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THE CENTOVALLI

John Weaver

Photos: George Bett



A Locarno-Camedo local service approaching Intragna. Worked by FART Abe4/6 No.51. Bungee jumpers can use the bridge on payment of a fee to the railway. Would they need a look-out if they can jump clear! In practice bungee jumpers use a platform under the bridge.

There are a number of reasons why the metre-gauge line between Domodossola in Italy and Locarno in Switzerland's Ticino should attract our attention. First and foremost is the spectacular scenery along almost the entire route, which gives the line its title 'The Centovalli' – has anyone actually counted 100 valleys? This scenery comes at a cost, the 55km route has 83 bridges and viaducts, and there are sharp curves, steep gradients and just a few tunnels to keep the civil engineers' attention focussed.

With the line's international status, its through services are operated by two separate companies, each with their own fleet of vehicles, and each with their own long title! The Italian

SSIF (Società Subalpina di Imprese Ferroviarie) is based in Domodossola, the Swiss FART (Ferrovie autolinee regionali ticinesi) in Locarno, and just over half of the route mileage lies within Italy.

Most of the rolling stock in daily use is under 20 years old and was built by ACMV at Vevey whilst some of the Italian stock dates from 1959. However, for that special occasion, vehicles of 1906 and 1923 vintage can be hired. The line is electrified at the unusual voltage of 1350v. Both of the terminal stations were originally 'on street' but have since been moved to subway status. Their functional dourness contrasts with the many wayside stations, of which colourful Intragna, pictured here, is a good example.



Intragna station. SSIF ABe4/6 units Nos. 61 and 64 combine to form a through service to Domodossola.

Locarno, September 2006. FART ABe4/6 No.52, built 1992, is bound for Domodossola.



Locarno, September 2006. 1959-vintage SSIF Abe8/8 No.21 'Roma' awaits its next duty.

