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Proposals in the Grisons

by A.E.Hauser Gubser

I enjoyed tremendously Mike Polglaze's contribution, *Rhaetian Lines that Might Have Been*, an approach to prototype modelling which I appreciate very much and which requires a lot of imagination and well founded data to create something different.

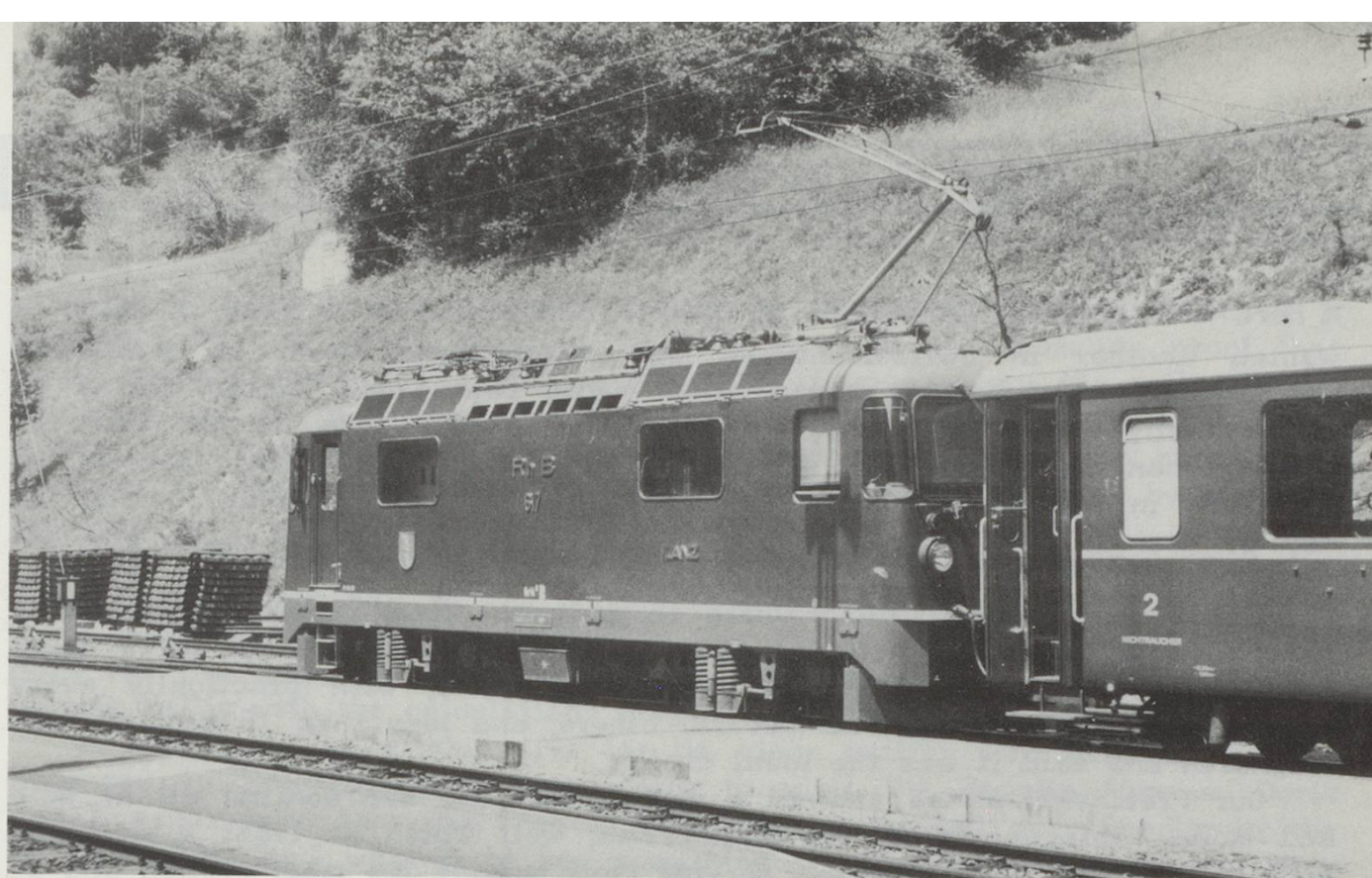
Members may be interested in some additional information on the lines "which might have been". Without going too far, we should look at this subject in its historical context. The Grisons were a favoured pass country for the Romans, who moved their legions north over the military roads they constructed through the region. During the Middle Ages a flourishing trade developed between Italy and Germany and, by preference, took the Grison passes. It is understandable therefore that the people of the Grisons, who earned a living from the transport of these goods, saw themselves as the natural bridge between North and South. When the opening of the Gotthard line took away their traffic, they wanted, desperately, to regain their business by construction an alpine transit route in *standard gauge*! They did not realise that there was no place for a second through route so close to the Gotthard, the more so since that line formed a shorter link between the Italian cities of Milan and Turin and the North. For more than 25 years there as a bitter political fight between the supporters of the standard gauge transit lines and those promoting metre gauge lines for tourist traffic.

It needed the determination of Mr. Hoelsboer and his supporters to bring home to the people of the Grisons the value of tourism and the construction of metre gauge lines. In the railway mania that followed a lot of routes were projected that never materialised. In addition to those mentioned by Mike Polglaze, there was to be a rack operated line from Davos to Langwies, the Septimer Railway over the Septimer pass from Chur to Thusis and then through the Oberhalbstein valley with a tunnel to Majola. A second route was proposed over the Julier pass. There was also a line projected from Chur over the Lenzerheid to Tiefencastel. Another proposal was for a line over the Scaletta pass to Susch and beyond. These were to be metre gauge railways.

Standard gauge lines were proposed over the Splügen, the Lukmanier and the so called *Orient Railway*. This would have operated over the Albula and the Offenbergr to Meran.

The proposed metre gauge line from Landquart to Schaan, on the Buchs-Feldkirch line (not Vaduz as indicated by Mike Polglaze) was intended to function as a feeder line from the Arlberg, the branch to Ragaz was intended to persuade foreigners to continue their holiday in one of the Grisons tourist resorts. This proposal was abandoned almost at once as it became clear that, with competition from the standard gauge line in the Rhine valley, it stood no chance of success. It would of course have been ideal, if only the standard gauge Rorschach-Chur line had not already been built.

As to the four lines mentioned by Mike Polglaze, the San Bernardino Railway would have had a length of 60km from Mesocco to Thusis and the estimated cost was SFr.32 million. The maximum grade was to have been 60%. It was intended to purchase the existing Bellinzona-Mesocco Railway. As the Bellinzona terminus was to far from the SBB station it would have been necessary to construct a direct link. The Scuol-Martinsbruck-Landeck line



RhB Ge4/4¹¹ No.617 Ilanz about to leave Thusis on Thusis-Davos shuttle service in June 1982.

Photo by C.J.Freezer.

would have been in two sections. From Scuol to Pfunds the line would have been metre gauge, built and operated by the RhB, whereas the Vintschgauban Mals-Naders-Pfunds-Landeck line would have been built to standard gauge by Austria. The RhB line would have cost some SFr.15 million and had a length of 31km. The Offenbergrailway, with a total length of 31km and an estimated cost of SFr.17 million was to start at Zernez and cross the Offenbergrail in tunnel before descending to Schluderns. The construction and operation of the entire route would have been in the hands of the RhB. The Bergeller line from St.Moritz to Chiavenna was planned with a maximum grade of only 30‰, which involved lengthening the route by means of eight spiral tunnels and several loops. Some 33 tunnels, with a total length of 16km would have been needed. The line would also have been built, financed and operated by the RhB.

These lines were not built mainly because the finances, after World War I, were more than doubtful. Today, there is little doubt that at least the Bergellerbahn and the San Bernardino Railway would have been valuable additions to the RhB and a benefit to the entire Canton. As to the Offenbergrail and Scuols-Pfunds lines, I am somewhat doubtful, since the traffic generated would probably have not proved sufficiently profitable.

The connection of the FO to the Brunig Railway was the brainchild of Minister Bovin. The idea was to connect Meiringen and Oberwald with a tunnel, and another tunnel would link Tschamut to Andermatt. When the mixed gauge from Zweisimmen to Interlaken is a fact, it would indeed have been possible to travel from Pfunds to Montreux on a metre gauge network of some 1000km.

For the time being the construction of the Vereina Tunnel is to provide a better service to the lower and higher Engadine as well as easing pressure on the Albula line. Whether an extension to Landeck will become reality will depend also on the willingness of Austria to have a rail connection.