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RIDING THE 'WALZENHAUSEN EXPRESS'

Don Gatehouse takes to the RhW on a wet June afternoon

The modest RhW platform at Rheineck shares the protection afforded to SBB passengers beneath the glazed station canopy. Class BDeh 1/2 No 1 sets off for Walzenhausen with R6161 on a dull, wet afternoon in June 2012.

All photos: Don Gatehouse

Appenzellerbahnen Rheineck-Walzenhausen (RhW) Class BDeh 1/2 No.1 departs Rheineck with R6145 on Monday 18th June 2012.

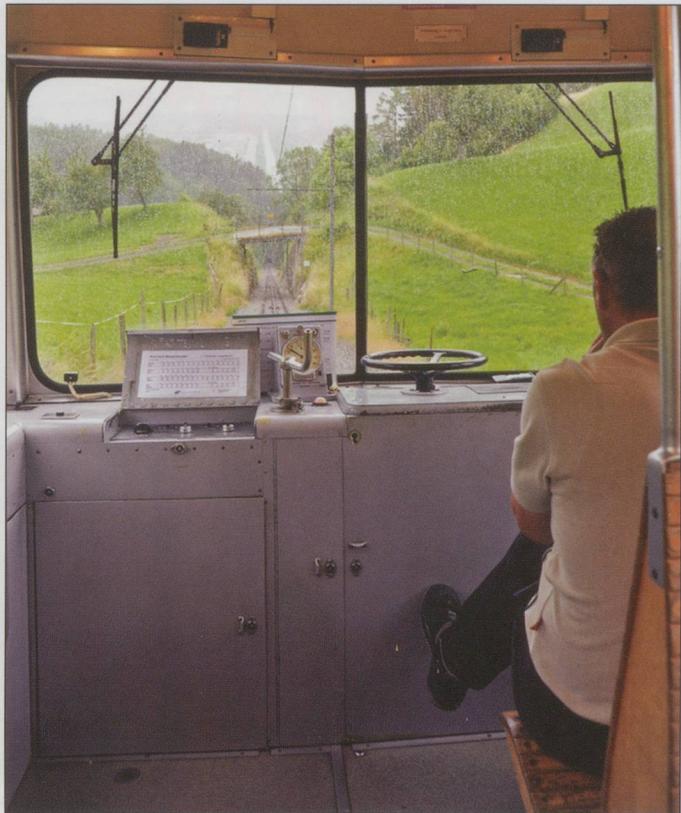


I had previously noticed the railcar that operates the Rheineck-Walzenhausen (RhW) service when travelling through Rheineck on a Rheintal Express en route to St. Gallen. So, while on holiday based near Rorschach on the Bodensee, I had the opportunity to take a closer look at one of Switzerland's smallest railways. Modest though it may be, I am advised that locally the service carries the unofficial title of the '*Walzenhausen Express*'. The line is now part of the Appenzellerbahnen organisation. I joined one of the twice-hourly mid-afternoon return workings that start from beneath the main building canopy at Rheineck's SBB station. Before we set off, the driver came through the railcar to check all tickets/passes and with the doors closed the Class BDeh1/2 No.1 built by SLM in 1958 soon rumbled out into the rain and headed along the single track with its unusual 1200 mm gauge. This dates from the construction of the line in 1896 as a funicular from Ruderbach (406m) to Walzenhausen (673m), with a tram connection from Rheineck. The two sections were converted in 1958 to become a railway, electrified at 600V dc, with rack operation on the funicular section.

Initially, leaving Rheineck the RhW track runs almost level and parallel to the SBB main line. After some 600m, just beyond where the adjacent Bahnhofstrasse reaches Ruderbach, the RhW alignment swings right to cross the road and approaches the first of two possible intermediate stops on the 1.9km route at Ruderbach where the RhW small depot is situated. The lines'

single railcar is maintained here although it is normally housed at Walzenhausen station. At this point the driver engaged the Rickenbach rack system at the start of the 25% (1 in 4) climb to Walzenhausen. With a burst of acceleration to commence the climb, we entered Schutz Tunnel (315m). The noise in the coach was amazing and quite a contrast to that experienced in a modern unit on the main line but in my view it all added to the experience of this unique little train, as did its slatted wooden seating. The second request stop is at Hof halfway up the climb. This is a small metal platform, matching the size of the railcar door, accessed by steps and it is not indicated in the public timetable. The sign, which is almost larger than the 'station', carries the warning '*Halt nur nach vereinbarung*' or 'Stops only by arrangement'.

Modest though it may be in terms of scale and distance covered, the RhW negotiates road crossings, travels through tunnels; over and under bridges; bisects a wood and farm pastures; runs through rock faced and stone lined cuttings and along embankments during the 6-mins. it takes to climb to the summit of the line, where the station is entered through a 70m tunnel. Walzenhausen is a community of some 2,000 people that once made a living from textiles, but now is a health resort that trades on its slogan of the '*Balcony above the Bodensee*'. With the rain still lashing down, there was little incentive to venture out of the station but I know the village is worth a visit and the view over the Bodensee on a clear day is certainly one to be enjoyed. So, I re-joined No.1 for the return journey and the rack assisted descent of 267m to Rheineck. My Stadler built '*Thurbo*' unit back to Rorschach was functional, smooth, fast and quiet but somehow lacked the character of the '*Walzenhausen Express*'. That said, don't just take my word for it, have a ride on the RhW when you can and experience that 'character' for yourself. I plan to do it again on a clear, dry day to enjoy that view. 



TOP: Having emerged from Walzenhausen tunnel the view forward confirms the straight descent to Schutz Tunnel just visible through the farm bridge. In the far distance above the trees, the Alter Rhine leads into Lake Constance.

BOTTOM: The view forward as we arrived at Ruderbach and our 1958 vintage transport was about to leave the rack section and cross the two roads on the approach to Rheineck.

Swiss Tip Good ideas and information about Switzerland from travellers.

Time between trains at Brig? Ignore the tempting forecourt with the MGB and slip out through the subway right at the back. It's signposted to the 'Autoquai' and the reward is that from the pavement you see close up all the northbound freights in the yard, and all arrivals and departures pass under your nose. In a typical 15-minutes you could see five trains, and many more locos if they are double-headed. You might even catch one of SARSA's Class 857 diesels on an infrastructure train. The only snag is the sun (low in winter) is in your face, but by photographing in the narrow shade of a mast or gantry you can probably get a decent picture. 