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Malcolm Hardy-Randall

Malcolm continues his journey along the Voralpen line. A break from his normal Gotthard stamping ground.

(CONTINUED FROM MARCH 2003)

At Arth-Goldau the passenger is afforded a superb view of the northern approaches to the Gotthard, the Mythen mountain to the south, the Rigi in the foreground and in the far distant background on the horizon the snow on the Titlis mountain. All these can be identified with the aid of the large maps laid out by the windows of each coach.

After 3 km the train having climbed 82 metres in altitude passes through the station of Steinerberg. From here the gradient increases for the next 5 km to 45‰ as the train continues through the countryside with the view opening out as the climb progresses. At Sattel - the home of the largest outdoor roller rink in Europe - just 8 km from Arth-Goldau the train is 772 metres above sea level having climbed 252 metres since its last stop, not bad for a

A JOURNEY ON THE VORALPEN EXPRESS



ARTH GOLDAU - UZNACH

standard gauge adhesion only railway! From Sattel the original construction plan was for the railway from Rapperswil to start its descent down to the Gotthard and to join up at Brunnen before proceeding around the southern flank of the Rigi mountain into Luzern. What a view that route would have given the passenger, but lack of finance changed all that and the plan was altered to the present one into Arth-Goldau.

In the next 3 km to Biberegg the train will climb another 180 metres in height, although looking out of the window with the countryside hurrying past it does not seem possible that the incline is a hefty 50‰ [1 in 20]. The view is of farmland with a mountain backdrop. By Biberegg the train has reached a height of

BT (now SOB) Re4/4 456 93 in Voralpen livery on the back end of a Voralpen service at Biberbrugg, the junction for Einsiedeln. May 1998.

Photo: Toggenburg





Samstagern. June 2002. Ex BT Re4/4 No.91 departs for Biberbrugg up an extraordinary gradient.

Photo: Malcom Hardy-Randall

restricted by trees, until moments later there is a brief glimpse of Lake Zürich, glistening in the sun, over 400 metres below. Just after leaving Schindellegi-Feusisberg station, on the rooftop of a block of flats on the right hand side is a very large outdoor model railway layout. From

Schindellegi-Feusisberg the route becomes double track down into the town of Samstagern. Here on the left hand side alongside the station is located one of the major workshops for the Südostbahn. In the workshops maintenance or repairs required on the rolling stock or locomotives will be carried out. Possibly unique for a major railway company workshop is the building of 5 inch and 7 inch garden railway models of superb quality that are offered for sale.

As the train leaves the station and starts the descent down the 50‰ ramp, the line to Wädenswil - on the shores of Lake Zürich now just over 200 metres below - can be seen dropping away on the left hand side. More and more of the lake can be seen from the train as

933 metres above sea level, the highest point on the line, and from here it is all down hill to Lake Zürich nearly 20 km further on.

The train continues its descent down to the town of Rothenthurm, which played an important role in the battle against the French in 1778, and on over the flat countryside until it reaches the village of Altmatt just 3 km further along the route. The early Christian pilgrims footpath via the *Katzenstrick* to Einsiedeln passes through Altmatt. For the next 3 km the train continues down the 50‰ gradient into Biberbrugg, where the line from Einsiedeln joins on the right hand side.

The town of Einsiedeln lies just 5 km to the south and is the location of a monastery that has attracted pilgrims for many decades. From the commencement of operations, in May 1887, the Wädenswil to Einsiedeln railway ran special trains from the lakeside town of Wädenswil. They carried pilgrims wanting to pay homage to the statue of the "Black Madonna and Christ child" dating from the tenth Century, in the Mercy Chapel inside the Monastery church.

From Biberbrugg the route continues down the mountain with the train passing through an area with the view partially

One of the SOB's ex SBB Re4/4^V 446 at Samstagern Depot. June 2000. You can see the station right behind.

Photo: John Atkinson



Ex SBB, now SOB Re4/4^{IV} in the first and most restrained of the various liveries that have ordained these locos. Waiting its next turn of duty in Samstagern depot. June 2002.

Photo: Malcolm Hardy-Randall



it continues down to Wollerau lying 120 metres lower down the mountain.

After passing through Wollerau the descent continues at 50‰ for the next 4 km and the vista is of the lake area and wide-open spaces. At Freienbach SOB the train passes through the extensive vineyards of the district at which point the descent is over, moments later the express pulls into platform 2 of the station at Pfäffikon SZ. This is a beautiful lakeside town that is really steeped in history, with its 13th century castle and tower, and well worth a visit.

The train leaves the station and crosses at almost 45 degrees the SBB main line from

Zürich to Sargans and the east of the country. From here the route of the VAE is along the lakeshore as the train approaches the long causeway into the town of Rapperswil - situated on the northern shore of Lake Zürich.

Rapperswil - the city of roses - has many attractions, from the ancient castle built by Count Rapperswil after the Crusade, the Polish museum with its collections of maps, the famous Rose Gardens and finally but by no means least the Knie Circus museum. Near the station is the steamer pier from where regular sailings take place along Lake Zürich right into Zürich itself. Rapperswil is an excellent place

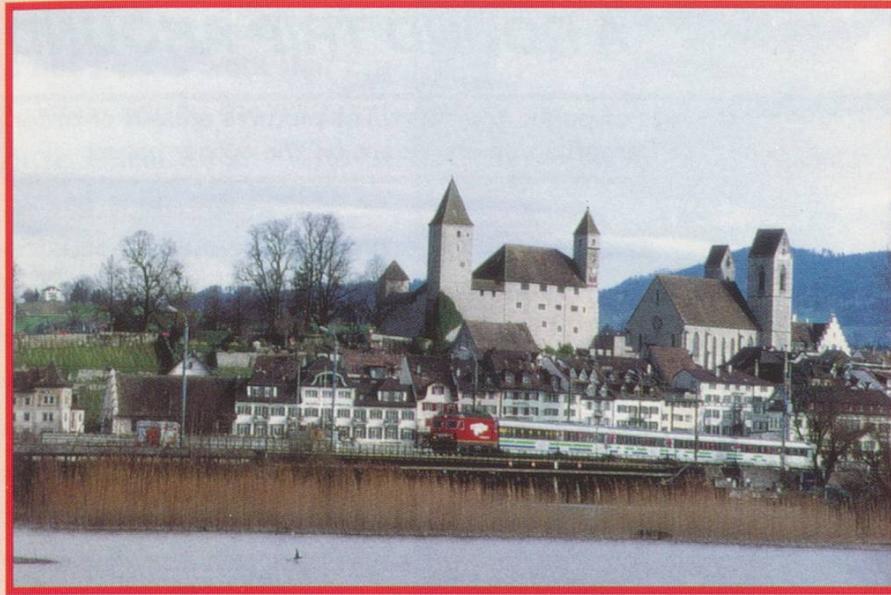
An SBB Re 4/4^{IV} comes off the causeway and enters Rapperswil Station at the head of a Voralpen. The SBB are part of the consortium and provide two of the six locomotives normally allocated to this service. May 2001.

Photo: Toggenburg



A Voralpen leaves Rapperswil and heads out onto the causeway. the town makes a fine backdrop.

Photo:©SOB



to break the journey and sample the many local delights both culinary and visual. (*Note from Ed. In particular look for Roland Born's wonderful model railway shop!*)

As the train leaves Rapperswil station it does so on tracks that were opened in 1859 by the United Switzerland Railway and now operated, since 1902, by the SBB. The route for the next 10 km runs along the northern shore of the Obersee. As the train hurries on its way through the village of Gruenfeld it is possible to look across the lake to the town of Lachen with the Rinderweidhorn and Grosser Aubrig mountains visible in the middle distance, and behind them the impressive mountain peaks of the Glarneralps in the distant background. From Bollingen the railway and the road are sandwiched between the lake and the Oberwald, Chlosterwald and Bannwald hills all the way into Schmerikon the next stop for the express. This town located on the north eastern shore of the Obersee is the final stop for the lake steamers that enter the Obersee via a channel through the causeway from Lake Zürich. Smaller vessels can continue eastwards via the Linthkanal linking the Obersee to the Walensee further to the east.

The attractive centre of Rapperswil. Well worth a visit at any time of the year. Roland Born's model shop is on a street to the right just by the steps. May 2001.

Photo: Toggenburg

Our journey continues to the regional centre of the Linth-Ebene district at Uznach just 3 kms up the line, where the SBB line turns southwards and continues on to Ziegelbrücke. However, our journey continues along the line to Romanshorn opened in 1910 for the

Bodensee Toggenburg Railway. The delay in completing the route was caused by a natural obstacle between Uznach and Wattwil, called the Ricken Pass. Proposals had been made to go around this area but in the end it was decided to bore a single-track tunnel under the pass.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

