

# Ron Smith looks at the Meiringen Innertkirchen Bahn

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal**

Band (Jahr): - **(2009)**

Heft 98

PDF erstellt am: **27.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854272>

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# MEIRINGEN MEANDERINGS



*The Engsee. PHOTO: Glyn Jones*

Meiringen, east of Lake Brienz and on the headwaters of the River Aare, is a delightful small town whose main claim to fame is fictional – its link with Sherlock Holmes. However it does make a good base for Swiss transport enthusiasts as it is located where the Zentralbahn starts to make its rack assisted climb over the Brunig Pass. In these three articles SRS members look at other transport to and from this quiet resort.

## **Ron Smith looks at the MEIRINGEN INNERTKIRCHEN BAHN**



Although it is only 4.8km long the Meiringen Innertkirchen Bahn (MIB) is an interesting railway. It is the operating name of the transport arm of the Kraftwerken Oberhasli AG (KWO) which gives the clue to its origins. Between Meiringen and

Innertkirchen the River Aare has forced its way through the local geology via the Aareschlucht – a very narrow crack in the mountain that has a footpath through it, part in tunnel, part on ledges overhanging the raging torrent. This is well worth a visit. The river provides a source of hydro electric power, and this is what the KWO

*The new MIB Be 4/4 No.8 at Meiringen. PHOTO: Ron Smith*



exploits, being founded in 1923 for this purpose.

In autumn 1924 a railway was proposed from Meiringen to Innertkirchen and on to Guttannen, but this never came about. However, this proposal laid the foundations for the current railway that was opened on 1st August 1926 (Swiss National Day). It was subsequently used to bring the plant and machinery for the Kraftwerk from the Brünig line, so an end on connection with the SBB was made at Meiringen, by crossing the road adjacent to the goods shed. While construction work was going on, the MIB hired Rhätische Bahn (RhB) Mallet G 2/2 + 2/3 locos No.19 "Maloja" and No.20 "Chiavenna", both built in 1896. These worked all traffic until 1934 when they were withdrawn, with No.19 being scrapped in 1940 and No.20 in 1937.

It was not until 1931 that the first passenger vehicles arrived, in the form of a battery railcar with 12 seats. This primitive little machine, affectionately known as "Trudi", was eventually downgraded to being a tractor, and then withdrawn and preserved in Bruchhausen Vilsen, Germany. "Trudi" was followed in 1939 and 1949 by two more battery railcars, BDa 2/2 numbers 4 and 5, each with 22 seats. These worked for 40 years, operating in tandem for hauling goods wagons. For particularly heavy loads,



TOP: MIB tram No.6 waits at Meiringen. 11/9/94

MIDDLE: MIB Tram No.7 at Innertkirchen.

2/9/91

BOTTOM: MIB No.7 waits at Meiringen dwarfed by standard gauge wagon.

PHOTOS: Kälti





TOP: Driver's view of line about to enter the Aareschlucht tunnel from Meiringen.

PHOTO: Tony Bagwell

MIDDLE: MIB Be 4/4 No.8 at Aareschlucht West.

PHOTO: Ron Smith

BOTTOM: Waiting at Innertkirchen.

PHOTO: Tony Bagwell

a steam tank engine from the Brünig provided the traction. This must have been interesting for the crews as they worked through the 1.5km Kirchet-Tunnel beside the Aareschlucht! However, the tunnel loading gauge is generous enough to take standard gauge wagons on transporter bogies. Battery railcar No.5 (subsequently classified CFa 2/2) was plinthed at Innertkirchen, while No.4 went to the Verkehrshaus at Luzern.

It was not until 1946 that the MIB gained the status of a public railway, when the Bundesrat gave a concession through to 2026. Part of the conditions was that the railway must be modernised including electrification and track renewal with heavier rails. Eventually the metre gauge line was electrified at 1200v with overhead catenary, and the upgraded operation commenced on November 1st 1977. To find suitable motive power, the MIB searched for second hand vehicles, and amazingly bought three trams (built by Fuchs of Heidelberg in 1952) from the Oberrheinischen Eisenbahngesellschaft in Mannheim, Germany. In May 1976 these were shipped to the

SBB workshop in Meiringen; one was scrapped for spares, two were thoroughly overhauled, fitted with 34 seats, then classified Bem 4/4 and numbered 6 and 7. They were the first in Switzerland to operate



from either diesel or electric power. The auxiliary diesel engine was fitted to provide power over the short section at Meiringen, where the SBB runs at 11,000v.

The antique Mannheim trams were a marvel to travel on with their wooden bodies, black and white enamel signs and flickering light bulbs. Towards the end of their life the MIB hired a single unit from the BOB, for example ABDeh 4/4 No.301 of 1949, which also worked the freight traffic. This unit worked on the line from 1988 to 1996, until a new railcar arrived from Stadler/ABB - Be 4/4 No.8. The reserve vehicle is now Be 4/4 No.74 of the Vereinige Bern Worb Bahn dating from 1961. This now carries MIB No.9.

The new 1996 railcar arrived in a smart red livery, but has since been repainted blue and become covered in advertising, for which roof-level boards were added. Today trains run every half an hour at peak times between the MIB's own station in Meiringen and Alpbach, Aareschlucht West (for walkers to access that end of the Schlucht), Aareschlucht Ost, Unterwasser, Innertkirchen Post (the village centre) and Innertkirchen MIB, which is the works depot of the KWO. The MIB is an interesting anachronism of a railway, and it is an experience to ride on it.

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## **Glyn Jones rides a MAGICAL POSTAUTO TOUR**

Many SRS Members will know that Meiringen's PostAuto Station, situated at the rear of the Zentralbahn Station, is the start of many memorable PostAuto journeys

over the Susten & Grimsel passes. There is another route that starts here that is mostly unknown to foreigners and we were recommended to do it, but only on a clear day. It is to Engstlenalp and the Engstlensee – where is that you ask? It is situated at 1850m and is reached by a left hand turn off the Susten pass road between Innertkirchen and Gadmen.

The four trips a day (in high summer only) take 50 minutes and are subject to the Alpine Ticket supplement if you are using a Swiss discount pass. We arrived for the 10:45 departure from Meiringen. There was a large queue for the bus but we were the only “Brits” and most people seemed to have through tickets from various parts of Switzerland. There was some discussion between the drivers as to if a second bus would be required but there was just enough room. Is it only in Switzerland that a relief bus is there waiting just in case? The service is, I believe, operated by Autoverkehr Grindelwald (AVG).

The bus turned off the Susten pass route onto a narrow mountain road and there was much sounding of the PostAuto's characteristic horn. The road eventually becomes a private toll road, maintained to a

*Engstlenalp.*

PHOTO: Glyn Jones

