

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2015)
Heft: 124

Artikel: Graubünden - a winter's tale
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854002>

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Graubünden – A Winter's Tale

Stephen Miles



'Deep and Crisp and Even'..., 'Allegra' Class 8/12 unit No.3512 in ABB (now Bombardier) advertising livery, heads the 11.00 Tirano – St. Moritz train through a magical landscape near Ospizio Bernina on 6 February 2015. All Photos: Stephen Miles

Like many railway enthusiasts of a 'certain age' my introduction to Swiss Railways was via the late George Behrend's classic book *'Railway Holiday in Switzerland'* first published in 1965. Many years later I finally travelled to Switzerland on an organised package tour, then once it was apparent how easy it was to travel in a country that loved its railways - and where everything connected to provide a fully integrated public transport network - I have travelled independently on many occasions. However, there was still one period of the year that I had dreamed of visiting Switzerland - in winter! When staying at the Grishuna Hotel in Filisur in summer 2014 the owner, Anna, advised that the best time to see snow in that area would be February. The Rhätische Bahn (RhB) is without doubt my favourite railway, so I was overjoyed to find my Christmas present from my wife was a four-night stay in the Grishuna in early February 2015. The hotel was well

placed for the journeys we wanted to make, and it had the added advantage of being an enthusiasts' delight, situated as it is at one end of Filisur station, with balconies overlooking the station and the Chur-St. Moritz main line. Additionally, as we had discovered on our summer stay, the Landwasser Viaduct and its purpose built viewing platform was only a 20-minute walk away.

Our 'Swiss' flight to Zürich was faultless, so with pre-purchased Swiss Cards and two journeys on SBB, changing at Zurich Hbf., we arrived at Chur and onto RhB metals. Our train to Filisur (headed by a Ge 4/4III) included a 'Glacier Express' portion from Zermatt. There was little snow on the ground at this stage, but once beyond Thusis the landscape became markedly whiter and by the time we were crossing the Landwasser viaduct it was snowing heavily. At Filisur station the platforms were covered from an earlier snowfall; this had to be an excellent omen for our stay in Graubünden. Unpacking completed it was time for a walk along the platform, where there was just enough light to photograph a Ge 6/6 on a freight train travelling from Landquart to Samedan.

The next day was overcast with snow showers as we caught the first train of the day to Samedan, changing for the short hop to Pontresina to change again onto the 09.48 St. Moritz to Tirano for our journey to Alp Grum on the Bernina Line. To my delight the train was formed of two Abe 4/4II Railcars and a single coach. Now we were into the land of 'proper snow', probably in the region of two to three feet deep at the lineside. Needless to say the line itself had been cleared and we arrived

On 9 February 2015 Ge 4/4 III No. 643 'Valais' passes the Hotel Grishuna as it departs from Filisur at the head of the 0758 Chur – St. Moritz.





at Alp Grum on time at 10.45. A few photographs and a welcome hot chocolate from the station buffet later, we were on our way at 12.13 on the 11.00 Tirano – St. Moritz train, formed by an ‘Allegra’ hauling extra coaches. Such a simple concept of catering for varying passenger flows, but which would of course be put in the “too difficult” box in the UK. We again made the Pontresina/Samedan connections, this time onto the 13.02 from St. Moritz, to alight at Bergün. I had read about the extra Bergün to Preda winter trains, for returning tobogganers, in the Society’s Swiss Travel Guide on the ‘Graubünden’ and wanted to see the operation in action. The extra train was push-pull operated by a Ge 4/4II and a driving trailer, between which were sandwiched a baggage van and three coaches for the

tobogganers. Having watched individuals, small groups and whole families taking advantage of the train service, we retreated to the Bahnmuseum Albula for ‘Küchen und Kaffè’. The day ended with a train back to Filisur, surprisingly headed by 1958-built Ge 6/6 Bo-Bo-Bo No.701 ‘Raetia’, and a walk to the Landwasser Viaduct viewpoint to photograph the trains forming Filisur’s 16.00 departures to Chur and St. Moritz in what could only be described as a “Christmas Card” landscape.

Apart from railways and photography our other pastime is walking and we had a recommendation from a fellow SRS member that an excellent day out would be to take the PostAuto from Davos to Sertig Dorfli and walk back. So on the sunny and cold following day we set off for Davos Platz on

a push-pull with a Ge 4/4III at one end of the train. At Davos Platz it was only a matter of crossing the road to catch one of the hourly PostAutos to Sertig. We were fortunate to have the front seats and could only marvel at the expertise of the driver as he negotiated the snow covered roads. Most passengers on the well-filled bus were travelling to Sertig and on arrival, whilst many of them set-off to view the waterfalls or headed for a warming drink in the adjacent hotel, we commenced the walk back to Davos. The entire walk took place in a snow-covered landscape against a brilliant blue sky, and we quickly ran out of superlatives to describe the ‘chocolate box’ views. We were amazed to note that adjacent to the main road a separate ‘ski path’ had been provided by a snowplough fitted with a blade that provided

grooves into which the skis would fit – the Swiss attention to detail is amazing! Our leisurely walk back to Davos Clavadel

1. On a gloriously sunny winter’s day ‘Allegra’ ABe 8/12 No. 3502 heads the southbound ‘Bernina Express’ 0858 Chur – Tirano as it slows for the Filisur stop on 7 February 2015.

2. Tractor Tm 2/2 No. 83 sits in the loop at Filisur coupled to mini – snowplough Xk 9145, waiting to depart towards Bergun on 6 February 2015.

3. Crossing the Landwasser viaduct soon after departing Filisur on 9 February 2015 is Ge 4/4 III No. 651 ‘Fideris’ in ‘Glacier on Tour’ livery at the head of 0902 St. Moritz – Chur.

4. Late afternoon on 5 February 2015 finds a Neoplan Cityliner postbus parked at Filisur station, waiting to depart to Tiefencastel.

took about 3 hours, then it was time for 'Rösti und Kaffee' before continuing on the footpath that paralleled the railway back to Davos Platz station, and a warm train back to Filisur.

On our penultimate day we experienced the weather we had come to Switzerland for – a 'white out' blizzard. The omens looked good, as there had been a thick fall of snow overnight in Filisur. We had decided to go to Davos and walk around the Davosersee, which we thought would look quite scenic in its frozen state. As we climbed away from Filisur on an 'Allegra' unit forming the 10.04 to Davos Platz snow was falling, and it became thicker as we neared Davos. The point heaters were working well and keeping the railway operational and after a short break on the platform at Platz we continued to Dorf by the same train. The Filisur-Davos Platz trains are interworked with those between Davos Platz and Landquart, and this diagramming ensures more reliable time keeping on both services by providing additional recovery time at Davos Platz. We were determined to do a walk despite the snow and wind, which by midday had reduced visibility drastically and covered the ice on the Davosersee, so we spent an hour outside before returning to Dorf station for a welcome coffee. However, we were not finished yet and completed the day by walking on the footpath adjacent to the river and railway back to Platz station. Despite the conditions (which would have caused major panic and the closure of all public buildings in the UK) it was amazing to see how many locals were out walking and enjoying themselves.

All too soon it was time to return home, but there was one photograph I still had to take – that of a Ge 4/4III passing the Grishuna with snow on the ground. That was accomplished with a white-liveried No.643 'Vals' heading the 08.58 Chur-St. Moritz. Leaving Filisur on the 11.01 I squeezed in more railway photography at Chur before travelling to Zürich with its immaculate trams and trolley buses, and had a further chance to observe operations at this major SBB hub. Then a mid-afternoon flight home knowing that it would not be too long before we would return to this wonderful country. On our return home, and for a few days afterwards, we checked the webcam at Filisur station but there was no evidence of any further snowfalls – without doubt we had shared our luckiest and most memorable 5 days in Switzerland. ❄️

1. With a Driving Trailer bringing up the rear, Motor Coach Be 4/4 No. 513 heading the 14.02 from Klosters Platz is almost lost in the snow as it approaches Davos Platz on 8 February 2015.

2. ABe 8/12 'Allegra' unit No. 3510 in the carriage sidings at Davos Platz with the point heaters working overtime on 8 February 2015.

3. It doesn't get much better than this for a photographer – a Postbus in the Sertigal valley on 7 February 2015.

4. On 7 February 2015 a Mercedes Benz 0550 Integro Postbus returns to Davos Platz from Sertig Dorfli. Note the adjacent 'ski path' with grooves to aid skiers.

5. Outside Zurich HBf on 9 February 2015 is No. 3052, a Class Be 5/6 'Cobra' low floor tram. These Bombardier built metre gauge trams were specifically designed for Zurich and have a passenger capacity of 203 (90 seated and 113 standees).

