

A ride behind a Rhatischebahn Crocodile

Autor(en): **Bayly, Mike**

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A RIDE BEHIND A RHATISCHEBAHN CROCODILE by Mike Bayly

Late July 1985 saw me in Switzerland, after months of careful planning, for two weeks photography of mainly the RhB, F.O. and M.O.B. metre gauge lines.

I had read in Euromodel Rail Review that the RhB were running occasional goods trains using their Ge 6/6 Crocodiles and that a coach would be included for passenger use. Five days into my fortnight and I was in Thusis, before wending my way up the valley towards Solis (to photograph the Solisbrücke) and Filisur (for the famous Landwasser viaduct). - Imagine my delight (or if you're an RhB nut - like me - ecstasy) at seeing Crocodile No. 412 simmering in the sun in front of goods train, facing towards Reichenau. I started filming (cine) and photographing slides and sound recording (cassette) just in case it departed too quickly. Having shot about £10.00 worth of film in as many minutes my thoughts turned back to the note I had read in ERR about travelling behind them. On enquiring at the ticket office as to the possibility, I was told I would need special permission. At this point, my lack of German and his lack of English made further enquiries too difficult so I had to reluctantly accept "no". (It eventually turned out that he thought I wanted to travel in the cab of the loco. - he was obviously much better at telepathy than understanding English !)

Shortly afterwards, whilst filing a general view of the station to be included in my "Bernina Express" film started the day before (that's another story!); the Croc started to shunt back out of the station, having uncoupled from its coach and wagons, back towards Solis. I jumped into my car, with cameras et al trailing behind me, and chased off in pursuit. The road between Thusis and Solis doesn't allow a view of the line and having got stuck behind a lorry loaded with logs in one of the many road tunnels, I had no way of knowing if I was ahead of the Croc' or not: I eventually got to the Solisbrücke and set up cameras and recorder ready. It was now early afternoon, the sun was scorching, and I hadn't had a chance to grab any food or drink, so I took a few minutes break to re-fuel. After an hour waiting and 3 or 4 trains passing in both directions, I came to the conclusion that the Croc' had beaten me. I packed up the cine and recorder and was just going to dismantle the camera and tripod when 'she' came tanking across the bridge - just time to grab a quick slide and feeling highly annoyed at missing a superb cine shot; but although I didn't know this at the time, compensation was only 10 minutes away.

I jumped back into the car and gave chase, catching up with her at Tiefencastel. A man and a young boy got down from the coach, coupled right next to her, so I made enquiries at this booking office. "Of course you can" was the reply. "Return to Filisur, please" I asked showing my half price pass. "3.80 Fr. please" (about £1.20!). Armed with ticket and all the 'kit' redundant American tourists - you know, the ones with cameras everywhere - were nothing in comparison!). I boarded the venerable old bogie coach with balconies at each end and beautiful - though somewhat uncomfortable - wooden seating. The end door leading onto the balcony was open and there I was right next to No. 411. Yes, I was surprised that it was not 412, the Croc' I had seen at Thusis. The excitement was increasing. Suddenly, we were off and the "grand old lady" throbbed up the steep slope out of Tiefencastel, the 'beat' increasing all the time with gathering speed.

There were no other passengers on the train, so I took the opportunity to do some filming and recording on the balcony. The swaying and the rhythmic throb of the Croc' was poetry in my ears (and hopefully also in the microphone to record for posterity !). We soon arrived at Surava and a small Tm 2/2 diesel shunter quickly coupled up at the back of the train and took off three Uce's (cement wagons). Their speed and efficiency has to be seen to be believed. We had to wait for a

passenger train in each direction so there was plenty of time to have a closer look at No. 411.

It was BEMO and their magnificent models, in HOm scale, that first made me interested in the Rhatischebahn. Their model of the Crocodile is really superb, capturing the "feel" and detail so well.

The green lights gave us the road again and were quickly off towards the Landwasser viaduct. To film this viaduct framed by the Croc' and the open balcony of the coach was almost the climax of the holiday, certainly much more than I had hoped for when I was planning the trip. The weather was perfect, the sun was in the right place and I had no crowds of people to contend with.

Alas, the viaduct came and went so quickly and of course, as is always the case when filming, I didn't actually see it in 'the flesh'; into the tunnel at the end of the viaduct and the short sharp climb up into Filisur station where I disembarked and took a few more sequences for what I hoped would be a memorable film.

Later in the afternoon, after filming and recording (particularly those musical station bells and announcements), I boarded a crowded 'Regionalzug' for the quick return to Tiefencastel to pick up my car and continue back to Filisur to film the Landwasser viaduct and the return Bernina Express.

As I sat on a rock in the middle of the Landwasser river, waiting for the train, I couldn't help dreaming of that beautiful old lady lumbering over the viaduct and that probably by the next time I could afford to come back to Switzerland she would be no more.

Thank you Croc' Nos. 411 and 412, your memory will be a source of inspiration and treasured for many years to come.

ANOTHER LOST RAILWAY, THE STEFFISBERG-THUN-INTERLAKEN by D.F. Arthur

At a meeting of my local Philatelic Society, a member asked me to interpret the Postmark on a Swiss Picture Postcard. Shown below, it turned out to be a 'Thun-Beatenbucht-Interlaken Bahnpost'. Now, there is no longer a railway on the north shore of Lake Thun, a trolley-bus runs from Thun to Beatenbucht and the Post bus runs from Beatenbucht to Interlaken. Reference to 'Schienennetz Schweiz' shows a railway, the Steffisberg-Thun-Interlaken, starting in 1913-14 and closed in stages between 1939 and 1958. Soon afterwards, the card came up at the Society auction and I acquired it!

Then, at a meeting of the Helvetia Philatelic Society I bought a book of railway scenes on old Postcards, 'Les Chemins de Fer d'autrefois en Suisse Centrale de 1870 a 1920' by Gaston Maison. This contained two views of the STI railway, one showing a tram type of loco with a trailer car on the sensational cliff road between Beatenbucht and Merligen. The other shows a train in the streets of Thun carrying French internees to hospitals in the area in 1916. A little later again I found a Postcard with three strikes of the 'St. Beatenberg Station' Postmark (shown below) used in 1909, four years before the opening of the STI! Baedeker for 1913 certainly shows that what is now called 'Beatenberg' was then called 'St. Beatenberg', but how can there have been a station there before the railway opened? And why 'station' and not 'bahnhof'? Could it be the Postmark of the upper station of the Beatenbucht-Beatenberg Funicular, opened in 1889?



'St Beatenberg Station' cancel, but 1909 is four years before the opening of the tramway in 1913!