

Steam on the Sursee - Triengen Bahn

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ABOVE: No. 5 heads off from Sursee on the Luzern - Basel main line to branch off to Triengen

BELOW: The attractive station at Triengen

All photos taken 29/09/2002 by Ron Smith

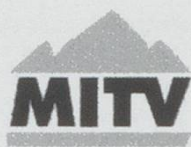
Sunday 29th September was the day this year when the ST (as they are known) brought out one of their 0-6-0 tank engines (not the one that was converted to run off electricity in the last war - that's another story). I'm a volunteer on the Keith & Dufftown Railway here in Scotland, and was continually frustrated that the Swiss can do it, but we continually find regulations why we can't.

By sloppy timing I just missed the 09.30 first train from Sursee on the Luzern to Basel main line. As my train ran in from Luzern, we passed the Calida factory on the outskirts of the town, and the number of people beside the factory shop there puzzled me. I bought my ST ticket from a volunteer manning a stand on the platform at Sursee, and asked if the Calida factory was open - he said no, only Monday to Friday. As I had to wait until 11.30 for the next steam train, I decided I would stroll along to the factory anyway. It WAS open, a special day of bargains and special reductions - it was mobbed!! I elbowed my way in, the underwear and pyjamas and ladies garments were selling like

hot cakes. I pushed my way about and stocked up on underwear of great Swiss quality, and joined the queue to pay. Eventually, sales shocked, I emerged with lots of stuff - and so missed the 11.30! This was silly, so I jumped on the Postbus to Schöftland, which traces the route, and was soon alighting in Triengen.

Here was a hive of activity. The stations on this railway are extremely attractive. The yard had people milling around while the loco was being refreshed after having completed one round trip to Sursee. The coaches are interesting, two blue bogie coaches, and three red six wheelers, the middle one of which





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The attractive station at Büron

is a converted van. It has two long marble-topped tables in the centre with loose chairs around, and wrought iron railings protecting the open doors in each side. In the yard next to the station restaurant (well worth a visit at any time, excellent food, tea with cold milk, lots of railway and road artefacts) were stands with ST articles for sale, an open-air barbecue with typical Swiss sausages, cutlets and more sausages, and a tent with benches and tables for even more food and drink. Various children's attractions were also laid on, rides, games, and this gave a clue to the success of the event; it is obviously a huge favourite as a family event with very few train-spotters at all! Another coach was parked as a Raclette buffet, and I had a freshly prepared potatoes and melted cheese meal with beer before managing to squeeze onto the five coach train, and off we went.

The line is mostly flat and straight, so the tank engine managed very well and smartly accelerated the packed train over the bell-clanging crossing and off past the small local airfield. Paragliders were swooping down to the glee of the younger passengers and my concern - it all seemed pretty close to me! Large square blocks of maize and borderless fields were beside us, as we frightened the many herons dotted about, and alarmed some thoroughbred horses as we stormed along. The open balconies of each vehicle were packed

with people and young children kept fleeing through from coach to coach across the fall plates. Our HSE would "have kittens" watching all this.

We slowed to a halt at Büron after passing a large works that used to make the steel for reinforced concrete. The main production has moved elsewhere and this loss of important traffic worried the ST and threatened their future, which was saved by developments nearer Sursee. With more clanging crossings we briskly set off again and sprinted to

Geuensee. This bonny station is particularly disfigured by graffiti, and a couple of louts had dragged a bench onto the old loading bay and scowled contemptuously as our train full of happy noisy people harmlessly enjoying themselves set off once again. Nearer Sursee larger industrial units have sprung up, served by a few new sidings, and this increase in freight traffic has been a lifeline to the ST. Then we slowed to curve upwards - and on to the SBB main line! The ST has its own small bay platform and I had been wondering how the run round was going to be organised, now I know. We steamed steadily right through the station, to the Luzern end sidings and stopped. The loco smartly ran round, coupled on, and drew us back into the platform.

While dozens of passengers, children and pushchairs were exchanged with the crowd on the platform, an express train (all DB coaches) rushed past on the other line heading for Luzern, the driver tootling his horn vigorously. This was running wrong line and had been looped past us. With a blast from the powerful deep whistle, we promptly rattled off again. As we forged along with that never to be forgotten sound of a steam engine working hard, with smoke, steam and smuts everywhere, the on board team managed to squeeze through to sell or check tickets, sell drinks, souvenirs, or snacks. I was impressed with their keenness, how many there were, and the variety of ages from a pensioner to a

lad who I would guess to be six or seven, with his dad. The lad was fervently selling ST baseball caps and was asking just everyone. This involvement of so many young folk is something that we don't have. Somehow the Swiss have managed to involve young people in things like the waste paper collection, and many other communal activities, and just see how many groups of them there are going here or there with backpacks and boots in reserved coaches on the SBB. This must be good for the future. Our youth seem isolated and alienated and do not consider working as a volunteer on a railway at all! Of course this is a generalisation and I'll get back to the train.

I'd squeezed onto the last balcony and enjoyed the sunshine and fresh air as we retraced our path. The permanent way is in very good condition, and the gradient posts are metal with the numbers punched out - another Germanic peculiarity of the ST. People were alighting and joining at the two intermediate stops, and waited, waving to the crowds on the train, until we had departed. All too soon our 21 - minute journey was coming to an end as we curved over the clanging crossing and chuffed resolutely back into Triengen. The great dreams of the ST would have had the line continuing across the cantonal boundary to Schöftland, so the station is built as a through one with the building at one side, and the two - road engine shed is on the other side.

Next to the shed is a Porsche-engined *draisine*. This is owned by two ST members and is awaiting restoration. The shed is redolent of a working steam shed, oil, coal dust, gloom, dirt, and that evocative smell. A real working everyday steam shed. Outside the crew were busy refilling the cab front bunkers with coal, by hand. I went over to have a *Nussstengel* and a chat, then it was back onto the train again. This time I managed to find a seat in the six-wheel van. This was a new experience. Rather hard riding, so a visit was made to a bogie coach where Swiss music and beer was being

lavishly dished out in the salon wagon, and before long we were proudly and sedately rolling through Sursee station again. This time the wait in the loop seemed to be dragging on a little, and many passengers decided to get off and go to their cars, wandering over the tracks! The crew became agitated and shepherded people out of the way as our loco ran round. Then with horn tootling a Kolibri EMU passed us on its way to Luzern and another train passed going towards Basel. Smartly we then pulled into the platform for another *mêlée* of exchanging crowds of passengers.

I had to go, and my lasting impressions will be the enthusiasm of the ST volunteers, and the integration of the train into the SBB system. The train made five return trips, starting at 09.30 from Triengen, the last one arriving back at 17.16. It was a huge success. Taking up the classic train - spotter position to photograph the train pulling away from Sursee, I was joined by just one other, a German "Bahnfreak." The train was a family day out, and this was the key to their success. Well done the ST. I look forward to next year's event, and hope that the railway will continue with its all year round freight service for many years to come. Details can be found on:

www.dampfzug.ch

and they can be contacted by e-mail on:

sursee-treingen-bahn@freesurf.ch

Shunter in headshunt at Triengen (Em 2/2 No. 1 BBC/SIG/SAURER 1965)

