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PREDAL LOOP EXTENDED

Geoffrey Kichenside



*New 2 track layout (instead of 3) at Preda. The 1252 Chur-St Moritz is on the left and Ge4/41 No. 609 is on the right with the 4 coach push-pull toboggan shuttle waiting to return to Bergun. Xmas 1998
(G M Kichenside)*

The three line note under the Rhätische Bahn heading in Notepad in the December 1998 issue referring to a new double line section between Bergün and Preda implied a somewhat more expansive addition to RhB track improvements than is really the case, for this is the most spectacular part of the Chur - St Moritz route involving major viaducts, four of them to-ing and fro-ing across the River Albula, and three spiral tunnels all within a crow's flight distance of about a couple of miles.

The new double track section is in fact little more than about a kilometre long northwards extension of the existing Preda station passing loop to within a couple of hundred metres of the road overbridge carrying the Albula pass road over the top of the railway. The road itself is almost as spectacular as the railway here, for climbing up

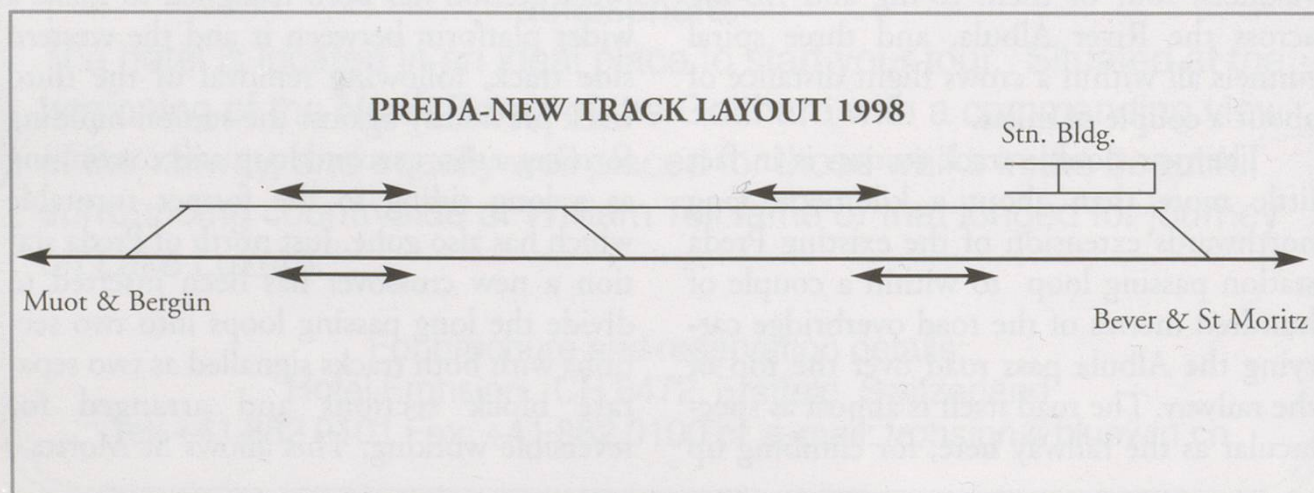
the step in the valley floor it passes under all four of the railway viaducts, then trying to keep pace with the height of the line lifted across the river by the double spiral, which it does by a double hairpin, it continues climbing alongside the line to the road over-bridge.

The easternmost loop track through Preda station has been realigned to make a wider platform between it and the western side track, following removal of the third track previously against the station building forming a short second loop and continuing as a long siding to the former turntable which has also gone. Just north of Preda station a new crossover has been inserted to divide the long passing loops into two sections with both tracks signalled as two separate block sections and arranged for reversible working. This allows St Moritz -

Chur trains to use the westernmost track past the station buildings then over the crossover to the eastern side track to the north end of the loop to await a train in the opposite direction to clear the single line section from Muot. This move was regularly used during the operation of the toboggan shuttle train between Bergün and Preda last winter since the shuttle train was usually at Preda standing on the eastern side loop by the station buildings when the hourly expresses were scheduled to pass each other at Preda. Once the St Moritz bound express had cleared the single line from Muot, the Chur bound express could leave the north end of the loop tracks, and, when clear, the empty toboggan shuttle train was then signalled on the eastern side track to the north end ready to follow the Chur express once the latter had cleared the intermediate block signals in the vicinity of the spiral tunnels towards Muot. With no train standing at Preda the loops are long enough to allow 'flying' passes with neither train being stopped, assuming the trains are in the right position and approach the loops at each end at more or less the same time. Normally the signalling between Solis and Preda is controlled remotely from the panel at Filisur and has included automatic route setting for simple two-train passing moves at the loops for over 20 years but signalling panels are provided at Bergün and Preda under local control when necessary.

With the removal of the platform side third track and with the realigned eastern side running loop track further away from the station than the old third track a new docking ramp has been installed on the goods loading platform at Preda to reach the floor of parcels and luggage compartments of motor coaches, driving trailers, and goods wagons especially for the unloading of palletised toboggans from the toboggan shuttle trains. While many winter sports enthusiasts bring their own toboggans or hire them in Bergün, many hire them from the station office at Preda, slide down the four miles or so toboggan run on the snow-bound Albula road to Bergün and surrender the hire in Bergün, after which the toboggans are loaded on to pallets, taken by lorry to Bergün station and loaded on to the shuttle train ready for the next round trip.

Outside of the winter season and the operation of the toboggan shuttles the new extended loops at Preda will allow one train to pass two others and in extreme cases could permit two trains in one direction to pass two in the opposite direction. Even after the opening of the Vereina tunnel cut-off from Klosters to the Lower Engadine, which will relieve the Albula route of some of its traffic, the Albula line will still be busy and will need all the capacity of its passing loops and its single line sections for the important St Moritz traffic and for services running through to the Bernina line.





Above - the new docking ramp on the realigned east side loop at Preda

Both pictures taken Christmas 1998 (G M Kichenside)

Below - Unloading toboggans from Abt1731 on the new ramp at Preda

