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The final year of The Gotthard - as we know it

Phil Weaver

An overall view of Airolo 08 July 2015.

All photos: Phil Weaver

As we know 2015/16 will be the last full year of the original Gotthard mountain section. Realising I would have to visit at least one final time before the Base Tunnel opens, I decided to go in July 2015. This would enable seeing the line in full summer operation, before the planned tunnel hand-over to the SBB this June and the commencement of some services through it. I chose to stay in the Hotel Weisses Rossli at Göschenen (the perfect base to explore the line) that offered bed, breakfast and evening meal for CHF100, a deal that I could not refuse. I highly recommend this establishment, especially as a pint of beer (560cls) is only CHF5.50! Not having planned any tinerary in advance, I would just do what I wanted depending on the weather, although in practice it was a heat wave. I acquired a 15-day Swiss Pass from the STC in London. The only specific trip I had planned

was a visit to the entrance of the new base tunnel. I had bought and read John Jesson's book '*Photographing the Gotthard*', published by the SRS, and this was invaluable, becoming my constant companion during my fortnight there, although quite a few places described have become overgrown in places! If you visit this year, be sure to take this publication with you. I decided to try to visit as many iconic locations as I could and managed to visit most, some more than once, from Sisikon in the north to Biasca in the south.

The amount of traffic traversing the line was phenomenal. While at Amsteg-Silenen one afternoon there were about sixteen trains in some eighty minutes (about one every five or six minutes), and quite often at Göschenen there were five or six trains in quick procession. Freight trains, nearly always double, triple, and sometimes quadruple, headed (and sometimes with a banker a well), were operated by various operators, including SBB, BLS, DB and Crossrail. Re4/4s and Class 460s hauled passenger trains on the IR Basel/Zurich Locarno services, RABDe500s on the IC Zürich-Chiasso service, and ETR470s and ETR610s (RABe503s) on the EC Zürich-Milan services. The ETR470s were an added bonus, as they should have been withdrawn by the time I was there. Three were in regular service all in FS livery and I even managed a final ride on one from Lugano to



BLS Re 4/4 No.177 +1 at Sisikon
11 July 2015.

Bellinzona - albeit with no airconditioning and the outside temperature around 35°C!

For me the highlights of the line are Wassen, Dazio Grande and Boscerina. I have visited Wassen and Dazio Grande previously but not Boscerina. This was everything I expected and more. I can honestly say, in my mind, it is the most spectacular railway location I have ever visited, even though when I found my way onto the riverbed I couldn't find the way out! Wassen needs a minimum of a couple of days to explore all the vantage points, as does Dazio Grande. I was going to do the same at Boscerina but was thwarted by a freight train with an emergency at Göschenen, so had a third day at Wassen. The traffic was so busy that at both Wassen and Boscerina I saw trains on two levels two or three times, and when at the old Giornico station, after having extracted myself from the river bed, I was treated to the ultimate reward of the sight of trains on all three levels. A word of caution though, extreme care should be taken as at a lot of the places the track is completely unfenced, especially at Dazio Grande and Boscerina. I would recommend that anyone who wants to visit the line does so this year while it is still in full use. I cannot enthuse more about this line. It is Switzerland, and it is Switzerland's ultimate main line railway. 

TOP: SBB Re 4/4 II No.11181 at Boscerina, Faïdo 17 July 2015.

MIDDLE: DB 185 123 on the top level at Wassen 09 July 2015.

BOTTOM: MGB Deh 4/4 No.52 climbs away from Göschenen 12 July 2015.





TOP: Trains on three levels Biaschina 14 July 2015.

LEFT: SBB ETR 610 at Biasca 17 July 2015.

RIGHT: SBB Re 4/4 II No.11298 makes light work of its load at Rodi-Fiesso 13 July 2015.

Where's Heidi?

This stained glass panel is not in a Swiss church, but where is it? 🇨🇭

