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Private Railways in Switzerland - 4

by Brian Hemming

Having described eight mountain railways in the last issue, this time just one private railway is covered - the Rhätische Bahn. This is without doubt the most popular private railway in Switzerland covering 375.6 km in Canton Graubünden. With the Gornergratbahn (GGB), the Brig-Visp-Zermatt-Bahn (BVZ) and the Furka-Oberalp-Bahn (FO) it forms a continuous metre gauge network of about 528.9 km. This makes through running of the Glacier Express from Zermatt to St.Moritz possible although the rack sections on the BVZ and FO preclude through working of RhB locomotives. If plans for the extension of the Montreux-Oberland-Bernois (MOB) through to the Rhône Valley come to fruition there could ultimately be a massive metre gauge network stretching from Tirano in Italy right through to Montreux and Luzern.

The RhB, which is owned by Canton Graubünden, is administered from its head office in Chur. The main works for the whole system is at Landquart which is also the point from which distances on the main network are measured.. The topography of the region results in a number of notable examples of civil engineering on the RhB. The Landwasser viaduct on the Albula line and the Langweiss viaduct on the Chur-Arosa line are spectacular as are the spirals on the Albula line between Bergün and Preda and the spiral at Brusio on the Bernina line. The highest point on the whole system is Ospizio Bernina at 2,253 m, whilst Tirano is the lowest at 429 m - both being on the Bernina line. The highest point on the main network is in the Albula tunnel at 1,823 m.

It is a matter of conjecture as to what might have been had all the plans which had been put forward come to fruition. The original plan for the Landquart-Davos-Bahn was to extend it to S-chanf and then continue via Samedan, St.Moritz and Maloja to Chiavenna. The preference for the Albula route resulted in the abandonment of the major portion of this but the idea for a line from St.Moritz to Maloja and Chiavenna remained. The economic effects of the First World War resulted in the abandonment of both this plan and a scheme to extend the Unterengadine line from

Scuol-Tarasp to Landeck in Austria. A bold scheme to connect Thusis with the Gotthard line at Castione-Arbedo via the San Bernardino never got beyond the planning stage.

Having already celebrated its centenary, the RhB holds a prominent place in the economy of Canton Graubünden. As well as carrying several million passengers each year, it is a vital artery for the transportation of freight with timber, cement and mineral water being major commodities. A recent development is a decision to ease the rack sections of the Furka-Oberalp-Bahn between Sedrun and Disentis/Mustér. This will extend adhesion working of the Glacier Express by the RhB to and from Sedrun and ease pressure on Disentis/Mustér.

Correction:

The computer lost some of the text in the first paragraph of the article on the Vitznau-Rigi-Bahn in *Swiss Express Vol.4/9 p.24*. The second and a third sentence in the first paragraph should read:

The line was opened in 1871 from Vitznau to the border of Canton Luzern at Rigi-Staffelhöhe but the company was unable to obtain a concession from Canton Schwyz to proceed to Rigi-Kulm. The Arth-Rigi-Bahn which is wholly in Canton Schwyz therefore obtained a concession and built the necessary extension which was leased to the VRB and opened in 1873 nearly two years before the ARB opened its own line to Rigi-Kulm.

SBB on the Internet

In the SBB/CFF's 'Via' magazine, there is an address for the SBB Internet site:

<http://www.sbb.ch/>

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