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Autumn in the Engadin

Following-on from his summer comments on the RhB Michael Donovan pays an autumn visit

Infrastructure

It seems that the RhB likes to complete its construction works by the end of September, not an unreasonable aspiration given the nature of the winters it experiences! Indeed, I woke up on 3rd October to see that the overnight rain had fallen as snow on the mountaintops above the Engadin Valley. I have noted previously that work has been going on at Küblis station for some time. Both on my outward (24th September) and return (4th October) journeys it was apparent that the track work was complete, as were the new canopies, underpasses, etc. However, I was disappointed to note that there was still a requirement for stone ballast at the north end of the layout, associated tamping, and platform surfacing, on both occasions. Indeed, no progress appeared to have been made in ten days. Various pieces of on-track machinery were standing around. Perhaps the intention is to commission the new track and bring it fully into service for the December 2016 timetable change.

In June, the Scuol/Tarasp – Pontresina shuttles were reversing in the Vereina tunnel at the “tunnel station Saslatch” while work was undertaken on the direct section from Saglians to Susch. This was still ongoing as at 4th October, but the track work and the overhead line had been reinstated. I expect the normal routing to have been reinstated from the weekend of 8/9th October. I didn’t manage to discover how the local freight was coping with the temporary closure, but on the two occasions when I saw it at Zernez (worked by a Ge6/6¹¹) it had more vehicles than I saw in the summer, and I wonder if it had been completely rearranged, possibly being diverted via Klosters to reverse, or whether a separate working was made direct from Landquart to Scuol/Tarasp instead of being worked from Samedan.

A viaduct just to the west of Ftan Baraigla (the first station west of the terminus at Scuol/Tarasp) has been receiving attention, in particular having a new deck installed. During the summer, there was a temporary speed restriction (TSR) in place, a full supporting scaffold had been erected, and it was covered in red netting. The rails had been cut to match the joints in the steel decking. In September, the sections of decking had been removed and stacked at the station, with the rails still attached, and new decking and rails had been

installed. By 29th September, rail welding had taken place, and the TSR had been lifted. A view from across the valley showed that the red netting was being removed and the scaffolding being disassembled.

How busy can a line be...

On 29th September, I took the 10.15 train from Scuol/Tarasp to Pontresina. The line through the Engadin is a single-track railway, with passing loops at Guarda (seldom used); Lavin (where the Scuol/Tarasp – Disentis/Mustér shuttles cross each other); Saglians (interconnections between the two sets of shuttles); Susch (Pontresina shuttles cross), Zernez, Carolina (a former station), Cinuos-Chel-Brail, S-charl; Zuoz; Madulein; La Punt/Chamues, Bevers and Samedan. The alternate hour Landquart – Vereina – St Moritz shuttles and the occasional freights are crossed at various locations. On this trip we crossed the Disentis/Mustér-Scuol Tarasp service at Saglians as usual, and the 10.02 Pontresina-Scuol/Tarasp train at the tunnel station of Saslatch as we reversed. Consequently, Susch was unused, but we passed the east-bound freight at Zernez; an engineer’s machine (locomotive with a crane) at Carolina; a new set (still without driving trailer) at Cinuos-Chel-Brail working from St Moritz-Landquart; an apparently empty stock movement similarly formed at S-charl, and the 11.02 Pontresina-Scuol/Tarasp at Zuoz. That was five consecutive loops used for crossing movements, and six out of seven if you count Saslatch as a loop for this purpose...

General

The Landquart-St Moritz shuttles are still unpredictable from a rolling stock perspective. Some were new sets, worked by Ge4/4¹¹s, a push-pull set of the kind used on the Engadin shuttles, similarly powered and, in one case, a scratch rake worked by a Ge6/6¹¹. Given the recent order for new EMUs (which will not be capable of taking “tail traffic”, unlike the dual-system units working many services), and the desire to provide a half-hourly service from Landquart to Davos Platz, it seems the Landquart-St Moritz services, still alternate hours, will be formed of the new EMUs, and be detached from a Landquart-Davos Platz train at Klosters Platz. We live in interesting times! 