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Autor: [s.n.]
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The “Rhätische Bahn” is a hundred years old

The Loveliest Railway



Circular viaduct to overcome the steep gradient near Brusio in the Poschiavo region.

On October 5, 1889 the inaugural train drove through the Prättigau region on the railway line from Landquart to Davos. That was the very first line of what is today called the “Rhätische Bahn” (“RhB”). Strictly speaking this would in English mean “The Rhaeto-Romanic Railway”, the name being

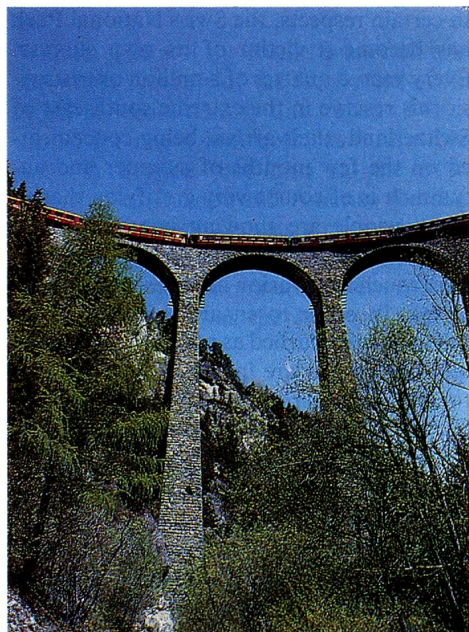
derived from the Latin “Raetia” for the Roman province that today corresponds roughly to the Canton of the Grisons. The RhB is nowadays the privately owned railway with the longest network (375 km) in all Switzerland.

In Chur, the capital of the Canton, only the

Swiss Federal Railways (“SBB”) were operating in 1889. Not until seven years later, on October 29, 1986 was the second branch line of the RhB, from Landquart to Chur, opened. The anniversary has been celebrated this year by various public functions all over the Canton. The idea of building the RhB came originally from a Dutch banker, Jan Holsboer. As a visitor to the health resort of Davos, he succeeded in raising the capital needed for initially opening up a railway in the Prättigau region. Numerous other branch lines and extensions were to follow over the years, including the tracks into the Engadine (St. Moritz) and over the Bernina into the Poschiavo Valley and on into Italy (Tirano). These stretches of line are world-famous today.

The opening up of the valleys of the Grisons by railway was primarily a reaction to the inauguration in 1882 of the Gotthard line, but it proved a farsighted investment because of the growing importance of tourist travel. It was “an expensive adventure, which gave rise to a serious crisis in the Grisons and almost ruined the Canton”: that was how Reto Mengiardi, President of the Cantonal government, summed up the situation in a speech at the celebrations. The speed at which the initial lines were built was a brave exploit in the light of the then available technical possibilities, and even today inspires admiration among visitors. Not without good reason is the RhB for many a railway “aficionado” seen as “the loveliest railway in the world”.

MZ



The RhB crosses over innumerable bridges and viaducts. (Photos: Charles Seiler)

The National Park celebrates its 75th-year Jubilee

Too Many Deer

It is 75 years ago that the Swiss National Park in the Lower Engadine was founded. Today this wild-life reserve – the biggest in all Switzerland – has almost reached the utmost limits of its capacity: every summer a quarter of a million visitors swarm around here.

On the peak of Piz Quattervals (“The Mountain of the four Valleys”), at 3,154 metres (10,350 feet) above sea level, the last remnants of the snow dazzle the onlooker under the deep blue of the Engadine summer sky. The heat is intense on the exposed moraine screes above the tree-line. But dazzled eyes search the terrain in vain behind binoculars – where in the world are the red deer?

Well, we are not in a zoo here, but in the Swiss National Park – a place where the animals do not turn dutifully up to be inspected by the tourists.

No axes and no shot-guns

Looking back from present-day society with its environmental problems, the 19th century seems at times idyllic. Such a nostalgic picture is of course somewhat illusory: indu-