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Rhaetian Ramblings

Michael Hill



Looking down on the construction site at Alp Grüm on 13 June.

LEFT: The Nostalgische Fahrten on 15 June.


All photos: Michael Hill



It is always a pleasure to introduce others to things you find pleasing, hence last June my wife and I persuaded my brother and two friends to join us on a Rail/Walking holiday utilising the RhB around the Graubünden. We first hiked from Bergün to Preda on Wanderweg 33 that really does give a better understanding of the extraordinary engineering needed to lift the line over 400m without rack assistance. The adhesive powers of Rhaetian Railway locomotives, and the modern 'Allegra' EMUs, was demonstrated to an even greater degree when we moved-on to remote Alp Grüm for a three-night stay. On several occasions when walking from Alp Grüm to Corvaglia and Poschiavo we were able to see the railway line close up, and to understand why, what the crow flies in 6km the train requires 16km. at a 7% gradient (1 in 14), through a succession of hairpin bends. Alp Grüm is a stunning place to stay, but it was not peaceful, as 24-hour engineering works were taking place during June and July to rebuild embankments immediately below it. Indeed it was these works that led to our only serious delay as a works train, comprising a loco and two cement mixers on rail wagons, brought down the overhead wire within the station. However, I use the term 'serious delay' in a Swiss context as services were restored in just over an hour, enabling us to join our intended service 75 minutes later from the next station, Corvaglia.

Our last 24 hours were spent in Filisur where a succession of treats was in store for us. Having hiked down the valley and

then up to the observation platform overlooking the Landwasser Viaduct, on our return to the excellent station buffet for an afternoon tea/ beer we saw wisps of steam. This turned out to be RhB G4/5 'Albula' on an unpublicised round trip, then no sooner had this train departed than Crocodile Ge 6/6 No.1415 arrived on one of the two daily Nostalgische Fahrten that are substituting for normal timetabled trains between May and October on the Filisur- Davos Platz service. On our final morning things became even better, as the Hotel Schontal gave us complimentary tickets for a Filisur-Davos return trip on the first Nostalgische Fahrten of the day. It was disappointing that No.1415 had been 'failed' overnight and had been substituted by 1947-built Class Ge 4/4i, but we were delighted to travel in newly restored carriage B2060, the quality of workmanship being quite stunning, whilst the wooden slatted seating reminded me of my first journey in an IET from Paddington to Reading recently!

Moreover our friends, who were returning to Zürich on the train after us from Filisur, then saw another steam train arrive before their departure. So, financially exhausted but spiritually revived, we reluctantly departed from this most exceptional of countries to return to London's suburbs and the dubious delights of our railway operations. 

RhB ABe 4 No 34 at Alp Grüm.

