

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal

Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society

Band: - (2010)

Heft: 104

Artikel: Going with the flow : David Adams takes a cruise down the Rhein

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854447>

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GOING WITH THE FLOW

David Adams takes a cruise down the Rhein

ALL PHOTOS: David Adams



ABOVE: Approaching Berlingen as the pleasure cruiser "Munot" departs east bound. LEFT: The "Thurgau" at "Platz" 3 in Kreuzlingen Hafen prior to its 11.00 departure to Schaffhausen.

Although my main interest in Switzerland is its railways, I am not averse to including other forms of transport in my itineraries when I visit. Last June I had five new ventures planned, but changed operating dates of some post bus services, and inclement weather in the mountains, resulted in me achieving just one of those goals – a cruise down the Rhein, something I had never got around to previously.

From Erstfeld, where a strong Föhn wind blew continuously for four days and reached gale force at times, I decided to head for Kreuzlingen in order to take a boat down the Rhein to Schaffhausen. Setting off on the 07.33 with changes at Arth Goldau and Zürich HB, I reached Weinfelden then took a connection by a Turbo Flirt EMU to Kreuzlingen and another quick and final change to

reach Kreuzlingen Hafen, just a minute away arriving at 10.31. This station is just a short 5-minute walk from the landing stages. My boat "ms Thurgau" was already at "Platz" 3 but I had time to wander around this pleasant area before joining the 11.00 sailing with arrival at Schaffhausen scheduled for 14.45. My choice of travelling in the westerly downstream direction was governed by the journey time which takes an hour longer upstream due to the Rhein's fast-following current.

We sailed on time in hazy sunshine and moved out briefly into German waters on Bodensee before heading into Konstanz harbour, our first of 16 intermediate calls. A Zeppelin airship was airborne over Bodensee as we then sailed into the narrower stretch of water that divides the German town of Konstanz, and passing under three

bridges, the first of which carries both road and rail, entered the Untersee. Several of the calling points on the south shore are served by trains on the Thurbo operated SBB Romanshorn to Schaffhausen line via Stein-am-Rhein. This town also has an additional direct service to Winterthur, so shorter river journeys are possible by utilising rail to and from such points.

Leaving Konstanz the next call at Gottlieben was back in Swiss territory, followed by Ermatigen then out across Untersee to the island of Reichenau, and a brief return to Germany. From here the weather became clearer and the waterway gradually became narrower as we stopped at the Swiss communities of Berlingen and Steckborn, before another call in German territory at Öhningen, prior to arriving at the Swiss architectural gem of Stein-am-Rhein.

Unfortunately, relatively little of the town's renowned historic buildings can be seen from the river. The Castle Hohenklingen, a dominant feature on a hill top which can be seen for some distance, overlooks the town. Almost all of the landing stages we called at had colourful floral decorations and there were also many attractive quayside buildings to see en route.

Much of the river is marked out with navigation aids in the form of wooden posts topped with a half green/half white diamond to indicate the deep water channels. Larger vessels must pass on the green side. Birdlife en route was rather sparse as June is not the best time of year for water species. Apart from red crested pochard and red kites, the cormorants, grey herons, mallard, coots, black headed gulls, mute swans, house

martins, swallows and swifts seen, are common in most of the UK.

For the first part of the trip "*ms Thurgau*" had been fairly lightly loaded. The only school party aboard from the start disembarked at Steckborn. It was a well behaved group of 15/16 year olds from Lugano, with a teacher originally from Zürich who had never been to this part of Switzerland before. However at Stein-am-Rhein the ship filled almost to capacity, mainly with parties of young children. Fortunately, the majority alighted 40 minutes later at Diessenhofen, which is approached by passing under a typically-Swiss covered wooden bridge. En route, before this stop a couple of naturist sunbathers on the river bank had caused some hilarity among the school children. After one final call at Büsingen, a tiny enclave of Germany completely surrounded by Switzerland, the turrets and railway bridge at Schaffhausen came into view and we docked two minutes early at 14.43.

From the ship to the bus stop for the connection to the SBB station it was a two minute walk. Although the Schaffhausen bus routes had changed since planning my trip at home I found that service Nos. 5 and 25 between them offered a frequent service to the Bahnhof, where my No. 25 deposited me, a few metres away from the rear coach of the 15.09 to Zürich and the start of my return trip to Erstfeld. So on a very satisfying and enjoyable day, which turned out to be the best weather wise of my eight-day stay, I used eight trains, a boat, and a bus all of which connected faultlessly and were valid on my Swiss Pass.