

Report from Rhätia

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Report from Rhätia

Michael Donovan

Unfortunately I was unable to make my annual trip to the Graubünden last year so I was delighted to be able to return to the Engadin this summer. Being away for some two years it was interesting to see the changes that had taken place on both the SBB and the Rhätische Bahn in such a relatively short time.

SBB service changes

Where both the Zürich Hbf – Chur services in the past were through workings from Basle or beyond, the semi-fast is now a shuttle between Zürich and Chur, making extra stops. On my return journey, it was formed of a six-car double-deck EMU with no buffet trolley, which was a shame as I had intended to buy a coffee – at the least! It ‘ate’ the schedule, which is probably timed for a locomotive and coaches until sufficient EMUs are available to cover all the workings. The other downside was that, having let the well-loaded international fast service go in order to have a less-crowded journey, I expected to be close to the buffers at Zürich Hbf. Unfortunately, we ran into a platform occupied by another such EMU, which resulted in quite a long walk before I could pick up my traditional Bratwurst and Bier prior to heading for the airport!

An interesting and potentially-useful cross-Zürich service runs half-hourly Effretikon – Zürich Flughafen [Airport] – Zürich Hbf – Pfäffikon SZ – Ziegelbrücke. This is a Regio (all stations) service at the extremities, but Interegio (semi-fast) between Zürich Hbf and Pfäffikon. For airline passengers travelling to the south side of the Zürichersee this saves changing trains at Zürich Hbf, hence avoiding changing levels and/or dragging luggage along long platforms. For main stations between Ziegelbrücke and Chur, it connects at the former station with one the half-hourly services with the Zürich Hbf – Chur service mentioned above.



Ge44 No.623 arrives at Klosters Platz en route from Disentis/Müster to Scuol Tarasp, 28/06/14.

RhB in the Prättigau

Travelling up the Prättigau from Landquart to Klosters on 17 June en route to my holiday home in Susch, I noticed that a new loop was being installed south of Küblis. It was awaiting overhead line that had subsequently been installed by the time I returned two-weeks later, although signalling and commissioning were still outstanding. Double-track was being installed from Klosters Platz towards Klosters Dorf. Clearly, this is in preparation for the planned two-trains-an-hour on the main network.



Ge6/6^{II} works a Landquart to St Moritz service approaching Zernez.

RhB service changes

Instead of the occasional ‘Heidi Express’, etc., that used to use the north-to-west spur off the Vereina tunnel between Klosters – Saglians, from last May there is an approximately two-hourly interval service between Landquart and St Moritz. These trains pass each other at S-chanf, and make limited stops. They are usually operated by a Ge4/4^{II} with an ordinary set of coaches (as opposed to a push-pull set), and sometimes convey “tail traffic” in the form of freight vans. An additional, roughly two-hourly, shuttle-service has also been introduced between Klosters Platz and Davos Platz, stopping only at Cavadürli (sometimes) and Davos Dorf. When I saw this working, it comprised Be4/4 No.515 and three coaches in push-pull mode. It provides a roughly twenty-minute connection at Klosters with the Landquart – St Moritz trains for journeys between Davos – Zernez and beyond. This is convenient outside the late-June to October period when the direct bus isn’t running.

RhB Operations in the Engadin

The hourly Engadin shuttle between Scuol/Tarasp and Pontresina is worked by three push-pull sets for most of the day, powered by Ge4/4^{II} locomotives on the Scuol/Tarasp end, with an air-conditioned



TOP: Ge4/4^{III} No.613 hauls a Disentis/ Münster - Scuol Tarasp service into Guarda.

MIDDLE: An unidentified Ge6/6^{II} works the morning freight from Zernez to Scuol Tarasp through Susch.

BOTTOM: RhB diesel shunter No. 90 at Zernez.

low floor driving trailer at the other. However, I noticed that one evening train was formed of part of one of the sets (Ge4/4^{III} and a rake of coaches) that normally worked the Scuol/Tarasp – Disentis/Münster services, less two or three vehicles, one of which was the cycle van. Investigation suggests this is because of the change in service pattern in the evening, when some trains turn back at Saglians, saving service duplication between there and Scuol/Tarasp. Also, towards the end of my stay, I noticed that an older driving trailer vehicle was being used on one Engadin set instead of the low-floor version. I suppose it was inevitable that, when I came to return home, this was the set that turned up, and I had to haul my bag up three steps into the train!

There was a regular freight working through Susch of up to twelve container flats, presumably from Chur/Landquart to Samedan with some destined for Scuol/Tarasp and also serving Zernez. This ran outward mid-morning, returning early in the afternoon. Usual traffic was containers for the Co-op and the Post, with four bogie flats being the normal formation east of Zernez. Traction was a Ge6/6^{II}. These seven locomotives are largely confined to freight working these days, but I did notice No.705 working a Landquart to St Moritz service on the approach to Zernez. Shunting locomotives are kept at Zernez and Scuol/Tarasp for the freight traffic. Other freight traffic noticed included a special formed of a Ge6/6^{II} and four bogies of timber from Scuol/Tarasp (which could have run via either the Engadin or the Prättigau), and another heading for Scuol/Tarasp conveying containers of building materials.

RhB Operations through Davos

I have previously commented on the working of the Landquart – Davos Platz and Davos Platz – Filisur shuttles. These days, the train from Landquart usually arrives at Platform 2 at Davos Platz headed by either a Ge4/4^{III} or an Allegra three-car EMU. If it's the former, the next three or four coaches are a push-pull set with a driving trailer at the Landquart end. In either case, there is then a short rake of three or four coaches and a bike van. The locomotive and push-pull set, or the Allegra unit, are detached from the loose vehicles, and shunted into Platform 3. A diesel shunting locomotive then attaches to the remaining vehicles. Immediately after the arrival of the service from Filisur in Platform 1, the train (Ge4/4^{III} and coaches or Allegra EMU) for Filisur departs from Platform 3. The shunting locomotive then moves the loose coaches from Platform 2, and attaches them to the rear of the train in Platform 1 – making a “sandwich” of the locomotive, if one is in use – for

the service to Landquart. On arrival at Landquart, the locomotive and push-pull set, or the Allegra unit, runs round the loose coaches, recreating the original formation for the next working. Although properly dressed in overall orange, and with a bump-cap, I was amazed to see the shunter at Landquart hitching a ride on the end of the train during this shunt movement. It would never be allowed in Britain! Clearly, this is an expensive way of operating, requiring a shunt locomotive, a driver and a shunter on duty at Davos Platz for around sixteen hours every day. It's probably driven by the need to connect at Filisur into and out of the Chur – St Moritz services, as there is insufficient time to turn-round the arrival at Davos Platz to form the return working to Filisur. This has presumably arisen from the enhancements made on the Albula section in order to accelerate the Chur – St Moritz services as part of national timetable upgrades. ✠



1. & 2: Tm2/2 No. 120 is a station pilot at Davos Platz.

3: A Postbus on the Zerne - Davos summer only service via the Flüelapass on 28.06.14, first day of operation of the year - at Susch.

4: RhB service wagons at Davos Frauenkirch.

5: Ge4/4^{III} 623 in the centre of a Davos Platz to Landquart service.

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