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Rigibahnen Roundup

Ron Smith



The new building at Rigi Kaltbad.

All Photos: Ron Smith

The Rigibahnen (RB) posted record profits for 2014, with the net profit increasing by an incredible 80% over 2013! A record 1.3 million passenger trips were made, up 8%. The increases continue, with passenger trips up another 23% in the first quarter of 2015. These successes can be seen as the result of efforts and promotions started in previous years beginning to bear fruit. In particular, the acceptance of the General Abbonement, (GA) and the Swiss Pass (now Swiss Travel Pass), has resulted in many more passengers, plus their focus on the Far East market has brought many more tourists. The RB is 'twinned' with Mount Emei in China. Each side has despatched a huge rock to the other, and the Chinese rock should be installed on the Rigi in July this year.

The customer base of the company is still almost 80% Swiss, and the company is aware that this must be maintained, with the increase in foreign guests being the 'icing-on-the-cake'. The Railway has a good philosophy of not out-sourcing if they can do it themselves - and make the profit. They took over the shop at Vitznau, then the restaurant at Staffel. Retail and catering contributed CHF2.3m in 2014 and is growing. Future projects in this area include the possibility of acquiring a restaurant in the Staffel area that has been empty for two years following the former owner's bankruptcy, and to develop this as well. At the end of September 2016 the franchise of the "RigiPic" shop and café at the summit

expires after 15 years, and the RB plan to take it back in-house, rebuilding and developing it. At the moment it rather resembles a military bunker, so taking care to preserve the environment and aesthetics, a new enlarged structure will house the railway's ticket and tourist centre, café and shop.

During last year many projects came to fruition. The clever rebuilding of the depot at Vitznau has resulted in a two level car park with luxury flats above. This has generated cash that is needed for the many major projects in hand. The rebuilt Kaltbad station opened on March 1st 2015. This has allowed track developments, eliminating an operating restriction. The rebuilding of Arth Goldau station has been very technically challenging, exacerbated by working over the busy SBB lines which had to keep operating. The whole structure is listed as well, which severely restricts what can be done. The deck was raised, refurbished and lowered, but the planned reopening of the station has had to be put back to possibly the end of 2016. This is because the towers at each side are proving difficult to adapt. The RB want to – and surely will – incorporate a travel centre, shops and facilities to enhance the travel experience, but it is going to be hard and expensive to adapt the structures.

Behind the scenes there is also much infrastructure work to be done. The on-going programme to convert the sub-stations to accept regenerated electricity continues, and three out of the five rectifiers are now working this way. The routine repair and replacement of overhead catenary is another on-going project, as is the refurbishment and maintenance of rolling stock. For example power car ARB No.6 had CHF102,000 spent on it. It is still planned to replace the older power cars Nos.1 to 5 with a new type of loco/train combination, capable of working efficiently with historic stock as well as new coaches and goods wagons. However, this project is not urgent and must take its place in the list of priorities, and it will possibly be 2020 before it is started. The rebuilding of the cable car from Weggis to Kaltbad, especially with new pylons, is going ahead in 2017 / 2018. In 2018 it will celebrate 50 years of operation, and it is hoped to have spectacular new cars




The Rigi station over the main line at Arth Goldau.

working for the celebration. There is also the possible project to take over the Kräbel to Scheidegg cable car – but it too needs investment and modernisation. The Railway continues to play a big part in the Rigi Plus AG company. This is owned by all the businesses on the mountain and is promoting the whole of the Rigi Mountain as one comprehensive tourist experience. It is a great initiative to ensure that the benefits are felt by the entire mountain and the people who depend on it for a living, and also who live there all year round.

The Rigibahnen is a freight railway as well. With the mountain being car and road free, everything must go by train. When the new spa and station were being built at Kaltbad, thousands of tonnes of materials and machinery were transported, which impacted on the capacity of the Railway to run steam trains. This activity has now been completed, resulting in a 28% drop in goods carried (but still generating an income of CHF444,000 in 2014). Numerous freight trains are run, for with the RB being a steep rack railway these trains can only comprise a couple of wagons, so heavy tonnages result in many train movements. The accompanying photos show busy shunting activity at Vitznau on 8th June this year. This activity makes the RB special with historic rolling stock, steam, and goods trains all running on one mountain railway that day in, day out, provides life line services to the local population as well as pleasure to countless tourists.

This year's steam operations were on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month from June to September. It is planned to expand steam operations in 2016, to run on Saturdays from Vitznau to Goldau, and Sundays Goldau to Vitznau. The two locomotives are kept in good condition...and don't forget to keep the date in your diary for 2021 when old vertical boiler veteran No.7 is due to come out of the Verkehrshaus museum in Luzern and cross the lake to pound up the mountain again. Finally, the man who has spearheaded the steady planned and successful development of the Railway over the past years, the CEO Herr Peter Pfenniger has announced that he will retire in the second half of 2016. This early notice gives the RB plenty of time to find a suitable replacement. He will be missed, and will leave behind a solid legacy of achievement.

Specially for SRS Members

On P.47 of the magazine you will find a special offer voucher generously supplied by the Rigibahnen to be used when visiting the mountain. To claim the offers the voucher must be presented with a valid SRS membership card in-lieu of a travel agency stamp. Photocopies will not be accepted. 

1. Nearing completion – the new Arth Goldau station.
2. Shunting duties at Vitznau.
3. No 18 on a goods train at Vitznau.
4. More shunting duties at Vitznau.
5. The battery shunter at Vitznau.

