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Highlights of the Glacier Express

Jason Sargerson takes a brief look at the route of the World's slowest express



ABOVE: A MGB He 4/4 II heads a Glacier Express past the well-known rockfall at Täsch.



ABOVE LEFT: RhB Ge 4/4 III crosses the Landwasser Viaduct with a Glacier Express, 02/08/2015.




ABOVE RIGHT: A Glacier Express follows the Vispa River near Täsch, 24/07/2015.

Photos: Jason Sargerson

I must confess I have only been on an actual Glacier Express working by accident. I was waiting rather impatiently for a train at Disentis and decided to get on the only one available - the Glacier Express. I joined a carriage full of Japanese tourists, there was much amusement when the train staff failed to check my ticket – of course I fitted right in! There was much enjoyment of the descent into Andermatt, where I bowed to my travel companions, and made my farewells.

The route of the Glacier Express is easily travelled by local train, allowing stops to be made at suitable locations for photographs. These are my selection of favourite places to enjoy the journey and the scenery. Starting at Zermatt on the Matterhorn Gotthard Bahn (MGB), I enjoy the trip by the Matternvispa stream, especially between Täsch and Herbruggen. Near Randa the mountainside collapsed in 1991, with a huge rock-fall all the way down to the railway. There are views up to the glacier and to the Weisshorn above, with the sheer scale of the rock-fall reminding you of the force of nature. The climb on the rack out of Andermatt is impressive, with the train looping across the mountainside. On a clear day there are superb views back down the valley past Andermatt. The train continues to climb all the way to the Oberalppass. The lake here is usually calm and there are fisherman and walkers enjoying the lake. This is the highest point on the journey and on a warm sunny day it is worth breaking the journey here.

On changing trains at Disentis from the MGB to the Rhätische Bahn (RhB), the railway descends gently, following the Vorderrhein. Past Castrisch the train closely follows the river, entering the spectacular Rhine Gorge or Rheinschlucht.

This gorge was cut through the limestone by the turbulent Rhine, exposing the distinctive white cliffs. A good place to stop is at Versam-Safien, if only to observe the canoe enthusiasts getting all their equipment ready. On leaving Chur, the train traverses the valley following the river's other branch, the Hinterrhein, up to Thusis. The railway begins to climb seriously after Thusis, passing Tiefencastel and heading for Filisur. When the cone of Muchetta (2623m) appears in the distance, it is not far to the Landwasser Viaduct. The train slows and passes through a short tunnel and as you emerge the locomotive is already on the Landwasser Viaduct. Everyone leans out of the window for their own special photograph. Then it is on to St Moritz, traversing the scenic climb up to the Albula tunnel before reaching the broad Engadine Valley and the end of the route of Switzerland's slow express. 

Looking down on Andermatt from the train, 27/07/2015.

