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Baggage Cars

s'Murmeli




Filisur RhB Davos train with open door and typical station barrow.

All photos: s'Murmeli

One of the enduring memories of far-off sunny journeys when I was much younger was of those happy, and obviously privileged people, who rode in the Baggage cars, or Fourgons. There was one on every Swiss train, usually half full of luggage, newspapers, boxes, parcels, sacks, milk churns and bicycles. In winter there were also skis and sledges. We always sent our winter sports gear for a few francs by 'luggage in advance' and collected it on arrival from the parcels office of our holiday village. The staff on fast and slow trains through the whole country seemed always to stand in summer in a wide open doorway, leaning nonchalantly on the yellow handrail across the middle of it as the scenery moved past. A stopping train was often made up of three cars, a first/second composite (AB) and a second-class car (B), and a 2- or 3-axle baggage car. We waved, they waved back, and we all longed to stand there too, but of course access to the

car was forbidden to the unauthorised, and leaning on that handrail was obviously only for experts. In winter there was a door to close, but in my memory it was always open.

Time has moved on and we all have noticed that, together with the Postal cars, and station post and parcels barrows, the baggage cars (later coded 'D'), are practically gone. There were at one time over 700 baggage cars in SBB service alone. Even in the 1980s there were still over 600. The Rhätische Bahn still has some (and surely a lot of baggage) in its locomotive-hauled Albula-line trains. Baggage cars ran regularly in the Basel/Zürich-Locarno, and in the Genève Aeroport – Brig, IC trains until the 2015 timetable, most recently these were some of the 41 Fourgons bought by SBB from the SNCF in 1990. BLS also had some of these, but when passed on to SBB they were quickly withdrawn. Now the last are fast disappearing. It was always strange to see

etched in the glass in the end door of these imports, a classic SNCF notice 'Porte dominant sur la voie'. (door opening to the track). But they did have two double doors each side, and yes, there was a handrail to lean on. Apart from these there are still some driving trailers around with baggage sections, some fitted for bicycles, but the post, and combined post and baggage cars (coded 'Z') with a letter box slot went some 12-years ago. Today there are neither baggage porters nor luggage offices, and trains with no conductors serve stations with no staff. Thankfully my generation has memories – and photographs. 

SBB ex-SNCF Fourgon in Chur on Basel train 2007





SBB Bülach 1964, again the open door and a lucky conductor.



Zentralbahn, Oberried, 2013, using a redundant baggage compartment to help a passenger with a bike and trailer.



SBB TEE Rheingold 1965 when it went to Genève. Note the Station barrows and left, a porter.



RhB Chur – St Moritz express 1967, the open door and also the postal car.



ABOVE: Crémises, SMB 1971, open doors and lots of parcels.

LEFT: SBB, Grellingen, 1998, Delémont – Basel local, classic EW 1 baggage car (also with open door!).

