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The MIB and a walk through the Aare Gorge

Adrian Foster

It was May 2010 and although I had called in at Meiringen en route to Interlaken from Lucerne via the Brünig Line on a previous visit to Switzerland due to an interest in Sherlock Holmes I decided to return. My wife and I stayed in the Park Hotel Du Sauvage, probably the biggest edifice in Meiringen, and from our window the main Zentralbahn (ZB) station could be seen - using a telephoto lens! However, we literally overlooked another smaller single-track line, which, at the time, ran into a stub terminus a short walk from the main station. The line itself carried on to link up with the ZB tracks but apparently difficulties with arranging links between different signalling and power supply systems precluded the passenger trains running into the ZB (ex SBB) station. This little line was the metre-gauge Meiringen – Innertkirchen Bahn (MIB), originally built by the Kraftwerke Oberhasli organisation (KWO) as a construction railway to support the building of hydroelectric dams in the Oberhasli approaching the Grimsel Pass. The KWO was established to build and operate the hydroelectric plants. The line opened in 1926 using steam locomotives acquired from the Rhätische Bahn to operate the line. As well as construction traffic, the line also operated a limited passenger service for workers. A battery railcar was purchased in 1931, and then a second in 1939. A licence to operate as a public passenger-carrying railway was obtained in 1946. This was to be operated by the MIB, created as a subsidiary company to KWO at the same time. This licence appears to have been for thirty years as, when the licence came up for renewal in 1976, it was decided to upgrade the line. The heavy, four-wheel battery railcars were harsh on the track and trackbed, and were at the end of their economic life so the line was electrified to 1,200V DC and second hand electric railcars (and trams) were acquired to operate it. By 2010 two different railcars were working the service. No.8, a Be 4/4 built by Stadler in 1996, which had an overall advertising livery, along with Bde 4/4 No.11 that was built originally for Chemins de Fer du Jura in 1953 then purchased by the MIB and rebuilt in 2005.

Railcar No 8 at Meiringen terminus.



View in the gorge.

Photos: Adrian Foster

Journey time on the MIB from Meiringen to Innertkirchen is a mere eleven minutes, a good four minutes of which is spent inside the tunnel adjacent to the Aare Gorge! Stations, or more correctly halts, are still shown as KWO on the name boards. Having travelled the full length of the line a couple of days previous, I suggested to my wife that we should catch the train to Aareschlucht Ost and walk back through the gorge. So, four minutes after leaving Meiringen we alighted at the Aareschlucht Ost stop that was only opened in 2003. This is recognised as the smallest 'station' in Switzerland and has to be seen to be believed! Apart from travelling on a recognised underground or Metro system I have never got off a train in a tunnel before. Using only the front door, the train stops opposite a door in the wall of the tunnel, through which is the visitor centre for the Aare Gorge, itself well worth seeing. The Aare gorge takes approximately forty minutes of easy walking to get through and at the other end is a suitable café for the obligatory refreshment. A further short walk and you arrive at Aareschlucht West to catch a train to take you back to Meiringen. Since our trip the MIB now runs into its own dedicated platform at the ZB station as the previous interface issues have been addressed at long last. 