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The Albula line of the Rhaetian Railway by Ted Vaughan

A walk along the line

I am certain I am not the only person whose first awareness of the Rhaetian Railway came from a photograph of the spirals between Bergün and Preda. Having travelled the line on several occasions over the past fifteen years, a leaflet in my hotel in Pontresina in 1994 caused me to walk the Krokodil path from Preda that summer. During the following winter holiday I walked the pass road from Bergün to see and photograph the line from a different angle.

The Albula pass road is closed to traffic during the winter as there is not considered to be the traffic to justify the snow clearing. From Preda to Bergün the road is used as a sledging run for much of the week. Enquiries at the hotel and of a holiday rep suggested it was not wise to walk along the road in winter, but with no schittlebahn trains running on a Monday and no sledging allowed that day, I thought it was worth my while trying to walk along the road. In the event there is nothing to stop such a walk.

Leaving Bergün the railway climbs along the mountainside to the left of the road, using an elongated S to gain height. Passing the Darlux skilift I was on the main pass road. Albula I viaduct soon comes into view, carrying the railway from left to right of the valley and into Rughnx Tunnel. The road passes through one of the low arches of the viaduct and photographs can be taken with ease at this spot. Having entered the tunnel, the line continues to swing to the right in a 270° loop before reappearing much higher up the mountainside. Shortly the line curves to the left to cross both river and road on Albula II viaduct. This spot is reasonably open and photography is possible. Rail and road then keep close together as far as the mouth of the Toua Tunnel. This tunnel turns the line 270° to the left bringing it back across the valley on Albula III Viaduct. A convenient access point to the railway for RhB staff means that it is possible to photograph the tunnel mouth with the viaduct high above (and without trespassing on the railway). Albula III is the most impressive of the viaducts, carrying the line at 75 feet across the valley. From the far end of the viaduct the railway turns 180° to the left through a snow shelter and recrosses the valley

over Albula IV viaduct, but these features cannot be seen from the road. Crossing the road from right to left, the railway enters Zuondra Tunnel which again turns the line 270° to the left before crossing the route just after it enters the tunnel many feet below. Whilst traversing Zuondra Tunnel the line crosses above Toua Tunnel. A couple of zigzags remain on the road before it, and the railway run together towards the small community of Preda. Photographs can be taken along this stretch of line, but the background does not have the same wildness as earlier in the trip.

The whole of the road was walked in the winter without any difficulties. One word of warning is that the only means of obtaining food and drink at Preda on this winter Monday was the snack machine at the station, the hotel being "Montag geschlossen".

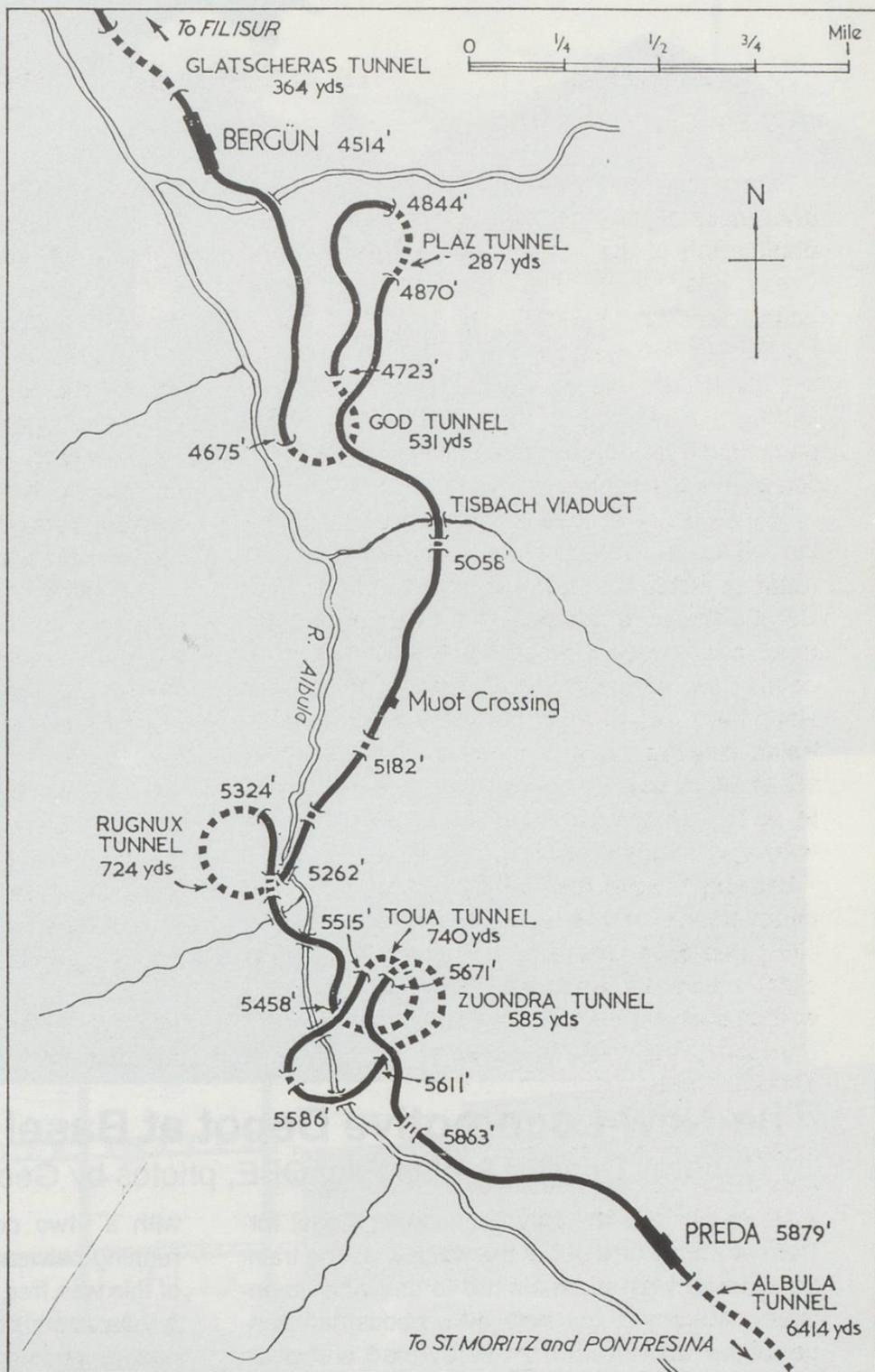
Having taken the reader up the valley in winter it is time to return to Bergün along the Krokodil path, this time in the summer. Although parts of the pathway can be found during the winter it must be very unwise for anyone to try and walk this way with snow on the ground.

Leaving Preda station, the typical Swiss yellow finger posts lead the walker along paths close to the railway. The first viewpoint overlooks the railway leading to the right the Zuondra Tunnel, with Albula III viaduct in the background. To the left, out of sight is Albula IV Viaduct. This is an excellent viewpoint and one where the RhB have placed a copy of the line's working timetable for people to consult. Continuing a few yards along the path and rounding an outcrop of rock Albula IV Viaduct comes into view. This is not easily photographed and the writer scrambled a few feet up the face of the outcrop to perch on some roots to gain a better spot. It is highly unlikely that it would be possible to photograph the same train on Albula III and Albula IV Viaducts.

At this spot a flight of steps takes the walker down to river level to pass through the arches of the viaduct. A walk alongside the river brings one to the next viaduct and the chance for more photography. The line from Preda to Bergün is at this point running from left to right. Although close together the density of trees means that the two

viaducts cannot be seen from one spot. With the line now making contortions on the mountainside to the right of the walker it is time to follow the river to Albula II Viaduct before the course can really be seen again. The valley has opened out a little at this location and a climb through a field gives a long distance view of the viaduct. Passing through the arches of the viaduct, the line to Bergün is now on the left of the walker. As if to make up for some comfortable walking, the pathway leaves the river and becomes a scramble along the mountainside. Trains can be heard high above, but the trees prevent them from being seen very well. The sound of a Bergün bound train will suddenly vanish as it traverses the Rughnx Tunnel and its route is turned 270° to the left to emerge at right angles to the original route onto Albula I Viaduct, now to the right of the walker. The pathway meanwhile crosses the line near to the downhill end of the Rughnx Tunnel. Shortly after this there is another location where there is a copy of the working timetable, this one overlooking the viaduct and river. The most interesting part of the route is now over. The railway initially hugs the mountainside to the right, but later descends through fields to Bergün. The pathway gradually relents and becomes a comfortable walk towards the village.

Publicity and times on the finger posts suggest the walk takes 2 to 2½ hours. Your writer spent 4½ hours including time waiting for trains at the various



photographic spots. There are no mountain huts offering refreshments en route.

Over the near century since the line was constructed the trees have grown up. Old photographs indicate that all four viaducts could be seen together. Whether this is still possible from high up on the mountainside is something the writer did not attempt to find out. Cards issued by the RhB show one viaduct after another in the valley, but this must have involved artists licence.

Should you decide to follow these walks, the writer hopes you will get as much enjoyment as he did.