

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2019)
Heft: 139

Artikel: Gian Brüngger - rolling stock II : rolling stock exhibition from Gian Brüngger's photo archives
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853831>

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Gian Brüngger - Rolling Stock II



Rolling stock exhibition from Gian Brüngger's photo archives.

A busy scene on the Bahnhofplatz at Chur in DC days. On the left is ABe 4/4 No 31, which was rebuilt as a dual-voltage machine in 1946 from 1908-built 1000 volt DC Berninabahn No 1, the Arosabahn being powered at that time by 2400 volts DC. To the right is 1958 built ABDe 4/4 No 484, one of three purpos-built for the line. Behind 484 is electro-diesel No 802 which only operated on diesel power on the Arosabahn. The date is 22nd February 1976.

On display until mid-November 2019 in the Albula Railway Museum, Bergün

In the newest iteration of the successful exhibition "Rolling Stock I", the Bergün Railway Museum has been showing extracts from Gian Brüngger's photographic archive. Gian Brüngger is a rail historian who worked for the Rhaetian railway all his life. He has been documenting the RhB's rolling stock since the 1960s, painstakingly recording all changes in construction or technical innovations in his notebooks and especially during the 1970s and 1980s he photographed everything that was in service on RhB lines. His photographs document the heyday of technical developments in rolling stock.

Presented as a systematic record of the RhB's rolling stock, these black and white photos present the railway's industrial goods like a sculpture. Spread over the various lines (main

network, Bernina Line, Chur-Arosa, and Bellinzona-Mesocco), the traction vehicles, passenger coaches, goods wagons, service vehicles and their compositions will fascinate the viewer and demonstrate the huge differences in the sometimes outrageous shapes and forms they had. The systematic organisation of the exhibition allows direct comparisons and an appreciation of the vehicles' various characters. On some of the photos the object almost disappears into the background. Gian Brüngger's photographic style is conceptual, reminiscent of the work done by Bernd and Hilla Becher, who tasked themselves with recording fading industrial cultures and documenting and archiving transformations.

Gian Brüngger

Gian Brüngger's grandfather was a linesman in Spinaz, and his father was the boss of the depot in Samedan and as a boy Gian was usually to be found either at the station or the depot. After his railway apprenticeship he spent the next 45 years working for the Rhaetian Railway. At the end of his career he was responsible for operational planning and the further development of the various lines. He has written several books about the Albula Line and he played a large part in drawing-up the dossier for membership to UNESCO World Heritage. As a member of the museum's scientific advisory board he has also played a key role in the creation of the museum.

Ge 4/6 No 391 hauling train No 354 at Ariefa, just south of Samedan on 29th June 1972.



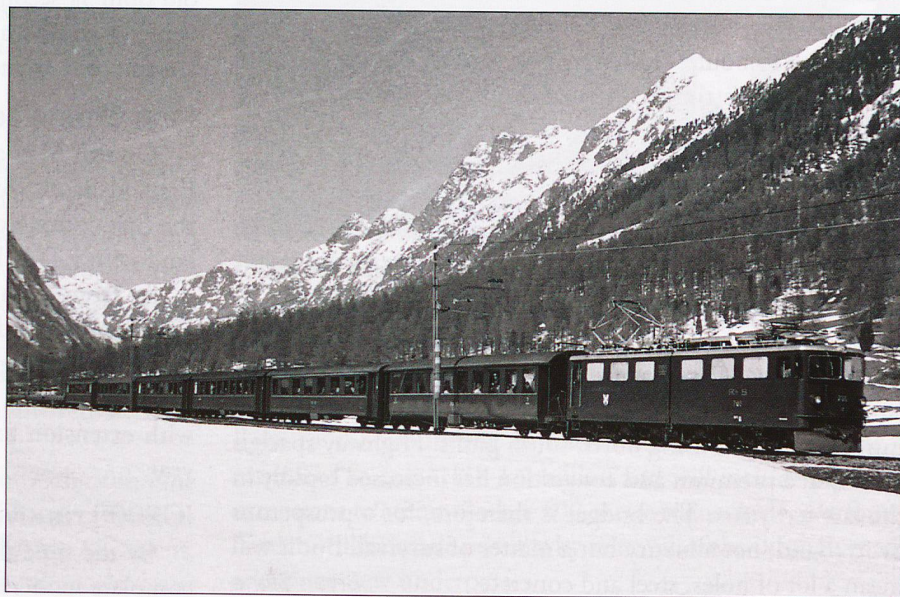
Gian Brüngger remembers:

In the past there were far more vehicles spread over the whole network. When a wagon was required for maintenance the wagon distribution centre had to actively go and search for it. Every afternoon, we at the stations made a note of which wagons were standing there, then we had to fill in a form. If there were no wagons there we took an A5-sized paper and wrote 'Vakat/Vacant' on it and added it to the daily internal post-bag, which in turn left for Chur with the last train of the day. Today we still have an internal post system for communication with the management in Chur, although the RhB's rolling stock is now equipped with GPS transmitters for easy location.

Sometimes the wagon distribution centre are looking for vehicles which had been taken out of service, so then I wrote back that this wagon or the other had been broken up. As a young railway clerk I had to be careful about what I wrote so as not to offend the bosses. It took a while for people to appreciate what I knew.

In 1962 I began keeping a record of the rolling stock. My dad thought I should make it into a book with all the different vehicles in it as well as including details about the kind of buffers they had and how the axles were equipped so that the maintenance teams, who might have to come out and do repairs, would know exactly what material to bring with them in their service wagon. Information about buffers and axles had to be found out on the spot, and that was quite a lot of work! As time went on, the book became thicker and thicker. Of course today the writing is done on my computer and I can print out the lists. I always have an A6-sized notebook with me and that's where I write down any alterations in the rolling stock and so I have built up my knowledge. All vehicles that came into service from 1889 are included in my notes and of course exactly what was altered. This means I have a chronological table of the rolling stock with all the details and a further table which is ordered according to the wagon numbers. Whenever I see a locomotive or a wagon I find out when the last maintenance date was! This information gives me an idea about what was changed, and it definitely challenges me to scrutinise the machines and to write it all down in my notebook, because as a pensioner today I don't get all the facts any more.

Albula Railway Museum 2018. 



TOP: BDe 4/4 No 38 is in charge of train No 521 at the famous Montebello curve near Morteratsch.

MIDDLE: ABe 4/4 No 37 at the head of a freight, gingerly making its way downhill on the curve at Alp Grüm, on 11th August 1972.

BOTTOM: Ge 6/6 No 702 is hauling a train in the Val Bever on 17th March 1973.