

Once a year is not enough

Autor(en): **Bennett, John**

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ONCE A YEAR IS NOT ENOUGH.

John Bennett



Panoramic view of Rougemont sitting peacefully in the valley floor.

PHOTOS: John Bennett

Despite visiting Switzerland with the family each summer for three years running, however long you have there only serves to whet the appetite for more. So, I had to go back again for another fix – this time alone and in October. So it was an easyjet flight to Geneva followed by a delightful SBB run through Lausanne to my chosen base at Vevey, with a side-trip on



the now-closed LO line to the lakeside at Ouchy. Given that I was going for a three day visit in October I took some warm clothing - I needn't have bothered as it was T-shirt weather!

The next morning was stunning with mist clinging to the waters of Lake Geneva and cloudless blue skies above. After the short run to Montreux, it was onto the MOB for that wonderfully steep climb through the houses crowding alongside the line. Then, as the 08.45 train left these houses behind, it rose through the mist and into brilliant sunshine that lasted all day. The autumn colours that might have been expected were only just starting to form – it seemed that no-one had told this part of the world that it wasn't still high summer! But with the sunshine and clear views who could complain?

The intention was to have a walk that roughly paralleled the MOB, and that the length of the walk should be determined by my energy levels as the day progressed and by whatever distractions presented themselves en-route. Having a choice of wayside stations to aim for, and then walk past, is an ideal basis for a (fairly) unstructured day's walking. So it was that I got off the train at Schönried and started walking back. It really doesn't get much better than the conditions that I enjoyed that day – summer weather but virtually no other tourists. During the entire walk I passed less than a dozen folks going the other way.

Whereas the MOB takes a diversion to the south to pass through Gstaad, my route took a short cut across the hillside before coming close to the line again near Saanen. A particularly pleasant path took me away from the railway again to climb through wooded hills before emerging to a panoramic view of Rougemont sitting peacefully in the valley floor. Somewhere in these woods I had crossed from the German-speaking canton to the French-speaking one. It was noticeable that the previously regularly-occurring yellow 'Wanderweg' signs had now been substituted by occasional painted sticks stuck in the ground!



The wooded hills between Gstaad and Saanen.



MOB ABDe 8/8 4001.





Has there ever been a better-maintained metre gauge line than the MOB?

GFM BDe4/4 122 at Palézieux.



Rougemont seemed like a good place to savour a beer and some good local food but, with the deserted main street looking like a scene from a western, it became apparent that the town was shut! The only thing missing was the tumbleweed blowing along! This was the (only) disadvantage with an October visit) So, emergency supplies consumed and legs not yet too tired – keep walking. Often the railway was in sight from the path, but in that way known to all railway photographers, trains only pass when you have no clear line of

sight! Eventually it seemed like Chateau d'Oex was the right place to end the walk, especially after enjoying a beer sitting in the sun on the terrace at the station hotel! The walk had been almost exactly 10 miles.

A rather indirect train journey back to Vevey followed – trying to make the most of my love of metre gauge lines. I had the rear-facing panorama coach all to myself to Montbovon. Has there ever been a better-maintained metre gauge line than the MOB? From Montbovon I caught the GFM train to Bulle and off we went down the road in that delightfully Swiss way that would cause total panic to British Health & Safety officials. From Bulle I shared the train with lots of lively school children who gradually dispersed into the countryside before the train terminated at Palézieux.

Back on standard gauge, a short journey brought me to Puidoux where a connection was waiting. This was the "Train des Vignes" which dropped down through the houses and vineyards on the south-facing slopes of the lake shore with mist once more forming on the lake. This scenic route formed a very pleasant end to the day's travelling and brought me back into Vevey in time to enjoy an evening meal eaten outside on the lakeside. All in all, probably the best October day I've ever experienced – until next time!

'Train des Vignes' waiting at Puidoux to travel down the hillside of Lake Geneva to Vevey.



Three views from the 'Train des Vignes' through the vineyards on the trip down to Vevey.