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CHÄRNSMATT LILIPUTBAHN

Keith Scotland visits this amazing operation.



I have been going to Luzern for over 20 years and thought that I knew everything about the area. Then, last April, a friend living there suggested that we could have a meal in a hotel that has a railway attached to it – and I had never heard of this! It is the Chärnsmatt Hotel at Rothenburg. It is just 8km from Luzern, accessible by bus on Line 51 or 52 with services every 15 minutes throughout the day, and every 30 minutes at weekends, with the journey taking just 16 minutes – get off at Rothenburg Lindau. The cheapest way is to buy a day ticket at CHF8.40, and then you can use it on other journeys as well. The hotel is also just 15 minutes walk from

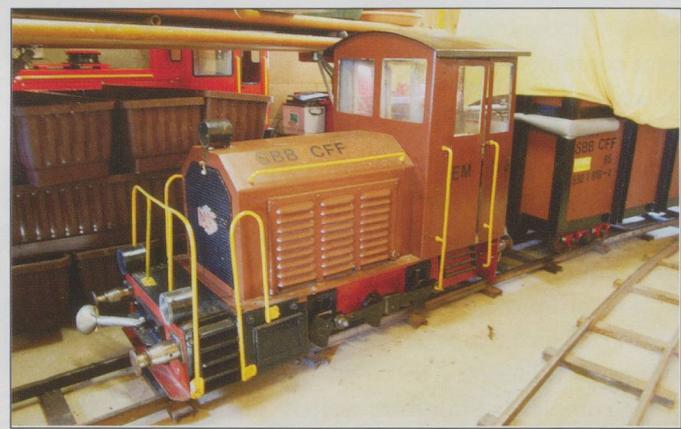
Rothenburg Dorf station on Luzern's S18 rail service to Sursee with its $\frac{1}{2}$ hourly frequency. At the front of the hotel there is a sign with a hint of a train – go round the back and you will be amazed. There is a large children's play area, and masses of $7\frac{1}{4}$ " gauge trackwork. There is a signal box, engine shed, turntable with a whole fan of tracks around it, a tunnel, a section of large wall with concrete pipes in it, where the coaching rakes are securely stabled, and even a rack section! I have never seen a fully functioning rack railway in this gauge.

It climbs to a platform where passengers may alight for an apéro, and view across the whole area. Surprisingly the whole site is not fenced off; there is a public right of way through it. The railway runs through a very attractive garden with ponds, plants and flower beds. It is an ideal place to take the family with so many varied children's attractions on site. When I visited, they very kindly started up the Furka Oberalp diesel loco, pulled a rake of coaches out of their concrete tube garage, and off we set. There is an incredible 1,400m of track, the usual circuit takes 860m, and the rack section is 100m. The railway operates, weather permitting, on Wednesdays,

weekends and public holidays from spring to autumn (check on www.chaernsmitt.ch) and individual trips cost just CHF2, or six rides for CHF10. The line opened in 1980, and has accumulated an impressive line up of locomotives. Pictures of them can be seen on the web site. For me, the surprise was two BR Britanniæ – 'Britannia' in 1950s BR blue, and 'Morning Star' in Brunswick green, complete with "Red Dragon" headboard. There is also a pair of Royal Scots, one in original LMS livery and the other with smoke deflectors. There are also German outline locos and many, many others. All these are live steam, and neat containers of differing grades of coal and anthracite line one wall of the engine shed. There are diesel locos in their own shed, including an electric (battery) driven tramcar. In the basement of the hotel are the workshops. These are very well equipped and the skill of the workmanship was evident in a brand new steam rack loco that is taking shape there, alongside trailers for the tram that are being completely built from scratch. The icing on the cake – the Liliputbahn issues Edmondson tickets! The operation is supported by a team of volunteers who have to be congratulated on a wonderful railway. The hotel is superb too – after exploring the railway we retired to the dining room for a meal that was top quality, whilst the accommodation is also to a high standard. A fascinating place to visit. 

More photos overleaf.





Swiss Tip Good ideas and information about Switzerland from travellers.

Visiting the Lugano area and interested in railway models? If so then visit the Galleria Baumgartner at Mendrisio. This is not primarily a railway exhibition but more a showcase of model trains that has been created by a wealthy Swiss Industrialist and railway enthusiast who has spent millions of francs purchasing the most comprehensive collection of models around. It is located in a purpose built building some 300m from the SBB Station on the opposite side of the road, back towards Lugano. A display of signals helps locate it. The 1st and 3rd floors are full of cases of model trains, mostly in Gauge 1, HO and O, from Hag, Marklin, Lemarco, KTM, Lionel, Fulgurex, Sunset, etc. that represent the railways of Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy, Benelux and the USA. There is a Gauge 1 layout on the mezzanine floor that starts automatically when visitors trigger a sensor, whilst there are also an HO layout, a three-rail tin plate Gauge O layout, plus a Gauge 1 layout under construction. The basement is devoted to Marklin in all its gauges from Z to 1. Additionally there is a cafe in a vintage railway coach together with a small shop. Admission costs CHF12 and opening hours are 09.30 to 12.00 and 13.30-17.30, Tuesday to Friday, and 09.30 to 17.30 Saturday and Sunday. It is closed on a Monday. 

