

The Seetalbahn

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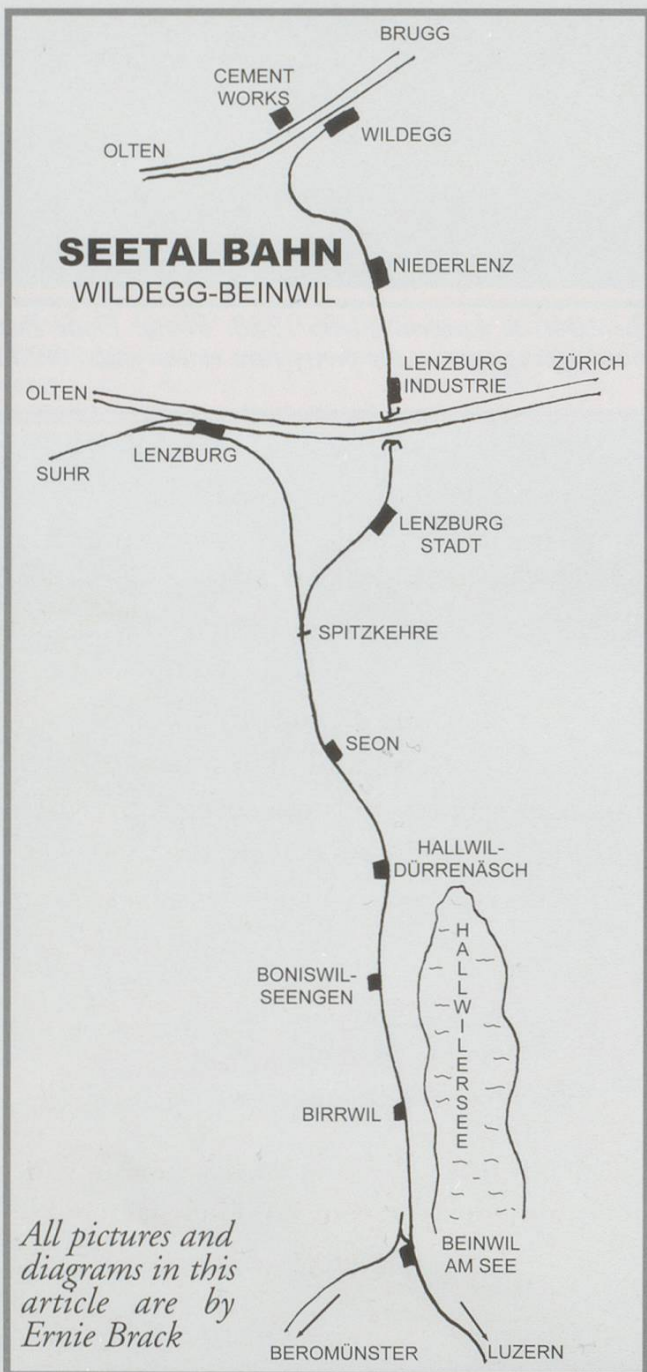
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Having examined the Beromünster branch it is now time to have a look at the Seetalbahn main line. This route although beginning to resemble more and more just another part of the SBB nevertheless is well worth exploring and is a line of many contrasts. Whilst part at the southern end is one of the most recently constructed parts of the SBB, the route at the northern tip has been closed for some 16 years, although the track is still in situ! Following a brief historical outline of the Seetalbahn, the article will deal with the northern section of

the line from Wildegg through Lenzburg to Beinwil. The route on to Emmenbrücke will be covered in a future issue of *Swiss Express*.

The Seetalbahn was conceived as a roadside standard gauge tramway connecting Lenzburg to Emmenbrücke and largely financed from England. The first section from Emmenbrücke to Beinwil opened on 3 September 1883 and the remainder to Lenzburg on 15 October 1883. A branch from Beinwil to Reinach followed, opening on 23 January 1887. The venture proved profitable and further extensions followed, from Lenzburg to Wildegg thereby connecting with the Zürich-Olten main line on 1 October 1895, and lastly from Reinach to Beromünster on 1 October 1906. Electrification at 5500V/25 Hz was accomplished in 1909-10 and the company was absorbed by the SBB on 1 January 1922. In due course the SBB converted the electrification to its standard 15kV/16 2/3 Hz system completed on 1 October 1930.

Under the SBB the line continued to serve as a useful part of the Swiss rail network until the upgrading of the mainline network began to affect traffic on the northern end of the system. In 1975 the SBB opened a cut-off line between Killwangen-Spreitenbach and Gruemet. This placed Lenzburg on the Zurich- Bern main line and services via Wildegg through Brugg and Baden were gradually replaced by faster through services on the new route. Passengers from the Seetal trains found it more convenient to change to the main line at Lenzburg and local passengers to Brugg or Baden already had through trains on existing lines from Lenzburg. To compound the problem travelling to Wildegg on the Seetal line involved a reversal at Lenzburg Spitzkehre and this further lengthened journey times. It was decided therefore to withdraw passenger services from the Spitzkehre junction to Wildegg from 2 June 1984 and completely close the section between



All pictures and diagrams in this article are by Ernie Brack



Tunnel under the main line at Lenzburg - 4/2000.

All Photos: Ernie Brack

Lenzburg Industrie and Wildegg. Closure apparently did not mean actually lifting the track as it was still there in 1999.

At the southern end of the line services were held up by the need to reverse passenger services at Emmenbrücke because the junction with the main Luzern-Olten line faced the wrong way and in addition joined the latter line just west of the station. Trains therefore blocked the main line twice as they reversed direction and then called at the station. In addition the roadside nature of the line held up road improvements in the Emmenbrücke area and it was decided to replace the section between Waldibrücke and Emmenbrücke with a new line on its own alignment and with a junction facing Luzern. This was brought into use on 24 May 1998 and part of the old line at the southern end lifted.

Although parts of the system have had their day (see my previous article on the Beromünster branch) the old connection at Emmenbrücke is remarkably the only bit of the Seetalbahn to actually disappear and the main section appears to have a secure future.

In the days of steam the system was worked by 9 x 0-6-0T, 4 x 2-6-0T and 2 x 0-4-0T. Under the STB electrification services were covered by 8 Bce 4/4 Railcars and 2 Fe 4/4 goods *Motorwagen* supplied by SWS/BBC. Following take-over by the SBB but prior to the upgrading of the electrification, three dual voltage De 6/6 "baby" crocodile locos appeared in 1926. Gradually as time went by the line lost some of its individuality. Up until the late 1980s services were handled by rebuilt De 4/4 *Gepäcktriebwagen* and the baby crocs. Passenger services are now covered by RBDe 560 Railcars whilst Ae 6/6 are the most common locomotives on goods workings. Other types do appear however and in the last couple of years I have seen Classes Re4/4^{II} and Am 841 on the line plus of course most types of the small shunters and tractors. There are proposals for the introduction of low-floor modern railcars, which will bring back some individuality to the services (but no doubt you will be unable to open the windows!)

DESCRIBING THE ROUTE - WILDEGG TO BEINWIL

Wildegg lies on the old main line from Zürich to Olten which whilst not as important as formerly is still a busy double track main line. There are basically three services in each direction per hour, two of which call at Wildegg. The stopping trains comprise hourly locals between Aarau and Brugg and regional expresses between

this first quarter mile as although the track is still down there are no parallel footpaths and the line follows the perimeter of a large active gravel pit. It is easier to take the road to Lenzburg, which leads away from the Wildegg Station building. Go straight over the main road at the crossroads and look out for a footpath on the right-hand side shortly before the road crosses the stream. About 300 yards along



Lenzburg Industrie. The mainline is on the embankment behind - 4/98.

Aarau and Baden. Through services are now chiefly hourly Zürich to Bern semi-fasts. There are numerous goods and mail trains and Wildegg itself generates substantial freight from a cement works adjacent to the station. A siding to a further cement works connects at the station and runs parallel on the northwest side of the line to Holderbank where a new station was opened in 1999. Wildegg itself has been rebuilt with raised platforms and a subway in recent years and there has been some track rationalisation to provide space for these. The old Seetal bay complete with ornate iron canopy remains. There are many photogenic viewpoints here and both the station and cement works can be worked into your pictures.

The Seetal track leaves from the bay and curves south and then east. I have not walked

this path you should reach the railway. The path crosses this and turns left alongside it. (The line remains on the left-hand side as far as the main line at Lenzburg.) Shortly after, the path becomes a small lane as we approach Niederlenz; across the line and half-hidden by bushes is a first-class lightweight coach. This is standing on a siding at Niederlenz station and a path on the left between the gardens leads down to the station. In 1999 all the tracks were still there although covered by substantial undergrowth. You can either retrace your steps back to the previous path or walk down past the station building and go over the level crossing and rejoin the path as it crosses this road. After about half a mile the motorway crosses our route high above our heads on a large viaduct and a large works on the right and the

track on the left hem in the path. An old semaphore signal stood here in 1999. The stream crosses under both the path and railway as we approach Lenzburg Industrie and the return of an active railway.

On the east side of the track there are three sidings serving a large silo owned by UFA. There is also a run-around loop although this is not required under the usual operating practice. The track

from here to Spitzkehre has been de-wired. A level crossing bisects the sidings and forms a good viewpoint. On the west side of this crossing an old standard gauge siding curves to the left and meets the remains of a narrow gauge industrial system serving a timber yard. Several points and wagon turntables remain *in situ*.

Each morning a small diesel tractor propels wagons from Lenzburg Main station to Spitzkehre junction. After reversal they are hauled through Stadt station to Industrie and then propelled into the various sidings. In the afternoon a shunter returns to collect the emp-

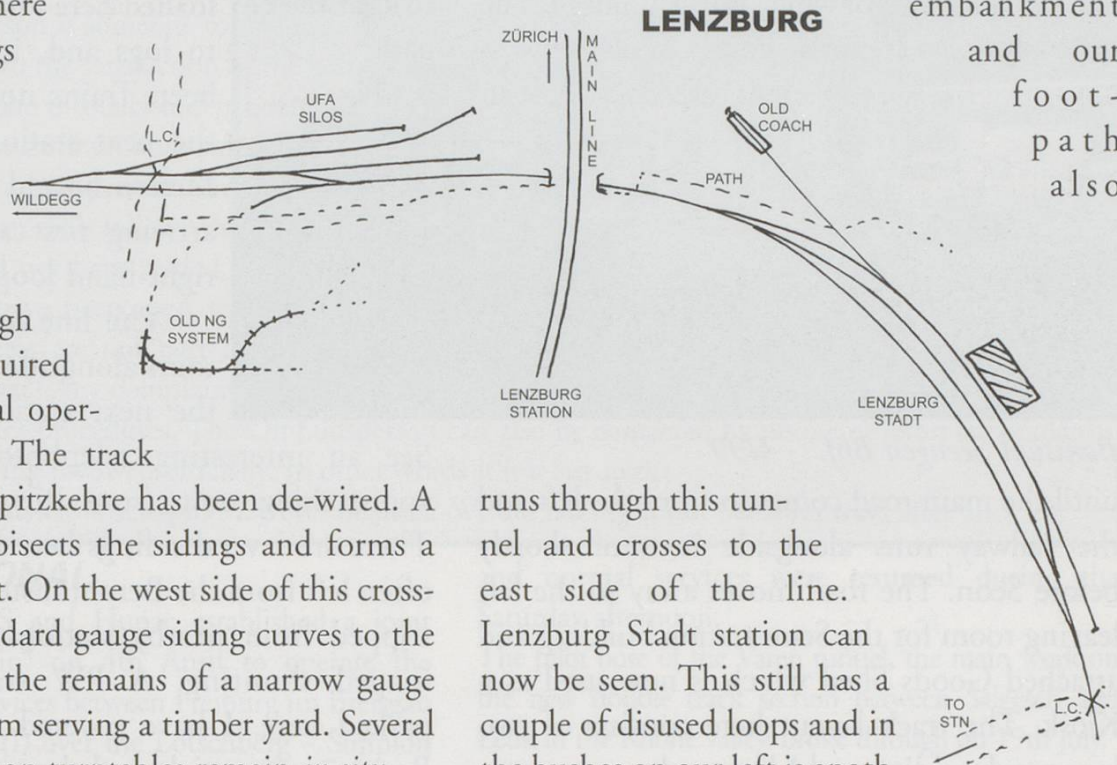
Lenzburg Stadt Bhf. - 11/5/88.



ties, propels them to Spitzkehre and then hauls them up to the main station. Wagons used include bogie and 4wheeled covered hoppers and tank wagons and vans.

The Seetal line pierces the Zurich-Olten route via a small tunnel in the

embankment and our foot-path also



runs through this tunnel and crosses to the east side of the line. Lenzburg Stadt station can now be seen. This still has a couple of disused loops and in the bushes on our left is another lightweight coach. This appears to be used as a charity shop. Stadt station is in a good state of repair and the kiosk is still open! Follow the course of the line past the station to the main road. Turn right at the road; go over the level crossing and walk up to Lenzburg Main line station. We can now use the train to continue our journey.

Should you be tempted to try this walk, it is about three miles in total, easy going and about an hour's duration at a moderate pace.

Seetal line trains leave from a platform outside Lenzburg station next to the track that connects into Lenzburg goods yard and the rest of the SBB. Leaving Lenzburg over a level crossing the line is on its own right of way past Spitzkehre



Boniswil-Seengen Bhf. - 4/99

until the main road comes in from the left and the railway runs alongside it until shortly before Seon. The road moves away to the left leaving room for the Seon station building and attached Goods Shed which is now used as a Kiosk. The track layout here consists of two loops and a siding and I have only once seen a goods van in the goods loop. Leaving Seon the route on its own right of way crosses a minor road before curving back through the houses and resuming its position on the western verge of the main road.

Hallwil-Dürrenäsch is the next station and the sidings here, whilst still extant, are out of use with a pink caravan parked across the

tracks. Boniswil-Seengen station follows and there is a two-road goods yard on the west side as you approach from Lenzburg. There are invariably wagons being loaded here ranging from vans to logs and, in season, sugar beet. Trains normally cross at the next station, Birrwil, the Luzern-bound train usually arriving first and taking the right-hand loop.

The line follows the contours alongside the road and at the next station Beinwil am

See an interesting telephoto view of the approaching train from Birrwil is possible. There are several sidings here and wagons are often left from the Beromünster branch or are tripped from nearby stations to avoid prolonged shunting. A PW tractor is often parked here. I have covered Beinwil in the Beromünster article and the remainder of the route to Emmenbrücke will be described in another issue.

Hallwil-Dürrenäsch Bhf. 11/5/88

