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RhB CELEBRATES WORLD HERITAGE STATUS

Nick Freezer reports on the UNESCO events



RhB No.181 arriving at Blonay. PHOTO: Nick Freezer.

The Albula and Bernina lines of the RhB were formally declared an UNESCO World Heritage site on July 7th this year. Celebrations to mark this event took place at Thusis, the Landwasser Viaduct, Samedan and in the Puschlav over the weekend of 12th to 14th September. Centrepiece of the event was an exhibition of RhB stock in Samedan shed on the Saturday and Sunday. A list of the items on display is on our website. Throughout the line significant locations were marked by 'Themen-thurm' - scaffolding towers covered in red fabric.

The formal handover of the award took place at Samedan on the Saturday; the invited guests having travelled by special train from Chur behind Ge4/4III No.650, carrying its revised World Heritage Site livery. The lengthy train included the four Pullmans, coach As 1161 and at least two Bernina Panoramic coaches. The formal part of the event consisted of the obligatory speeches, interspersed with songs by school choirs from the heritage sites, together with the dignitaries holding a red ribbon to mark the symbolic linking of north and south. The speakers' platform was Kkl wagon 7311, positioned on the shed traverser. After the presentation of the certificate the wagon was removed allowing No. 650 to be added to the exhibition.

At the Landwasser Viaduct a large marquee was erected in the meadows below, with PostAuto shuttles to Filisur and Tiefencastel stations, while on the RhB line a temporary halt, marked by a 'Schmitten' nameboard, was established between the Schmittentobel Viaduct and the Zalaint Tunnel. At Thusis, the Stiva Retica coach was stabled at the goods loading ramp, with heritage PostAutos running to the Via Mala gorge - plus a concert by the bus station on the Saturday afternoon. Laser displays were put on in the evenings at the Landwasser and Brusio viaducts and also at St Moritz.

Over the same weekend, the Blonay-Chamby Museum Line brought Berninabahn Ge6/6 No.181 into service for the first time since 1981. A visit on the Sunday afternoon found the engine running with ex-RhB coaches AB 121 and As 2 replacing a steam diagram. With only two coaches loadings were on occasions more reminiscent of London commuter services than a preservation line! To add to the RhB ambience, snowplough Xrotd 9214 was showing off its rotary plough, although whether it was actually in steam like its sister plough at Samedan the previous day was debatable as it was coupled to in-steam ex-Rimini tram engine G2/2 No.4 and Biel water tank tram Xe2/2 No.1.