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Bülach station August 4 2003. Now compare to the computer simulated graphic on the next page.

Photo: Phil Weaver

Well almost.... Having bought Microsoft Train Simulator, I soon yearned for more than it provided. What comes with it is quite good, two routes in the USA, two in Japan, one in the Alps (Austria), and one in the UK. It allows you to drive trains on selected routes and for a first effort by a major company it is very good.

Having got to grips with it, I then decided to find out what else was available. Searching the Internet found plenty of sites supporting the program, and I noticed there were quite a few add-ons in computer stores, but it is the Internet that gives the most. There are literally hundreds of sites and a lot of them let you download extras for free. Then I narrowed my search for Swiss Railways, and was pleasantly surprised at what was to be found. There were at least three routes. I downloaded these and the results were superb. The first was a fictitious route based loosely on The Gotthard

Line. The next was a real route to the North west of Zürich and the third was The Albula Line. The first was a good attempt, but I think was too ambitious. Also it did not contain any stock or activities, which meant looking for them elsewhere. This isn't too much of a chore as most stock is to be found on the sites, but you have to go and look for it. The other two simulations contain all the stock and activities to make the route complete.

The Zürich Unterland is the area to the North and Northwest of Zürich, and the route takes in the lines from Waldshut and Koblenz through to Pfungen and the main line from Oberglatt to Rafz. There are many variations of train to drive, including the IR service from Zürich to Schaffhausen, hauled by Re4/4's, the various S-Bahn services with Re450 and RBe 540's and freight trains, including oil and gravel with the Re10/10 combination and Ae6/6's.



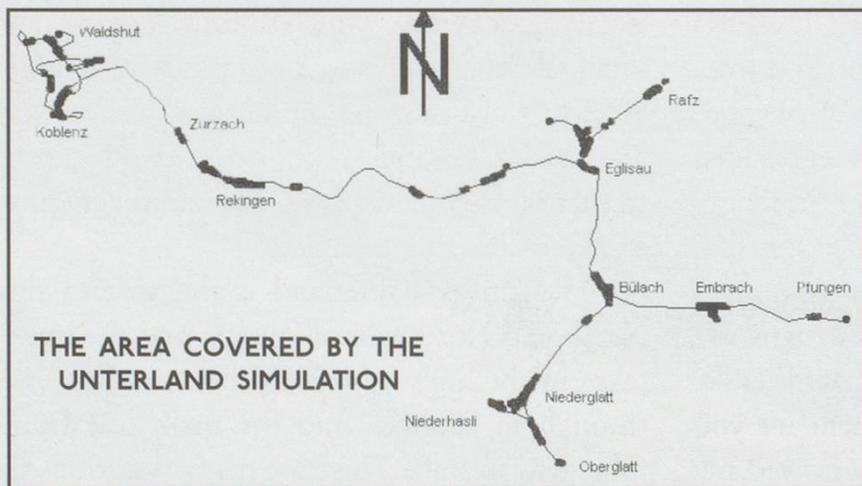
Bülach station from the cab of an RBe 540 awaiting departure with the 12.32pm S22 for Rafz. An Re460 is alongside and ahead an Re4/4 draws away with an IR train for Schaffhausen.

The next route is the Albula line of the RhB. This takes in the route from Surava and Monstein through Filisur down to Bever. The scenery is again very lifelike and the station layouts spot on. I haven't visited the area but a friend who has, says it is really quite accurate. All

The simulation is as realistic as I think it can be, given the amount of work that has gone into producing it, and the restrictions of the host program itself. Also the amount of processing power required to provide just the scenery is enormous. The main 'Swiss' drawback is the use of 'standard' Microsoft Train Simulation Signals, although once used to them you hardly notice. It really gives the flavour of the line. I have just been in touch

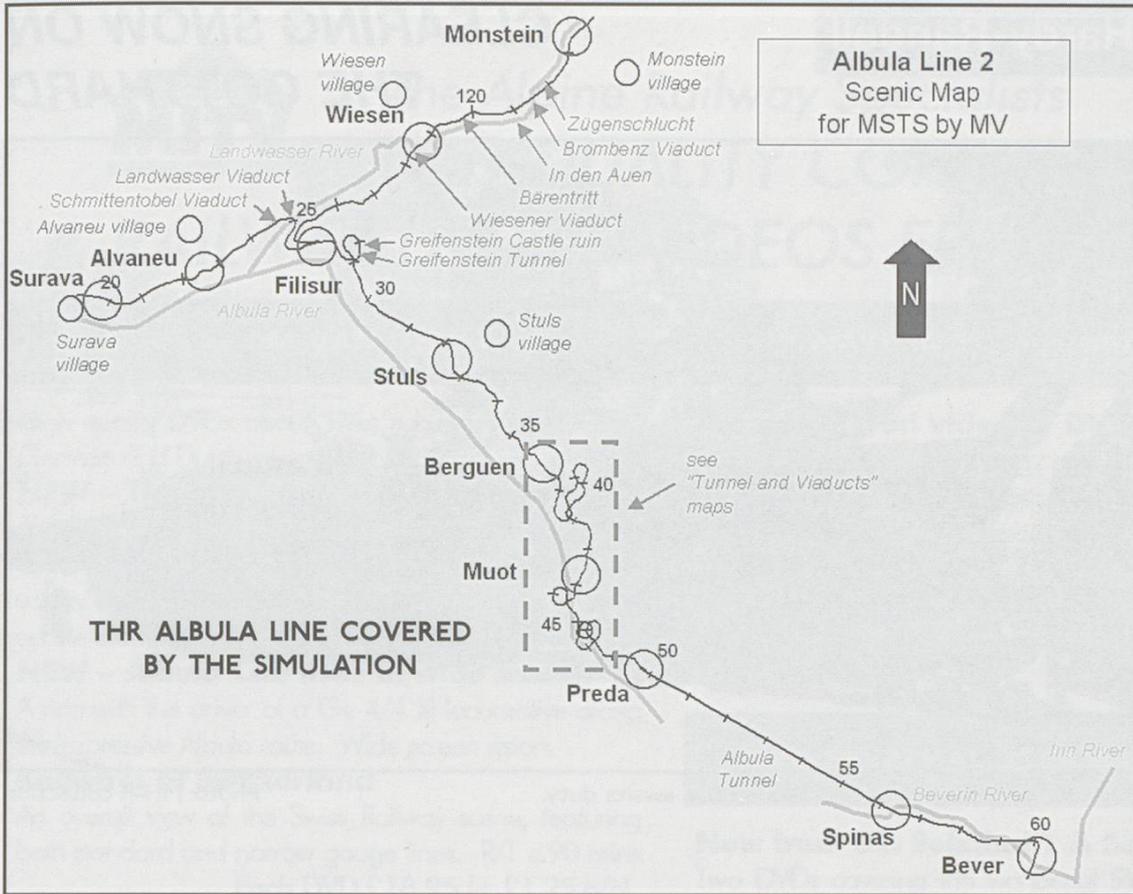
manner of simulations are provided, including the open stock and steam traction. You can even drive the "Croc" on special trains.

Again the simulation only really suffers from the restrictions of the main program. In both simulations there are places where trains need to reverse. At present this isn't possible with the host program and both authors have come up with different ways to achieve this. The Unterland way is via a reverse loop in a tunnel and the Albula way is done using a hidden triangle. Although slightly non-prototypical, it doesn't really detract from the enjoyment.



with Daniel (the author) recently (October), and he tells me that he is in the process of extending it to Oerlikon.

There is also a commercial simulation available, 'Heidi express', which covers the RhB route from Landquart to Davos. This simulation is also very good and scores slightly over the others as it features Swiss signals and a Swiss whistle instead of the standard Microsoft horns on the other simulations. I believe that the same company is also producing another RhB simulation soon.



Full details of the Unterland simulation can be found at: www.8ung.at/unterland/

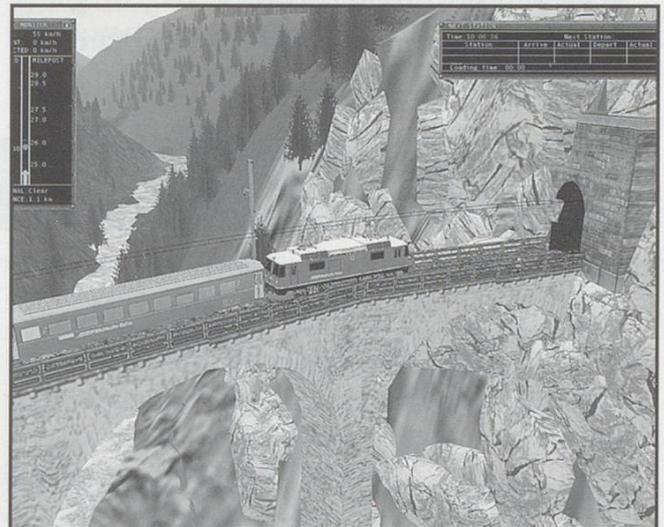
And the Albula line at:

www.avsim.com/hangar/utills/mvchallenges/mstsalbula2/MSTs-Albula2.html

A very good site for downloading pretty well anything to do with Train Simulator is

www.the-train.de/en/index.php

One drawback is that you will need a broadband connection to download the route and stock, as they are very big files.



A Ge4/4¹ on the Landwasser Viaduct.



Muot station and the leaning viaduct. Muot is a passing station. Here starts the most impressive part of the journey on the Albula Line. After Muot and the short Fuegna tunnel (visible here), the track crosses the Albula River on a viaduct (Albula I Viaduct) and immediately enters a helicoidal tunnel, Rugnux Tunnel, from which it emerges onto a "leaning viaduct", clearly visible at the top of this picture.