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Swiss expertise worldwide

A double helping for this edition of *Swiss Express,* as we go down under once again to visit a winter sports railway and also head to Hong Kong for an example of commuting Asian style.

In addition to the Tasmanian West Coast Wilderness Railway described in September *Swiss Express*, page 43, there is another railway in Australia which is even more Swiss.

SkiTube by Victor Isaacs

A SkiTube train commences its ascent near the Bullocks Flat terminus. *Photo:* Wikimedia Commons Troy Thomas

SkiTube is a mountain railway in the Southern Alps of New South Wales, Australia. The railway provides transport to two ski fields, Perisher Valley and Blue Cow. Access by road to the large Perisher Valley resort in winter is often very difficult in snowy conditions. Blue Cow is a comparatively new ski resort, inaugurated in 1988. The SkiTube railway provides its only connection to the rest of the world.

The railway operates with Electric Multiple Unit trains built in Australia by Comeng with some parts by Fuji. The mechanical parts, however, came from SLM and the electrical equipment is by ASEA Brown-Boveri of Switzerland. The eleven carriages are 16.8 m long and 3.8 m wide, and can carry 225 passengers. This provides for the movement of around 4,500 people per hour. There are four motor carriages, four driving trailers and three non-driving trailers. The motor cars each have four 301 kW traction motors, making them possibly the most powerful rack railcars in the world. The braking system is mixed regenerative and rheostatic. Trains are capable of 40 km/h, however this is limited during the downhill journey to 21 km/h.

Signalling is pure Swiss and the railway operates strictly according to Swiss railway regulations. For example, the unusual downhill speed of 21 km per hour is apparently because this is the safe speed determined by the Swiss Federal Ministry of Transport.

SkiTube's large valley terminal is next to a large car park at Bullocks Flat in the Kosciuszko National Park. The railway descends to the Thredbo River, which is crossed via a large bridge, and it then commences its climb. There are magnificent mountain views. But, unfortunately, after only two kilometres the railway enters a tunnel ending the vistas. The major station of Perisher Valley is situated after four kilometres. The tunnel then resumes for a further 2.5 kilometres to Blue Cow.

SkiTube at Blue Cow station.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons Eurovision Nim

SkiTube opened from the lower terminus to the major. resort of Perisher valley on 26 July 1987 and to Blue Cow on 31 March 1988. The line is entirely rack on the Von Roll system. It climbs 655 metres in 8.5 kilometres. The line is single with crossing loops.

The railway is privately owned by the company which controls the two ski resorts it serves.

Unfortunately, since 2004 SkiTube has only operated in the Winter ski season, June to early October. However, during this period an intensive service operates. Because there are no roads to Blue Cow, SkiTube sometimes operates mixed trains, with the EMUs pushing a freight wagon uphill and pulling it downhill. This provides all of Blue Cow's supplies and takes away its rubbish.

Although SkiTube has Australian built carriages, it has a real Swiss atmosphere because of its mountain setting and Swiss-type operation. The scenery on the short open-air valley section provides great mountain views, especially after snowfalls.

More details are at **https://www.perisher.com.au/plan-your-trip/new-to-perisher/skitube** and at **https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skitube_Alpine_Railway.**

The Re 460 in Hong Kong

by Owen Pong

Photos: Kazuaki Yokokawa

The Re 460 locomotive was built for the SBB, and also for export to Norway and Finland. The only other export success was to Hong Kong, and what are believed to be the last two locomotives constructed by SLM Winterthur, went there, being delivered on 11th May 1997. Numbered TLN001 and TLS002, they power 12-coach trains of KTT double-deck coaches, with a train capacity of 1,268 passengers on the service from Hung Hom (Kowloon) to Guangzhoudong (Guangzhou East).

There are nine train pairs per day, six operated by China Railways,(CR) and three by Hong Kong Railways,(MTR Corporation Ltd., MTRCL) with the Re 460s working in "top and tail" mode to avoid running round at each end.