

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2011)
Heft: 106

Artikel: DFB reaches Oberwald
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854684>

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DFB REACHES OBERWALD

Christopher Elliott



DFB No.1 waits to haul the first official train over the Furka Pass from Oberwald to Realp, 12th August 2010 at Oberwald.

ALL PHOTOS: Chris Elliott

At last! It is open again – the Furka Pass Line. On Thursday 12th August 2010 the historic Furka Pass line from Realp to Oberwald celebrated its official re-opening, operated by the Dampfbahn Furka Bergstrecke (DFB), with the first service train running the whole length of the line. This was the first through operation since the completion of the 15.5km Furka Base tunnel in 1982. The official opening day was followed by a three-day festival with an intensive service running between Oberwald and Gletsch and many activities in the village at the foot of the Rhone glacier. The opening day was relatively quiet with just one train in the morning travelling through from Realp to Oberwald. This carried people who had worked on the project for many years to a celebratory meal and the formal opening ceremony. Illustrating what a difficult project this had been to realise, the initial run was only able to take place after volunteers cleared the track near Muttbach-Belvédère of a small landslide which had come down the day before.

The first formal service was planned to leave at 14:45 but before this there were other celebratory activities that had to take place. The attendant crowds heard a senior member of the DFB read a speech from Adolf Ogg, who was the Swiss transport minister who gave permission for the start of the line's restoration work. This was

followed by a light-hearted speech and then prayers led by the priest of Oberwald. Excitement then grew as the time came for the first official train's departure. Those lucky enough to be able to travel boarded the three coach train with DFB No.1 at its head, whilst many others headed along the track to find a good photographic vantage point. Precisely on time DFB No.1, draped in sunflowers, set off with her train. Amidst all the steam and smoke the train made its way slowly forward, first up the short incline, then over the barrier-controlled road crossing with its special retractable rack, and then on slowly and steadily up the valley towards Gletsch.

MGB Gem 4/4 No.61 heads out of Oberwald bound for Gletsch, 13/08/2010.





TOP: DFB Nos.6 and 7 cross at Gletsch 13/08/ 2010 as part of the celebrations to mark the opening of the complete Furka Pass line from Oberwald to Realp.

ABOVE: DFB No.1 is filled with water for its return to Realp. Gletsch, 13/08/ 2010

Friday morning in Gletsch saw the PostAuto services from Andermatt arriving with standing room only on many trips, whilst the station was very busy with relatively frequent trains arriving from and setting off for Oberwald, also carrying passengers. In the station sidings the DFB volunteers had a number of interesting specialist vehicles on view, and on the grass to the side of the station building there were many stalls – including a Cornish pasty vendor which amused me. On the pass roads to the Grimsel and the Furka an old Saurer PostAuto ran excursions for CHF10 which added to the atmosphere. Just before noon there was the arrival of the first of two trains from Realp; this was to go forward to Oberwald headed by No.4 which had been given by the MGB to the DFB the day before. The sight of the smoke from the locomotive winding its way down the valley to the station was a great experience. Having booked a seat on the 15:30 train down from Gletsch to

Oberwald I boarded just after 15:00 which was just as well as there was quite a squash inside our coach. Despite the difficulty in booking a ticket many weeks in advance it seemed that they were also being sold on the day and some complimentary tickets were being given out as well! However the ride down was fabulous; first along the road; then into the spiral tunnel; then along the other side of the valley to a footpath which many people were using as a viewing area. All too soon it seemed we were down in Oberwald. Once there we saw MGB Gem4/4 leave Oberwald for Gletsch in order to haul the evening trains. I wonder when it will be used on these rails again.

The Saturday and Sunday programmes were essentially the same, but with one great difference – the weather. Whereas Thursday and Friday had been cloudy, with the odd shower on Thursday, both Saturday and Sunday were complete washouts. It was a great pity since so much work had gone into making the event attractive for the visitors. I do not know how the visitor numbers were affected but I cannot envisage many but the most committed being there.

For those who have never visited this railway they are missing a great treasure. While not a cheap day out, travelling the whole route is an unforgettable experience as it makes its way through the rugged uninhabited countryside. For those who want a shorter experience, I understand that a shuttle service will be available in years to come between Oberwald and Gletsch. 

FIFTY YEARS AND GROWING

Keith Scotland

