

The story of Swissrail '90. Part 1, The best laid schemes...

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The best laid schemes...

by Cyril Freezer
The Story of Swissrail '90 Part 1

As many members will know, I have been organising a railtour of Switzerland for the past ten years. One thing I have learned, there is a special section of Murphy's Law that relates to railtours and states that no matter how meticulously you plan, events will overtake you. In this respect, Swissrail '90 lived up to expectation.

It's my practice to send air tickets and Swiss Pass in advance and arrange a rendezvous in Heathrow departure lounge. The agreed meeting point was opposite the Duty Free Shop, we arrived to discover that BAA had re-arranged everything. However, with a well trained party, all sixteen were there promptly, we boarded the plane in good time and took off on schedule. Touchdown at Zurich was a shade early and, luggage came though quickly and we began moving off to the Flughafen station. Expecting trouble, I'd allowed over an hour to catch our train and it looked as though we'd have a long wait, I was beginning feel uneasy, this was again nature. At least it would give me time to collect my Kursbuch, as Murphy had decreed that the 1990 edition wouldn't get to SNTG in time.

A welcome cup of coffee and some fifteen minutes later I became anxious, for only half the party had materialised. I began scouting round, discovering in the process just how many corners there are in Flughafen before I spotted them. We'd hit our first serious snag, one suitcase had failed to catch the flight. This is another good reason for not having a close connection, the paperwork involved takes about twenty minutes to process. The suitcase arrived, as promised, the following day.

We were going to Chur. The obvious route is to take any service to the Hauptbahnhof and then catch the direct train. However, my son and resident timetable expert, Nick had noticed a rather interesting service originating in Brig and going via St.Gallen and Rorschach which went direct from the Flughafen. It would be wrong to call it the "scenic route" because the direct line is, if anything, more spectacular but it made a change. The train was comfortable and our tour timetable expert was able to assure us that, at the worst point, we had only lost five minutes. By Landquart we'd recovered three of them but were held just outside Chur, probably to let the direct train get in first. We were met as arranged, our luggage was taken to the *Drei Koenige* and we booked in. The second snag then arose, two of the party were travelling by train and hadn't arrived. Explanations ensued, were accepted and our rail based pair turned up just in time to change for dinner.

Later, several of us ended up at a small cafe by the Plessurquai, it was a fine warm evening, we sat outside and had just enjoyed a good cup of coffee apiece and watched the evening railcar heading to Arosa, when they came round with a tray of drinks - free! Apparently, it was the cook's first day and he wanted to take wine with the guests. This was too good to last.

Saturday was the "free day", when everyone does their own thing. I had my half hearted suggestion of a trip to Arosa vetoed, but as Doris had a much better idea, a visit to Appenzell by postbus over the Toggenburg I wasn't too disappointed. A further delve into the Kursbuch showed that we could get to Urnasch via Schwagalp by more buses.

We caught the 9.24 from Chur to Bern. So, for that matter, did most of the party, mainly heading for Schaufhausen and the Rhinefalls. We duly arrived at Buchs, found the postbus without difficulty and got the two front seats. The journey was all we asked of it, a nice blend of town and country with a very pleasant run through the pass itself. Then, as we ran into Nesslerau the rain began. This called for a quick decision, did we hang about for best part of an hour in the wet, or take the alternative route by train? The train won, we headed out for Wattwil, changed there for Herisau and then waited for the metre gauge service to Appenzell, due in a little under ten minutes.



The Appenzellerbahn shed at Herisau, 2.6.90. Del/4 No.50 with ex-RhB G3/4 raising steam.

Photo Cyril Freezer

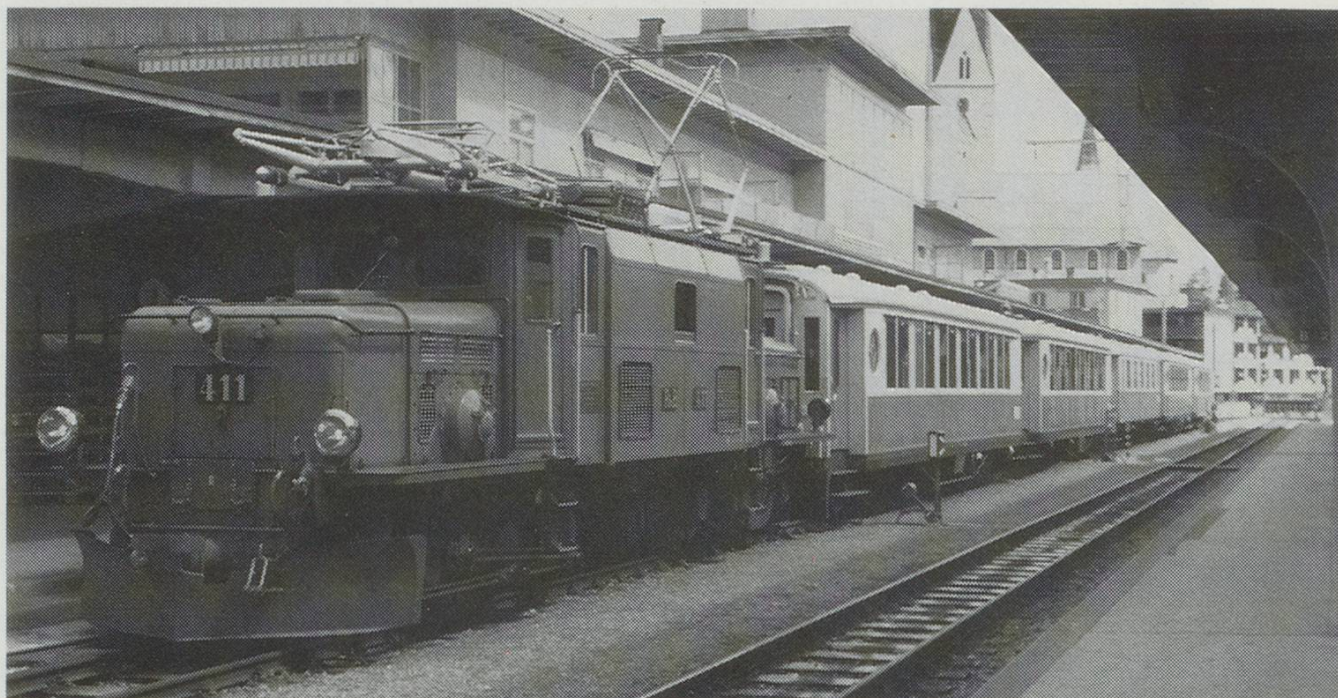
By now it was raining steadily, I could see a plume of smoke rising in front of the shed and went to investigate, taking what shelter I could from the adjacent buildings. As I thought, they were raising steam, believing I only had a scant two minutes before my train arrived, I'd no desire to wander along the yard, hoping to get a closer shot, particularly as it looked as if the loco was nicely masked by stored stock. I extended my zoom to its maximum 85mm and shot. You can just see there's a steam loco there and the other stock is interesting.

Needless to say, the train was late, but eventually we got to our destination, to find the rain was as heavy as ever. Appenzell, on a bright day, is utterly delightful but in the wet it leaves much to be desired. We headed for St.Gallen. The train left Appenzell on time and kept time until Teufen where we waited for the cross. And waited...

We eventually arrived at St.Gallen over five down, but before heading for the shops, went to check our train departure. We then saw that the direct train to Chur was about to leave, we made a -1 second connection, a helpful chap on the platform got the guard to re-open the doors as we clambered into a moving coach. We did our shopping in Chur, where in Globus we discovered the 2 decilitre bottles of RhB 100 wine that had been SFr5 last year were now only SFr1.60. We bought three.

The following day we went to Scuol via Davos. At Landquart we were alongside a special, headed by "Baby Krok" 411, consisting of the four ex-Pullman saloons and a restored first class saloon in the centre. At Davos the party split. This is inevitable, given the Swiss Pass, but it does create problems for the organiser. On this occasion nearly half the group had decided to go direct to Scuol in order to walk down to the village. Of the ten remaining, half went off into town, the other half hung about the station. We had good reason, there was that special, which was due to leave five minutes after us.

Just what happened to it in the interim I cannot say, for it eventually turned up half an hour later. However, Davos Platz, on a fine day isn't a bad place to while away one's time and in due course we were rewarded with the sight of the Krok heading round the curve into the station. There was a loud clatter of shutters, accompanied by a soft purr



*Ge6/6' "Baby Krok" No.411 with ex MOB Pullman saloons at Davos Platz
3.6.90*

Photo Cyril Freezer

from my trusty cine camera and shortly after that the Davos-Filisur shuttle arrived, one of the new push-pull sets with a rebuilt Ge4/4' at the end. Our reserved coach was coupled on, all ten of us boarded it and in due course we set off. At Filisur we had to change, they had provided another first class saloon on the Chur-St Moritz train. As you will recall, the party had shrunk to ten from the original 18. Into the bargain, for reasons best known to themselves, SNTD had booked us in as twenty. We had ample space in the coach.

At Samedan retribution descended in the shape of a burly RhB official who wanted to know what had happened to the rest of us. It's at times like this that one hits a language barrier, but eventually we were able to assure him that the others had gone on ahead to sample the delights of Scuol and, whilst I'd not say he was exactly satisfied, he was prepared to leave it there. We were shunted onto the Engadine train with the efficiency one has grown to expect at Samedan and with clear skies and a following wind, the run along the Inn valley was a positive delight. At Scuol our coach was put onto the rear of the next train and we collected the rest of the party who had enjoyed their stroll. Unfortunately, we didn't see our friend again at Samedan to show him we weren't spinning a yarn. There, together with some additional coaches, we were attached to the St.Moritz-Chur train. It ran without incident arriving on time.

Monday was something of a disaster; I knew this was going to happen too late to re-arrange schedules with the RhB. The basic reason was simple enough, the fact that while we no longer celebrate Whitsuntide the Swiss do. We were to take the Bernina Express on a public holiday and to make matters worse, the bookings were garbled. We had chosen to travel via St.Moritz, and then along the Bernina line by a local train, which is, I think, much more fun. The RhB thought that as we were finishing at Tirano, we should go there direct and had reserved all the first class on the Tirano section of the 9.00 Chur-St.Moritz, twelve seats for a party of 18 with a school party in the second class alongside. Fortunately, a first class coach in the main train was empty and the staff at Chur were very helpful.

This meant there was no reservation on the local from St.Moritz. At that point St.Christopher came to our aid and arranged for the power car to be one of the modern units. The party had shrunk to 13, and with padded second class it was simple to put the main group in the first whilst the



Contretemps near la Presse, 4.6.90. The Chur bound Bernina Express has just side-swiped two cars parked too close to the line.

Photo Cyril Freezer

Freezers went second. There we were joined by two Australians who were stopping at our hotel, and two more Aussies who were also heading for Tirano.

The weather was none too good and at Bernina Hospice we got into the clouds. I felt a little sorry for the Australians, we had seen the views before and will doubtless have another chance, but for them it was a holiday in a lifetime. It was not until we were on the last zig-zag down to Poschiavo before it became possible to see any way ahead.

The return journey on the Bernina express was unfortunate. For a start, due to the mix up I'd mentioned, we had to travel back in second class and the train was crowded. Then, at the north end of the Lago di Poschiavo we ran into a couple of cars.

In no way was it the driver's fault, quite the reverse for he rounded a corner only to find that a couple of dolts had parked foul of the tracks. A crash application of the brakes stopped the train (two AB4/4s and seven coaches) with the cars halfway along the first coach. Needless to say the permanent snowplough had done no good to either vehicle; at that point I realised that George Stephenson's comment regarding cows also applies to cars.

It took quite a while to sort this out, the drivers names were taken, with the warning that they would be heavily fined - this on top of having the side ripped out of the car! Then it was necessary to bounce the vehicles clear, since there was a possibility that one or more footsteps could be shorn off as the train went past. And of course, the incident was recorded by around a dozen photographers, and I learned a little later, will form a highlight of our Australian friend's video. One result was that we missed all the nicely timed connections and for once it was the Bernina Express that had to wait at the loops. Even so, we made up time and were only five minutes astray at Chur. We made it back to the hotel with just time to freshen up and change before dinner. While we were looking forward to the second part of the tour at Vevey, we were sad to be leaving Chur and one of the friendliest hotels we have ever visited.