

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2013)
Heft: 114

Artikel: Rittner Bahn and Trogener Bahn : Ron Smith reports on two lines that have a common link
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854214>

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RITTNER BAHN AND TROGENER BAHN

Ron Smith reports on two lines that have a common link



Ex. TB, BDe 4/8 No.21 is seen approaching Wolfsgraben Ritten.

All photos: Ron Smith

It is a testament to the high original build-quality, and their operator's strict maintenance regimes, that many items of Swiss rolling stock find homes elsewhere in the World once their working life in Switzerland is over. For example two BDe4/8 units, retired by the Trogenerbahn (TB) in 2009 are currently working on the Rittner Bahn (RB), in the autonomous, German speaking, northern Italian region of the Sud Tyrol. The RB used to run from the capital, Bozen, up onto the Ritten plateau. The 11.75km metre-gauge line, electrified at 750Vdc from the start, was opened in 1907. It included a rack section to climb up to the plateau, which was replaced in 1966 by a 4565m long cable car operation, at the time the longest in the world, up to Oberbozen. The remaining 6.8km line has continued to run in splendid isolation. It still operates some of the original cars, (now at 800V dc) as well as one 1958-built car from the Stuttgarter Strassenbahn. This ran on the Esslingen – Nellingen – Denkendorf line until 1977, when it was stored and then moved to

the RB in 1982 along with a sister unit, which has since been returned to Stuttgart for preservation. The units from the TB made their way to Italy thanks to the initiative of Jürg Lüthard, a Swiss railway journalist, who knows both railways well. Two-car BDe4/8 No.24, built in 1977 by Flug und Fahrzeugwerke AG, Altenrhein, with Brown Boveri electricals, seats 72 and weighs 39t. On the 1,000V dc system of the TB its maximum speed was 65 kph but this is reduced using the 800V dc RB system. It went into service on 17th May 2010 and was quickly followed by similar 1975 built unit No.21. Prior to refurbishment they ran in their TB livery, but now with a smart new livery and new upholstery they provide the backbone of the RB services. These units are so successful that the RB would like more, so TB units Nos.22 and 23 are due to join them in 2016 after the completion of a major project in the St Gallen area.

The TB is now part of the Appenzeller Bahn (AB), which has absorbed several railways in the area. The AB has a major project underway called the 'Durchmesserlinie' - see www.dml-ab.ch for full details. This will connect the Trogen - St. Gallen line with the St. Gallen to Appenzell line via a new connection in St. Gallen, road realignments and many track work projects. These include the elimination of the last 978m section of Riggensbach rack at Ruckhalde, which climbs at 9% (1 in 11) and will be replaced with a 705m tunnel. This will allow time-savings compared with the existing route and is crucial to achieving a 15-minute interval service from Trogen to Gais via St. Gallen utilising non-rack stock, including the TB's new Stadler units. The tunnel alone will cost CHF54m out of the total 2-year project cost of CHF90m. Work is due to begin in 2014. Thirty years ago there were six rack sections on the AB, totalling 4.4km.

'Oldtimer' and No 24 at Oberbozen Ritten.



The RB with its tram-style arched catenary supported on wooden poles is well worth a visit. The line is single track without signals. Workings from Oberbozen to Klobenstein cross at Lichtenstern with drivers swapping trains and driving back to their respective termini – a version of one engine in steam, actually one driver on the line! There are several of the original wooden bodied railcars still running, and these will be kept for running special trains, and for the short Oberbozen to Maria Himmelfahrt shuttle. It is a great experience to ride in these slatted wooden-seated, ornate, classic vehicles. It is a busy railway, now all-passenger, as the road that was built up to the plateau in the 1960s took away the freight traffic. It provides a vital local service and is integrated into the region's transport network that has a card covering all public transport. More information can be found at www.ritten.com. 



ABOVE: 'Oldtimer' No2 and No21 cross at Lichtenstern - Stella Ritten.

BELOW LEFT: No 21 at Oberbozen.

BELOW RIGHT: No21 approaching Wolfsgraben Ritten.



DFB NEWS

The Dampfbahn Furka-Bergstrecke (DFB) restoration team at Goldau working on the former RhB steam snowblower XrodT R12 reports that during 2012 a lot of progress has been made. The body is now almost finished, the controls are almost complete whilst the tender is stripped ready for further work. To enable it to be used on the DFB R12 will require a rack brake. In order to achieve this a rack bogie has been taken from an ex-Vietnam flat car and this will be installed under R12's tender; however this will require modifications to brake cylinders and air tanks. They also report that in May the boiler overhaul of DFB No 9 was completed. Welcome additional finance was raised during the year by gaining a contract to remove some 350m of Riggerbach rack-rails from the Gutschbahn in Luzern for installation on the Rigibahn below Staffel. 

Keith Scotland

The snowblower outside the restoration depot at Goldau.
Photo: Keith Scotland

