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The Rhätische Bahn

The Rhätische Bahn / Ferrovia Retica / Viafier Retica has the largest network of all the private railways in Switzerland. The company operates most of the railways in the south-easternmost canton of Graubünden since the Federal Railways SBB-CFF-FFS extend only a few kilometres over the cantonal border to the capital Chur.



The Rhätische Bahn

RhB serves the major tourist centres, and one of the lines, the Berninabahn, crosses the Bernina Pass to the Italian border and on to Tirano, where there is a link to the Italian railways.

In 2008 the Rhaetian Railway in the Albula / Bernina Landscapes was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The RhB network was developed in various stages at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, with the result that several different electrification systems are in use. All the RhB is of 1,000 mm (3 ft 3+3/8 in) gauge, and is electrified.

The network contains 84 tunnels (the longest being the 19.042 km Vereina tunnel) and 383 bridges. The maximum gradient is 4.5%, except on the Bernina Railway, where it is 7%.

The RhB is 53% owned by the Cantonal government of Graubünden, 43% by the Swiss Confederation, and 4% is held privately. *from the internet*

Who is the most famous citizen of Graubünden?

If you like art, you might think of Segantini, or Giacometti. Actually, there are two Giacomettis, a sculptor, and a painter famous for his beautiful stained glass windows. But much, much more famous than any of them is Heidi, followed, at a considerable distance, by Schellenursli. Heidi has been translated into many languages; several film versions, musicals and animated films exist all over the world. *tb*

A wealth of languages

Graubünden is the only canton of Switzerland with three official languages: German (a dialect of German referred to as Bündnerdeutsch) in the northwest (68%), Romansh in the Engadin and around Disentis/Mustér (15%), and Italian in the Italian Graubünden (10%). The remaining 7% speak other languages.

In the middle of the nineteenth century Romansh was still counted as the native tongue of over half the population of Graubünden, but the development of roads and railways penetrating otherwise remote valleys led to greater and greater erosion, as the Romansh people themselves realized that their language was an impediment to getting well-paid work outside their traditional communities. With schools, churches and communes slowly switching over to German, a conscious effort began around 1900 to nurture Romansh: cultural pressure groups and writers' organizations began to promote the language both in Graubünden and nationwide. In 1938, an amendment to the Swiss Constitution confirmed the status of Romansh as a national language, a halfway-house proposal which still required Romansh-speakers to use German, French or Italian. In 1996 a second constitutional amendment elevated Romansh to the status of a semi-official language of the Confederation, thereby preserving its status amongst Romansh communities, guaranteeing its appearance on official documents such as passports and in legislation affecting Romansh areas, and eliminating the requirement for Romansh-speakers to use any other language.



Romansh is an umbrella term covering a group of closely-related dialects, and all belonging to the Rhaeto-Romance language family. These dialects include Sursilvan, Sutsilvan, Surmiran, Puter and Vallader. In 1980, the Lia Rumantscha, a leading Romansh cultural organization, put forward a proposal to standardize the language.

The result was the creation of Rumantsch Grischun (Graubünden Romansh), a composite written language formed by averaging out words across all five dialects. There is still some resistance to forming a hybrid in this way; today, local communities still stick to their own dialect in everyday life, and presenters on Radio Grischa and Radio Piz Corvatsch, the two Graubünden stations, speak their own local idiom. However, Rumantsch Grischun has become a unifying tool in those situations where Romansh speakers used to be forced into German for ease of communication: Now they can speak Rumantsch Grischun. Rumantsch Grischun is also the accepted written form of the various Romansh dialects. *from swissinfo*