

Climbing above Territet : Bryan and Hanna Stone explore the railway history of the slopes above Le Léman

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Climbing above Territet

Bryan and Hanna Stone explore the railway history of the slopes above Le Léman.



The line crosses the alpine watershed.

All photos: Bryan Stone, except where shown

Territet is a small lakeside town 1,6 km from Montreux, its simple station on Line 100, Lausanne – Brig, squeezed in between Le Léman, a road and the Anglican Church of Montreux-Territet. A lakeside footpath leads 1km to the superb Château de Chillon. There was once a tram. The Anglican Church here is a pointer to our story. Territet in the late 19th C. was the centre of wealthy English tourism in this region, and church, hotels, promenades and gardens all tell of those golden times. Above Territet, however, is an even more select location, Glion, which also enjoyed the well-heeled English trade. A short distance up, on a headland above Glion, is the resort of Caux, home of one of the most ornate and luxurious hotels, an extraordinary pile like a fairy-tale castle, the 'Caux Palace Hotel'.

Niklaus Riggenschach, who had built the Rigi Bahn and was now an engineer for mountain railways built, in 1883, a funicular from Territet to Glion. It was, after his Giessbach line near Brienz, only the second in Switzerland. It was a balanced line, operated hydraulically, that is, the two cars were connected by a cable, with pulley at the top, and were balanced by their own weight. Water was admitted to the tank of the car at the top, while the tank of that at the bottom was emptied. The imbalance thus 'powered' the descending car, until in its turn, at the bottom, the water was released. There were once many such installations and one, in Fribourg, is still working. Riggenschach's security system was his rack, engaging with a toothed wheel on the car axle, which was braked by the conductor. To reassure his clients (the English, then as now, presumably asked "Is it safe?") Riggenschach conducted a famous public trial: He unhooked the upper car from the cable and, with the handbrake, controlled a perfect descent to Territet. Nothing then held up the formal opening on 19th August 1883. The metre-gauge line is 632m long, climbs 300m, and has a maximum grade of 570 per mille. Alas, the Riggenschach system and water drive were all

swept away in a renovation in 1975, but it is a beautiful ride. Michael Farr described this line in more detail in the

The Territet to Glion funicular on an old postcard.

Barry Eastick collection





June 2015 *Swiss Express*.

So we arrive in Glion. A few paces bring us to the platforms and workshops, of the next railway, the Glion-Naye. This was a conventional SLM standard mountain railway with Abt rack, steam locomotives and 800mm gauge. The objective was the Rochers-de-Naye, a spectacular panorama point above Lac Léman, with alpine views in all directions. The first section, Glion to Caux, was opened on 2nd July 1892, and the station building and restaurant are unusually elaborate. They are in fact integrated even today into the grounds of the 'Caux Palace Hotel'. On 28th July 1892 a further section was opened, and



finally Rochers-de-Naye at 1970m (72m below the peak of the same name) was reached on 16th September that year, presumably too late for the main season. Another large and palatial hotel was built at the summit station, with paths, gardens and even a fountain, but this has long disappeared. Today's summit station, cosy enough inside, is built like a bunker fortress, in a singularly unattractive hollow on a bare mountainside. Steam operation continued until on the 22nd July 1938 electrification was turned on at 850V dc. The light-weight railcars of that time, Bhe2/4 Nos. 201 – 204, that enabled a through service from Montreux, were in service until recently. No.204 is still used for works trains and may be seen out and about.



Before this, however, there was another fundamental change. Glion was dissatisfied. The funicular from Territet was all very well, but now the mainline trains, from France and elsewhere in Switzerland, stopped in Montreux. Glion, and the Rochers-de-Naye, wanted a direct connection. So, on 8th April 1909, the Montreux-Glion railway was opened, electrified from opening at 850V dc. One of the two-axle locomotives, HGe2/2 No 2, survived (although it was re-bodied in 1986), and is today usually around Glion depot. For another 29 years passengers for the mountain section changed here onto the steam train until the original line was electrified and through running commenced. So the Montreux – Rochers-de-Naye operation, which readers see today half-hidden behind the MOB trains at Montreux, is really an historical tangle. Its obvious starting point, which most passengers use today, was the last - by 17 years - to be built and the unusual layout at Glion now makes more sense. Another oddity is that having operated as a single entity for almost 50 years the two companies only merged as the MGN in 1987.




The journey today over the whole 10.36km is still exciting. In the first climb out of Montreux, 122 per mille (1 in 8.5), making a wide zigzag up the hillside, the best view of Chillon can be enjoyed. At Glion the grade becomes 220 per mille (1 in 4.5), but the light railcars are lively, touching 15 KM/H. Glimpses of the hotel at Caux are brief (best from further up), but today it is now the home of the Swiss Hotel Management School, and the students earn their honours by

1. Bhe 4/8 No.303 at Caux. 2. The picturesque Caux station.
3. Bhe 4/8 No.302 at Rochers-de-Naye
4. Rochers-de-Naye station

serving. They also serve in the ornate Jugendstil Station Buffet, at Caux, which was unfortunately closed on our last visit. We are anxious one day to try it.

We were up there in November, on an unusually fine and clear Indian Summer day. We found the views on the way up, which include the impressive Dent de Jaman (1875m) right at the lineside, are better than those from the top, despite clear wall-to-wall visibility on our day. It is amusing to see that the line, despite some heavy tunnelling, was really built on a shoestring. In the winter Rochers-de-Naye is a ski centre, so the railway runs all the year. This means that two electric snowploughs are based at Glion, Xrote 3 (1954) and Xrote4 (2013), as are two powerful hybrid (diesel and electric) locomotives, Hem 2/2 Nos.11 and 12 built by Stadler in 2013. Regular services are in the hands of Bhe4/8 Nos.301-305, 301-303 date from 1983 and 304 from 1992. No.305 is a late addition to the fleet having been built in 2010 to the same design by the MOB's workshops at Charnex to help cope with increased traffic flows. As previously noted Bhe2/4 No.204 (the last of the 1938 cars) and Bhe2/4 No.207 from 1949 are still around. All were built by the now-defunct SLM. There is also a diesel loco, Hm2/2 No.4, built by Buhler in 1973 for the Briener Rothorn Bahn and acquired by the line in 1996.

The lines are now marketed under the 'Goldenpass' banner. But there is still another curiosity. From Montreux to Caux, the train is the public transport for several communities, also enjoying a subsidy. School children, shoppers and commuters join and alight at several local stations. Up to Caux, and on the Territet-Glion funicular, you are on the General Abonnement map, so passes are valid. However beyond Caux the GA has not been valid, so although the fare was half-price to holders it was not cheap, CHF52 for Hanna and me. This may explain why *Swiss Express* has had no recent articles. But from the December 2015 timetable change, the mountain

section is now accessible using the GA (and presumably for tourists using a Swiss Pass) so it is hoped that more people will sample this section in the future. For the railway lover, and on a good day, it is truly an experience. 



TOP: Bhe 2/4 No. 204, from 1938, at Caux.

ABOVE: Hem 2/2 No.12 at Glion.

BELOW: An old postcard image of the original Rochers-de-Naye Hotel.

SRS collection

