

Braunwald

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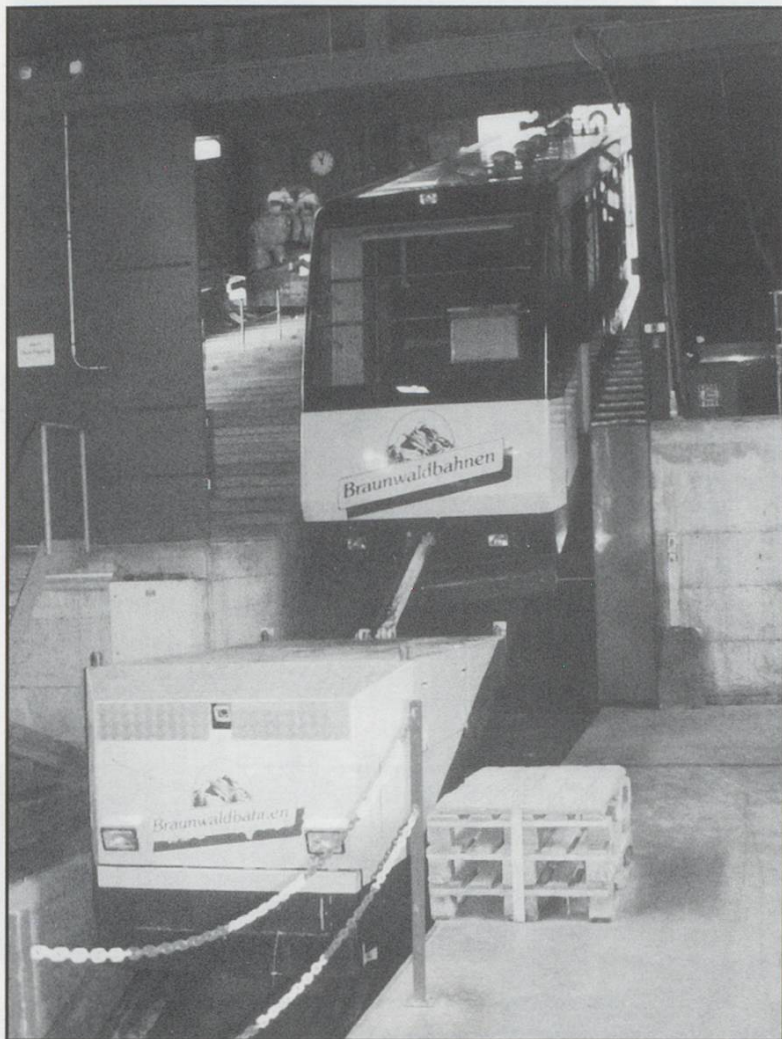
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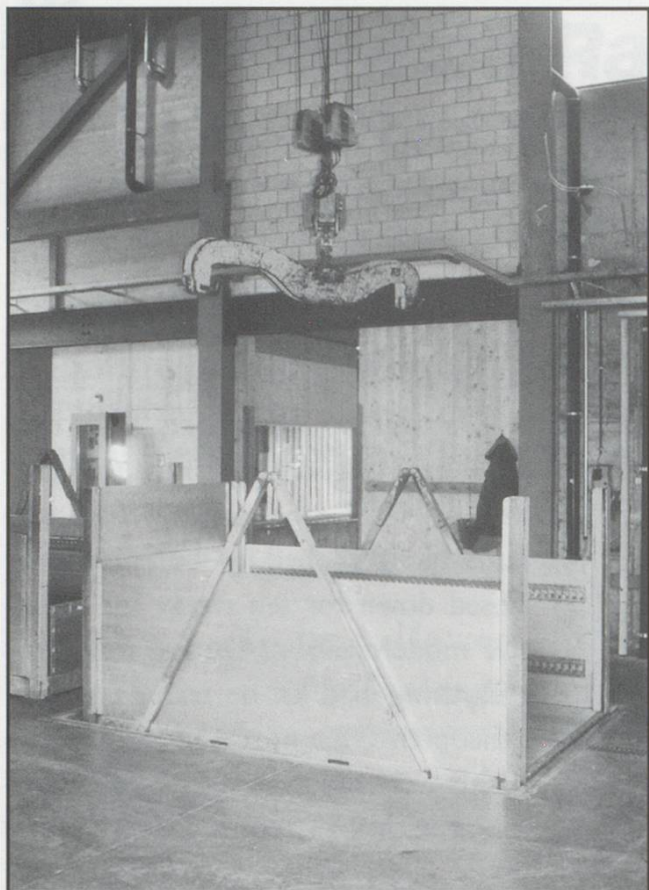
The yellow car (the other one is blue) arriving at Linthal-Braunwald. The freight-platform can be seen attached to the valley side of the car.

ALL PHOTOS BY GEORGE HOEKSTRA

This year, the AGM of the Swiss Railway Journalists was held in Braunwald, in the valley of the Linth, in Canton Glarus. Braunwald is situated on a plateau above Linthal, at an altitude of between 1300 and 1400 metres (4300 ft) and is one of the few motor vehicle-free villages in Switzerland. Linthal is the terminus of a branch line departing from Ziegelbrücke, on the Zürich - Chur mainline. The Braunwaldbahn funicular railway departs from the "Linthal-Braunwaldbahn" SBB station, one stop before the village of Linthal itself. Three different gauges can be seen here: the 1435 mm of the standard gauge trains, the 1000 mm meter gauge of the funicular and 600 mm gauge for a short stretch used by the containers for the transport of heating oil. The 1400 m (4600 ft) long funicular railway is the lifeline of the village of Braunwald, as there is no connec-

tion by road. Literally everything has to be hauled up to, or down from, the village by the Braunwaldbahn: almost half a million passengers and over 6000 tons of goods a year! In the summer of 1997, the original funicular built in 1907 had to be completely closed down for ten weeks for extensive modernization. During this time, everything had to be transported by helicopter. On a normal day 56 return flights were made. A record was established with 143 return flights in one single day! Although an effort was made to limit the number of journeys, a total of 25 200 persons were carried by the helicopters during the ten weeks! Each new car of the renovated funicular can carry a maximum of 114 passengers in the cabin, plus 1^{1/2} tons of freight on the platform secured to the valley side of the car. Journey time was almost halved now only taking 4^{1/2} minutes, instead of almost 8 minutes previously. As a result over 900 passengers can be carried in an hour. Several installations were put into place to save on costly manpower, but without compromising on safety. One person can now control the whole operation; the cars are monitored by video and most of the tickets are checked by machine.

Braunwald caters for both tourist seasons: in summer there are lots of possibilities for hiking with various trails taking from one to five hours to complete. For the more leisurely inclined (like me, that is...) there is a chairlift, known these days as a "nostalgic"-lift, up to Gumen at 1900 m (6230 ft) and a cable car to Grotzenbüel at 1560 m (5120 ft). In winter, Alpine and Nordic skiers as well as snowboard-



A set of hoists and cranes are installed to heave the many different containers onto the freight platform.

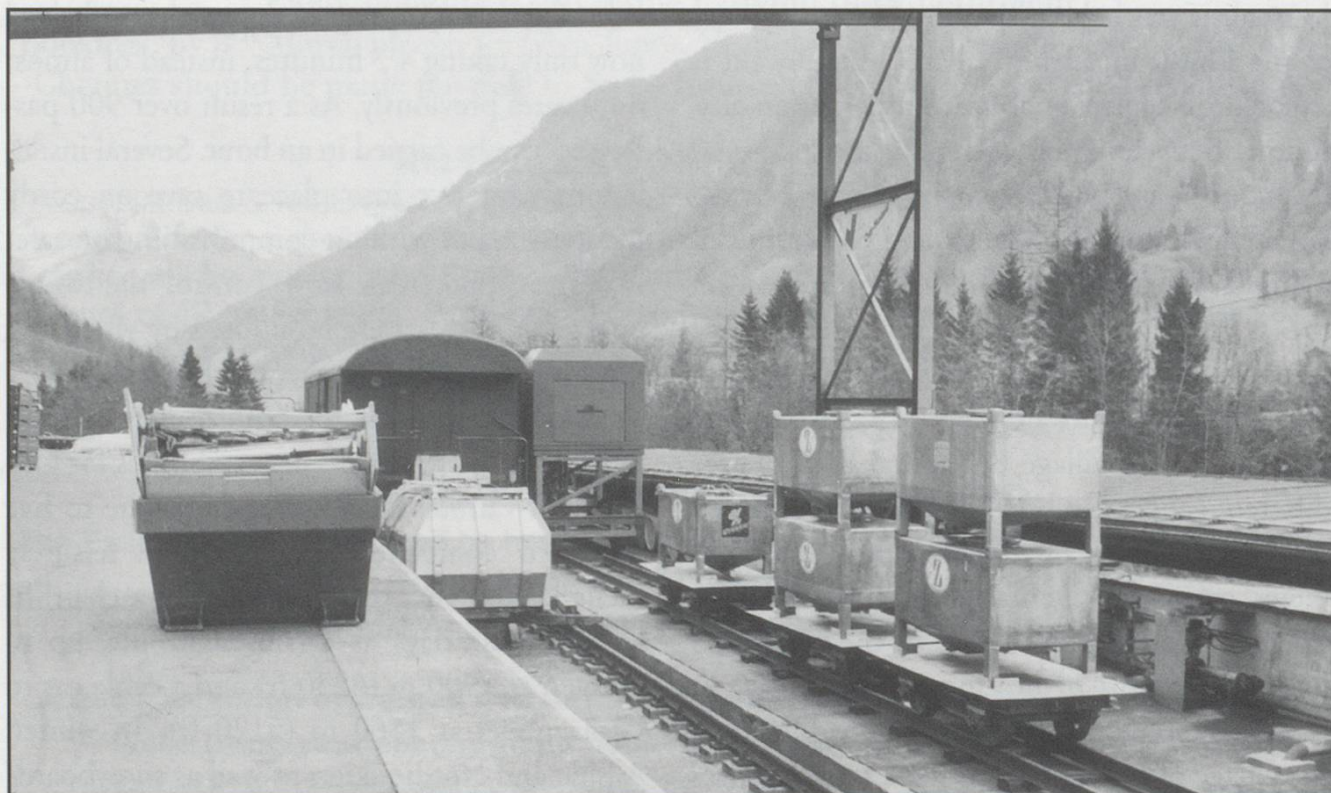
ers have two more chairlifts and two ski lifts at their disposal. Skating, curling and sleigh riding are all also well provided for. The absence of

motorcars not only leaves the air clean, but also makes the roads safe for children and adults alike. That is, apart from the occasional overzealous skier or electro-cart driver! There are about a dozen hotels and guesthouses, as well as a youth hostel to choose from. Our AGM was held at the Panorama Hotel Waldhaus, which is run by a British/Swiss couple: Christopher and Ursula Harvey. No prizes for guessing who's what. The hotel classifies itself as three stars and five hearts. I can vouch for the five hearts: nice location with lots of trees around, good food and very friendly service in the lovely restaurant. Christopher drove me back to the funicular in his electro-cart. He had to do it twice, as I had forgotten my camera in the restaurant. I owe him one!

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Braunwald Tourismus, CH - 8784 Braunwald.
 Internet: www.braunwald.ch
 Panorama Hotel Waldhaus, CH - 8784 Braunwald.
 Internet: www.panorama-hotel.ch

Outside, two of the three gauges of the Braunwaldbahn can be seen here: the 1435 mm standard gauge spur to the SBB track and the 600 mm spur for the transport of oil containers to the funicular.





TOP:

One of the automatic ticket checking stiles. It can cope with magnetic stripe, as well as chip cards, but not normal "SBB" paper tickets! These have to be shown to the controller/ticket seller/car operator, who then opens the stile electrically.

CENTRE:

Like everywhere in the forests, timber is a main "crop". It is transported down on these long carts, attached to the funiculars.

BOTTOM:

The Braunwald terminus, with the blue car just arriving. The hoist can be seen, as well as on the right one of the transporters for livestock, remember: all transport, whether up or down, can only be made by the funicular.

