two threatened operations nearby, both of them within the area covered by the Berner Oberland Pass.

On the subject of new EMUs, I travelled a fair distance on the BLS class 535 "Lötschberger" units on the Zweisimmen line and found them spacious and comfortable, in first class at least. The ZB class 160 I travelled on last year was

also comfortable as were the class 130s I used on this trip. The same no doubt applies to the new class 150s. Compared to some of the ugly units that have appeared over the past few years, these EMUs are all fairly photogenic as well but what they lack is opening windows. For some reason the scenery looks a lot better when not viewed from inside a sterile, air conditioned, plastic tube through tinted glass. Builders and operators of trains on scenic routes should take note and provide at least some fresh air accommodation or risk alienating potential customers.

The weather plays a critical role on any photographic trip and this one was blessed with plenty of sunshine and sweltering temperatures.

There was a build up of cloud over the mountains every afternoon that influenced where I went and when, pushing me in the direction of the ZB and BLS lines almost every lunchtime. The mornings were cloudless though and the sun shone around 80% of the time overall, well above average for my recent European trips.

Fortunately there was enough time and enough sunlight to cover the BLS and ZB as well as the mountain railways and a satisfyingly varied selection of pictures was obtained, as you'll know if you've read this far. It wasn't difficult to convince myself that I'll need to go back and do it all again at some stage, particularly the afternoon shots on the Schynige Platte, Wengernalp and Mürren lines.

The most photographed traction unit of the trip was also the most threatened, ZB's 110.003 left Meiringen for Interlaken with IR2226 on 14 July 2013.

