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WINTER IN SUMMER

By Peter Over

Despite having holidayed in Switzerland fairly regularly since 1966, two ambitions remained unsatisfied; 1) to visit the Rhaetische Bahn and 2) to experience Switzerland in the snow, primarily for photographic purposes. Last June my wife and I decided to fulfil the first and rented an apartment in Pontresina. Little did we realise that we would achieve the second — and in June.

We arrived on 4th June, stunned by the beauty of the region and its feats of railway engineering. After a poor Spring the weather was superb and the first day was spent basking in the sun near Ospizio Bernina: examining the alpine flowers just in bloom, watching the trains and photographing ourselves in front of the remnants of snow still lying from Winter. That evening, heavy rain was being forecast no matter which T.V. Channel, French, German or Italian, one watched. It started next evening and by the following morning (Sunday 6th) it had turned to snow. It finally stopped snowing about 09.00 on Monday by which time it measured about 3ft. outside our apartment.

To all intents and purposes, Pontresina doesn't open until mid-June — presumably such weather is not uncommon. So what to do in sub-zero temperatures on a Swiss Sunday to avoid staying all day in a centrally heated apartment? Go for a ride on a train, of course. We took virtually every item of our Summer clothing and trudged through the slush to the Station. We met nobody and the trains, packed with tourists the previous day, were drastically reduced — a single unit in most cases. But they were operating and with no apparent ill affect. St Moritz was equally deserted but the Station Buffet at Samedan proved lively and warm, and several hours were spent there. Outside, the car-carrier train was experiencing a sudden surge of business from motorists who had realised there was an easier way back over the pass.

On Tuesday the weather brightened dramatically. The snow had fallen with very little wind and consequently the trees were heavily laden with snow producing a Xmas postcard effect in the dazzling sun. My camera was working overtime, photographing in a winter setting the same scenes photographed a day earlier in 'Summer'.

Two days later, the temperature was back in the 70's and the only snow was on higher slopes; an exception being on the north facing section between Bergün and Preda where it lay deeply amongst the spirals. In the Landwasser Gorge where we sat watching Krocodil Ge4/4 No. 414 crossing above with a mixed train, the temperature was high but the freezing water from the freshly melted snow cooled our feet.

At the time, the snowfall appeared to threaten our holiday plans: in hindsight we seem to have got the best of both worlds — and all within a week!

Rh.B. ABe4/4's at Surovas in June 88

Photo: P. Over

