

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2019)
Heft: 140

Artikel: Misoxer memories
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-853850>

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be known as Schweizer Bergwelt, features the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau plus Matterhorn mountain backdrops with a Lauterbrunnen model in build. The active modeller informed John that they were confident the room would be fully operational and open to visitors in the autumn.




Eiger in build.

Photo: John Steedman

Editor's Note

Sometimes these reports contain prior notice of planned work and interruptions of normal services. These are without guarantee. Readers must check locally, or on websites, when travelling to avoid disappointment, but also because such projects can change even at short notice.

Swiss News was compiled by the Editor with input from David Carpenter, Sholto Thomas and Robert Amstutz. 



RhB ABDe 4/4 No. 452 at Mesocco in 1976.

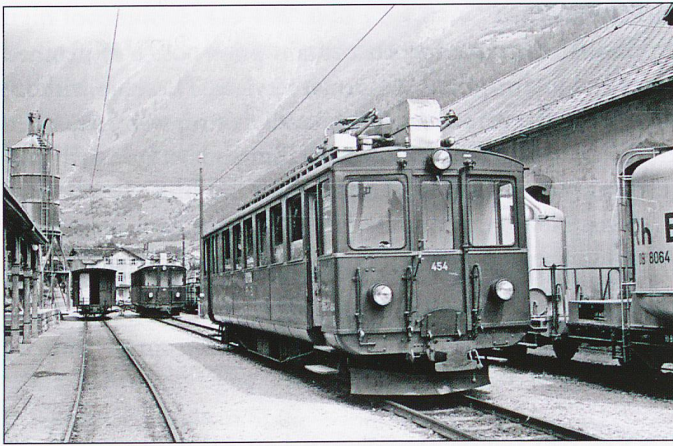
Photo: Martin Fisher

Forty years ago this month, on 9 December 1979, the upper section of the curious line that threaded the Misox valley, straddling the Ticino/Graubünden border north east of Castione-Arbedo, was formally closed. In fact it had been impassable since 6 August the previous year after prolonged torrential rainfall had breached the formation in no less than twelve locations. It was the beginning of the end for the branch which had been conceived with high ambitions but, in truth, was doomed to failure from the day it opened.

The electric railway Bellinzona-Mesocco (BM) stemmed from the idea of a rail connection between the capital of Ticino and the Graubünden transport crossroads of Thusis.

For that reason construction was carried out as far as possible according to the standards of the Rhätische Bahn (RhB). It was electrified from the outset at 1,500 volts DC with energy being supplied from a hydro-electric plant at Cebbia, above Mesocco.

The line was 31 km long and its trains had to overcome a height difference of 538 metres over that length which necessitated a ruling gradient of 60‰. In all there were sixteen crossings and halts, crossing facilities being provided at ten points. From Bellinzona to Mesocco the line crossed 26 bridges (total length 561m) and three tunnels (85m). The maximum line speed was 45 kph.



Mesocco was never intended to be the final destination. From the outset an extension was planned to reach Thusis on the RhB's Albula line. This would have involved the construction of a summit tunnel under the San Bernardino Pass - a task that would always have been beyond the resources of the railway. Furthermore, the BM never succeeded in reaching the significant Gotthard main line station at Bellinzona. Its station was separate, some ten minutes' walk away, in Piazza Mesolcina. The railway did run close to the main line station at Castione-Arbedo to the north of Bellinzona, where freight transfers between gauges were made. The situation here, however, was never ideal.

The railway's independent existence ended in 1942 when, at a time of great financial loss-making companies throughout Switzerland were forcibly merged with larger neighbours to reduce subsidies. Thus, the BM was taken over by the RhB. This was not as absurd as it sounds - it is often not realised that the border between Ticino and Graubünden lies only a few kilometres up the valley from Castione. However, the new owners found their acquisition in a desperate state. Whilst some urgent permanent way improvements were completed, the planned replacement of the original fleet of railcars had to wait and the intended conversion to AC traction never took place. When motive power was out of action suitable DC traction was hired from elsewhere. Indeed for many years an ex-Appenzeller Bahn ABe 4/4 graced the branch.

Closure proposals were to follow in the 1960s, the catalyst being the construction of the A13 Autobahn with its 6.6km long San Bernardino road tunnel. The new road tunnel opened on 1 December 1967. Perhaps surprisingly it was another three years before the Federal Government ordered passenger traffic to transfer to road - the familiar yellow buses of Post Auto started carrying passengers through the Misox valley on 18 May 1972. A year later the section from Bellinzona to Castione-Arbedo was taken up and the line now remained open only for freight from the latter point to Mesocco.

The storm of 1978 that severed the upper section has been

Tutti i treni 1 e 2 classe									
71 Bellinzona-Mesocco									
Trazione elettrica Sferramento ridotto									
55	Chiaso	70	pt	5:41	6:25	9:41	9:55	12:58	13:03
29	Lugano	70	ar	6:08	7:00	10:08	10:22	13:14	13:34
0	Bellinzona	70	ar	6:35	7:32	10:34	11:06	13:40	14:02
20	Locarno	70a	ar	6:01	7:07	9:46	11:22	12:42	15:30
0	Bellinzona	70a	ar	6:29	7:37	10:14	11:55	13:09	15:57
km									
0	Dir. RhB, Chur			1:02	1:04	1:06	1:08	1:10	1:12
0	Bellinzona FR (S. I)			1:02	1:04	1:06	1:08	1:10	1:12
3	Molinazzo (F)			6:54	8:07	10:50	12:12	13:53	16:42
4	Castione-Arbedo			6:57	8:10	10:53	12:15	13:56	16:45
4	Castione (Misox)			7:04	8:13	10:55	12:16	13:58	16:47
5	Castione Villaggio (F)			7:06	8:15	10:57	12:18	14:00	16:49
7	Lumino (F)			7:11	8:19	11:01	12:21	14:03	16:52
12	S. Vittore			7:18	8:26	11:08	12:28	14:09	16:58
14	Roveredo (GR) 820			7:25	8:31	11:13	12:33	14:14	17:03
15	S. Antonio (Misox)			7:28	8:32	11:15	12:35	14:16	17:05
17	Grono 813, a.s.			7:35	8:37	11:19	12:39	14:21	17:10
20	Leggia (F)			7:40	8:41	11:23	12:43	14:25	17:15
22	Cama			7:43	8:44	11:26	12:46	14:28	17:18
24	Piani di Verdobio (F)			7:46	8:47	11:29	12:49	14:31	17:21
24	Sorte (F)			7:48	8:49	11:31	12:51	14:33	17:23
24	Lostallo			7:54	8:56	11:36	12:56	14:38	17:28
32	Cabbio (F)			7:57	9:00	11:40	12:55	14:45	17:32
39	Soazza			8:12	9:12	11:51	13:05	14:52	17:43
43	Mesocco 783, 817			8:17	9:19	11:58	13:12	15:05	17:51
km									
0	Mesocco			5:22	6:24	9:00	10:20	12:08	13:22
4	Soazza			5:29	6:31	9:07	10:27	12:15	13:29
12	Cabbio (F)			5:38	6:40	9:17	10:36	12:24	13:38
14	Lostallo			5:41	6:44	9:22	10:40	12:29	13:42
18	Sorte (F)			5:45	6:48	9:26	10:44	12:33	13:46
20	Piani di Verdobio (F)			5:48	6:51	9:29	10:46	12:36	13:49
22	Cama			5:50	6:54	9:31	10:49	12:41	13:52
23	Leggia (F)			5:52	6:56	9:33	10:51	12:43	13:54
26	Grono 813, a.s.			6:00	7:05	9:39	10:58	12:50	14:00
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32	S. Vittore			6:08	7:16	9:48	11:09	12:59	14:10
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38	Castione Villaggio (F)			6:17	7:25	9:56	11:17	13:06	14:18
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29	Lugano			7:12	8:17	10:17	12:17	14:21	14:58
55	Chiaso			7:39	8:50	10:31	12:31	14:35	15:09

referred to above. Reconstruction was out of the question given the line's now reduced potential. The depot and works at Mesocco were now isolated, so operations were transferred to an empty factory building at Grono. On 9 December 1979 the fifteen kilometres between Cama and Mesocco were

TOP: RhB ABDe 4/4 No. 454 at Mesocco in 1966.

Photo: ETH-Bibliothek Zürich

MIDDLE: Bellinzona station.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

BOTTOM: Mesocco station in 1970.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons


LEFT: Bellinzona-Mesocco Time table.

officially closed and lifted.

After the closure of Valmoesa steelworks at San Vittore in 1987, RhB could only offer freight services to a few industrial users in Grono and Cama, these involving the transport of standard gauge wagons on metre gauge transporter bogies. This traffic finally ceased in 2003.

In 2003 a concession was awarded to the Società Esercizio Ferroviario Turistici (SEFT) to operate a preserved railway, which was carried out under the name of Ferrovia Mesolcinense (FM). Services originally operated over the entire remaining line from Castione-Arbedo to Cama. However in 2014 residential property development in Roveredo and expansion plans at Castione-Arbedo resulted in a further reduction in track length to just 3.9km between a point near Grono and Cama. Finally on 5 June 2016, the concession for the final stretch was withdrawn.

Much of the line can still be followed on foot and many of

the station buildings along the valley still stand. Older members may still have in their collection issue 65 of *Swiss Express* for December 2000 in which our current Chairman, John Jesson, describes a walk along it. 

LEFT: 200 Franc share certificate.

RIGHT: Map of Mesocco by Cathy Hickey.



Stamp News



In our last issue we told the story of the Bodensee Trajektfähre (train ferries). As we reported, this year marked the 150th anniversary of the launch of the first ferry in 1869. The Swiss Post Office issued a pair of commemorative stamps in May to mark the occasion which we reproduce here. Originals can be ordered from



www.postshop.ch/shop/en/philately/single-stamps/150-years-lake-line-train-ferry/p/548538.

Swiss Post's collectors' magazine 'Focus on Stamps' is available in English either as a pdf download or online here: www.magazine-focus-on-stamps.ch/en. 