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OFF THE BEATEN TRACK Greg Beecroft

Industrial railways in the Rhein valley



In the mine caverns at Gonzen

PHOTOS: Greg Beecroft

SBB ran another of its “Switzerland on Branch Lines” tours over three days this June, visiting interesting railway installations along the Rhein valley starting on Saturday 9th at Sargans, with a trip to the former Gonzen iron ore mine. The mine ceased production over forty years ago, but remains open as a tourist attraction. A 600mm gauge railway carries visitors from the mine entrance to some of the former workings. The ore deposits slope steeply and funiculars were used to carry material. One of these, no longer operational, can be viewed. (The mine is easily reached by Post Bus from Sargans station to Vild).

The afternoon was spent on a special train, powered by SBB’s preserved diesel locomotive No.18451, visiting freight installations at Sennwald, Untervaz, Chur and Domat/Ems. The trip to Domat/Ems involved use of the mixed-gauge section of the RhB with the train running into the new Stallinger timber plant there. The timber sidings are on the north side of the RhB main line, but are accessed via an underpass from the Ems Chemie sidings on the south side.

Austrian lines were covered on Sunday 10th, with a special train from Feldkirch to Wolfurt Verschubbahnhof, where it was possible to visit the signal box. The train



IR 750mm tourist train at St Margrethen



SBB 18451 in the Stallinger facility at Domat



then continued to Lustenau, where the rest of the day was spent on the Internationale Rheinregulierung system. This 750mm gauge railway was built to assist with maintenance of the flood banks along the River Rhein, but now it only carries tourists. Afternoon trips operate along the eastern bank on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, from Lustenau to near where the Rhein enters the Bodensee. The SBB special also visited the west bank lines, which extend into Switzerland, but much of the railway on that side of the river is out of use and dismantled.

The highlight of the trip was on Monday 11th, with a visit to the Gotthard base tunnel construction site at Sedrun. The party travelled in Pullman Car 1144 attached to the 07.56 Chur to Disentis/Muster. Thence MGB locomotive No.32 hauled the car direct to the AlpTransit sidings at Las Rueras. This is at the foot of a rack-worked branch line, just over 2 km long, off the MGB main line. At Las Rueras an adit leads into the mountainside, accessing a vast chamber in the rock. Here two shafts 800 metres deep lead to the tunnel itself. There is an extensive 900mm gauge railway system, principally for removal of spoil, but with a timetabled passenger service for the workers. Visitors are allowed to ride on the train as far as the shaft chamber. It was also possible to travel on the funicular that links the work site with Sedrun

MGB (ex FO) 32 at Sedrun

village. This has a single car and is passenger-operated. It is 157 metres long and the upper station is 64 metres above the lower one.

Following lunch in Sedrun, the party returned to Disentis/Muster by Post Bus, to rejoin the Pullman Car, this time on the rear of the 14.45 to Chur. With that train running late (yes, with an SBB party on board!) a very fast connection had to be made into the 16:08 to Arosa. That made a special stop at Forsch, so that the group could visit the funicular down to the Arosa Energie power station. This is 324.5 metres long and descends 122.94 metres. It has a single car, which is not enclosed. The funicular replaced a cable car in 1929. The power station is something of a museum piece, with Oerlikon turbines 94 years old still in operation.

Finally, back at Chur, there was a very short charter working, shunting from the Arosa platforms to the main RhB station, using locomotive 215. So another most successful and enjoyable trip came to an end and thanks go to Peter Huber and Henri Heizmann of SBB for their hard work in organising it. Further trips are likely to be advertised in RailAway publicity, but if you would like to be circulated with details please write to Peter Huber at SBB, Billetschalter Chur, Postfach 566, 7001 Chur, or email him at swisstrains@hisppeed.ch

The funicular to the Arosa Energie plant



600mm gauge trains await visitors at Gonzen mine



The Alp Transit works funicular at Sedrun

