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Rhätische Bahn Observations

Michael Donovan takes his annual look at the Rhätische Bahn



Ge4/4ii 627 works a Pontresina to Scuol-Tarasp service into Bever.

All photos: Michael Donovan

Last year I was fortunate to make two visits to the Graubünden, where the RhB is engaged in a massive programme of maintenance and improvement works. During June I observed that the reconstruction of the station at Küblis had been completed. Expecting to see three through tracks and a bay platform, the "bay" turned out to be for use by PostAutos giving cross-platform interchange with trains arriving from Chur and Landquart. Last summer, they reconstructed a viaduct to the west of Ftan Baraigla, the first stop heading west from Scuol-Tarasp, and this appears to be part of a rolling programme that has seen work commence on another viaduct just west of Scuol-Tarasp.

Whilst staying near this eastern terminus of the line through the Engadin, I had noticed the 10.23 arrival from Pontresina conveying two SwissPost containers on well-wagons as "tail traffic" (some railwaymen will remember this

term!). Coop has long had its own containers conveyed by the RhB, and its competitor Volg, which tends to have outlets located in smaller villages (and in my experience consequently charges slightly higher prices), now has RhB vans in its own livery. One is scheduled to be on the 10.15 arrival from Disentis-Mustér at Scuol-Tarasp each weekday. Other goods workings on this line include an east-bound freight train (worked by a Ge6/6^{II} on each occasion that I saw it), that departs from Zernez around 11.05. I had assumed that this had come from Samedan, but on the last morning of my autumn trip I observed locomotive Ge6/6^{II} No.703 at La Punt-Chamuesch running "light" – that is, without any wagons from Samedan to Zernez. It was then observed at Zernez, attached to some wagons, and waiting to follow my train eastwards. This could, of course, have been for want of traffic from Samedan on this occasion.

In my June visit I became aware that the Landquart - St Moritz two-hourly service continued to be formed, apparently, of whatever locomotive and rolling stock could be found at the time of departure! I'm sure there's a pattern to this, but, as I only saw these services on a few occasions, I could not discern it. Some Chur - St Moritz services were formed of a three-car EMU hauling (or propelling) a set of new Stadler coaches. As the new driving trailer vehicles had begun arriving to complete the sets, this then allowed for push-pull working. However, I have still only seen one set formed with the driving trailer.


Unfortunately, for my autumn visit I had Ge4/4i^{III} 650 approaches Bever with Chur to St Moritz service.



been unable to obtain my usual accommodation in the Lower Engadin at Tarasp, so I decided to stay instead in La Punt, in the Upper Engadin. This small community on the north bank of the River Inn is half of the Gemeinde of La Punt-Chamuesch, with its other half (pronounced Tshamois-tsh in the local dialect) located on the south bank of the river. It was over nine years since I had stayed there, and this belated return visit provided me with some different perspectives on the RhB's operations along this beautiful valley.

After arriving at Zürich Hauptbahnhof, following my flight to in Switzerland, I was concerned to note that my train to Landquart was shown as "Ersatzzug". In my mind "Ersatz" is a substitute for the real thing. Well, it couldn't be a bus, as it was shown as departing from Platform 8! It occurred to me that it might simply be a different type of train, which turned-out to be the correct answer. As was reported in *Swiss Express*, the DB's Rhine valley line was closed north of Basel at the time, following subsidence caused by construction of a new tunnel. This service would normally have been formed of a German ICE unit that would have started its journey many hours earlier in the northern city of Kiel, but its long trip would have been curtailed at Karlsruhe north of the incident at Rastatt. My service was therefore operated south of Basle by a locomotive-hauled Swiss train, and I subsequently observed some other normally 'international' trains using Swiss stock and marked as "Ersatzzugs". En route, on leaving Sargans, I noted 'Krokodil' Be6/8^{III} No.13302 and two green coaches awaiting their next working - probably not as a DB ICE replacement! Regrettably my camera was still in my bag, not that there would have been time enough to snatch a photograph even if it had been to hand.

Having reached the Engadin, my first observation was that the Pontresina - Scuol/Tarasp hourly shuttle service was being operated by three push-pull "Pendelzug" sets. Of the three sets, two were formed with a low-floor driving trailer second coach at the opposite end to the locomotive, and the third had an older conventional driving trailer brake second. Traction for these workings was usually provided by a Ge4/4ii. It was a surprise one morning, therefore, to observe an Electric Multiple Unit formed of Triebwagon No.511 propelling Driving Trailer Second 1713 and two coaches leaving La Punt-Chamuesch towards Scuol-Tarasp. Perhaps there had been a problem somewhere. There was an interesting article recently in *Swiss Express* that told how materials for, and spoil arising from, the new Albula tunnel excavations were taken to and from site. Arriving at Bever late one afternoon, I walked

through the restaurant to the outside seating area just in time to see Ge4/4^I Nos.601 and 605 arrive with the spoil train, then pause for a few moments while the Pontresina to Scuol/Tarasp arrived. A few days later, I was partway down the path from Muottas Muragl to Bever when I observed the same two locomotives approaching Samedan with the construction train. On arrival, they ran round their train, and propelled it into the sidings. 



TOP: Triebwagon No.511 propels the 09:02 Pontresina – Scuol-Tarasp away from La Punt Chamuesch on 26 September 2017.

MIDDLE: Ge4/4^{II} 620 arrives at La Punt Chamuesch with a Pontresina to Scuol-Tarasp shuttle.

BOTTOM: Tm2/2 119 is station pilot at Pontresina.