

**Gilbert Gribi** takes another look at a well-known museum line in Switzerland.  
*Photographs and drawings by the author.*

# Blonay – Chamby

Preservation Swiss style

About twenty kilometres from the Lausanne terminus of the TGV, or, more precisely, 7km as the crow flies from the Franco-Swiss border on Lake Geneva, there is a rather unusual metre gauge preserved railway.

It dominates the Vaud Riviera, a region known worldwide for its climate and its scenery. (Often illustrated by a view of the Chillon castle on the edge of the lake and the Dents du Midi mountain range in the background.)

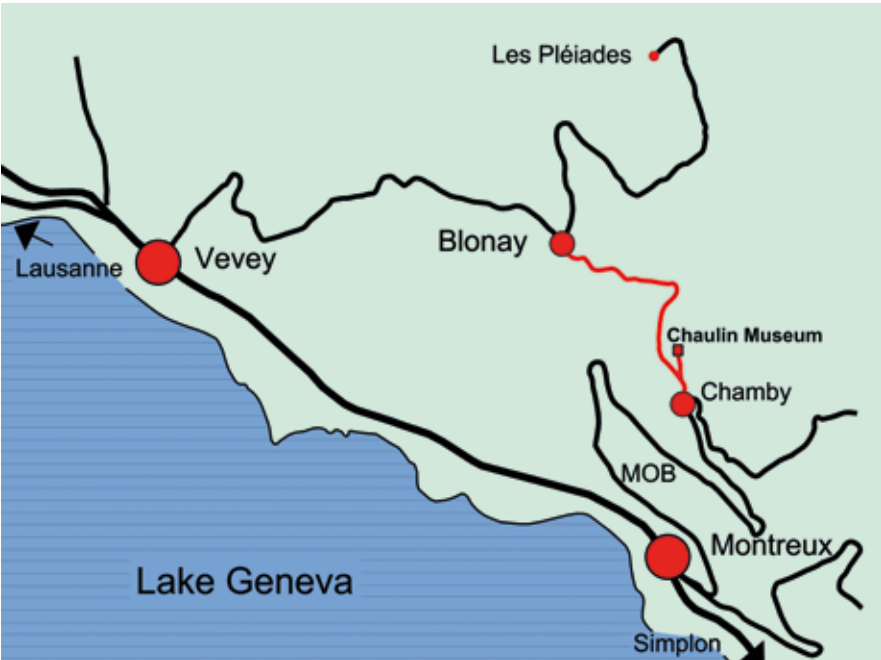
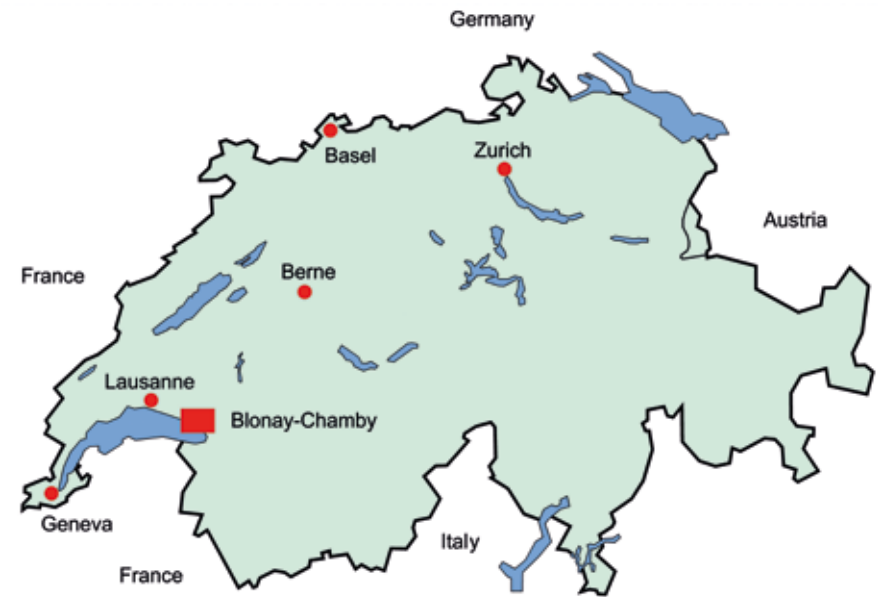
It is located in a region where railway enthusiasts can discover a wide variety of trains, including a rack railway which rises from Montreux to the Rochers de Naye at an altitude of nearly 2,000m, as well as funiculars connecting the lakeside towns to the surrounding mountains. In Aigle or Bex you can choose destinations offered by the Aigle – Leysin (AL), L'Aigle – Ollon – Monthey – Champéry (AOMC), L'Aigle – Sepey – Diableret (ASD), and the Bex – Villars – Bretaye, all these mountain lines being metre gauge. You could make longer journeys with the MOB (Montreux Oberland Bernois or GFM (Gruyère – Fribourg – Morat), in particular to visit La Gruyère; home of the famous cheese (which, contrary to popular belief, does not have holes!). And we should not forget the magnificent Swiss steam park at Bouveret which can be accessed from the Swiss or French shores of Lake Geneva by paddle steamers.

The Blonay – Chamby connects the MOB, a link between the French and German speaking parts of Switzerland, and the more modest but just as pleasant Compagnie des chemins de fer électriques veveysans (CEV), which many may have used to go skiing in Les Pléiades (1,400m).

So from either Vevey or Montreux it is possible to arrange magnificent rail itineraries.

The trip on the preserved line in period stock is enhanced by a visit to the related museum. The line is electrified (at 900V) which allows the use of historic electric locomotives and railcars as well as trams, which are well represented in the collection.

Unusually, the line is managed and operated exclusively by a team of volunteer enthusiasts.



## Brief history

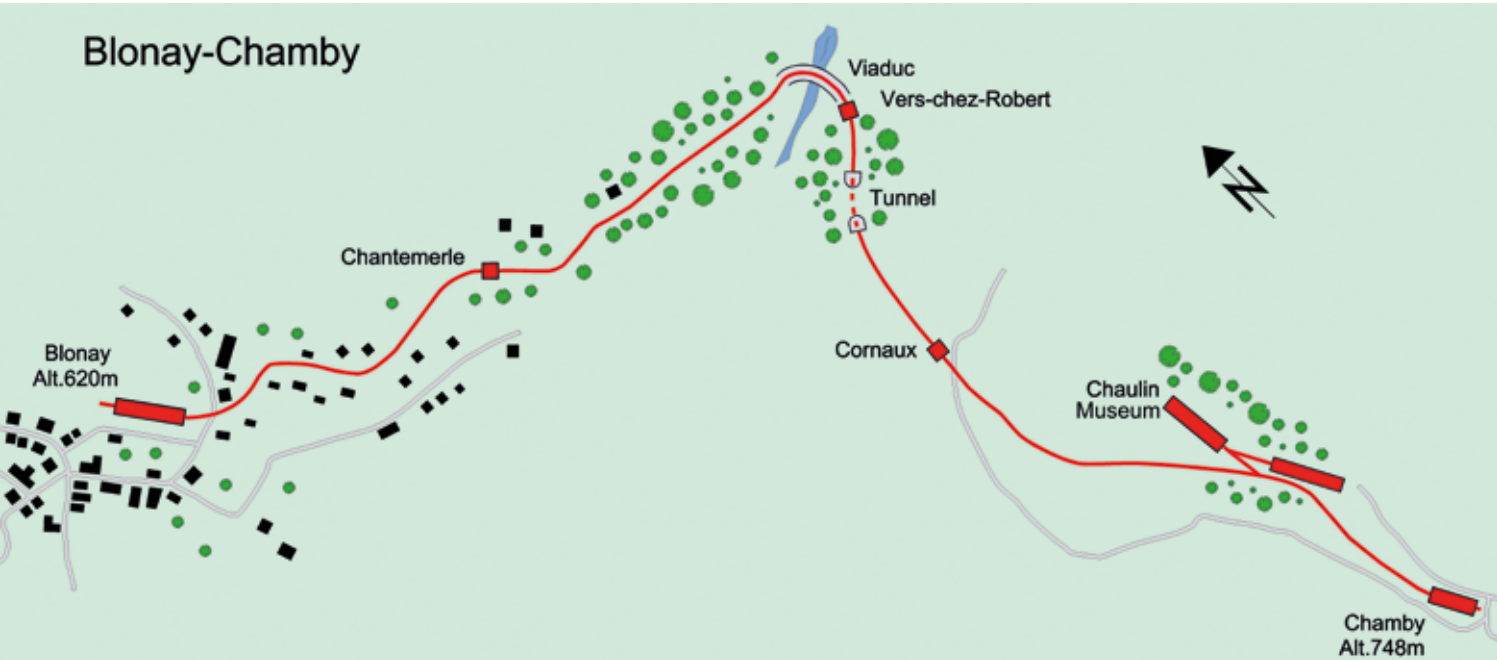
Before the existence of the museum, this single track line was operated by the Vevey electric railways. Due to its low profitability and poor condition, operation was abandoned in 1966. In that year, a few enthusiasts joined forces and contacted the authorities concerned. They then founded a company to establish the Blonay – Chamby tourist railway. It would later be dissolved to make way for a co-operative company and a support society.

The Compagnie des chemins de fer électriques veveysans granted them the right to use the line.

After two years of procedures, they obtained from the various authorities and competent bodies authorisation to operate the railway. They undertook the necessary work, in particular urgent repairs to damage caused by the abandonment of the line.

The new company received its first tram and its first locomotive in 1967. The inauguration took place in July 1968.

Above  
**Lausanne Echallens Bercher G3/3 No.5 on the imposing Baye de Clarens viaduct with Bernina Bahn and Rhätische Bahn coaches.**







Above  
Berner Oberland Bahn  
HGe3/3 No.29  
at Blonay station.

In the beginning the Blonay – Chamby experienced many difficulties: work in conditions that were not always easy, a landslide which interrupted traffic for several weeks, drought which prohibited steam traction, smoke which was poorly accepted by certain local residents, and financial problems (to name only the main ones). However, thanks to the enthusiasm and dedication of the members, as well as the financial assistance provided by neighbouring municipalities and the technical participation of private companies, the company gradually overcame all the difficulties. Its current financial situation can be described as healthy despite a significant loan for the construction of a new depot.

Blonay – Chamby has several hundred contributing members, including around a hundred active people who devote a minimum of working time to it every year. They come from all social and professional backgrounds, and several nationalities.

The journey

From the small pretty village of Blonay, trains go to Chamby following a short (3km) but varied route. The average gradient is 43/1000.

For safety reasons, trains run at reduced speed which delights passengers who have the time to admire and photograph the numerous railway works along the route.

Four steam locos are currently available to undertake the heavy work of pulling the passenger coaches:

- Brig – Furka – Disentis HG3/4 No.3
- Ferrovie Padane G2/2 No.4
- Lausanne – Echallens – Bercher G3/3 No.5
- Bière – Apples – Morges G3/3 No.6.

In Blonay, the tourist train is the ‘guest’ of the CEV, owners of the station. An additional track was installed so that the Blonay – Chamby operations did not disrupt the circulation of CEV trains.

A small chalet welcomes visitors and the adventure begins with the purchase of the ticket, which children are happy to present to the conductor. Once the passengers have taken their seats, the countdown begins. We are in Switzerland and the stationmaster’s green baton will rise on time, or rather, at the exact second of departure.

The train leaves Blonay station on a slight gradient. It passes a residential area and begins to traverse several curves on the hillside.

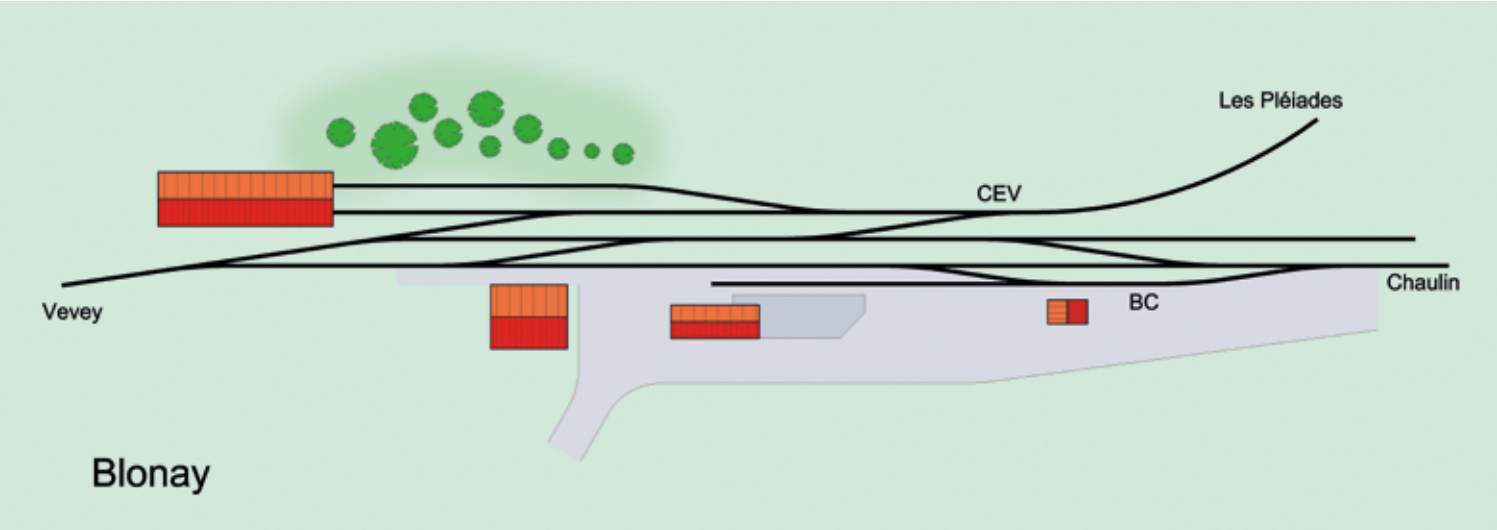
Reaching the site of the Chantemerle landslide, it must slowly cross the ‘temporary’ structure made of metal beams placed on stacks of crossed sleepers. Fortunately the ground has definitely stabilised.

The train then enters a dense forest and reaches the curved viaduct of La Baye de Clarens, one of the signature structures on the line.

At the other end of this bridge we pass Vers-chez-Robert halt which was, during the early years, the ‘base camp’ of the team. After a short stop, the train runs along a steep embankment with a retaining wall and a little further on disappears into a 45m tunnel, emerging into an open meadow where traveller can admire the exceptional scenery of the region.

From Cornaux halt, it passes the museum at Chaulin without stopping and begins the last climb in the forest to reach Chamby station. After a short stop there it returns to the museum.

This trip takes place several times at weekends from May to October. The museum visit is included in the ticket price.



Chaulin museum

What sets this museum apart from other larger ones is not only the diversity of the material on display but above all the fact that it is a living museum. Visitors will witness a multitude of diverse scenes, shunting, firing up a steam locomotive, refilling with water or fuel, etc.

You are able to visit the place in complete freedom and devote the necessary time because the connection for the return to Blonay is guaranteed until the end of the afternoon.

Rolling stock

The majority of material is from Switzerland, naturally, but there are also items from France, Germany, Italy, and Spain showcased inside two large exhibition halls.

From the founding of the preservation scheme, a team was responsible for finding the rolling stock. Although it was relatively easy to obtain electric locos and trams, it was more difficult to find steam locos – many of these machines had unfortunately already met the sad fate of scrap metal, and those that remained were sought after by other museums.

Conclusion

The visitor who spends a few hours on the Blonay – Chamby will observe with pleasure the dedication and courtesy of the members. This is one of the particular features of this railway. If you are in the area, it is well worth a visit. Your contribution will be welcome and your visit will be the best encouragement to this team who are dedicated to ensuring that these trains will be available for a long time to come.

If during your visit you would like to quench your thirst or eat something, the buffet at Chaulin station is open every Saturday and Sunday from May to October.

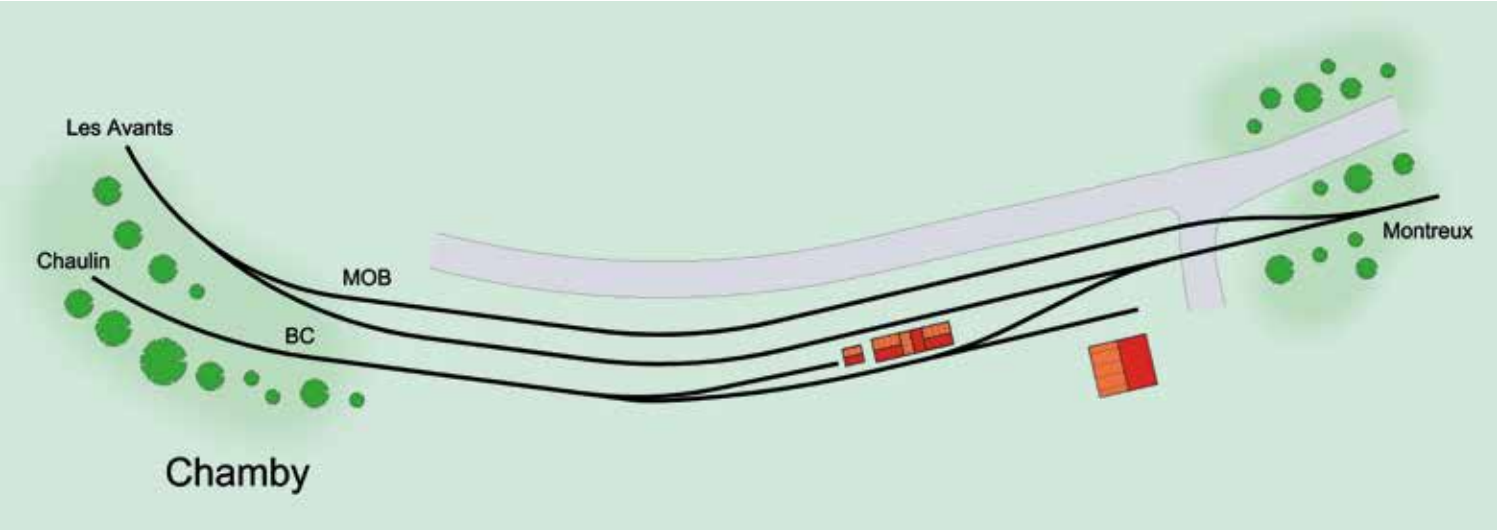
Blonay – Chamby railway museum  
Boite postale 366,  
CH-1001 Lausanne, Switzerland.  
<https://blonay-chamby.ch>

Previous CM features about the line:  
May 2008  
June 2008 (with scale drawings of Chamby station)  
June 2016 (with scale drawings of Chaulin shed)



Above  
Süddeutsche Eisenbahn Gesellschaft Mallet  
G2×2/2 No.105 from the Zell – Todtnau line  
on the Baye de Clarens viaduct.

Below  
No.105 is refuelled at the coaling stage  
as Compagnie Genevoise des Tramways  
Electriques Fe4/4 No.151 leaves the museum.





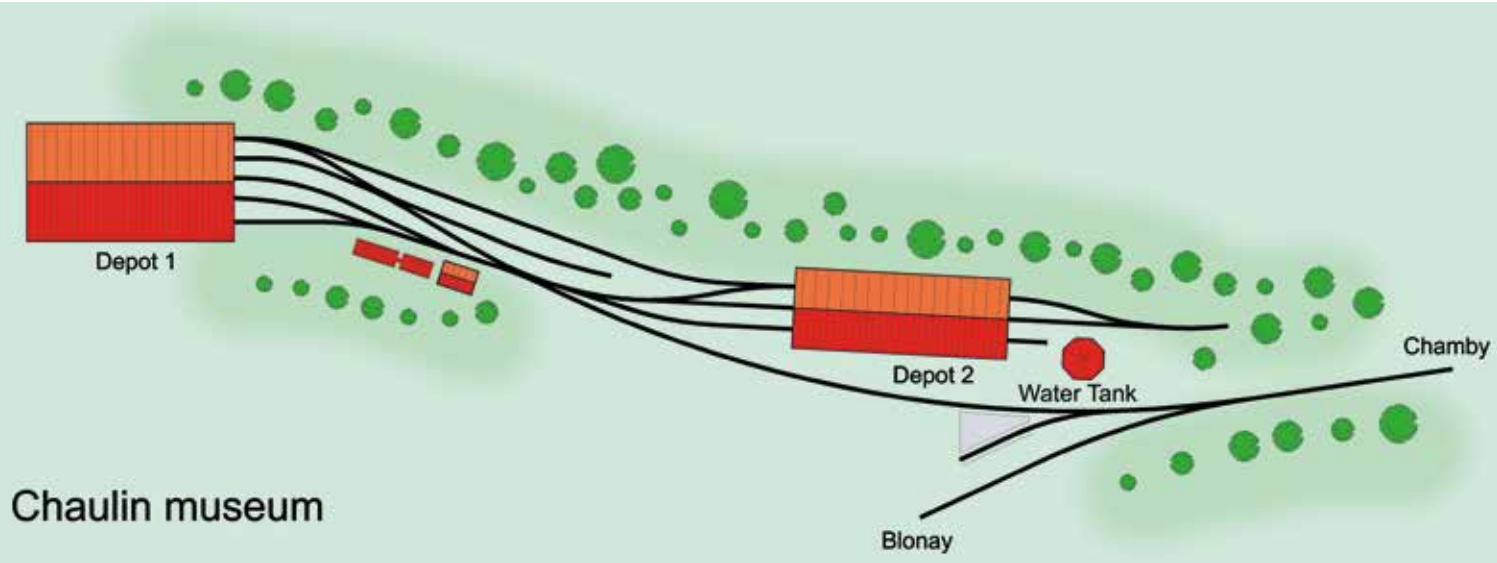


Above left and above  
Brig Furka Disentis HG3/4 No.3 at the museum,  
ready to leave for Chaulin and Blonay.



The small selection of photographs on these pages  
gives just some idea of the variety of metre gauge stock  
at the museum, and the very high standard of restoration.

Left  
Rheintalische Strassenbahn Ze2/2 No.31 at the museum.



Above  
Rhätische Bahn BCe4/4 No.35 outside No.1 shed.

Above right  
Bernina Bahn Ge4/4 No.81 in the yard.



Right  
Monthey Champéry Morgins BCFe4/4 No.6  
alongside Tramways Lausannois Ce2/3 No.28.

Right  
Bernina Bahn G2x3/3 No.1052 rotary snow plough.

Below  
Tramways Lausannois Ce2/3 No.28 and trailer.

