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Neisenbahn stamp and post card.



Ge4/4II, 619, stands on "Bernina 100 bill-board" duties alongside the Bernina line at the south end of Pontresina station on 12/06/2010. PHOTO: David Adams

MONTANA MINIATURES

George Hoekstra takes the Funi to the Model Railway Museum

PHOTOS: George Hoekstra

Although I obviously knew the long Funicular which runs from Sierre to Montana/ Crans in the Valais quite well, it was my British friend John Griffiths who drew my attention to the model railway museum in Crans, a few hundred yards from its summit terminus.

The base terminus of the SMC Funicular

in Sierre is only a few hundred yards from the station, but it is hidden in a narrow road off the Avenue General Guisan. It is quite easy to find though. All you have to do is to follow the (slightly faded) red line which is painted on the pavement in front of the station. Follow the line up to the Avenue, turn left and after a few hundred yards it will

tell you to turn right and hey presto, you are there. The Funicular itself is quite spectacular being 4.191kms long with an average grade of 22.75 % (1 in 4). The base station in Sierre is at 539m the summit at Montana/ Crans is at an altitude of 1466 m. There are six intermediate stations that are served by 'the local' which takes an hour. The non-stop 'express' takes only 12 minutes at a maximum speed of almost 30 kph - all that on a 1 in 4 slope! Contrary to most cable-operated funiculars, the line is far from straight; it curves through the landscape, which consists mainly of vineyards - very colourful in late October. The view back down the valley and up to the mountains on the opposite side is very impressive in any season.

At the top, turn left out of the station and follow the road to the junction, then take the lower road, which is signposted both "Crans" and "Trains miniatures". Follow this road downwards and upwards, almost to the Co-op where the entrance to the museum is in the parking area on the right hand side of the road. The museum is open every day of the year from 10.00-13.00 and 15.00-18.00. It costs CHF10 to enter, which is quite good value, and once inside, you will probably be greeted by the caretaker, Madam Bonvin, who speaks English. Right next to the entrance is a room for showing videos and further inside there is 700 sq.m. of exhibition space on two floors with some six layouts of various sizes. One of them has a great attraction for children: they can control trains with real life tram controllers! Downstairs is a very large USA-Style LGB layout. Then there are lots of showcases which contain over 1,300 models mostly in HO, including 300 engines. They are mostly arranged as complete trains, made up as they have run in Switzerland over the years, from the "Spanish Bröti Bahn" to today's expresses. The collection was mainly put together through the efforts of three gentlemen, Messrs Rouvinez, Ney and Genayne. All are passionate about model railways and determined to save some of the products of firms like Märklin, Fleischmann, Jouef,

Roco, Jep, Distler and others for future generations to enjoy. For further information see www.trains-miniatures.ch or Tel.: ++41(0)27 565 4747.

A lot of the static exhibits consist of complete rakes of trains, as they ran in Switzerland. When I visited, there were other children in the museum; controlling trains on a layout with real tram controllers.



Some of the exhibits are very rare accessories. These generally survive in much smaller numbers than rolling stock.



The oldest exhibit is this Märklin Clockwork locomotive, which is over 100 years old, donated by the Burckhard family. Its old broken spring lies in front. It had just been fitted with a new one and the loco now runs again!

