TPOs of the Swiss Private Railways

Introduction

With a network of 5232km (*3250 miles*), Switzerland's railways are divided between the mainline routes of the Federal Railways (SBB/CFF/FFS) and Bern-Lötschberg-Simplon (BLS AG), and numerous private railways serving the outlying communities and remote mountain valleys.

The term 'Private Railway' is used to describe the small independent companies that constructed regional railways (branch lines) from around 1875. The majority of these were narrow-gauge, i.e. metre, 800mm, or 750mm. A few were also built to the standard-gauge layout of 1435mm (*4' 8½"*).

From 1885, some of these private railways were operating a Travelling Post Office, such as the regional lines St. Sulpice-Travers, Tramelan-Tavannes and Viège-Zermatt. As the network of branch lines expanded the TPO services increased, with each route using its own 'named' date canceller issued by the Swiss Post Office.

Many of the date cancellers were manufactured by Güller & Co. of Hüttikon, Canton Zürich, in the form of a double-circle with date-bridge and train number, together with the route name and the descriptor 'Regional', 'Ambulant' or 'Bahnpost'. Examples are shown below:

The Exhibit

The purpose of this exhibit is to describe the TPOs operating on these private railways: identifying the route, company-name, types of canceller used, and provide an insight to the workings of each line.


Rhatische Bahn TPO wagon Z.26, Chur-Disentis route, 1913

Bibliography

Throughout the display reference is made to the TPO canceller-types and their recorded dates of use for each route. These are fully documented and illustrated in the handbook '***Die Schweizerischen Bahnpoststempel***' by Alfred Müller, published by Zumstein & Co. in 1977. Cancellers are grouped (86B, 86E, 86G, etc.) as previously recorded in the '***Grosses Handbuch der Abstempelungen auf Schweizer Marken 1843–1907***' by Andres & Emmenegger, re-published in 1969.

The metre-gauge line opened from Aigle to Sépey on 22 December 1913 and was extended to Diablerets on 7 July 1914. Electrified from the start, it reaches an altitude of 1,175m with a maximum incline of 60%. TPO services operated on the 22.3km route from 1913 until 1952.
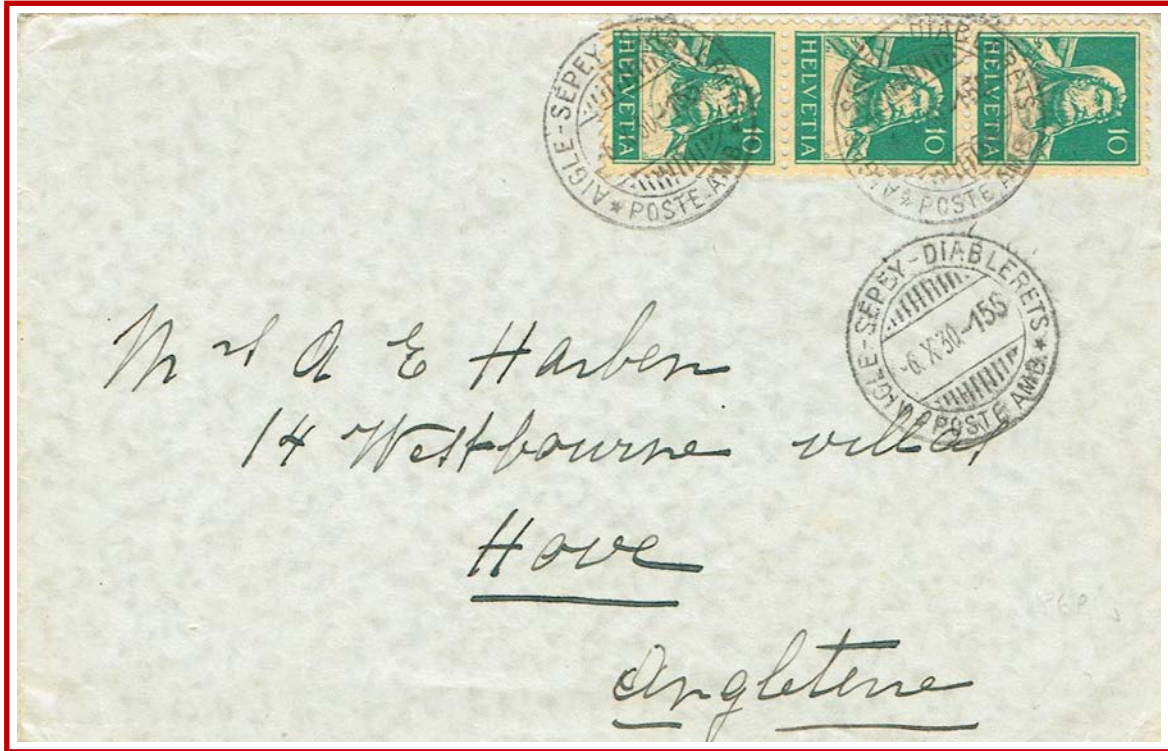

1930: cover (*origin unknown*) addressed to Hove, England.
30c. (*foreign letter rate, 20g*); Tariff: 1 Oct 1924

Type 86B/3

The first section of standard-gauge line, from La Chaux de Fonds to Le Locle was opened by the *Compagnie du Jura Industriel* in July 1857 Taken over by the *Jura Neuchâtelois* in 1886, the railway was extended from Le Locle to connect with the line from the French town of Morteau. A TPO operated on this route from 1886.
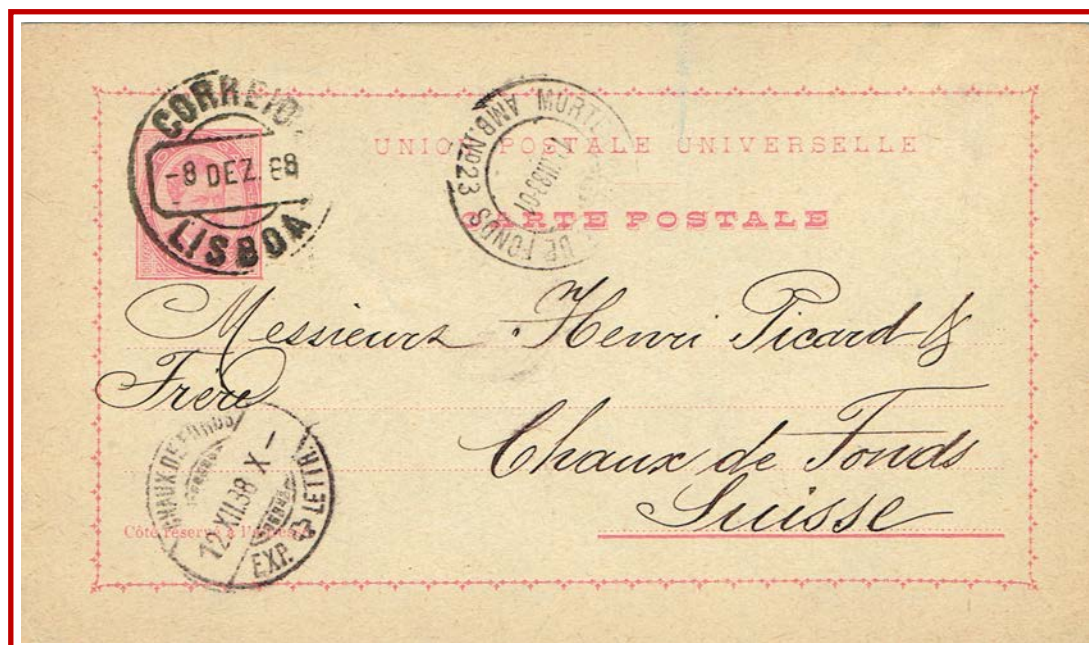
1888: postal card from Lisbon to Chaux de Fonds, Canton Neuchâtel.
Transit by rail BESANÇON – MORTEAU – CHAUX DE FONDS

Type 86B/53

Examples of Type 86B/53 canceller are rarely seen
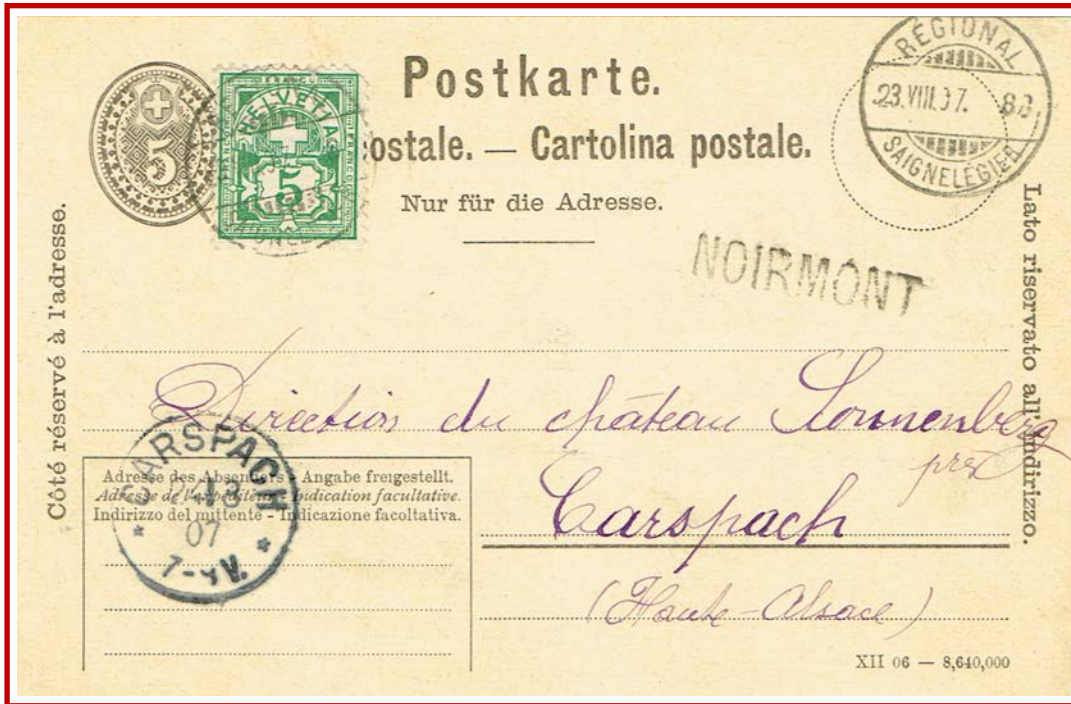

86B/53
(*1886-1904*)

The longest of the Jura region's railways links the horse-breeding centre at Saignelégier with the core of the watch-making industry at Chaux-de-Fonds. The metre-gauge line opened on 7 December 1892 and a TPO is known to have operated on the route from 1895, using cancellers inscribed 'Regional / Saignelégier'.
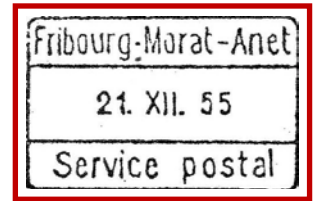

86E/7
(*1895-1907*)

1907: postal card from Noirmont, Canton Neuchâtel, to Carspach, Alsace Region, France
10c. (*foreign postcard rate*) Tariff: 1 Jul 1875   NOIRMONT posting mark

Type 86E/7

Saignelégier station

The 32km standard-gauge track was opened on 23 August 1898 between Fribourg and Morat (German: Murten) and extended to Anet (Ins) on 1 May 1903. TPO cancellations used on this route were of a unique type - a rectangular box - and are known to have been in use from 1927.
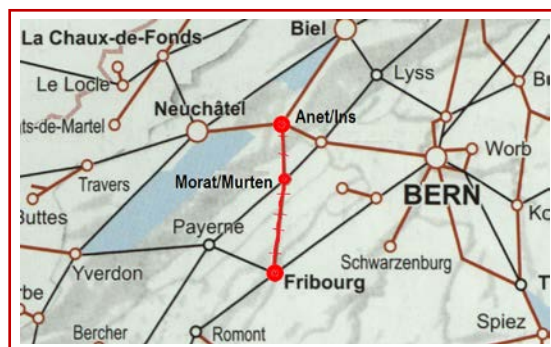
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┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Fribourg-Morat-Anet     │
├─────────────────────────┤
│     21. XII. 55         │
├─────────────────────────┤
│   Service postal        │
└─────────────────────────┘
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86Q/1
(1927-1975)

1944: commercial cover to the Swiss Cheese Trade Union in Berne.
20c. (*inland letter rate, 250g*); Tariff: 1 Jan 1921

Type 86Q/1

The metre-gauge *Berner Oberland Bahn* commenced operation on 1 July 1890, connecting Interlaken with the two valley communities of Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald. A TPO service operated on the Grindelwald section from 1899, with the text on the first canceller inscribed 'Grindelwald / Interlaken'.
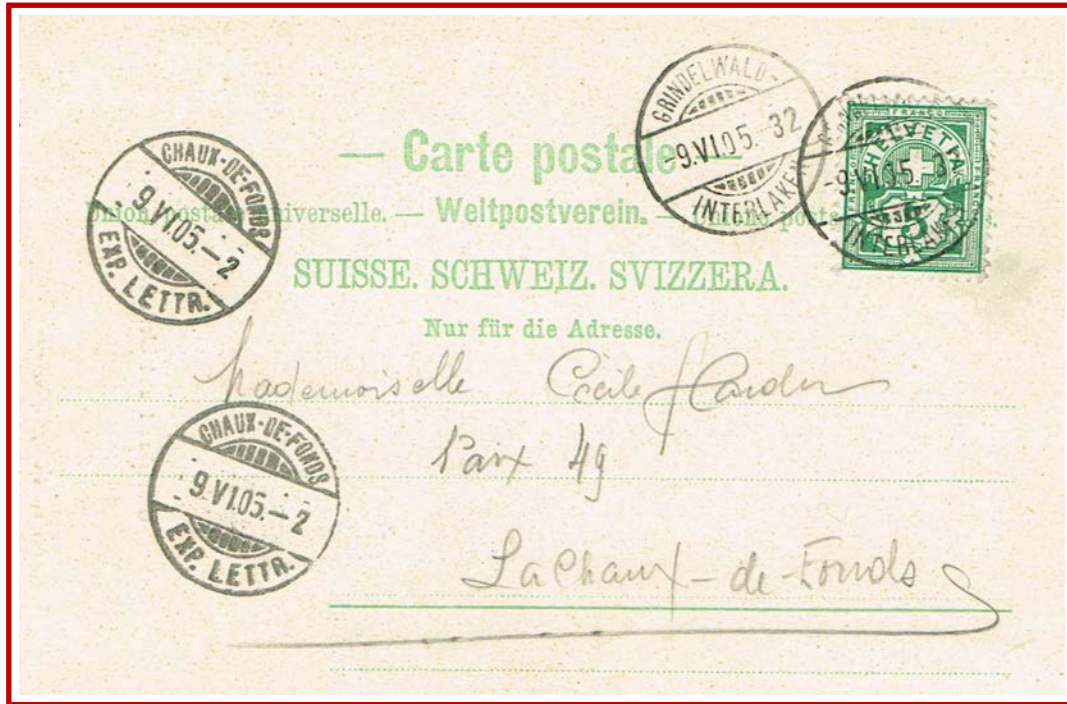
1905: view card from Grindelwald to Chaux-de-Fonds, Canton Neuchâtel.
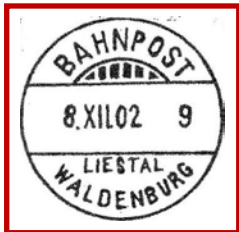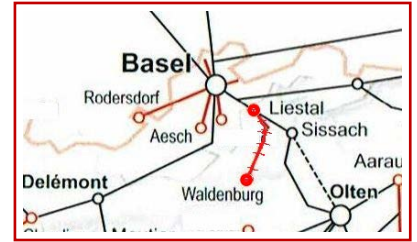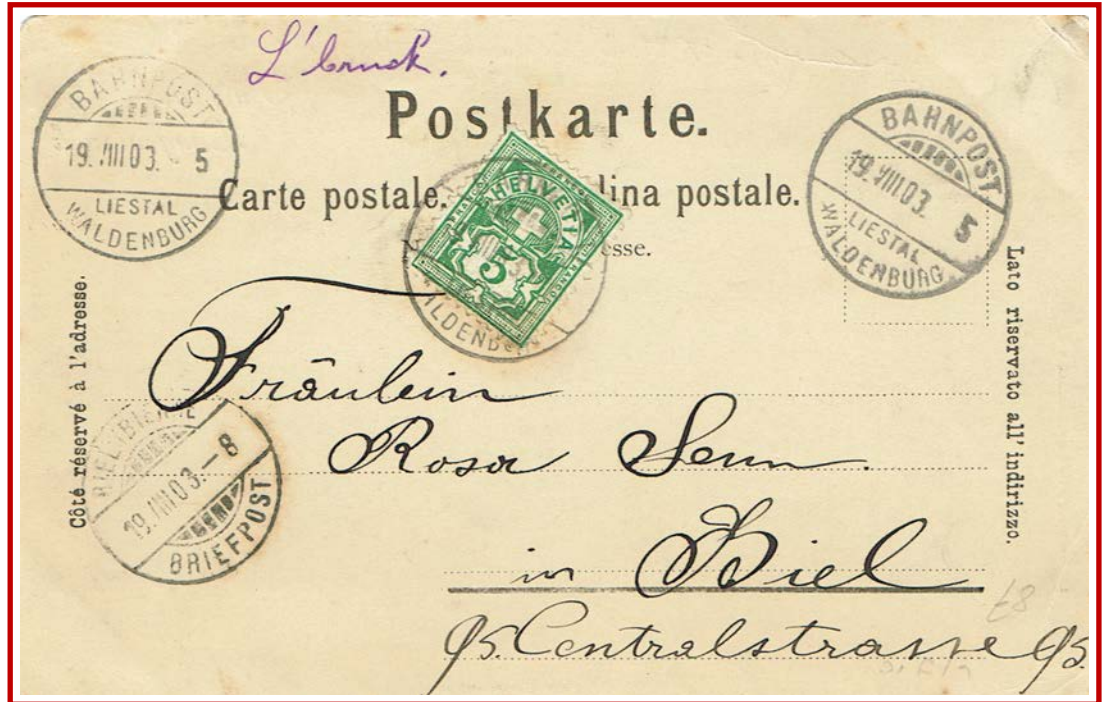5c. (*inland postcard rate*); Tariff: 1 Oct 1870

Type 86D/6

86D/6
(*1899-1911*)

With a width of 750mm (*2' 5½"*) the Waldenburgerbahn is the smallest narrow-gauge railway in Switzerland. The line opened in 1880 running on a single track between Waldenburg and the manufacturing town of Liestal in the half-canton of Baselland. Four different types of TPO cancellers have been used on this route, the first in 1901 .

86F/2
(*1901-1947*)

1903: postal card Langenbruck to Biel.

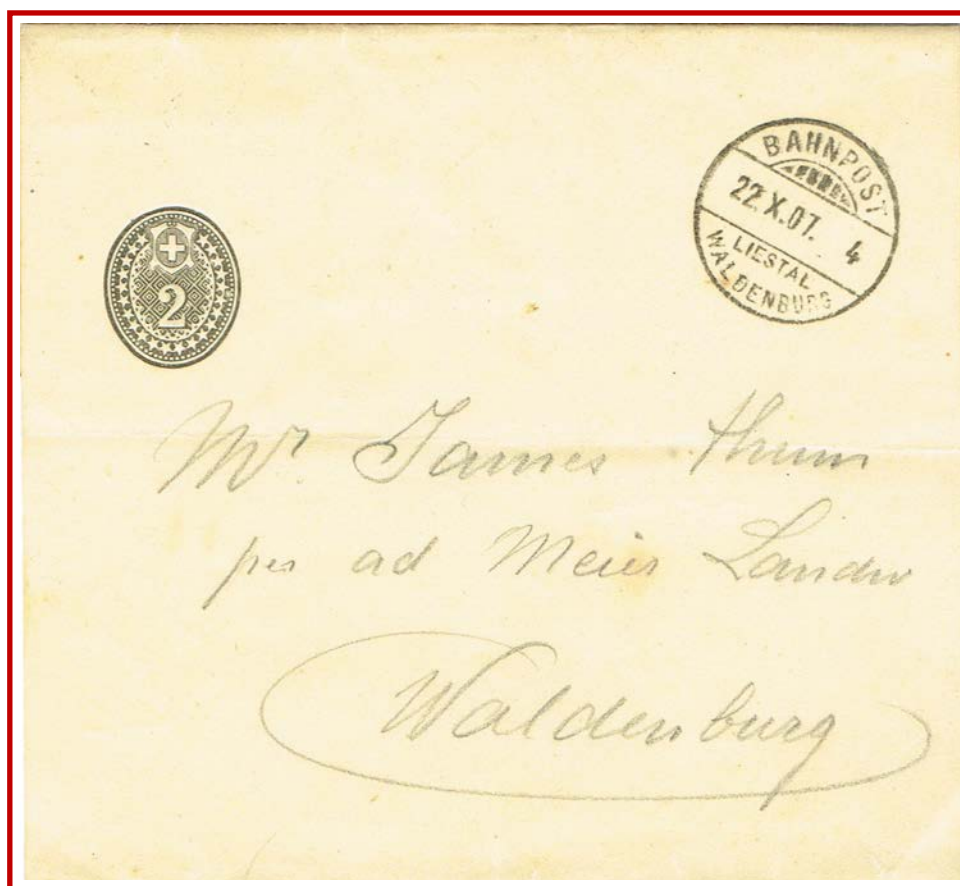5c. (*inland postcard*)
Tariff: 1 Oct 1870

"***L'bruck***"
(*Langenbruck*)
posting mark

1920: parcel advice card from Höltstein.

The 13km line took eight months to complete and was operated by steam-hauled trains until 1953. For much of its journey it takes the form of a single-track roadside electric tramway, with eleven intermediate stops.

1907: wrapper with embossed 2c value, addressed to Waldenburg.
2c. (*printed matter rate, 50g*); Tariff: 1 Oct 1872

Type 86F/2

Photograph of TPO van on the Waldenburgerbahn (date unknown)

The 19km Swiss section of the cross-border route to the French town of Chamonix is metre-gauge with rack assistance. Electrified from the start, it was opened in August 1906. A TPO service operated on the line from 1907, using cancellers inscribed 'Martigny-Châtelard / Poste. Amb.'
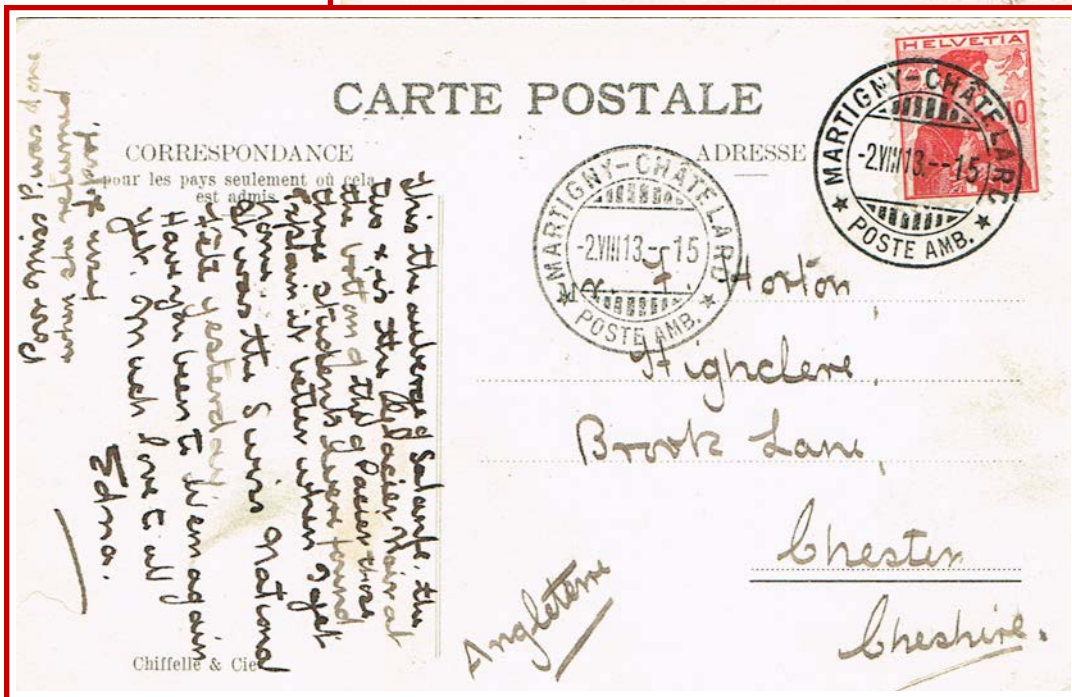

86B/49
(*1907-1930*)

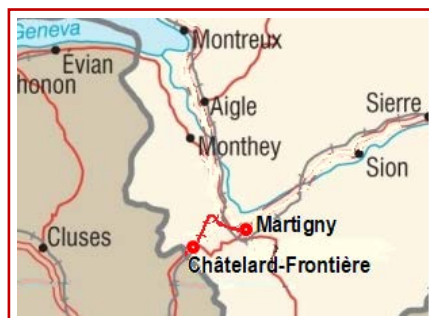1909: over-franked card from Finhaut (VS) to Fribourg.

Correct postage = 5c. (*inland postcard rate*)

FINHAUT posting mark

1913: postcard from the Auberge de Salanfe, Evionnaz (*VS*), addressed to Chester, England.
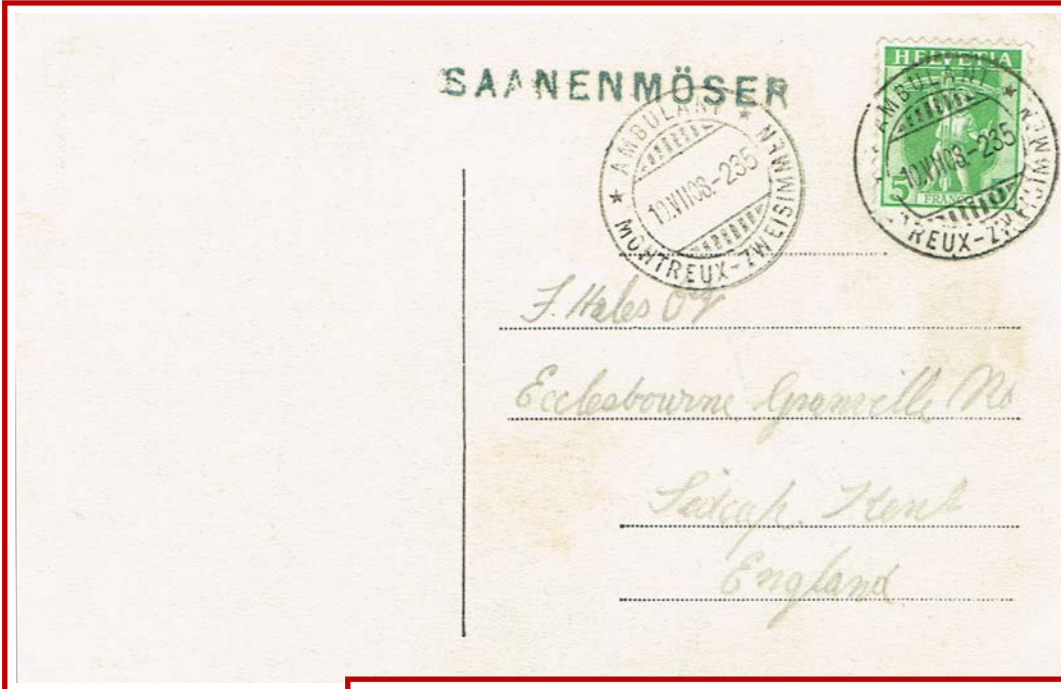
10c. (*foreign postcard*) Tariff: 1 Jul 1875

One of the oldest electric railways in the country, the metre-gauge MOB has a 62.4km main line connecting Montreux, Gstaad and Zweisimmen, and a 13km branch line from Zweisimmen to Lenk. The main line was completed in July 1905 and was operated by TPO's from 1906 until the service ceased on 30 May 1999.
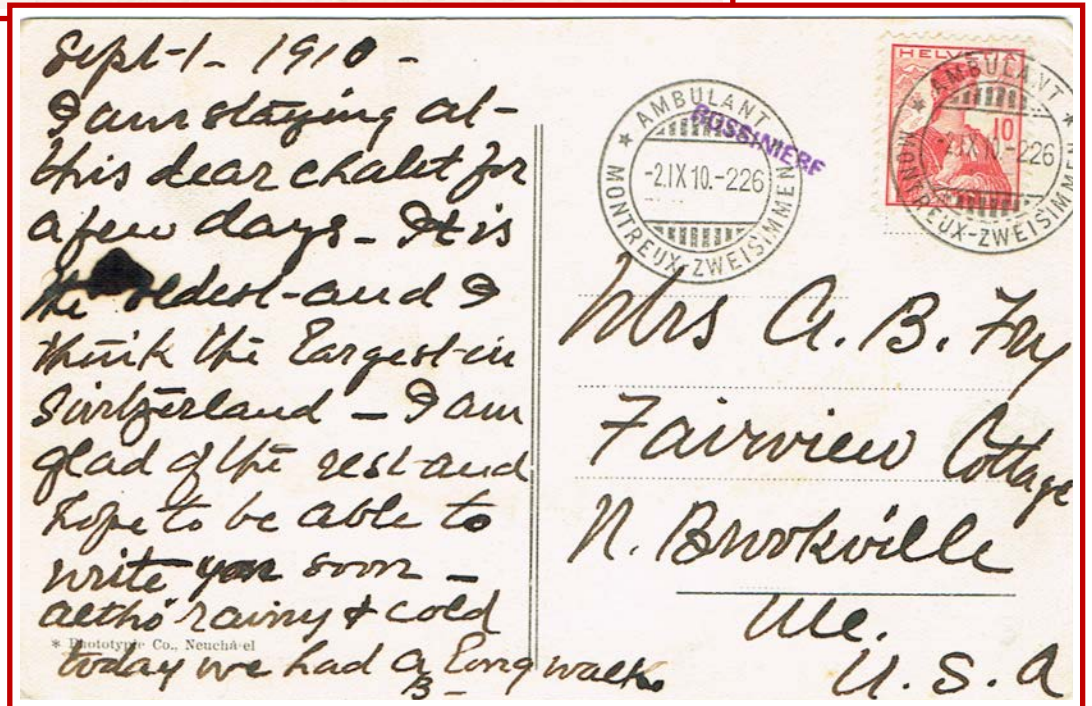

86B/52
(*1906-1956*)

1908: view card addressed to England and posted at the Saanenmöser Pass station on the MOB route

5c. (*foreign printed matter*)
Tariff: 1 Jul 1875

SAANENMÖSER
posting mark

1910: view card to USA, posted at Rossinère station.
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10c. (*foreign postcard*)
Tariff: 1 Jul 1875

ROSSINERE
posting mark

Introduction

With a 384km (*238 mile*) network of metre-gauge track, the Rhätische Bahn is the largest independent railway in Switzerland. Serving the Canton of Graubünden (*Grisons*), it connects with the SBB mainline at Chur and the Italian railway at Tirano. Cancellers used on the main routes were inscribed 'BAHNPOST / RHÂT. BAHN'.

86E/6
(*1906-1940*)

1910: UPU postal card to Waldhausen, Hannover, Germany

ST.MORITZ-DORF posting chop (AW43/S76) and Type 86E/6 cds.
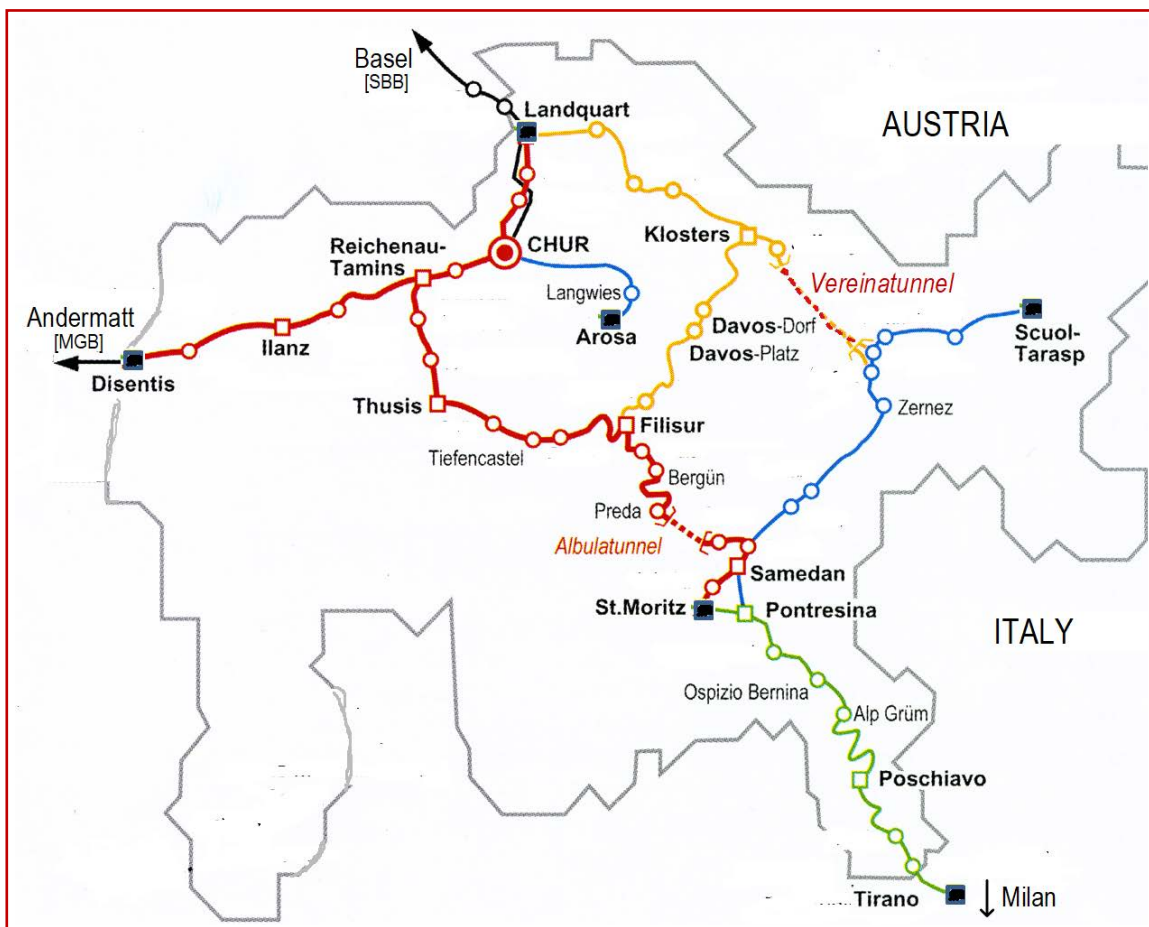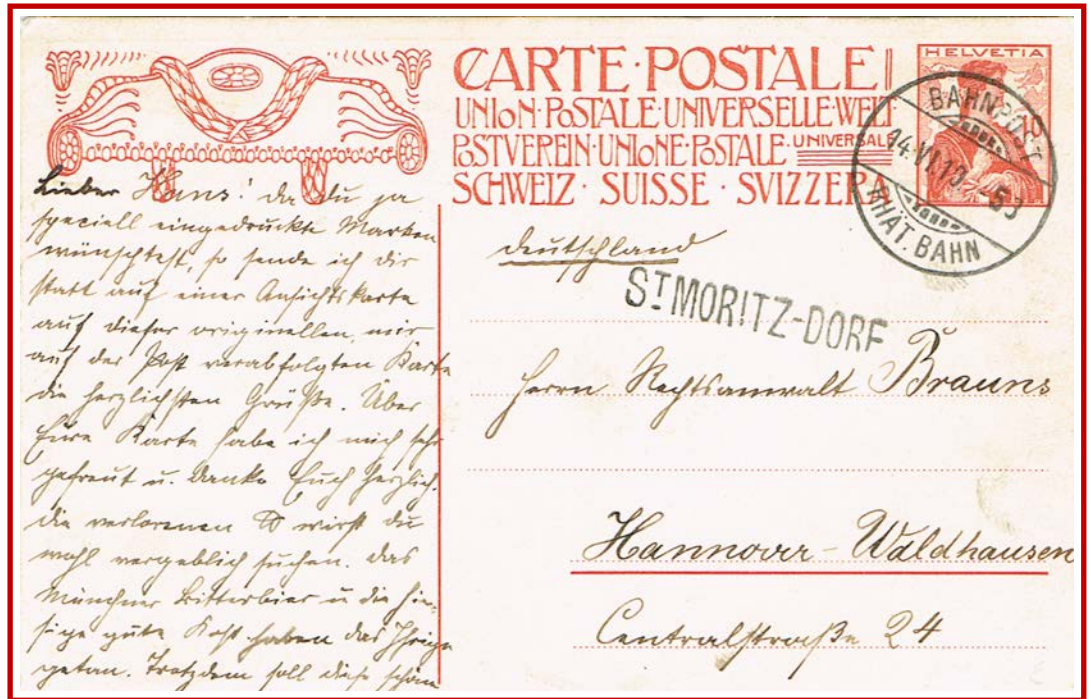
Rhätische Bahn network - with end-stations marked:

Completed in 1906, the Albula line is the main route through Graubünden, connecting Chur, Thusis, Filisur, Albula and St. Moritz in the Engadine. TPO cancellers of the closed-bridge design were used from 1913.
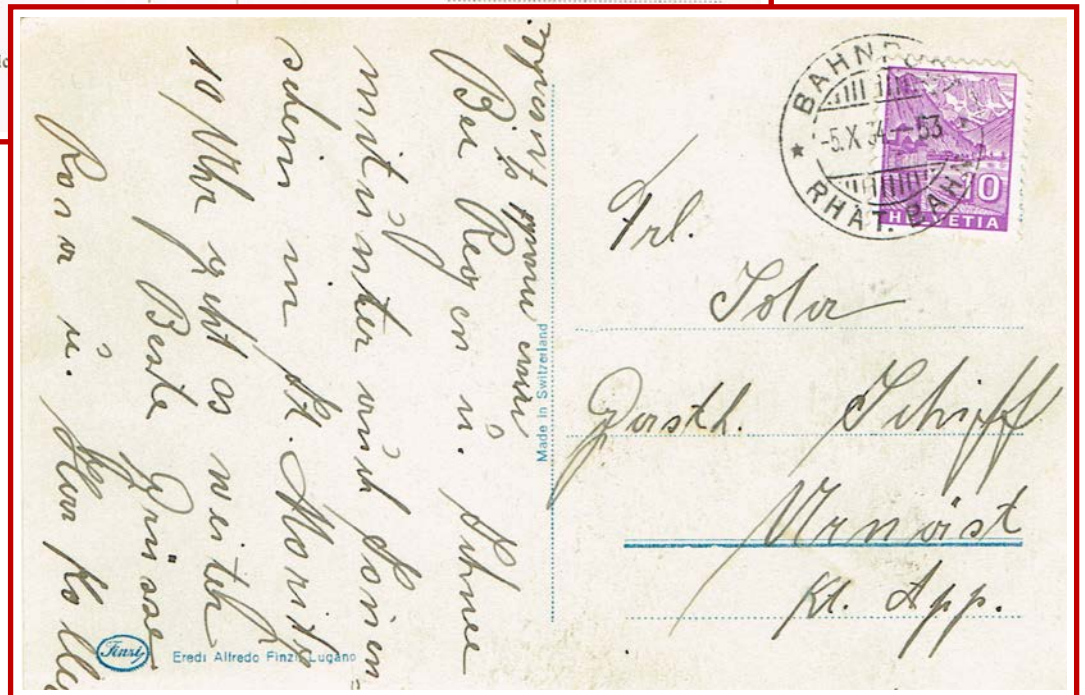

Wehrli A.-G., Kilchberg, Züri…

86B/61
(1913-1939)

1914: postcard addressed to Berlin.

10c. (*foreign postcard*)
Tariff: 1 Jul 1875

1934: postcard from St. Moritz addressed to Urnäsch, Appenzell AR
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10c. (*inland postcard*)
Tariff: 1 Jan 1921

Type 86B/61

The most iconic feature of the Albula line is the Landwasser Viaduct between Filisur and Tiefencastel. Constructed of limestone, it has a span of 136 metres and is 65m high.