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Autor:	Stone, Bryan
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Centenary Celebrations at Oberwald

Bryan Stone marks the 100th Anniversary of the DFB's predecessor



The magnificent scenery of the DFB line at the Steinstafel Viaduct.

Photo: Glyn Jones

August 2014 marked the 100th anniversary of the opening of the first stretch of the route through the Alps that in time became the Furka-Oberalp-Bahn. This event was celebrated at Gletsch by the DFB on August 13th when four of the original engines, Nos.1, 3, 4 and 9, were present. That this would have been possible was highly unlikely when the DFB itself came into fruition, and it may not occur again. Back in 1914 the opening of the first section of the line was a non-event, as bankruptcy and WW I had stopped completion, with the sections on the Oberalp and Furka remaining unusable. Subsequently the Furka-Oberalp-Bahn (FO) was formed in 1926 to complete the works and open the railway throughout from Brig to Disentis. The ten locomotives ordered from SLM in 1911 were delivered in 1913/1914 in time for the partial opening. On these engines the rack drive is by a reduction gear, from low-pressure cylinders set higher and inside the frames, using exhaust steam from the high-pressure, adhesion-drive cylinders. When not on rack sections, the low-pressure steam circuit is simply turned-off, with the exhaust going direct to atmosphere. From 1926 to wartime electrification in 1942 these engines ran the entire service. Nos. 6 and 7 were transferred in 1941 to the BAM/MOB and later sold in France. Nos.1, 2, 8, and 9 were sold after WWII to France, for use in French Indochina – subsequently Vietnam. The FO retained Nos.3, 4, 5 and 10 as reserve locos. In time No.5 was cannibalized for spare parts and No.10 was destroyed in an avalanche. So only Nos. 3 and 4 remained in Switzerland while, as many may know, Nos.1 and 9 were repatriated from the North Vietnamese jungle to serve the DFB after the re-opening of the Furka section. No.4, was kept in operation by the FO until 1972, and never left the line it was built for going directly to the DFB, but No 3 went to the Blonay-Chamby Museum Railway in 1967. There she was restored to running order in 1989, and is often in use today. For the anniversary event it was arranged that No.3 should be brought up to Reckingen – Oberwald. Although she still has the original

rack drive, this was not restored by the B-C (where it is not needed) and it is not authorized for use, but it was arranged for No.3 to run specials on the adhesion stretch below Oberwald. To enable her to take part in the reunion with her sisters Nos.1, 4 and 9 in Gletsch, she had to be hauled there. 

Ron Smith gives an update on progress on Xrotd R12

The 'Gruppe R12' in Goldau continues to make steady progress with the renovation of the former Furka Oberalp R12 snow blower. The bodywork is now complete, with all the doors and windows in place. The wooden floor is in the final stages of completion. All the fittings are in place and are awaiting the first steaming. The rotor blade mechanism is still waiting for parts of its braking mechanism and for the sheets around the cutting blades. On the tender, the water tank and coalbunker are ready for painting. The braking mechanism for both rack and adhesion is still to be constructed. 

Snow plough collage.

Ron Smith

