

Franco-Swiss frontiers : in the 1950s-60s

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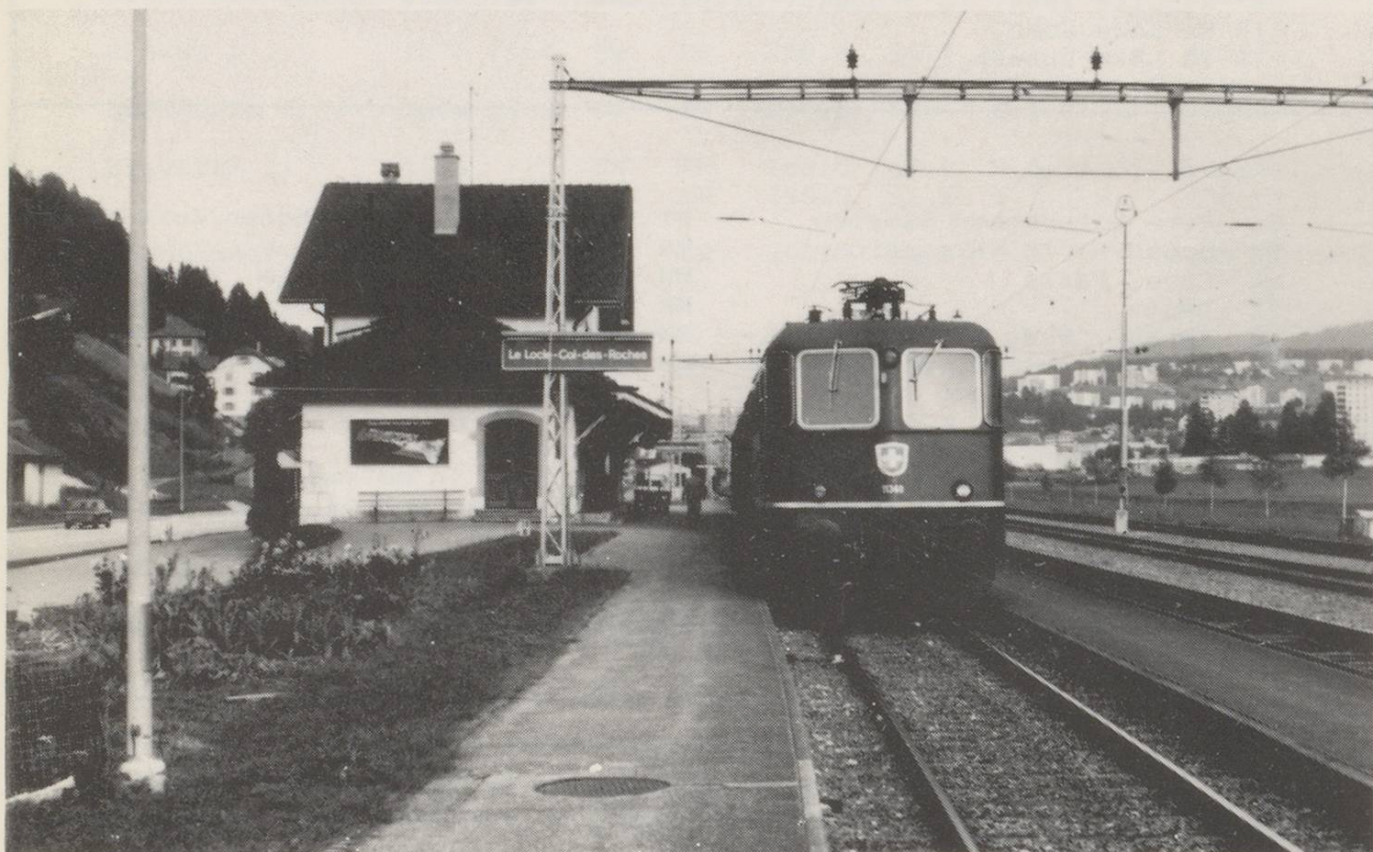
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FRANCO-SWISS FRONTIERS. IN THE 1950s-60s. by George Behrend.

This article excludes Basel and Geneva, and also (if you know where it is), Crassier La Rippe - closed, near Nyon.

So lets begin with Pontarlier, a market town in France, with nothing Swiss outside the station. Pre-war all was steam; during the war the CFF electrified to Les Verrieres, a small Swiss mountain village with a limited run round loop etc., where SNCF steam took over. After the war, the Swiss electrified into Pontarlier, long before the SNCF wires came from Frasné. The voltages divide in the centre of the station, a Y tractor hauling the dead locomotives to fly shunt them back to their end of the station, trains arriving with lowered pantographs. Coaches were standard SNCF green couchettes, some SBB and BLS international coaches and a Wagons-Lits (Lx type) on the through Paris-Interlaken train. The red French post sorting coach and a couple of ordinary green OCEM SNCF coaches came off at Pontarlier and one SBB and a BLS coach came on (standard internal types).



Re 4/4 II no. 11340 arrives at Le Locle - Col - des - Roches with a mixed freight train. Photo editor.

Those of you lucky enough to possess *Railway Holiday in Switzerland* (remaindered behind the author's back when D & C swore they never remaindered anything), can read that the BLS engine (Standard Ae 4/4 such as No. 252) waiting placidly on the train at Spiez looked so ordinary no one would guess it spent the night in France; but not that the author went that way specially to see if it did. Soon afterwards the matter of CFF drivers overnighing in France was resolved and BLS balanced the CFF workings on the BN, by running to Le Locle instead.

Until the arrival of TGVs at Pontarlier in 1987, **Rae TEE sets of the SBB** worked on to Frasné, to connect with the TGV Lausanne-Paris service. That was the only Swiss working beyond Pontarlier. These sets were regularly seen at Vallorbe on the Cis-Alpin running between Milan and Paris.

Steam was the ubiquitous 141R, diesel the BB 66000; through freight was negligible, carried on the local pick up goods which in Switzerland was one of the last strongholds of

mixed trains (one open vestibule six-wheeler or bogie coach next to the engine). Engines from Biel shed were Be 4/6, Be 4/7, sometimes some Re 4/4 I, also Ae 3/6 II from Olten, the same as worked to Le Locle (where the Ee 3/3 shunter was, I think, an end-cab version. Be 3/5's from Berne also put in appearances. SNCF electric were the steeple cab 12000 BB until the advent of the 25500 dual voltage BB, though as I forget precisely when the wires reached Pontarlier, the former may well have departed from Dole-Vallorbe by then.

Traffic on the lengthy Besancon-Le Locle branch is so light, railcars have coped for years - in particular XD 4000 which have pointed ends, and fixed snowplough front ends. Also X 3000-X 4000 with rounded ends and many small windows, some with notable roof air intake, and later X 2400 and X 3800, displaced today by the latest X 2100 (blue). Steam in the shape of a 40J hauled the local freight, it would seem but often the local freight terminated at Morteau, as there was no international traffic. The line is so long there is an SNCF depot between Le Locle-Col des Roches (frontier station at the top of the Col), and Le Locle Ville. This line but not the bay, is electrified and used by CFF trains, though many do not bother to extend to Col des Roches (wholly inside Switzerland). Engines seen included Ae 6/6, not mentioned elsewhere.

By contrast Delle is a lovely main line, in decline, a high, huge SNCF station building and all the passenger trains are foreign except for the odd through ones which may well stop altogether. They now do not run beyond nearby Belfort. These single (Swiss) coach trains are hauled by 67400 or 68000 BB & AIA AIA diesels, very wasteful. Delle's Y tractor could probably do the job. Delle is wholly in France quite a large town, and in the 1930s CFF completed the wires from Porrentruy. Freight is taken by 63000 BB (mostly timber). Passenger trains had Ae 4/7s until supplanted by Re 4/4 II which of course also run ubiquitously to all the other points mentioned here. With Belfort-Basel electrified, but Paris-Belfort not, Delle seems rather doomed. Local buses long ago supplanted the passenger locals in France; in Switzerland the Delemont locals had 6 wheel open end carriages from time to time. Canton Berne did not care for its French speakers who recently broke away and have their own Jura Canton. They wish to go to Delle to shop cheaply in France but many trains end at the last Swiss station, Boncourt. When you visit Delle what do you see? Usually, nothing! Be 4/6 motor coaches I believe work the line now, no running round needed on local trains. Through trains like the Oberland Express with SBB, BLS and Wagons-Lits stock, plus SNCF couchettes lasted till the late 1950s, hauled by 231 G & K., PLM engines latterly as well as 241A & 141Ps from Chaumont, but only to Belfort. 131 TB 2-6-2 tanks I believe worked the short lightly laid branch on to Delle.

Vallorbe is quite different to all these places. Passenger trains had 141E & 141F PLM Mikados (mountain version of the 231 G & H to speak approximately). Based at Dole, the pilot usually came on at Moutiers, and trains to France from Vallorbe were also double headed, to save sending the pilot back light engine. All very expensive, and supplanted by the first 25000 v AC line outside north-eastern France of any great length. Track was singled (great mistake perhaps) and controlled by CTC from Dijon, which has DC wires to Dole. Electric Traction (see above), the 25500 being fitted with radio. Freight was mostly 141R hauled, but latterly 141Rs worked on everything not diesel hauled, I believe. BB 66000 had a spell on the line.

The Swiss end of the international station which is however entirely Swiss, had an 0-6-OT/E standard SBB shunter working to Le Brassus and a Ee 3/3 shunted in the yard. Freight was hauled by Crocodiles, Ae 4/7 and later Ae 6/6 on the passenger trains, then Re 4/4 II and nowadays Re 6/6. Rolling Stock included FS Italian, SNCF & SBB also JZ later. A varied selection of Wagons-Lits including of course the Athens and Istanbul Simplon Orient/Direct Orient cars. After electrification Be 4/6 motor coaches ran the Le Brassus branch.