

# The day that the rain came down

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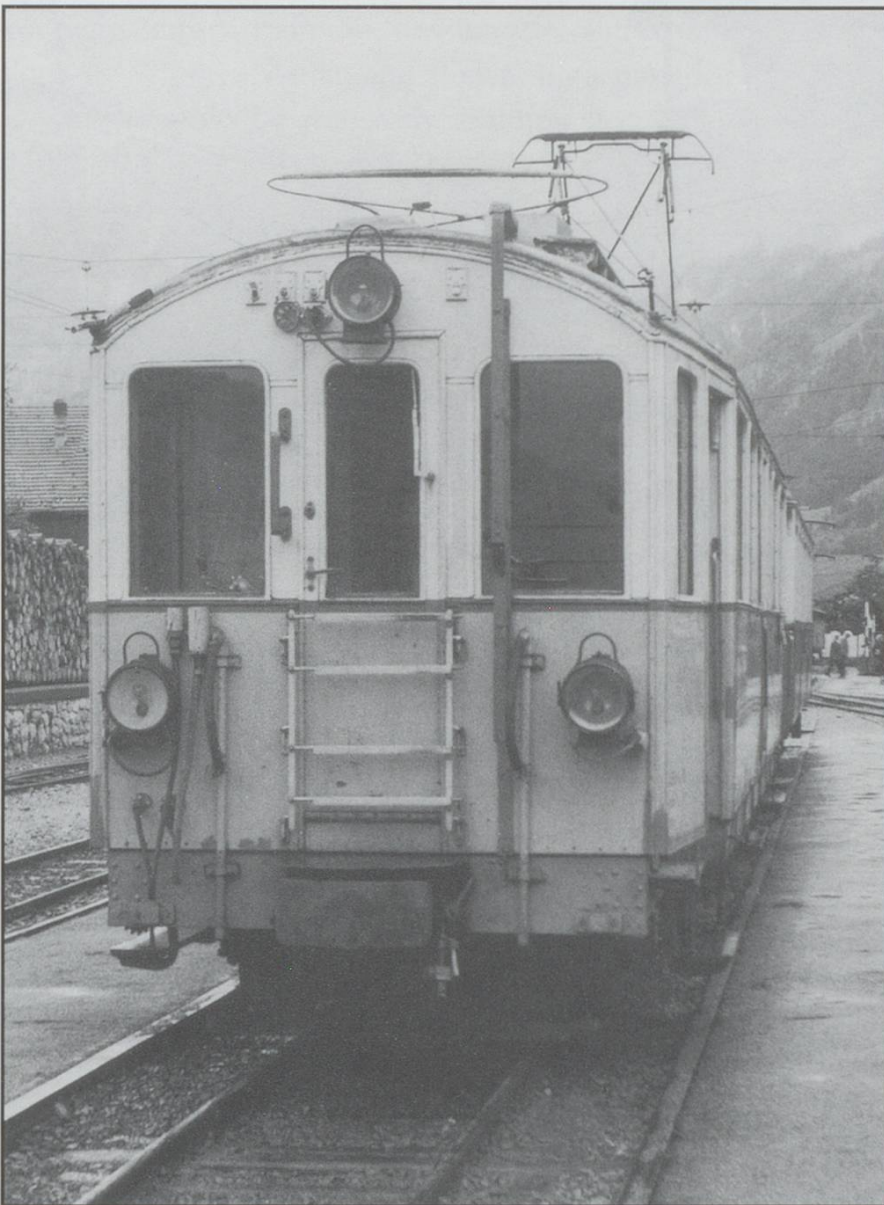
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This article was originally submitted to *Railway World* in 1968. Philip located it recently together with the pictures submitted.

Whilst on holiday last September (*i.e.* 1968), I encountered one of those dismal wet days that are inevitable in a mountainous country like Switzerland. Even after lunch the weather showed no signs of improvement, and so, determined not to spend the remainder of the day in and around the hotel, I set off from the tiny station at Bönigen on the edge of the lake of Brienz to explore one of the more distant branch lines marked on my Regional Holiday Season Ticket.

After a 25 minute wait at Interlaken Ost station, we set off promptly at 14.03 and threaded our way, whistling, through the back gardens to Interlaken West, from where, after a brief halt, we started the non-stop run to Spiez. The line, single at this point, runs along the edge of the beautiful



Thuner See, cloaked today in mist with rainsqualls drifting across its surface. After passing through Därligen and Leissigen with their cement and plaster works the route climbs from the lake edge up through the crossing station of Faulensee to the busy junction at Spiez.

From the Interlaken branch, we crossed the Bern - Brig main lines and pulled up at platform 5 on the far side of the station, away from the lake. Our train is a four coach electric push-pull set, semi-permanently coupled and vestibuled throughout, consisting of a two car

*Lenk Sept. 1968 ABDe 4/4 motor car similar to the one recently preserved on the Blonay-Chamby.*

*Photo: Philip Elwin*

Blue Arrow multiple unit of the Bern Lötschberg Simplon Railway (BLS) propelling two coaches, the leading one of which is provided with a driving cab. We are booked through from Bönigen to Zweisimmen so there is no need to change trains here.

After a three minute halt we are on our way once again, dropping and curving away west and south from the double track main Thun - Spiez line on to the single track of the Spiez-Erlenbach-Zweisimmen Railway (SEZ), now



*A general view of Lenk, Sept. 1968. ABDe 4/4 motor car awaits running round before returning to Zweisimmen. Photo: Philip Elwin.*

worked as part of the BLS. The line curves around the base of the conical Niesen mountain, passing in turn an arsenal with its own branch line and the picturesque castle at Wimmis before plunging into the narrow mouth of the Simmental and climbing immediately up through the gorge and into the widening valley beyond. For the train it is an almost continuous climb with no advertised stop, although we are brought to a stand at Därstetten to wait for a downhill train to clear the single track ahead of us. We make a punctual arrival at Zweisimmen, 35 km from Spiez after a 36 minute journey.

The standard gauge BLS train pulled up alongside the picturesque old wooden overall roof of the metre gauge Montreux-Oberland-Bernois Railway (MOB) with its clock tower. Across the platform is the connecting "main line" MOB metre gauge train bound for Gstaad and Montreux headed by one of the new ABDe 8/8 twin motor coach sets hauling two coaches. Meanwhile, standing on one of the outer tracks, hardly in the station at all, is

the branch line metre gauge train to Lenk in Simmental comprising a veteran (even then!) ABDe 4/4 motor car hauling a modernised second class coach. Unlike the other MOB vehicles on view, the motor car for Lenk does not have the pale blue painted lower panels surmounted by cream but the grey and cream livery of an earlier age. The roof sports a bow collector as well as a conventional, "diamond" pantograph, although only the latter is raised.

No sooner had I secured a seat at the rear of the trailer coach, than we were off down the platform through the rain. Instead of taking the right hand climbing "main line" route to Gstaad and Montreux via Saanenmöser, we rumbled over the points and crossings and descended past the rolling stock sheds to the roadside where, after being joined by a line from the standard gauge exchange sidings, we crossed the highway and set off through the fields.

The line crosses the width of the valley, bridges the Grosse Simme river and stays on the east side of the river all the way to Lenk. Electrified at 810v DC from the time of its construction in 1912, a service of 11 trains each way was running in 1968. Fast trains were

allowed 23 minutes for the uphill run of 13 km calling only at St Stephan, whilst mixed and stopping trains were allowed 35 minutes or more. The difference in height between Zweisimmen and the upper terminus at Lenk is 120 metres, a level run by most Swiss standards!

Once under way the train rolled in a leisurely fashion from side to side on the light rail, rumbling through halts at Blankenburg

called out in the midst of one of the heavier deluges of the day, changed the points and hastily retreated to cover, only to be recalled by the guard to collect a packet from the van. We were soon off again, for there was no other train on the branch, and climbed through Matten and Boden, both provided with halts, before finally grinding to a halt in the open plan terminus at Lenk.



*Zweisimmen station Sept. 1968. Montreux train on left headed by ABDe 8/8 with a type ABDe 4 4 railcar in the centre background. Photo: Philip Elwin*

and Stöckli without stopping, finally coming to rest outside the station building at St Stephan, the principal intermediate stopping place. Here in addition to a passing loop the MOB provided sidings for the timber traffic, occupied on this occasion by a solitary standard gauge wagon looking rather out of its element, perched in the rain atop a narrow gauge transporter.

The Stationmaster, giving us his personal attention although rather perturbed at being

During the 35 minute layover in the station yard our motor coach is run around its one coach train, and after tea is ready to commence the downhill run as the 16.15 all stations service. Instead of returning in the trailer I boarded the motor coach although I had some doubts about being allowed to remain there as I had noted that no one rode up in it besides the crew. On arrival neither the driver nor the guard were inclined to effect my

removal although I suspected a couple of knowing glances in my direction.

The few other passengers settled in the trailer coach. The exterior paintwork had suggested that this was a works locomotive or shunter turned out to cover a lightly loaded afternoon train, but inside all the seats were *in situ* and other than a greasy wooden floor, the decorations complained of nothing more than old age.

The train was soon started on its way amid a cloud of grey smoke emanating from some under floor mechanical device. We pitched down the gradient at the end of the station, banging and rattling over the short rails, rolling from side to side around the curves. The whistle, high-pitched and rather weak, was almost inaudible from within against the noise of vibrating body panels and jarring windows. As the speed increased, so did the vibration, magnifying the impression of speed considerably. I now realised why everyone else was in the trailing coach for the ride was very hard and the body seemed to “bottom” on the springs quite often as we clattered downhill, rushing through Boden, stopping briefly at Matten, squealing around curves down to the stop at St Stephan

where a mixed train bound for Lenk was putting off some wagons in the rain.

The interior of the motor car must have been little altered in appearance since the time of its construction during the first years of the century. The grace of the first class saloon, with its upholstered seats and curtains, contrasted sharply with the spartan slatted wooden seats of the second class compartment. After picking up a good complement of passengers, all in the coach, we set off beside the rising river to Stöckli and Blankenburg, collecting a few passengers from both before grinding up the short ramp beside the MOB car sheds, through the station yard and into the shelter of the overall roof at Zweisimmen.

Across the platforms the standard gauge BLS train for Spiez stood out in the open, patiently waiting for the Montreux express which followed us in, cautiously picking its way over the points at the south end of the station as the Lenk train backed out into the rain to shrill whistles, in the direction of the sheds.

*A recent picture of Lenk. taken from a slightly different perspective but showing how little it has actually changed. Photo: DS, May 2001*

