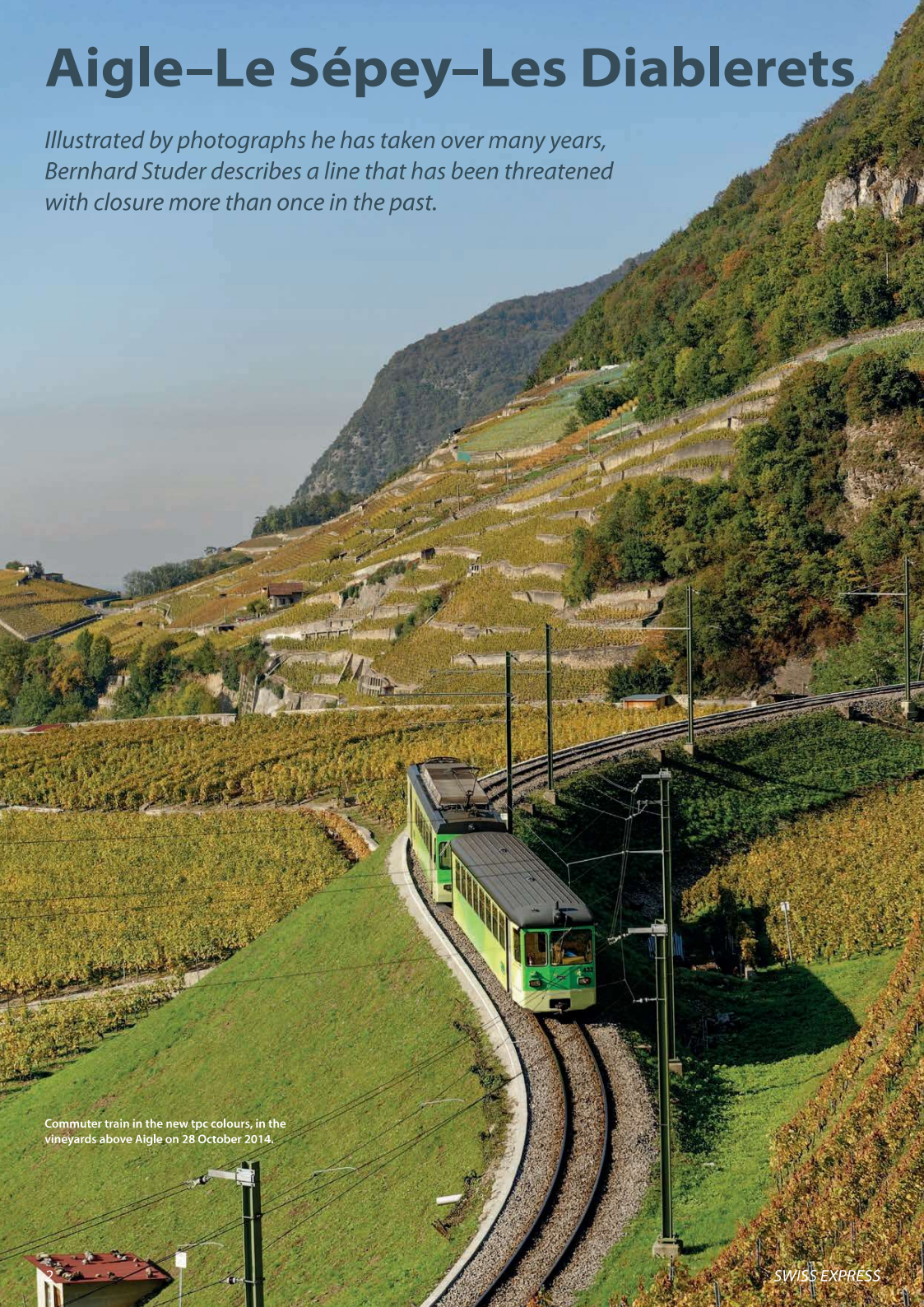


Aigle–Le Sépey–Les Diablerets

Illustrated by photographs he has taken over many years, Bernhard Studer describes a line that has been threatened with closure more than once in the past.



Commuter train in the new tpc colours, in the vineyards above Aigle on 28 October 2014.

SWISS EXPRESS

FOR ME, THE RAILWAY FROM Aigle to Le Sépey and on to Les Diablerets (ASD) is one of the most beautiful in Switzerland. The railway, which was electrically operated from the start (1350 V DC, later increased to 1500 V), was opened as far as Le Sépey on 22 December 1913 and onward to Les Diablerets on 7 July the following year. At that time, the railway's intention was to extend the tracks over the alpine pass of Col du Pillon into the Bernese Oberland to Gsteig, Gstaad and Saanen, there to connect with the Montreux–Oberland Bernois line. Unfortunately, the continuation was never realised, and the ASD has remained to this day a branch line.

Since 1999, the ASD has been part of tpc, the *Transports publics du Chablais*¹. Four originally independent metre-gauge railways are combined in the tpc. In addition to the ASD, the railways from Aigle to Leysin (A-L), from Aigle to Champéry

(AOMC) and from Bex to the Col de Bretaye (BVB) are part of the group.

The ASD line climbs steeply, but by adhesion only, from the Rhône Valley into the Vallée des Ormonts. Over a length of 23.34 km (including the detour to Le Sépey), a respectable altitude difference of just over 750 metres is overcome. The maximum gradient is 60 ‰ (1 in 16.6), with minimum curve radii of just 50 metres! The landscape is fascinating and the view from the train is magnificent. Nevertheless, the railway is little known.

¹ *Chablais* is the name of the lower Rhône valley, south of the point where the river Rhône flows into Lac Léman.



Top: Motor coach No.2, shunting in Aigle station on 27 February 1973.

Above: Motor coaches Nos.2 and 12 are seen in front of the depot at Aigle which had to be rebuilt after the huge fire of 1940. Photograph taken on 2 March 1973.

Top: Before the foundation of the tpc (*Transports publics du Chablais*) in 1999, the three railways that met at the station forecourt in Aigle carried very different liveries. On the far left, the brown BDeh 2/4 No.204 rack-and-pinion railcar of the Aigle–Leysin railway (A–L), on the far right the red driving trailer Bt 134 of the Aigle–Monthey–Champéry Railway (AOMC) and in the middle two railcars of the ASD, orange ABDe 4/4 No.3 and the then new BDe 4/4 No.402. (Photo: 1 November 1987).

Above: Today, Aigle station is modernised and the tpc have unified the colour scheme of the trains. On the left, BDeh 2/6 544 waits for departure to Champéry, on the right ASD BDe 4/4 No.401, ready for the trip to Les Diablerets (Photo: 18 February 2017).

Right: Above the small town of Aigle, BDe 4/4 Nos.403 and 402 are seen hauling an open car (borrowed from the Brünig Railway) and an unidentified driving trailer on 28 August 2004. In the background is Aigle Castle, one of the most important castles in Switzerland. The complex was mentioned as early as the 12th century and today houses a wine and salt museum.



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Above: ABDe 4/4 No.1 (built in 1913 and reconstructed after fire damage in 1941) has been preserved as a historic vehicle. Here the beautiful vehicle is on the move at Bellevue, high above Aigle on 18 February 2017.

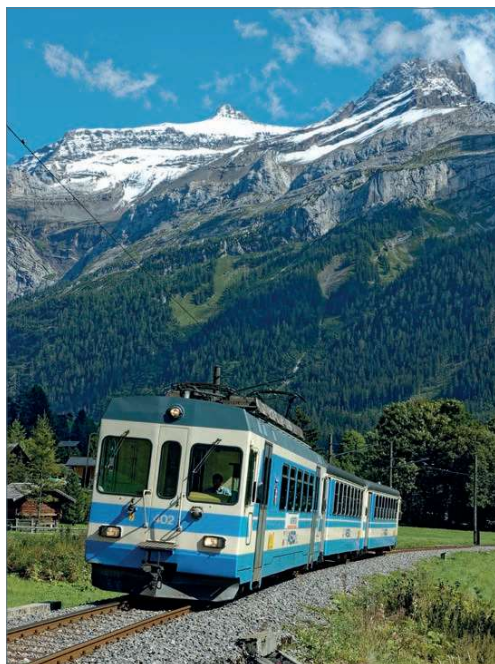


Left: ABDe 4/4 No.11 with a passenger train, above Aigle on 25 September 1982. The red car at the end of the train is a vehicle borrowed from the AOMC.

Lower left: BDe 4/4 No.402 with two ex-Birsigalbahn vehicles above Aigle on 28 August 2004.

Bottom left: An ASD passenger train, above Aigle on 28 August 2004. The leading vehicle is driving trailer Bt 434, built in 1966 for the Birsigalbahn.

Below: BDe 4/4 No.402, photographed below Les Diablerets on 28 August 2004.



Above: By the turn of the millennium, No.2 had exchanged its red livery for this eye-catching fancy colour scheme in which it is marketed as "Transormonan". This photograph was taken on 2 September 2000.

When the line opened ASD's railcars and passenger coaches were painted red. In the 1940s, the colour scheme changed to a light blue and cream with dark blue lining. The new railcars acquired in 1987 and the vehicles taken over from the Birsigalbahn were painted in a darker shade of blue and cream. At that time some old vehicles were painted orange to make them look a bit more modern.

Since the merger into the tpc, the ASD vehicles that have been running since the 1980s and which cover the timetable service have been painted in the current green and light green tpc livery. The museum vehicle, ABDe 4/4 No.1 is now back in light blue and cream.

Right: Deviating from the usual colour scheme, for a few years No.2 ran in this red livery. Photograph taken on 15 October 1983.

Below: Between Verchiez and Plambuit, the imposing Pont du Vanel spans the Vanex brook. Photograph taken on 15 October 1983.

Below right: Today, the Pont du Vanel is painted in this red-oxide shade (25 April 1992).



In 1940, the depot in Aigle burnt down after a short circuit. Three of the railway's five railcars and four of its five passenger coaches were severely damaged. The world political situation was gloomy which helped the ASD to survive despite this misfortune. The fire insurance money was however not

enough to buy new vehicles, so the damaged old vehicles were rebuilt in an only slightly modernised form.

It has never been a foregone conclusion that the trains would still be running today. Time and again, there have been discussions about converting it to a bus service. Because



Above: When there is a shortage of rolling stock, trains of the Aigle–Leysin railway can also occasionally be seen running on the ASD line, as here on 13 June 1981 with Bt No.352 and BDeh 4/4 No.302 encountered at Exergillod station.

Left: Trains crossing at Exergillod on 25 September 1982: on the left No.1 on its way to Le Sépey and, on the right, No.11 heading toward Aigle.

Below: Trains crossing in Les Planches on 9 September 1973. On the left No.3 has arrived at the junction from Aigle and must wait until No.12 and its trailer have passed heading toward Les Diablerets. The short section from Les Planches to Le Sépey and back is covered twice by all trains. At Le Sépey station a hairpin bend must be negotiated.

This photograph shows the detail differences between the motor coaches that were totally rebuilt after the fire and those which were renovated. No.3 was rebuilt and has larger, wider side windows; No.12 was renovated and kept the older style of window.



the continuation over the Col du Pillon was never realised, traffic volumes have always remained quite modest. Until quite recently, whenever larger investments became necessary, discontinuation of the service was discussed anew.

In 1984, the ASD survived only by luck after the Federal Transport Office in Bern cancelled the payment of federal subsidies for the line's operation and maintenance, stating that they wanted to finance a conversion to bus operation. Bern justified this by saying that bus operation would be sufficient for local access and that there would be almost no tourist traffic on the ASD. At that time, the ASD was the only railway

Top: At Les Planches, the imposing Pont des Planches, one of the world's first large reinforced concrete bridges, crosses the valley. Photograph taken on 28 February 1973.

Right: No.12 at Le Sépey station on 28 February 1973. All trains must reverse direction here.

Below: Nos.3 and 1, towing trailers 33, 32 and 34 all in orange, seen between Le Sépey and Les Planches on 25 September 1982.


Below right: No.12 with a passenger train also conveying goods wagons, between Les Echenards and Les Planches on 15/10/1977.

in Switzerland whose railcars and passenger coaches were all from the opening period! But the canton of Vaud and the inhabitants of the Vallée des Ormonts fought back for their railway. With cantonal aid, four new railcars were purchased (see panel below) and some passenger coaches and driving trailers of the Birsigalbahn that had become superfluous to



Basel's suburban traffic were bought. This clearly shows that, in Switzerland, politics come from the bottom up, not from the top down!

Around 1990, the politicians again discussed a conversion to bus operation, because it became apparent that expensive investments would be necessary in the aging track systems, in the catenary and in the safety systems.

Only the merger of the four metre-gauge railways in the Chablais to form tpc has ensured the long-term survival of the friendly railway to Les Diablerets. A visit to this little train, which runs through an extraordinarily charming region, is highly recommended! 



Top: The cattle seem more interested in the train than in the photographer! Vers l'Eglise on 13 June 1981.

Upper left: Vers l'Eglise is a very nice little village. This train, photographed on 13 June 1981 is composed of ABDe 4/4 No.12, trailers 35 and 31 and ABDe 4/4 No.11.

Upper right: Trains crossing at Vers l'Eglise station on 15 October 1977. On the left is No.12, on the right No.1.

Left: Goods train led by No.12 at Vers l'Eglise on 15 October 1977.

Below left: In Saint-Georges-de-Commiers, near Grenoble in the French Alps on 8 September 1991, ASD motor coaches Nos.3 and 12 are waiting for another use on the museum railway to la Mure. Parked behind them is the brown Ge 4/4 No.182 of the Rhaetian Railway. This locomotive later returned to Switzerland where it was refurbished and today it is back in service on the Bernina line. The two ex-ASD railcars, on the other hand, are still at Saint-Georges-de-Commiers. They have never been used on the la Mure Railway.

Opposite, upper left: Nos.12 and 11 crossing at Les Echenards station on 25 September 1982.

Opposite, upper right: Below Les Diablerets the impressive Diablerets massif is visible. Photograph taken on 25 September 1982.

Opposite, bottom: BDe 4/4 Nos.401 and 402 in the current green and light green tpc livery at Les Diablerets station on 11 September 2020.

ASD Rolling Stock

(It has to be said that the history of the earliest vehicles is complicated and sources differ.)

First Generation dating back to the opening in 1913

Motor Coaches

- Nos.1–3 Class: BCZe 4/4 (signifying second and third class with postal compartment)
Nos.11–12 Class CZFe 4/4 (third class only, postal and general luggage compartment)

In 1935 the postal compartments were converted to general luggage compartments and the classifications became BCFe 4/4 and CFe 4/4 respectively.

Nos.1, 2 and 11 were totally destroyed in the 1940 fire. They were rebuilt with second- and third-class accommodation, so were now type BCFe 4/4 and they were renumbered 1 to 3. Nos.3 and 12 were renovated a few years later (No.3 becoming No.11). Both had two classes so were also BCFe 4/4. Following the abolition of third class (1956) and the redesignation of the luggage compartment from F to D (1962) they became ABDe 4/4 and finally BDe 4/4 with the removal of the first class in 1987.

Nos.1 and 2 are now preserved by the ASD. In 1987 Nos.3 and 12 were sold to the Chemin de fer de la Mure in France. No.11 was scrapped.

Trailers

- Nos.21–22 BC (second and third class)
Nos.31–33 C (third class only)

All five were rebuilt after the fire as third class only (second class post-1956), Nos.21 and 22 being renumbered 34 and 35.

In 1988 No.31 was sold to the German Märkische Museumseisenbahn. The same year Nos.32, 33 and 35 were sold to la Mure, although No.35 was brought back to the ASD in September 1993. No.34 has always remained with the ASD and now runs with motor coach No.1.

Second Generation 1987

Four motor coaches, BDe 4/4 Nos.401–404 were built in 1987 by Ateliers de constructions mécaniques de Vevey (ACMV) and Brown, Boveri & Cie (BBC). In addition, four driving trailers (Nos. 431–434) and a trailer car (421) were acquired second-hand from the Birsigtalbahn.

All are still with the railway. 421 and 433 have been rebuilt as salon cars.

Third Generation 2023?

As reported in the *Swiss News* section of this issue, tpc has ordered three new two-section units from Stadler which will presumably replace 401–404 and some if not all the driving trailers.

