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Train RhB411 by Rob Morrey

I suppose we all have our favourite railway lines, stations, views etc. Well, RhB 411 is my favourite train. It fills all my desired criteria.

It is a firm belief of mine that named trains (eg Glacier Express, Bernina Express) are best left to tourists. They seem to like to travel in cocooned luxury behind tinted windows. They also seem to worship the 'group' mentality. Fine, that leaves the real trains for the likes of me.

RhB 411 is a real train. Its the 08.35 St. Moritz to Alp Grün. All stations. The "Bummelzug par excellence" as the multi-lingual Swiss might call it. It is also not for the unwary. It only runs at certain times of the year. Furthermore, in August 1996, it continues to Tirano according to RhB timetables, but not according to the 96/7 SBB timetable. Most un-Swiss!

I travelled on this eccentric train on August 14th, a morning of dazzling sunshine. A power car, luggage van, standard RhB 2nd class coach (with those splendid opening windows) and a goods van. Passengers were few, perhaps because two Tirano trains follow within an hour, as we sauntered with our trainee Zugfuehrer in his immaculate new uniform, to Pontresina. There was a six minute pause here whilst the connection from Samedan arrived to provide us with another handful of passengers. Then we were off up the severe gradients to the Bernina Pass.

Surovas (in effect Pontresina south) was a veritable hive of activity as a dozen people boarded. One new arrival an American lady,

summed it up nicely - "what a cute little train - and its got a wc" She and most of the other 2 dozen or so people got off at Morteratsch, whose glacier looked stunning in the sunshine.

The train continued its leisurely way up the gradients, round the very sharp curves amongst the snow capped peaks. With so few passengers I was easily able to utilise a window on each side for photography. Since I last travelled on this train, I noted with regret the demolition of the lovely old station building at Bernina Suot - such a shame, but at least the new edifice is on the same side of the road as the railway!

Ospizio Bernina (2253 metres above sea level) is in a magical setting, facing the lake and more snowy summits. The road is some distance away so on that morning peace reigned until the block bells rang and we were off on the last leg to Alp Grüm, reached after 58 minutes worth of sheer bliss. The view south to Tirano and west to the glacier must be as fine as anywhere in the world.

My train overcame its identity crisis and did indeed continue towards Tirano, with just 3 souls on board - they had read the RhB timetable and not my SBB one!! I was happy to take pictures of it going round that curve, I followed on the next train and returned later on a northbound train with the celebrated open-air coaches.

So a memorable journey. If you should wish to follow in my tracks, I recommend it without hesitation. But save a window seat for me!

Give my regards to the cute little train.

Merci!

