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FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

George M Hoekstra

HORSE POWER

First plastic cows, now horses.

As many of you will have seen, a few years ago the city of Zürich commissioned the decoration of about 100 life-size plastic cows by local artists and art departments of local colleges. The cows could be seen all over Zürich for about a year, then they were auctioned off – I have seen one in Britain... Now, for the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the horse-market in Saignelégier in the Jura, art departments and artists from all over Switzerland were given the opportunity to decorate a few dozen plastic life-size models of horses and colts. Why do I tell you this? Well, for the occasion, an SBB “Coca Cola can”, No. 460-036-7, was baptized with the name of the region: “Franches-Montagnes”. Even that would not be so special, except for the fact that the former normal gauge SBB line from Glovelier to Saignelégier was converted to metre gauge in the fifties and since then has been part of the Chemins de Fer du Jura, or CJ system. So how did the 84-ton standard gauge loco get there? Watch...



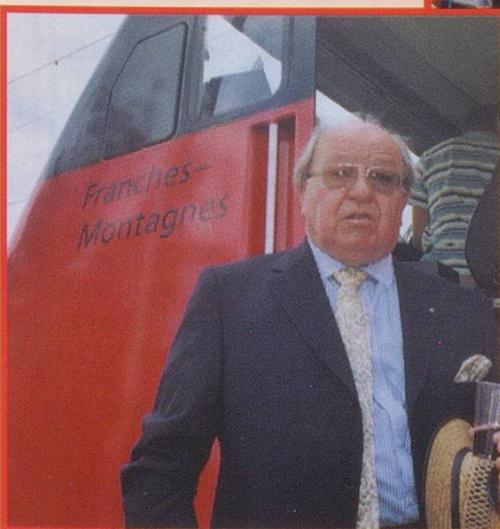
The engine, with its two pantographs removed, was loaded on two metre gauge wagon carrier trucks Nos. Ua 251 and 252 (ex-SZB), which, each carrying a load of 42 tons, were to say the least well loaded! The overhead wires were switched off, as the distance between them and the roof of the class 460 loco was too small. Traction from Glovelier to Saignelégier was provided by Mallet steam engine CP E 164 of “La Traction”, the association running steam excursions on the CJ. As the line used to be standard gauge, the profiles of the tunnels were just big enough for this gigantic load! Photo and information courtesy of my friend and colleague Peter Willen; he waited three hours for this shot, but it was worth it!



Once in the station, the little station pilot had great fun pulling its huge brother back and forth. You can almost hear the carrier trucks groan! The name had not been unveiled at this time.

All photos by George Hoekstra unless stated otherwise.

An upstairs living room window gives a bird's-eye view. The poor housewife just about had a fit when I asked if I could take a picture from upstairs: she did not have time to clean up... But she was sweet to let me up anyway. As Saignelégier is not very big, almost everybody must have turned up. The decorated horses and colts can just be seen among the crowd.



The proud godfather with his engine, its two-line name just revealed. The gentleman, Mr Guy Cattin, is enjoying a well-earned drink. He worked for almost 15 years to get the name of the area on an SBB engine. It wasn't easy: the line now is no longer SBB-territory, it is no longer accessible on standard gauge track, the name would need two lines as it was too long, this had never been done and so on. But tenacity prevails, bravo!

ALP TRANSIT GOTTHARD

In July, a group of railway journalists was invited to view some of the workings in the base tunnels, which are being drilled through the Gotthard. In contrast to the Lötschberg workings the geology of the Gotthard is both more complex and, as the route does not follow the summit tunnel as closely, less well known. It was very impressive to see how the building crews have to cope with things like the enormous pressure of the mountain. Also impressive is the sheer size of the tunnel profiles and the intense darkness as soon as there is no artificial lighting. Then the working with modern explosives: a liquid mixture is pumped into the holes drilled by a so-called "Jumbo" robot. This modern mixture, which is so safe it even can be dropped, is a far cry from the Nitro-mixtures I had to work with! But enough, I will let the pictures do the talking. Just a little info: the

new Information Centre "Gottardo Sud" in Pollegio near Bodio is well worth a visit. The hourly post bus from Airolo to Bellinzona stops there, ask for "Alp Transit Pollegio". Opening hours: Tuesday till Sunday 09.30 – 1800. Closed on Mondays. The Information Centre in Sedrun, which has been open for several years, is open daily, except for Tuesday, 10.00-12.00 and 14.00-18.00. ATTENTION: the Sedrun centre will be closed throughout November. Videos of the tunnel workings can be purchased from both these centres, as well as at the main office in the centre of Luzern: Alp Transit Gotthard, Zentralstrasse 5. These Videos are not available by mail order. I will review one as soon as they send me one. Internet site for the whole undertaking:

www.alptransit.ch



**ALL PHOTOGRAPHS IN THIS SECTION
BY GEORGE HOEKSTRA
AND TAKEN IN JULY 2003**

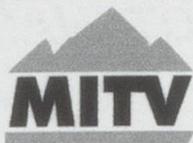
Photo No. 1

Dimensions of the tunnel can be judged against the height of the people walking in it. Remember, this is a single-bore tunnel! Also look at the size of the CAT 725 dumper – it has no number plates: it only circulates on site, bringing the rock from the blasting edge to the crusher and conveyor belts further back.



Photo No. 2

The "Jumbo" has almost finished drilling the holes for the next blasting in the rock face. The holes are drilled in concentric rings, from the centre to the outside edges. The surface of the rock from the previous blasting is stabilized for the new drilling by spraying a coat of cement over it.



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The Rhaetian Railway's spectacular line along the Rhine valley between Reichenau and Ilanz is the setting for a variety of locos and stock pictured in the 2004 RhB calendar. Approx. 48 x 30 cm. £12.95 (+ £2.25 p/p UK: £6.00 p/p overseas)

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New from Leutwiler Verlag

A fascinating archive collection featuring a wide variety of Swiss trams and light railways in service throughout the country in the 1960s. Many of the routes featured are now only a memory. German commentary. R/T c.60 mins. £21.95 (+ £1.35 p/p)

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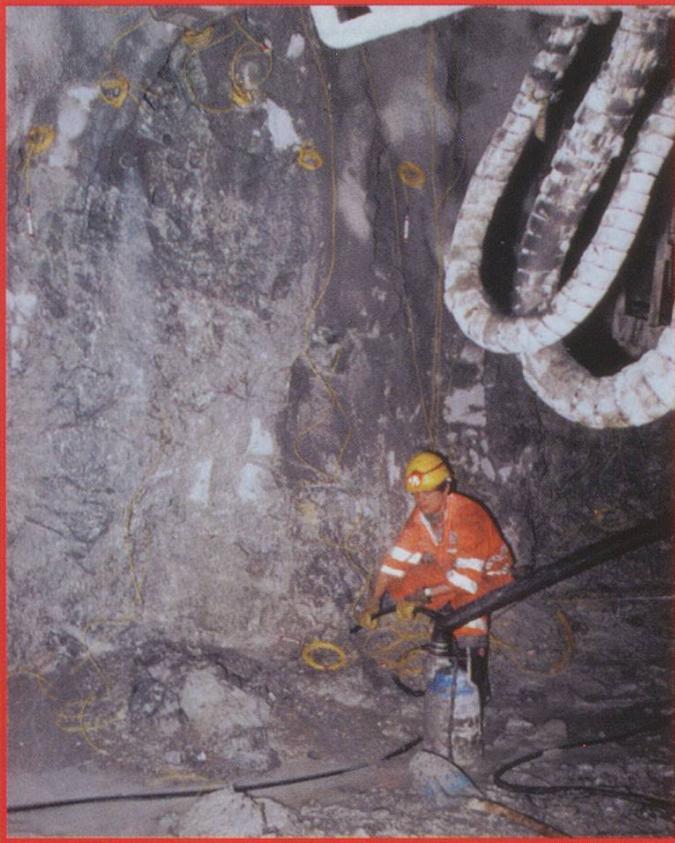


Photo No. 3: After the holes are drilled most, except three in the centre, are filled with the liquid explosives. Detonators are fitted and the orange leads are tied to the detonator control. Blasting is done in stages from the inside out to the edges. The empty holes give the first circle of exploding rock somewhere to go, the rest then fills up the space left by the previous blast. All this in just over two seconds!

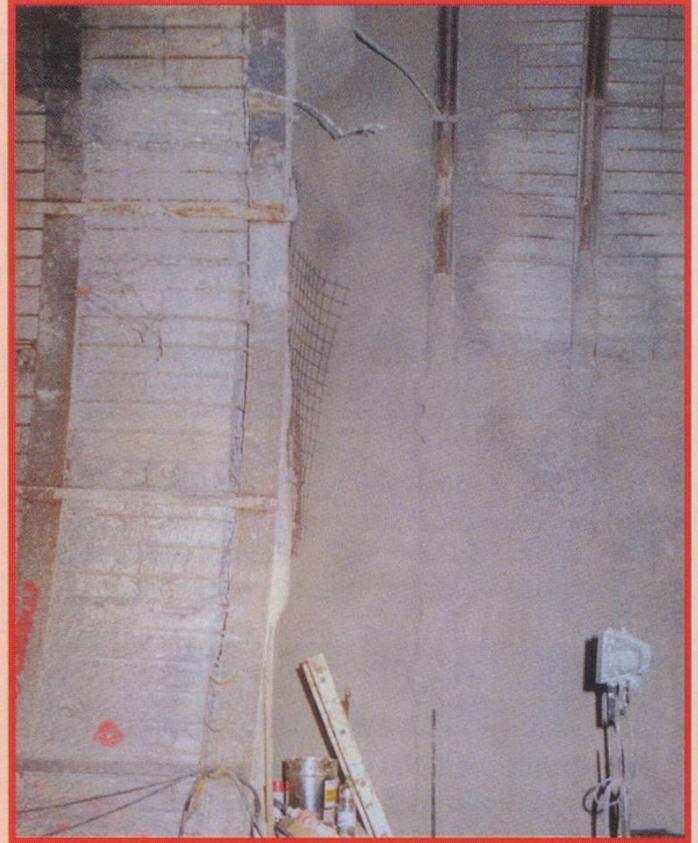


Photo No. 4: After the blasting, the rock face is covered by reinforcements, consisting of a combination of wire netting, steel beams and plates. Drainage mats are sometimes fitted in between them, to carry infiltrating water down to the drainage pipes in the bottom of the tunnel, underneath the tracks.

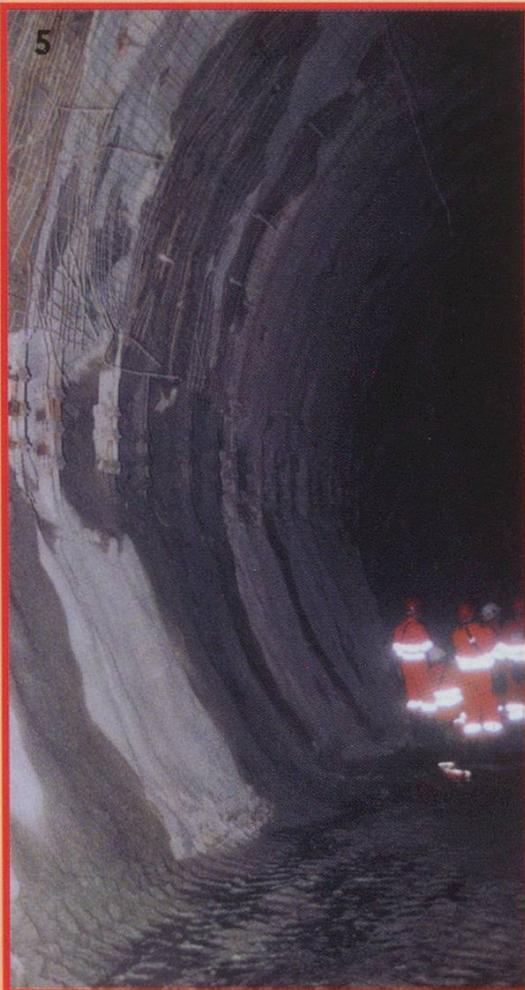


Photo No. 5: If the pressure in the rock is very great, spaces a few feet square are initially left open at regular intervals in the reinforcements. The mountains will close up these spaces, by settling into the new shape and thus relieving most of the pressure. Sounds amazing, but it works!

Photo No. 6: If all is well, the last set of reinforcements is fitted. These are the so-called anchors: they are long rods cemented into the surface of the rock, which help to hold back the reinforcement plates seen in photo 4, which are now behind a cement coating.





Photo No. 7

As we are a railway society, here are some shots of the very extensive 900 mm gauge railway at Pollegio, which carries men and materials far into the tunnel. You can see a lot from the outside. First a mini train: the battery-operated engine is coupled to a people-carrying trailer with driving compartment ("d.v.t." for you rail-bods).

Photo No. 8

Some of the very large array of rolling stock: specialized vehicles for the carriage of cement, cable-laying equipment, reinforcement plates, various chemicals, bins for waste requiring special treatment as well as plain flat cars for general equipment.



Photo No. 9

A peep into the cab: two handles control everything on this electric train. The most important piece of equipment is the radio: essential for contact with control and security at all times. Look at the adjustable and fully sprung seat for the driver: there are some very much larger railways I could mention, which would regard this as an unnecessary "luxury" for their drivers, even though every motor car has them . . .

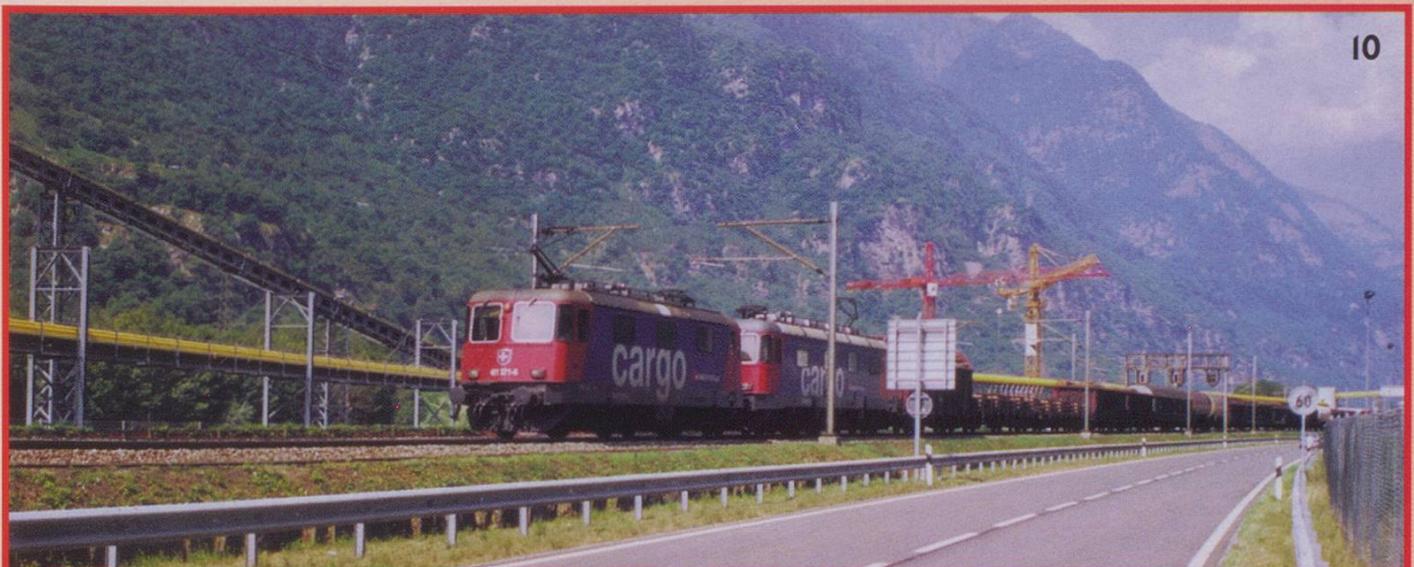


Photo No. 10

Right opposite the street is the Gotthard main line. For another 10 years, all traffic will still have to take the "high road". Why did I not wait till the engines were closer? They would have obscured some of the long conveyor belts taking the spoil out of the tunnels. As carriage of large amounts of spoil on the road is forbidden in Switzerland, the network of conveyor belts is more than twenty miles long!

Photo No. 11

And finally: here is one I made earlier! In 1993 I had a special container wagon made for *Loki* magazine, to commemorate the Swiss voters saying yes to the building and financing of the NEAT Alpine base-tunnels project. If anyone is interested, I still have about four of these, choice of 2-rail or 3-rail wheels, £15 + carriage in Britain, contact me via the Editor.



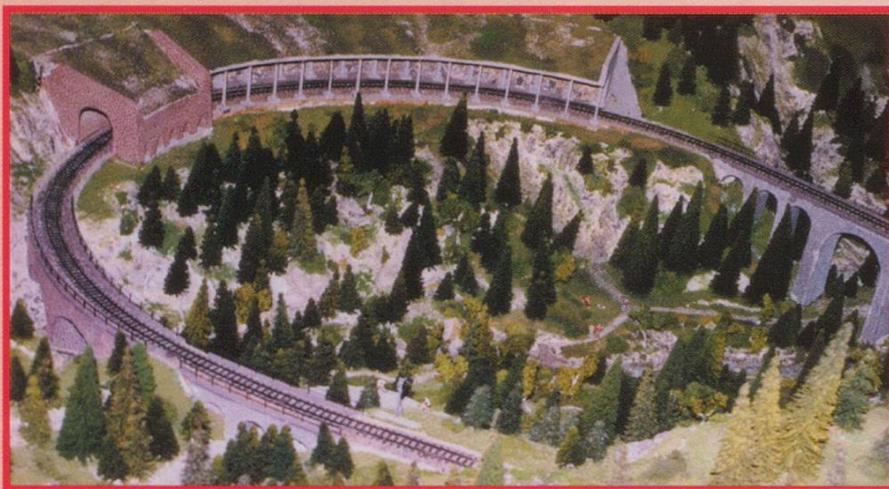
HAVE YOU EVER . . .

EATEN DINNER, SILVER SERVICE, FOUR COURSE, ON AN RHB TRAIN,
HAULED BY A CROCODILE, SITTING AT A LONG TABLE, IN THE OPEN AIR,
ON AN OPEN WAGON, STRAPPED IN, STATIONARY, ON THE LANDWASSER,
LISTENING TO A MAN PLAYING THE ALPENHORN, STANDING, ON HIS HEAD?
THOUGHT NOT . . . NOW READ ON . . .

THE ULTIMATE ALFRESCO DINING EXPERIENCE

Your own correspondent and your Editor were invited to a presentation of the Albula and Ruinaulta lines, which are 100 years old this year. I will pick out four highlights: three for everybody to enjoy and one very special one-off affair. The first highlight is the now almost finished Albula model railway in the museum at Bergün. I know not all of you like model railways, but this one is well worth a visit, especially to prepare yourself for the second highlight: rolling down the road from Preda to Bergün on the scooter-bikes known as "trottis". This road has been used in winter, when it is closed for traffic, for the famous sledge-drives. You get the most wonderful views of the winding RhB route between the two towns from this road,

which is the actual Albula pass road. But do not let this put you off; apart from motorbikes, there is not a lot of traffic on this road in summer. As for the one-off, this was a treat for the journalists: supper on an open wagon, on the Landwasser viaduct! It could only be done in the late evening, when the very heavy traffic of freight and specials has quieted down to just the hourly trains. This event required special dispensation from a whole string of regulations, so do not expect this to be a regular venture. The next day we were on an open wagon again, this time though on one of the wooden-seated panorama cars, for a trip through the Ruinaulta, the beautiful Rhine gorge. Again, I will let the photos tell the story.



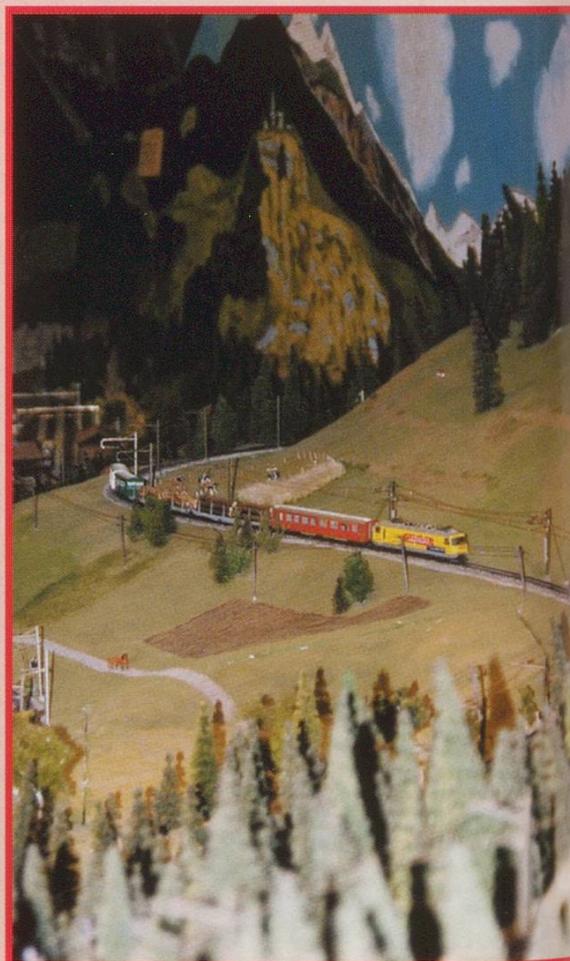
ABOVE AND FAR RIGHT: The almost finished (Is a model railway ever finished?) model in HO scale of the central part of the Albula railway in the museum at Bergün. Look at the detail: walkers, cyclists, picnickers, animals, all there.

Photos: Above: George Hoekstra.

Far right: Toggenburg

RIGHT: The model railway is controlled with rows and rows of relays, just like the real one. This railway is built and maintained by a group of dedicated enthusiasts, many of whom work for the RhB.

Photo: George Hoekstra





LEFT:

The group of trotti-riders, just before setting off from Preda. You can either stand up or sit down on the trotti. As it is downhill to Bergün, it is not too strenuous. You may be able to make out a well-known face at the back.

Photo: Goerge Hoekstra

MIDDLE AND LOWER:

You really get some spectacular views of the Albula line from this route. And as I said, not a lot of road traffic in the morning. It gets busier in the afternoon. Ge4/4' 609 heads the Bernina Express towards Preda. 17/6/03

Photos: Middle : George Hoekstra

Lower: Toggenburg





LEFT: We knew something special was going to happen as we heard the whistle coming up the gradient. We were not disappointed. RhB Ge4/4 414 picks up the party at Alvaneu. Photo: Toggenburg

CENTRE LEFT: Preparation for dinner. As we were going to be on an open wagon on a very high viaduct, the local fire brigade fixed us up with heavy belts that were hooked onto a chain, fixed to the bottom of the wagon. It thus was impossible to stand up, let alone fall off. Your correspondent is the one in the middle; on the right is my friend and colleague Peter Federmann. Yet another friend and colleague (the railway journalists are a small but close knit group) took this picture: Jürgen Bögelspacher/photo affairs.

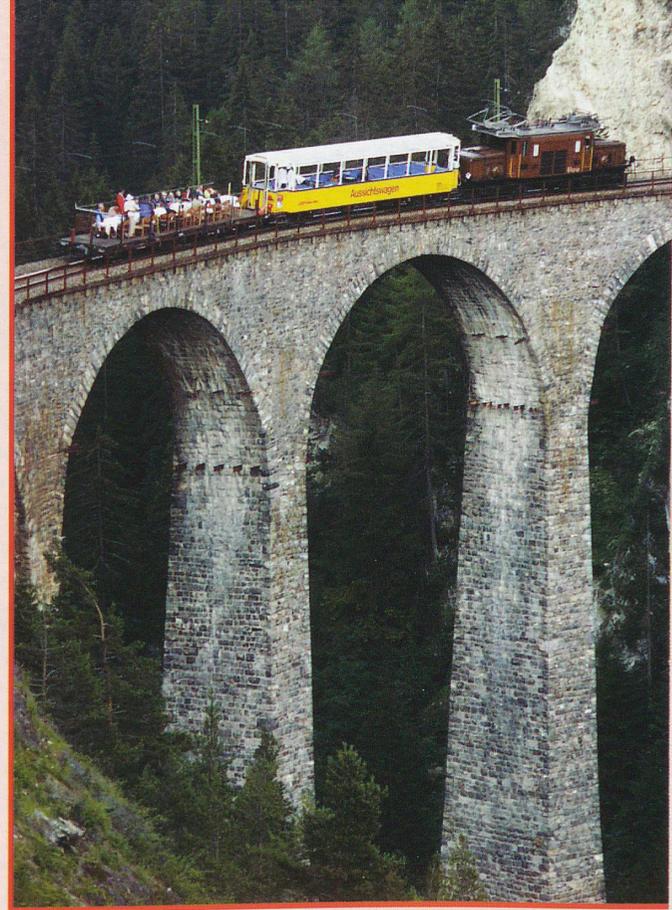
TOP CENTRE: Your correspondent and editor toast the famous Landwasser viaduct, clearly visible on the right. In front of us is the only four-axle open panorama car of the RhB, where the food was prepared.



TOP RIGHT: One member of our group gave up his place at the dinner table to make this photo of our train from a nearby hilltop - what a sacrifice!

CENTRE: The very pretty waitress who served us, remember where she is standing: on top of the Landwasser viaduct, and she wasn't strapped in. A tour de force.

LOWER LEFT: Entertainment was appropriately provided by an alphorn. But there was a huge difference: the player did it standing on his head! This in itself is no mean feat, but remember where we are: the track on the 100 m radius Landwasser viaduct is severely canted. To balance himself, he had to lean a long way to the other side! It truly was a very memorable evening!



LOWER RIGHT: During our journey along the Ruinalta, we see the cover page for more details, we stopped at Trin. The station building is, like many others on the RhB, still the original one from when the line was built. Also like many other stations, it is more than a kilometre from the village. The station buffet was closed many years ago, but the lady who was running it still lives there and will still sometimes serve you, if she feels up to it. The track on the left still carries the original rails: they have never been replaced!

