

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: 3 (1991-1993)
Heft: 6

Artikel: The Furka-Oberalp Bahn
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-855201>

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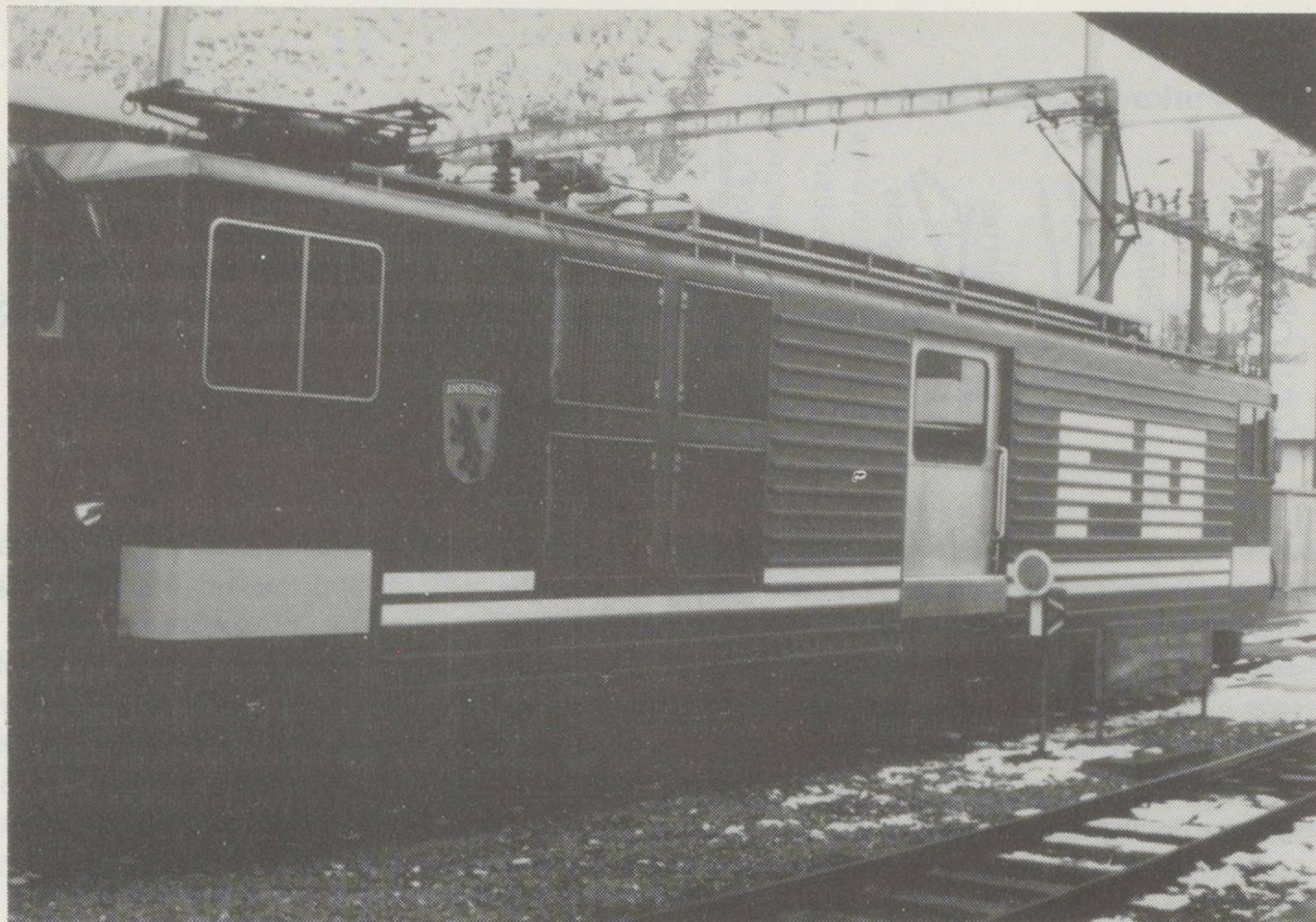
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Furka-Oberalp Deh4/4" N0.95 *Andermatt* at Andermatt 9 October 1989.

The Furka-Oberalp Bahn

by Gary M. Olson

All photographs by the author

I am not sure how I acquired my fascination with the Furka-Oberalp Bahn. Perhaps it is the intriguing name. Perhaps it is the wild Alpine country that it serves. It is my favourite metre gauge railway, even though it comes up against stiff competition, given the variety and richness of narrow gauge railroading in the Alps.

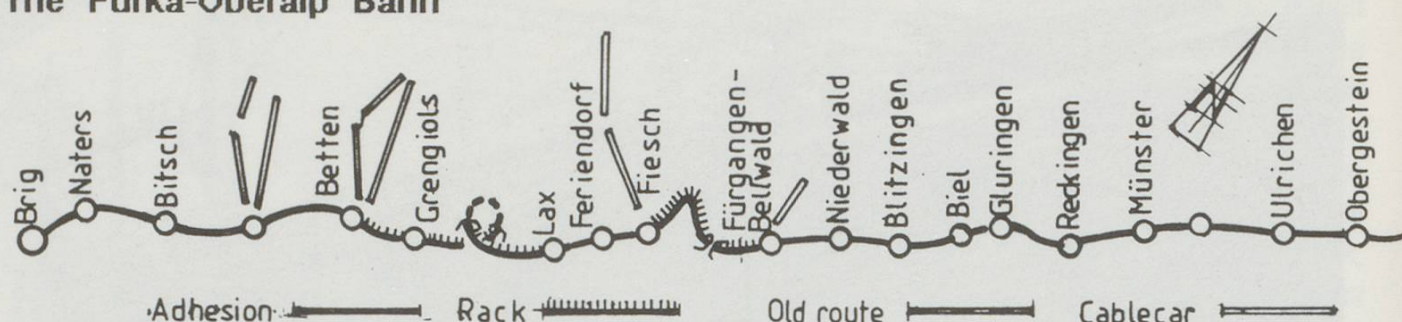
The Furka-Oberalp is primarily a single-track line, with its principal service extending 96.7 km from Brig to Disentis/Mustèr. There is a short 3.8 km spur from Andermatt to Göschenen, the former Schöllenen Bahn, which links up with the SBB's Gotthard route. The metre gauge service continues at Disentis/Mustèr over the Rhaetische Bahn, and from Brig over the Brig-Visp-Zermatt Bahn. The famous Glacier Express trains, which now run year-round in many sections, links Zermatt to St. Moritz and Davos over the Furka-Oberalp and its connecting

metre gauge partners. The Furka-Oberalp meets the SBB and BLS in Brig and its small spur to Göschenen allows it to connect with the SBB on the Gotthard route.

The Furka-Oberalp serves a high alpine route. Its main line follows the River Rhone through the Goms valley to the Grimsel and Furka passes and, on the other side of the massif, follows the Furka Reuss river through the Urseren valley and the Vorderrhein river (one of the two sources of the Rhein) to Disentis. Much of the route is near or above the tree line, presenting a rocky and stark appearance.

Because of this severe terrain, much of the Furka-Oberalp route requires rack assistance up and down the steep grades. Approximately 22% of the Furka-Oberalp's track is rack fitted. There are also frequent bridges, tunnels and

The Furka-Oberalp Bahn



avalanche galleries typical of mountain railways. Some of the most striking mountain railway working through the Furka Pass is now dormant since the opening of the Furka Basis tunnel in 1982, but plenty of good Alpine trackage remains.

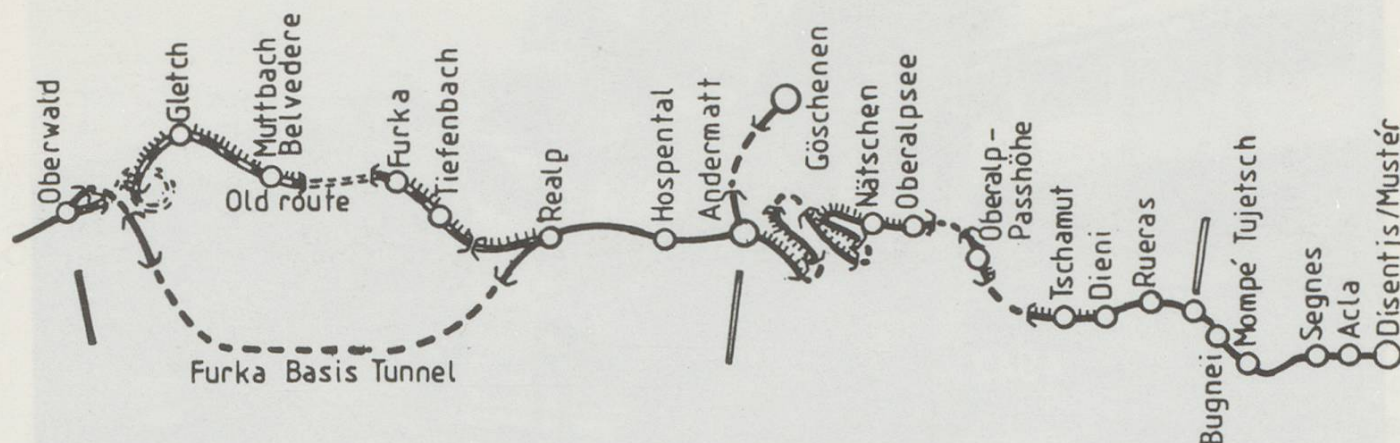
Many enterprises attempted to launch rail services in the region served by the current Furka-Oberalp, but most never even got started. The difficult terrain required expensive construction and the projected volume of traffic through the lightly settled area was a deterrent. But, by 1910 a company dedicated to developing a service over what is now the

Furka-Oberalp was launched as the Furkabahn and the difficult construction, requiring many bridges, tunnels and, of course, a mixture of rack and adhesion railway began. A service between Brig and Gletsch was started in 1914, using steam traction, but the full service between Brig and Disentis did not begin until 1926. During the previous year, the railway adopted its current name, the Furka-Oberalp Bahn.

Steam operation over this difficult terrain was expensive and complex so, following the lead of the neighbouring Rhaetische Bahn and Visp-Zermatt Bahn, the Furka-Oberalp began

Furka-Oberalp Gm4/4 No.71 Eltch at Andermatt 9 October 1989





electrification of its line in the 1930s and completed the route from Brig to Disentis in 1942.

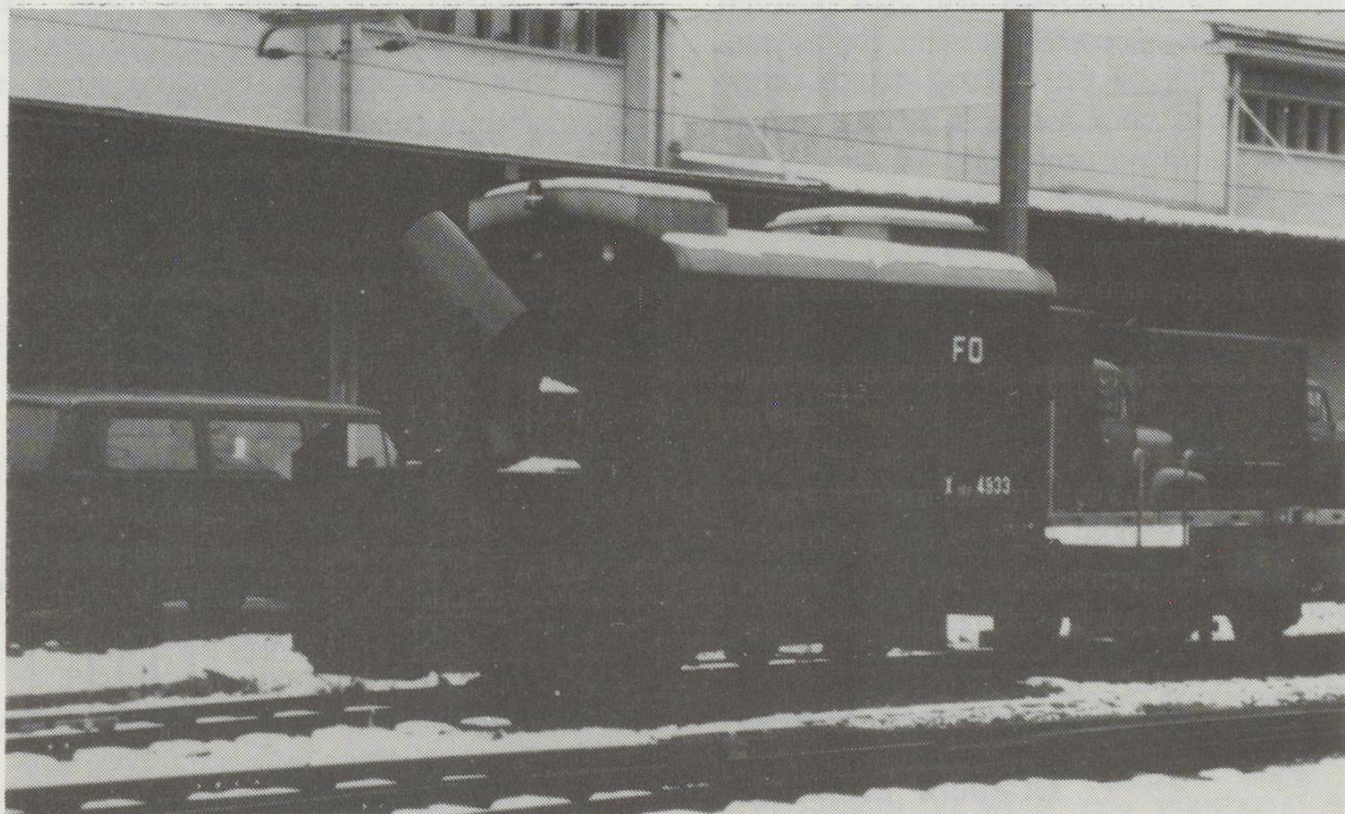
The earliest electric locomotives, the HGe4/4's were built to the same specifications as a comparable engines on the Visp-Zermatt Bahn and the first four were delivered in 1940. Most of the class, consisting of a total of seven engines, Nos.31-37, are still in service, though they have been replaced on the major prestigious routes by the new HGe4/4" Nos.101-108

The short spur between Andermatt and Göschenen was, until 1961, served by the tiny

Schöllenen Bahn, whose name remains engraved above the lower tunnel portal, clearly visible from Göschenen station. Service on this route began in 1917, allowing travellers on the Gotthard route to reach the summer and winter resort of Andermatt. A variety of interesting material ran over the route, including the boxy little HGe2/2s that continued to be used by the Furka-Oberalp as recently as 1985.

For many years the Furka-Oberalp route between Oberwald and Realp had to be closed down in the winter because passage was impossible through the Furka pass. An unusual rail bridge over the Steffenbach was taken up

Furka-Oberalp Xrote No.4933 at Andermatt 9 October 1989.





Furka-Oberalp X 4942 at Andermatt, 9 October 1989.

during the winter to prevent avalanche damage. In 1982 the Furka Basis tunnel was opened between Oberwald and Realp, making all-year-round operation over the entire Furka-Oberalp system possible. At 15.4 km the tunnel is the second longest in Switzerland, exceeded only by the Simplon. It took nearly nine years to bore and cost SFr.311 million. Besides permitting year-round services of the

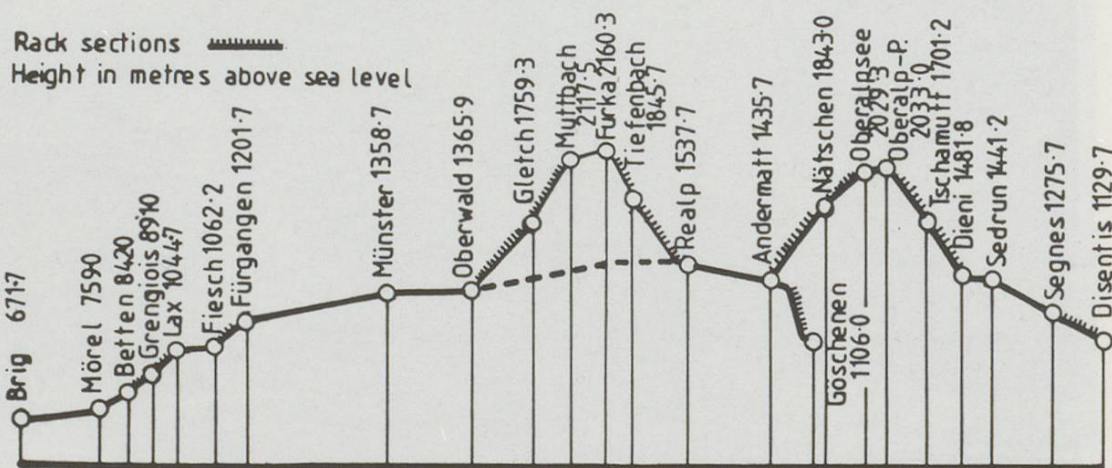
prestigious and popular *Glacier*

Express, it has also allowed the Furka-Oberalp to operate car carrier trains, using the two Ge4/4^{III} "tunnelloks", Nos .81-82 saving drivers the difficult (and for much of the year, impossible) mountain drive over the Furka Pass.

The disused

Furka Pass route is being restored for a new service. An enterprise known as the Dampfbahn Furka-Bergstrecke AG (DFB) has plans to reopen the line with steam traction. A partial service should commence this year, but considerable work is needed to get the old route back into operable condition since its abandonment a decade ago.

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Gradient profile of the Furka-Oberalp Bahn

Modelling the FO

by C.J.Freezer

Although modelling the FO in HOm is not as straightforward a matter as it is when the RhB is the chosen prototype, the current situation is quite good and seems set fair to improve. In fact, it is a little less trouble to follow the FO in 1992 than it was to model the GWR in 1962!

Bemo is the main source of supply, they initially offered the Ge4/4" tunnelloks Nos 81-82, but lacking any car carrier stock their value on a FO model is doubtful, their best employment is on an RhB model, recording their use on that line until 1982. They also offered a supposedly FO coach, but as this was a repaint of their original short Bernina line stock, we will pass quickly on to the later offerings. The original HGe4/4' are currently listed as available, and the full length FO coaches are now to be seen. As the majority of loco hauled trains on the FO have RhB and BVZ stock in the makeup, this side of the story is straightforward. The new HGe4/4"s are scheduled for delivery in the latter part of this year and judging by recent releases, Bemo have joined that select group of manufacturers whose projected Nuremberg delivery dates are reasonably accurate.

The main lack at present are the motor luggage vans, used for push-pull services and the sleek railcar sets. These are produced from time to time by the specialist brass kit/ready assembled suppliers, but one suspects that most members would need to budget carefully to afford the price.

Signals and overhead gear are virtually identical to those used on the RhB, so one can use Bemo and Sommerfeld equipment here. At present no buildings are on offer but the often spartan station structures should not present any serious difficulty to a serious modeller.

Prototype information is plentiful, if in German. Kurt Seidel's *Furka-Oberalp Bahn* is large and exhaustive, with side elevations of most of the rolling stock up to the date of publication (1982). I've not discovered a

publication offering track plans, but I have to admit that I have not been looking that hard; if any member knows different...

Of course, the most pleasant way of getting prototype information is the field survey, on the FO on a fine day it will be nothing short of idyllic. There is a good local service between Disentis and Andermatt, allowing one ample opportunity to hop out and survey a site between trains. The local service between Andermatt and Brig is a little more sparse and so one needs to plan the journey with care. The *Glacier Express* is not recommended, it doesn't stop at many stations, but on the other hand it does frequently make a local wait for long enough to enable a nimble enthusiast to wield camera and sketchbook to good effect. But be warned, the moment the last coach in the *Glacier* clears the entry point to the loop, the local will be off like a shot, return to your train before the express actually reaches the station.

If you have a 200mm telephoto and know the route, it is possible to photograph the whole of Andermatt's layout from the train whilst descending from Nâtschen. There aren't many railways of which that can be said!

The Furka-Oberalp Bahn

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The most glamorous service over the Furka-Oberalp is the *Glacier Express*. These trains run between St.Moritz, Davos and Chur in Graubunden, where they are operated by the Rhb, and Zermatt in Valais where they are operated by the BVZ. In between they run over the Furka-Oberalp. Currently there are, in summer, seven workings, four eastbound and three westbound, though only two in each direction carry restaurant cars and the first eastbound *Glacier A* only runs between Brig and Disentis. In winter one working in each direction suffices.