

Idiosyncrasies - and a No. 25 bus : Rob Morrey explores lesser-known parts of Switzerland and Germany

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal**

Band (Jahr): - **(2015)**

Heft 121

PDF erstellt am: **11.07.2024**

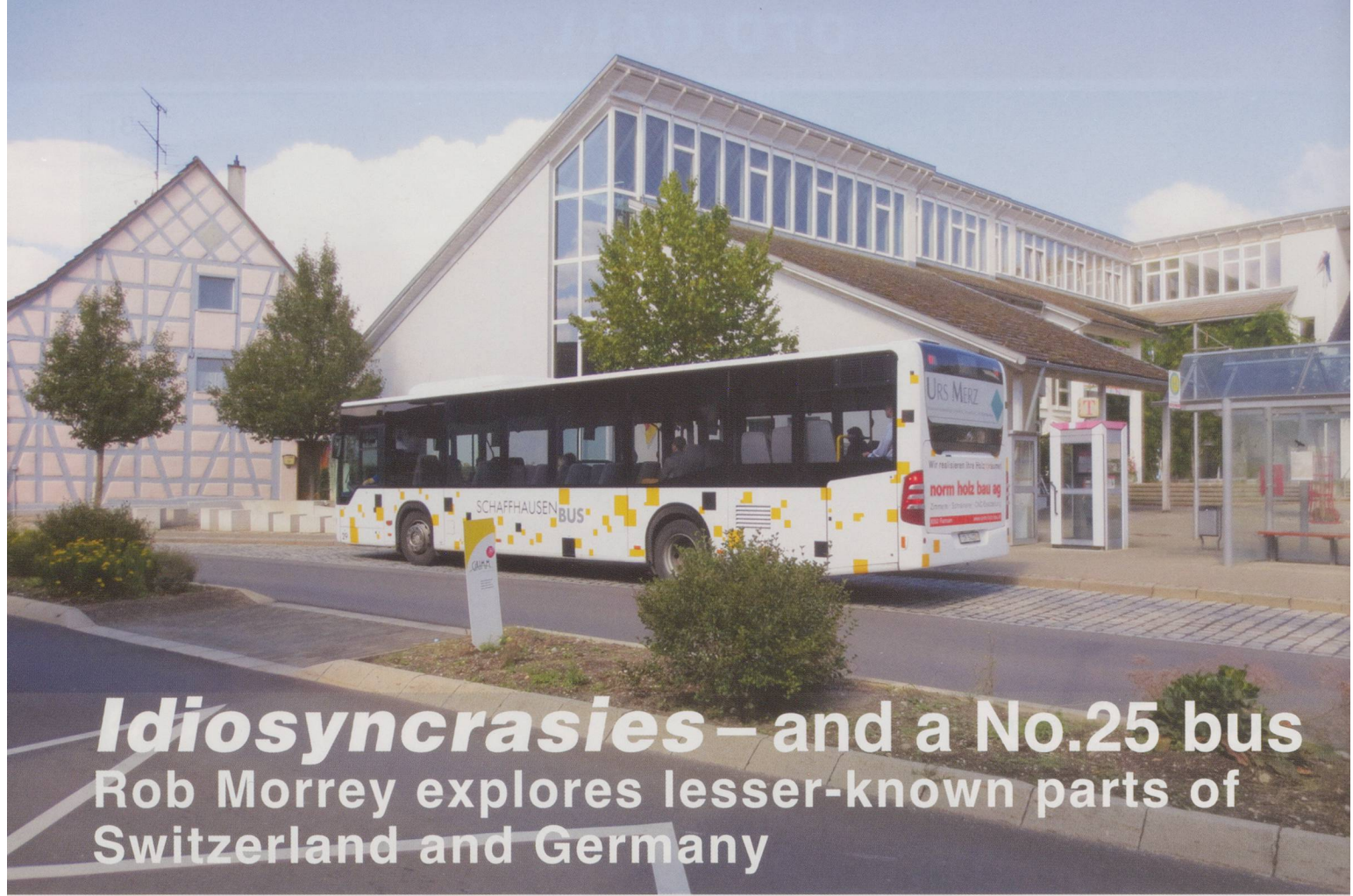
Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853942>

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Idiosyncrasies – and a No.25 bus

Rob Morrey explores lesser-known parts of Switzerland and Germany

The International bus No. 25 outside Büsingen Rathaus.

All photos: Rob Morrey

On a glorious September morning I walked from my hotel in Konstanz (Germany) to the main railway station, which is just a few metres from the – invisible – Swiss border. Having bought an Euregio Tageskarte (Zone 3) for €18 from a red DB ticket machine (the adjacent blue SBB machine charges a more expensive CHF26 for the same thing!), I began a day of exploration with this excellent public transport ticket, one that ignores International boundaries – just as well as around here they are virtually impossible to spot. And they defy logic. The 08.48 to Swiss Kreuzlingen took all of 2 minutes before I changed onto the 09.01 SBB Thurbo service to Schaffhausen, where my arrival gave me 15 minutes to wait in the adjacent Busbahnhof for the

No.25 service operated by RVSH-Schaffhausenbus. Setting off with just a handful of passengers we potted along the north bank of the Rhein, crossing en-route another invisible Swiss/German border into the German enclave of Büsingen, my first destination of the day. Why Büsingen? Because it's different. An oddity. A quirk.

Büsingen is part of Germany, but completely surrounded by Switzerland, the border only marked by 123 small granite boundary stones. Since 1967 it has been subject to its own special treaty – for instance, although belonging to Germany it is not part of the EU. It has two postcodes, D-78266 for Germany, CH-8238 for Switzerland and both Swiss and German stamps can be used for postage. Both postcodes are displayed at the Post Office entrance – but the building clearly shows 'Deutsche Post' in big letters on its façade. Outside the office – centrally located in 'downtown' Büsingen next to the modern glass-fronted Rathaus – there are two Pay Phones, one for 'Swisscom' one for 'Deutsche Telekom'. Inside the Post Office though there was just one queue to the counter, so some things are normal! Although it only has a population of around 1,450 it has its own vehicle registration letters (BüS), the only German village with them. There is just a junior school in the national German education system in the enclave. Senior pupils then move on to schools in the Swiss system




FAR LEFT: Divided Loyalties.

LEFT: International Communications (i.e. one phone box for Switzerland, one for Germany).

where the costs are paid for by the small municipality. Most Büsingen business is done with Switzerland, the Swiss Franc is the common currency (although the Euro is also legal tender), and it is also in the Swiss customs area. Over the years the inhabitants have tried to merge into the surrounding country – but it hasn't happened even though tax and other complications can make daily life difficult. Basically Büsingen is a backwater. A publicity pamphlet I picked up includes photos of the village attractions. That a picture of the bus shelter is included gives a hint that not a lot happens there. I meandered around the streets for a while, down to the landing stage where the Rhein steamers call, as I looked to buy some souvenir postcards. No chance. True a food shop was open, and so were two bars, but otherwise nothing. Nothing at all.

So I waited for the next hourly No.25 on its trip to the nearby Swiss village of Ramsen. Again the bus had few passengers. However it soon turned off the 'main' road to head past Büsingen football ground (the team play in a Swiss league) and the lovely Bergkirche, built in 1095. At this point I, and my bus, said goodbye to Büsingen, a small corner of Germany that is forever Switzerland, as moments later it crossed another unmarked border to run across a narrow strip of Swiss territory to stop at the small village of Dörflingen. The No.25 then ran into and out of Germany again, serving Randegg, before it finally reached Ramsen. All this along delightful deserted byways, and across invisible international frontiers. Does any other bus service, anywhere, cross so many borders in a 35 minute journey? I had now swapped sleepy Büsingen for soporific Ramsen. This village is also idiosyncratic, as it is in an enclave of Canton Schaffhausen surrounded on three sides by Germany and on the fourth by Canton Thurgau on the far side of the Rhein. However, I happened by chance on the railway station on the Museumbahn Etzwilen-Singen, where some interesting rolling stock was stored in the open, in the glare of the mid-day sun. Photos taken I caught a shiny red German Südbadenbus (DB in disguise) operating in Switzerland – what else in this mixed-up corner of the world – for the short ride to Stein am Rhein and renewed my acquaintance with tourist Switzerland. As I devoured a couple of exquisite pain-au-chocolats in Stein's historic main street with its wonderfully decorated buildings I reflected on a 'morning with a difference' and pondered these 'mysteries':— A) Why is there a prominent sign in Büsingen pointing to the Bahnhof, when there isn't one?; B) What was life like in Büsingen during WW2?; and C) Is the abolition of Swiss/German border controls a blessing or not?

In conclusion I recommend the truly international Euregiokarte (covering parts of not only Switzerland and Germany, but a portion of Austria as well) if you are in the Bodensee Area. Amongst other delights, tickets are valid on buses in Kursbuch tables 71.025 and 71.033 – enabling you to reach parts that the *SwissPass* cannot! 



1. Hustle and bustle in the main street (or Downtown Büsingen?).
2. The Rhein at Büsingen.
3. A rare Swiss diesel.
4. Ramsen Station looking towards Singen.