

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2011)
Heft: 107

Artikel: Domat-Ems - a postscript
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854701>

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DOMAT-EMS – A POSTSCRIPT

Richard Baker




A RhB train of logs at Bergün in Jan 2011 heading to Campocologno in Italy via the Bernina Pass.

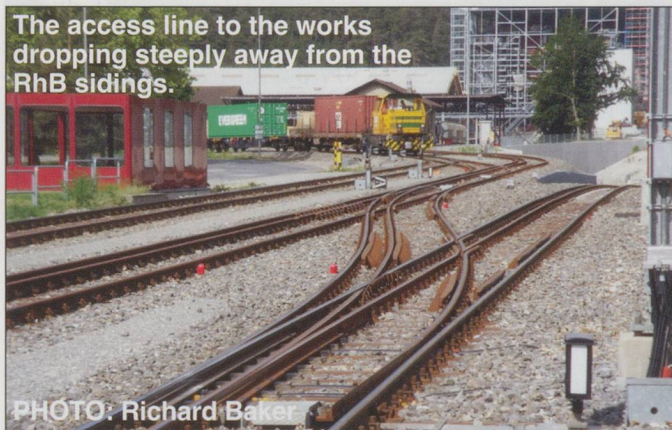
PHOTO: s'Murmeli.

In the March 2011 edition of *Swiss Express* I was concerned to read that the extensive rail-served timber processing plant at Domat-Ems outside Chur had ceased to operate due to bankruptcy. I had first become aware of this operation in 2008, both from seeing it from an RhB train en-route to Filisur, and then reading a magazine article about the investment made by the Swiss subsidiary of the Austrian Stallinger Group. With an expected throughput of some 600,000 cubic metres of wood per year, this was predicted to be a great opportunity locally for both the RhB and the SBB. Not only had there been CHF15m spent on a dual-gauge rail connection to the adjacent lines, but Canton Graubünden had pumped substantial public funds into the development. It was also agreed between SBB/RhB that the former would allocate an Am 843 diesel loco to work the incoming loads of timber “in-the-round” and the outgoing products. Additionally the RhB had apparently ordered ten new wagons (Sgp 7601 – 7610) which, with their double vertical supports, would be very suitable to handle the incoming timber. However, even shortly after the opening of the plant, it was being reported that levels of wood movements were not as great as had been expected, perhaps being affected by the import of cheaper raw material from places like Germany.

Having collated this background information I went to look in more detail at the railway connections to the plant in May 2008. In fact these were actually slightly east of the station at Ems Werk (not at Domat-Ems) where trains stop by request. The connection to the plant (it is still in-situ) is made from the nearest parallel freight line to those of the RhB and these tracks are located on the opposite side of the main line to the plant itself. The freight lines were originally built to serve the Ems Werk, a chemical complex which generates significant rail traffic. The direct single track connection to the timber plant - which is dual-gauge, as are the internal tracks - drops down steeply and passes under the main line to emerge in the centre part of the complex. At the time an

Am 843 (No Am 843 090-2) was shunting on the Ems Werk access tracks although nothing was moving in the processing plant. There were, however, numerous high-sided wagons of wood chippings awaiting collection. In *Swiss Express* it noted that the timber processing plant had “electrified” sidings. At the time of my visit there was no electrical supply on any of the access tracks or in the factory area. The yellow diamond with a horizontal black bar showed the overhead power specifically ended at the point where the tracks dip from the level and go down steeply under the main line tracks. (Our information came from an outside source – Editor)

A further visit some five months after the closure saw the empty works to be forlorn and desolate. Offers have apparently been made to buy and run the site, although little information is coming out in public but the Canton has voted against any further subsidy. Apart from the human cost to those who lost their jobs this closure has had very significant effects on the SBB, the RhB and other Swiss railways showing how just one change can affect so many other aspects of commercial activity on the railway network. For example I understand that some of the local timber that once went to Domat-Ems is now being hauled by the RhB over the Bernina Pass to Italy. 



The access line to the works dropping steeply away from the RhB sidings.

PHOTO: Richard Baker