

Grosses BLS-Südrampenfest

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GROSSES BLS-SÜDRAMPENFEST Neil Wheelwright

Lötschberger on Baltschieder Viaduct.
All photos: Neil Wheelwright

Not having been able to join the Society trip to the main BLS 100 celebrations in June, I decided to visit Brig in September for their South Ramp Fair. This two day event on 7th / 8th September was advertised as the 'BLS-Festmeile von Goppenstein bis Domodossola'. The BLS ran a shuttle service every 15 minutes between Brig and Goppenstein, combining the hourly service from Bern, formed of two Class 535 'Lötschbergers', some shuttles from Spiez formed of class 565 NPZ units including a 'Jumbo' coach, as well as some historic trains. Staying in Brig enabled me to use the first shuttle service at 09:05 up the hill to Goppenstein. The historic trains consisted of BLS Ae4/4 251 on a push-pull set, the BN Be4/4 761 in two-tone green livery on a push-pull set and BLS Ae6/8 205 on 4-coaches from the Swiss Classic Train. For a supplement,

it was possible to ride in SBB's 'Churchill Pfeil' non-stop between Brig and Goppenstein. However, the attached BLS Re4/4 seemed to be doing most of the work!

My general impression was that the event was aimed more at the local populace – which seemed reasonable as it is they who use the service, pay their taxes to support it and put up with the noise of the traffic - rather than the enthusiast, although we were well catered for as well. It also appeared that the catering at each site was operated by one of the local hostelrys. The exhibitions at each of the stations differed. Goppenstein housed the main music tent, had a small display about the car shuttle service, and some local tourist tents advertising the charms of the Lötschental. It was also possible to get a close-up view of the Lötschberg tunnel portal. An added attraction was some road tours in an old post bus.

Hohtenn had little beyond the usual beer and bratwurst facility, plus a small exhibition about the infrastructure along the route. However, Ausserberg had rather more including a couple of sales stalls, one of which was selling old BLS pamphlets, books, etc., where I managed to find a 1920s English language book describing the BLS. Ausserberg also hosted one of the two motive power exhibitions – including a 'Lötschberger', 'Blauen Pfeil' BDe4/6 No.736 part way

'Blauen Pfeil' at Ausserberg.





TOP: Ae6/8 & Swiss Classic Train on Baltschieder Viaduct.
 MIDDLE: BN Be4/4 at Hottent.
 BOTTOM: 'Lötschberger' & 'Blauen Pfeil' on display at Ausserberg.

through restoration, BLS Ae8/8 No. 273 and current BLS permanent way department No. 235 206. There were also events in the centre of Ausserberg, far enough away from the station to justify a PTT mini-bus shuttle.

I took the opportunity of good weather to walk between Ausserberg and Eggerberg on the South Ramp walk. There are not many photo opportunities before reaching the Baltschieder Viaduct (& the main one I found was periodically obscured by one of the rotating watering sprays – which managed to be exactly in line

when the Ae6/8 went past!), but the walk is worth it for those views alone. Whilst this walk is fairly straight-forward except for a steep descent above the viaduct, the approach from Eggerberg is very easy along a wide track and is recommended for anyone who would like to photograph away from the stations but would be concerned about how hard parts of the south ramp walk might be. The display at Eggerberg was very small but included a miniature railway for children's rides.

The next stop down is Lalden, which was the second site for those interested in railway hardware. The display included the new – demonstration 'Last Mile Lok' No.187 002; the current – BLS Re4/4 No.185 'Lalden', small shunter No. 235 091 and SERSA's leased Vossloh diesel No.275 627, and the old preserved BLS locomotives Ce4/6 No.307 and Ce4/4 No.312. The BLS also opened the last stretch of the South Ramp walk from Lalden down to Naters during the weekend –something for a future visit! Brig hosted a number of events including a street of stalls, many serving Swiss wines, between the station and the main square in the old town which hosted a stage for a number of musical performances. By mid afternoon, the sites and trains were getting very busy but at no time did the crowds seem uncomfortable.

However, this was not the case for the Domodossola end of the event. As part of the BLS bid to run the passenger and car shuttles through the Simplon tunnel, they extended the through trains from Bern to Domodossola most hours with free travel. Whilst not exhibiting at the station, there was a display on one of the squares in the old town. It seems there was also another event in the town as I had seen a 10-coach SBB shuttle going south from Brig around 9am fairly full, and the regular stopping trains were being formed of two six-coach rakes. The result was that some of the northbound BLS evening trains through the tunnel were full to overflowing. One of the advertised highlights of the weekend was a floodlit cavalcade across the Luogelkin Viaduct on the Saturday evening. I did not apply for one of the CHF100 tickets and will be interested to see reports of the event.

The Sunday bore out the weather forecasts of being wet, so I went up to Bern to see the Bern Tram Museum open day and have a ride behind the steam tram. This was an interesting day as the museum society had moved all its trams to the Burgernziel depot, leaving articulated buses at the Weissenbühl museum building. This was, I think, part of their campaign to save the now-closed Burgernziel depot site from being developed and hoping it would be saved to provide an excellent tram museum. Sadly, reports are that the site will not be saved. ❑