

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2003)
Heft: [3]

Artikel: A journey on the Voralpen Express : Uznach - St. Gallen [continued]
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-855146>

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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 JUNE 2003)

Just 3 km from the town of Uznach the train passes through the small village of Kaltbrunn and into the 8,600 metre long single track Ricken tunnel. Immediately after the tunnel the train enters the junction town of Wattwil, where the line from Wil to Ebnat-Kappel - opened in 1870 by the Toggenburg railway and extended to Nesslau-Neu St Johann in 1912 by the BT - crosses the route to St. Gallen.

The views of Wattwil, the Toggenburg regional town, are dominated by the impressive Schloss Iberg. The town straddling the river Thur is an important junction of both road and rail. From here for the next 2.5 km the track is double as the SBB line follows alongside the old BT route into the picturesque market town of Lichtensteig. The rebuilt station operated by the SBB lies in the newer part of the town, but just across the Thur river is the old part of town that dates back to the 13th Century and visible briefly, on the left hand side, from the train. The town with its ornately decorated half-timbered arcaded shops is

another of the many places on this journey truly worthy of a visit. Lichtensteig is the central town for the Toggenburg region.

Our train starts to climb, up the 18‰ gradient, through a short tunnel under the old town and on into the 3,556 metre long Wasserfluh tunnel taking us into the open countryside to the north. In this part of the 28 km long journey to St Gallen the train will cross 13 bridges and travel through 12 tunnels. The VAE continues to climb along the steep sided Necker valley on through Brunnadern-Neckertal, around the western side of the Wilket Mountain to Mogelsberg. The gradual climb continues on slightly elevated track for the next 5 km giving a commanding view of the wide-open countryside all the way into Degersheim.

Degersheim was the hometown of the industrialist Isidor Grauer-Frey who proposed the building of the BT railway so that he could move his textile products to the Bodensee in the north. Sat on a plinth on the southern part of the station is the preserved steam locomotive BT type Eb 3/5 No.6. The VAE has now reached the highest part of this section at 798 metres above sea level. Shortly after leaving the station the train enters the 366 metre long Bühlberg tunnel and immediately on exiting the north portal crosses the 282 metre long Weissenbach bridge. From here the route continues around the west side of the foothills of the 20 km long Alpstein mountain range that stretches from Stein

Wattwil, July 2002. SOB Re4/4 No 91 heads the VAE.

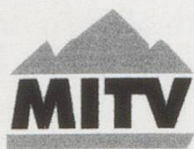
Photo: Malcolm Hardy-Randall



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An SBB Re4/4¹ 11385 backs an ex BT VAE set into Herisau Works. May 1998.

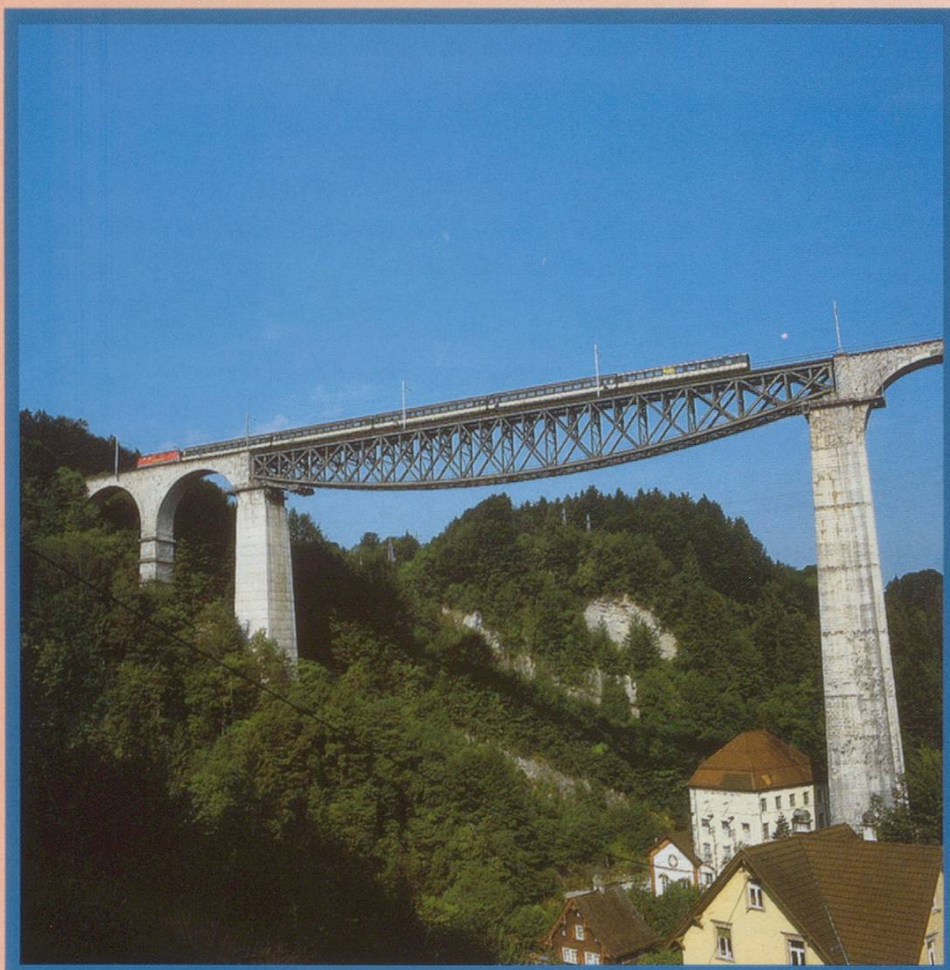
Photo: Toggenburg

[Toggenberg] in the south to the 1,000 metre high Ruppenpass in the north.

The journey continues all the time descending slowly toward the lake, on through Schachen BT, known for its wooden furniture products, across the 296 metre long Glattal viaduct over the Glatt river and through the

short Mühlebühl tunnel into the station at Herisau. This town is the capital of the Appenzell-Ausserrhoden and is also the location for the head office of the Appenzeller Bahnen, which operates the metre gauge line that links Gossau with Herisau, Urnäsch, Appenzell, Gais and St Gallen. The Voralpen Express is now 117.2 km from Luzern and just 29.8 km from its journey's end in Romanshorn. The town is very well known for its textile products.

At the north end of the station, on the right hand side, is the other major workshop of the SOB, previously for the Bodensee Toggenburg railway, providing for all repairs and overhauls of company rolling stock. The workshop also handles wheel repairs for the Appenzeller Bahnen. Occasionally it is possible to see, outside the



The extraordinary Sitter Viaduct.

Photo©SOB

depot, one of the older BT electric locomotives of the type Be 4/4, built by SLM/SAAS in 1931 that is often used on special trains and sometimes the old-timer coaches of the "Amor Express" also stored in the depot and available for private hire.

Soon after leaving the station the express enters the short Tal tunnel followed quickly by the Heinrichsbach tunnel before crossing the 118 metre long Walketobel Viaduct after which it passes through the Gübsensee Halt. The view is more and more one of residential built-up areas as we speed towards the Cantonal capital just a short distance ahead. The journey continues through the short Sturtzenegg tunnel from which the train emerges onto the approaches to the Sitter Viaduct.

The 365 metre long viaduct is built with stone for the arched sections and steel for the 120 metre long centre section. The structure is the highest railway bridge in Europe crossing the Sitter, approximately 99 metres below, at the bottom of this steep sided gorge. During construction workers had to climb the centre support - demolished after construction was complete - as they built the steel section of the bridge, before and after a days work. Visible on the left hand side is another impressive railway bridge that carries the SBB main line from Gossau.

The train now enters the suburbs of the capital city as it passes through St Gallen Haggen after which the line crosses the twin tracks of the SBB main line from Zürich. On the left hand side is St

Leonard's church with its tall spire overlooking the station and its southern approaches. Shortly after passing this imposing building the large roundhouse for the locomotives of the SBB can be seen on the left hand side. Now the express enters the main station on track 3, while waiting alongside on track 2 is a connecting service "The Rheintal Express", bound for Buchs, Sargans and Chur.

St Gallen is the capital city of the Canton St Gallen and has a traceable history that goes back to 612 AD and the arrival of the Irish monk Gallus in whose honour the city is named. Close to the station is the head office of the Schweizerische Südostbahn AG the operating company of the Voralpen-Express. The city is well known around the world for its textiles and many other products from local industry, as well as the Cathedral, which dates back to 1756, the decor of which is quite breathtaking in its splendour, not forgetting the magnificent book archive and also its renowned university.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

St Gallen, cultural and business centre of eastern Switzerland. Street cafe in the old part of town with its colourful murals and oriel windows.

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