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Railway Walks - 1 by John Jesson, photographs by author

The walks along the north and south ramps of the Lötschberg and that between Bergün and Preda have been well-documented by members but, as many will be aware, these are not the only walks which are possible to take in both scenery and railways. The only difference is that they are not signposted, and a certain amount of ingenuity is sometimes necessary. I have found the 1:25000 Landeskarte for the section to be of great assistance, which good walking shoes or boots make things easier when the going gets rough, as it sometimes can. At times it is necessary to walk close to the railway, or to cross it. The Swiss are far more dedicated to the concept of personal responsibility than are the British, but please be very careful. Look and listen before crossing any railway, and consider the train drivers, who cannot stop or swerve out of your way. When you see or hear a train coming, stand well clear of the line and make it obvious to the driver that you have seen the train, either by taking a photograph, or by raising your arm. Do not walk on the railway at any time.

Leuk to Salgesch

This is the last remaining single-track section of the Simplon route, and can be as rough or easy as you want to make it. There is no footpath as such, but plenty of access to the vines which grow in profusion along the Rhône valley. However, when the paths run out, it can be rather a scramble around the edges of the vines to find the next access track going in the right direction.

Leave Leuk station at the southern side and cross the Rhône by the road bridge. This gives a good view of the railway bridge. Follow the road as it first crosses the railway and then climbs parallel to it. A path on the left (river) side leads across the railway tunnel and provides access to an area of scrub alongside the railway at the Salgesch end of the short tunnel. It is possible to descend to the river bed, but be very, very careful, as the electricity generating stations control the flow of water. Signs (in 4 languages) warn that large quantities of water can suddenly flood what is apparently safe ground. There is some warning, though, as the sound of the increased water flow



Previous page: Not far from Salgesch, the line runs through this rock cutting, Re 4/4 11349 works one of the Brig terminating services.

is quite obvious, and the river banks are quite easy to scale. Autumn is probably the safest time - the river can be so low that it is possible to walk across it (I know - I've done it). I would not recommend walking along the track - trains are travelling quickly, and the sound of their approach is masked by the river.

About 1 km from the tunnel is a small bridge over a stream (Delabrücke). This is almost impossible to spot from the train, as the stream has undercut the rock to such an extent it is invisible from above. However, the river bed gives excellent views of the bridge and the trains passing over it. Just behind the railway bridge is the bridge carrying the old road, which is spanned in its turn by an ancient tower. Behind this again, and a long way above, is the new road bridge.

From the railway bridge there is a little-used but clear path up to the road. Walk back towards Leuk a few metres (through the old tower) and there is a good view along the railway towards Salgesch. From here on for a couple of kilometres the railway is perched on a ledge, and photographic possibilities are poor to non-

Above: Re460 036 crosses Dalabrücke, between Leuk and Salgesch. Behind the train can be seen the old road, with the tower straddling it, and behind the new road bridge

existent. The old road climbs to the village of Varen (opportunity for refreshment) before dropping again towards Salgesch. About 800m beyond Varen, a track leads off the road to the left, back towards the railway and river. The track peters out before reaching the railway, but it is possible to skirt the vines and scramble down the terraces to the railway, where there seems to be a path alongside the track which gives further photographic opportunities, especially where the railway cuts through an outcropping of rock.

Just after this rock outcropping, there is a siding which seems to be a dump site for old ballast, and where a mechanical digger is often working. By walking through this area, access is gained to a lane. Walk along this, away from the railway, a short distance, then follow the signposted narrow path through the vines to the railway station. The walk takes about half a day, and parts of it can be quite energetic. I started from Montreux, so it was mid-afternoon when I got back to Salgesch, and had enough time for a trip to Brig before heading back to Montreux.