

Memories of Stansstad : four generations of a railway - StSt - StEB - LSE - ZB

Autor(en): **Rowbotham, Tony**

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MEMORIES OF STANSSTAD

Four generations of a railway - StSt - StEB - LSE - ZB

My first holiday in Switzerland was at Stansstad in 1963 (with just over SFr8 to £1) staying at the Hotel Winkelried on the lakeside. Stansstad, then a small village, lies roughly south of Luzern on the shore of the main part of the Vierwaldstätter See at the point where it is joined by its south-western arm, the Alpnacher See. During a recent spring-clean I came across an old black and white postcard of the village that shows one of the lake steamers passing through the swing bridge carrying the local road, and entering the main part of the lake from the Alpnacher See. Stansstad has a landing stage and at the time the lake steamers could moor directly adjacent to the terminal station of the Stansstad Engelberg Railway (StEB), making for an easy transfer.

The StEB was opened in 1898 to connect the lake steamers with the holiday resort of Engelberg, passing through Stans on the way. It was electrified from the start using the three-phase system, for at this time in the development of electrical traction it was not practical to build single-phase AC motors. This system resulted in the need for two contact wires and all the resulting complications with the supply system that this brought. For the first part of the journey from Stansstad the terrain is fairly flat, but after Stans the gradients start building



ABOVE: The postcard showing the old Stansstad station and the lifting bridge. The compact station layout with adjacent small harbour could form the basis an interesting model, any takers....? (Photoglob Webrli AG)

up to 3% levels, although this is still easily climbable with ordinary adhesion equipment. However, when Obermatt is reached the gradients become much steeper, reaching 24.6%, and it was necessary to propel the trains up the hill by an additional HGe2/2 locomotive working off the Riggenbach rack.

This first part of this line replaced an earlier tramway between Stansstad and Stans, the



ABOVE: The old line crossing the road into the Harbour Station and the complication of the 3-phase wiring.
NEXT PAGE, UPPER: Loco waiting to giving rack assistance.
CENTRE: New bridge partially built looking towards the tunnel in 1964.
LOWER: Timber false work for the high-level bridge under construction in 1963.

All photos Tony Rowbotham

Strassenbahn Stansstad–Stans (StSt). I have a reproduction of an old 1896 poster showing the time and fares for this Strassenbahn that was electrified at 500v DC and closed in 1903. The journey from Stansstad to Stans appeared to take about 18 minutes and cost 40 centimes for a second class and 20 centimes for a third class single fare. Regrettably this poster does not show any detail of the tramway, just pictures of bearded gnomes making sophisticated electric machinery by candle light in their caves!

Whilst I was there in 1963 work had started on constructing a new high level bridge, incorporating the local road, a new motorway and a new railway line, to replace the existing low-level swing bridge. Despite the new bridge having 7.3m clearance above water level, I recall the wheelhouse on the steamers, together with the masts, having to be lowered hydraulically to pass under the bridge.

The StEB had had financial problems for

some years, and a decision had been made to connect the railway through to Luzern making use of this new bridge. The station on the landing stage was to be closed and replaced with a new through station. A new 1743m long tunnel through the Lopperberg was required and this emerged alongside the existing 1186m Lopperberg tunnel on the SBB metre gauge Luzern to Interlaken line just before reaching Hergiswil Station. The two tunnel mouths are adjacent and the uninitiated could well assume that it is a double track tunnel. From here the new railway, the Luzern-Stans-Engelberg-Bahn (LSE), would share the SBB single track into the station at Luzern, about another 8km to the north. As a part of this link-up the line to Engelberg was upgraded electrically to the SBB standard of 15,000 v so it was compatible with the Brünigbahn.

A couple of years later when the new line was in operation, I was travelling towards Engelberg, leaning out of the window taking

some pictures, when the ticket collector appeared. He led me to the front of the train and sat me down next to the driver. On the approach to Engelberg I stood up to take some particularly spectacular view. Not realising that the seat was designed to spring upwards with no body sitting on it, I ended up on the floor when I went to sit back down, much to the amusement of the driver. A lack of German on my part luckily prevented any conversation on the matter! A few years ago I drove through Stansstad and found it then to have become just an undistinguished suburb of Luzern, with the Hotel Winkelried closed and boarded up – although it has since been re-opened.

Recently the LSE and the SBB metre gauge lines have been amalgamated to form *Die Zentralbahn* following which major changes to parts of its infrastructure are taking place. Firstly a long stretch of the line just to the south of Luzern station is being doubled, whilst on the approach to Engelberg a new tunnel just over 4 km long is being built from south of Grafenort. This will enable trains to by-pass the steep gradient, with its Riggensbach rack section between Obermatt and Ghärst, that was mentioned previously.

Editors Note. The floods of August 2005 wrought havoc on the old LSE and with the new tunnel works, as was commented upon in the last issue of Swiss Express.

