

Hidden treasures

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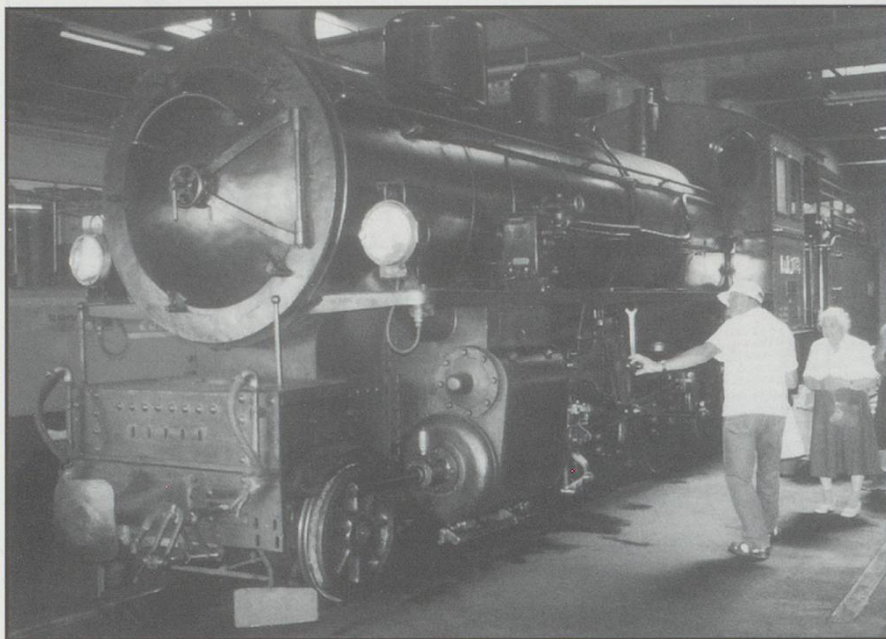
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Our CEAV guide explains to the tour party the working details of RhB tender loco G4/5 No.108. (August 29th 2001)

ALL THE PICTURES IN THIS ARTICLE ARE BY BRIAN ROSEN

We always like to try and get beneath the touristy layers when we travel, and fortunately, a railway interest often helps this to happen by surprise. Last August, we took our main family summer holiday in Chur, Andermatt and Zuoz in the Engadin, discovering new delights and returning to old ones. We did the entire trip by rail from London, via Bruxelles then through eastern France to Basel and Zürich. This was possibly not as quick as going via Paris, but the change at Bruxelles Midi is much easier with luggage than having to cross Paris to change termini. We self-catered for most of the trip by finding excellent apartments on the Internet, through the local tourist offices. Their web sites can be found for almost any district by using the formula [www.\[placename\].ch](http://www.[placename].ch), and usually provide a choice of languages. We also did our rail planning from the Internet version of the Kursbuch, too. By the way, for those who think that you can never do anything in Switzerland for less than an "arm-and-a-leg", our accommodation costs were cheaper than booking through international agents and tourist companies, and also cheaper than comparable accommodation in Britain.

Amongst our numerous railway highlights on this holiday, were two steam trips - the RhB Dampffahrt Davoser Rundfahrt behind RhB G4/5 No. 107 on August 19th (see the Christmas card picture spread) and the DFB Realp - Gletsch (Furka Pass) trip, behind DFB No. 1. Both trips were in fine weather. Our holiday dates also overlapped with the Society's rendezvous event at the Verkehrshaus, Luzern

(recorded in the last issue of *Swiss Express*), so we were able to join up with that, too. But also very special for us, in a completely different way, were two railway events at Samedan.

Before leaving, I had, as usual, combed all the last few years' issues of *Swiss Express* for ideas and "railway walks", and took with us a small file of photocopies. Amongst them I had a very brief, but auspicious item by Mark Fox (*Swiss Express* 6/4, Dec. 2000, p.63) entitled Secrets of the RhB. Mark relates how he discovered from the Samedan tourist office that members of the public were invited to take part in conducted tours of the Samedan loco shed on Wednesday afternoons, and so we followed in his footsteps a year later, but through slightly different circumstances. Incidentally, to answer a question by Mark, one reason why the tours do not seem to be given any publicity by the RhB themselves, is that the tours (last year at least) are actually organised not by the RhB but, as we discovered later, by the Samedan-based Club Engiadinais Amihs da la Viafier (CEAV) which more or less translates from the Romansch as the Engadin Club of Railway Friends.

One evening we were wandering around Samedan waiting to change trains for Zuoz at the end of a day spent walking up the Morteratsch valley to see the glacier (an excellent and easy railway walk near the Bernina Pass). The tourist office was closed by then, and we thought we had lost the chance to find out about the loco shed tours, but we came across various notices about this posted around the main shopping area of the town. Then, to our delight and surprise, we found a large G-Scale layout in a shop window in the main street, which passers-by could activate by a push-button near the door.

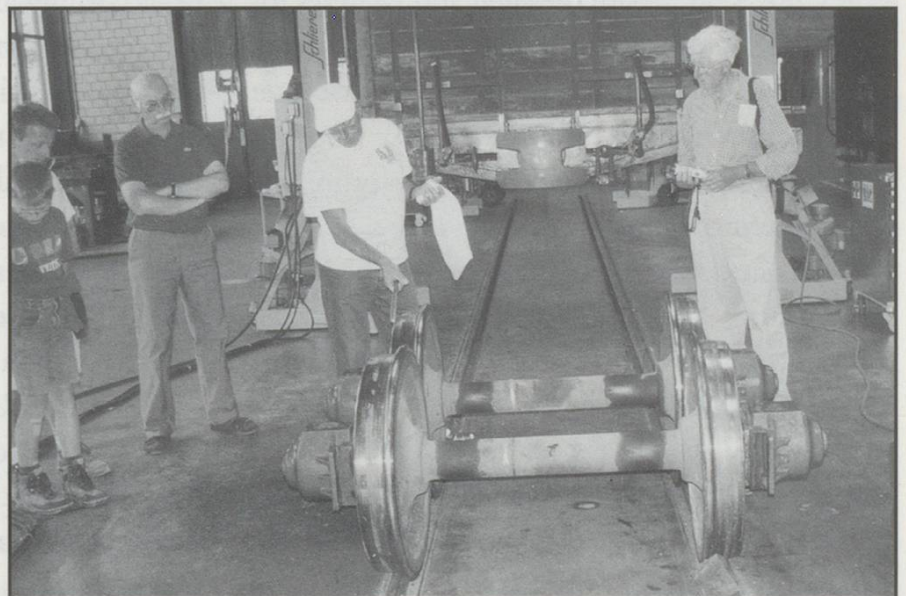
Posted in the window was information about a variety of rail-based activities, including the CEAV's open evenings on Thursdays. We did not recall seeing this shop-window layout on our visits to Samedan in previous years. As we found out later, this was CEAV's temporary clubroom, previously a Co-op store, but I don't know where CEAV will move to next. Nevertheless, as a result, I am about to answer Mark Fox's other question, "Now are there any other members out there who stumbled upon some hidden treasures. . . that they would like to share. . . ." "Well, yes."

But first the loco shed tour. The notice told people to assemble at 4 p.m. at the information point in the main entrance area of Samedan station, and we arrived in good time on Wednesday August 29th (2001), after spending the earlier part of the day at Poschiavo, and on the much loved and sensational Bernina line. Nothing much seemed to happen for a while, and the few scattered people also loitering around looked as though they were just waiting

Our CEAV guide explains to the tour party the technicalities of wheel construction, here removed from the RhB covered wagon on jacks at rear (August 29th 2001)

for friends. Then suddenly, one of the loiterers (actually a CEAV member, it turned out) held up a notice saying "Bahnromantik" and beckoned everyone to assemble. A very assorted crowd of about 25 people, not all of them out-and-out rail fans, emerged from odd corners of the station, and we all followed him through the station underpass to the locoshed on the far side of the tracks. As with our two steam trips, I was struck how little the appearance of the party resembled the British media caricature of train spotters.

I expected to be issued with hard hats, but the party was led immediately to RhB G4/5 No. 108, whose sister steam loco had hauled us ten days before. I had never previously seen either of these interesting locos "in the flesh". Our guide had started his tour in High German, but then apologetically explained that he found Swiss German easier and switched accordingly. We picked up the gist as best we could. An elderly lady plied him with lively questions about how steam locos worked, to which he replied with kindness and patience. Our guide went on to each item in the shed in turn, carefully explaining technicalities of the work being done and answering questions. We were all free to photograph anything we wished, but light is limited in parts of the shed, and I recommend strong flash and/or tripod to anyone who finds themselves doing the same thing another time.



To our further delight and surprise, the best sight in the shed for us, was the Bernina Krokodil (Ge4/4 No. 182). The last time we had seen this was in May 1996, in what looked like a railway version of the elephants' graveyard, derelict and being overgrown by weeds in a siding at St. Georges de Commiers on the CF de La Mure preservation line in France (*Swiss Express* 5/12, Dec. 1999, p.43). We've become attached to this unique loco ever since son George was quite upset to see it in its former sorry and apparently doomed condition, so it was good to now see it being restored by 'Club 1889'. This is a society and voluntary workforce who devote themselves to restoring RhB heritage rolling stock in Samedan, Chur, Poschiavo, and Landquart.

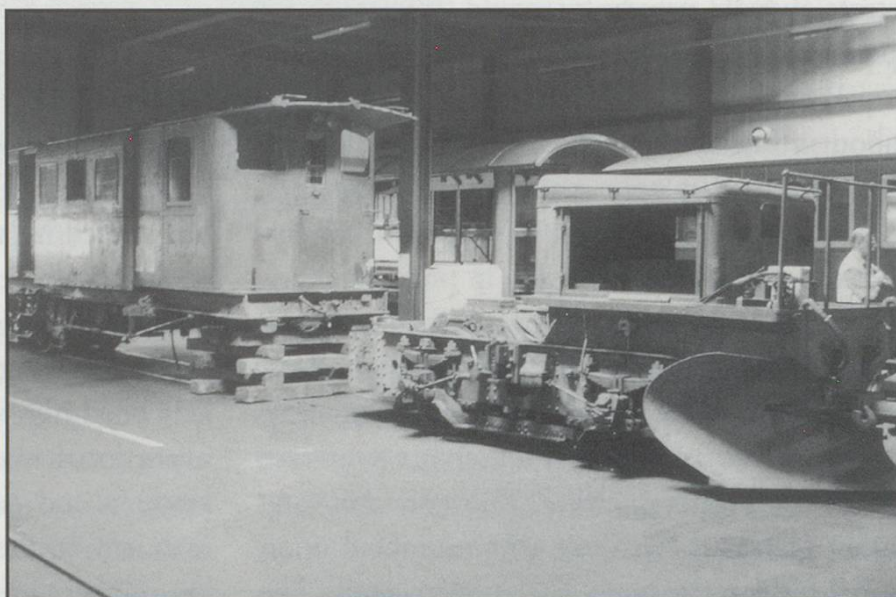
Also in the shed was a refreshment buffet car being restored: an old RhB passenger coach; a two-axle covered freight wagon under repair; veteran electric loco Ge4/6 No. 353; Krokodil Ge6/6 No. 412, and Ge4/4¹ No. 606 *Kesch*, the latter in regular service but then in for maintenance. We proudly photographed each other in the pit beneath it.

The RhB evidently allow the local preservation Club 1889 to use the shed and facilities for restoration work. How much the RhB workforce is also involved, I don't know, but we later met a CEAV society officer - a joiner who was also working as a volunteer on restoring the refreshment coach in the loco shed.

The next day, we returned to Samedan in the evening after a "railway walk" (from St. Moritz through the woods to Celerina) for the CEAV open evening in the former Co-op. We didn't know what to expect from this, and I was wary about exposing my limited ability to make technical conversation in German or Romansch. But George was really keen, and I need not have

worried. The big, but relatively simple run-round layout, was fully in action. The line is set out as an irregular oval causeway at tabletop height, with station area (Surava), Engadin-line *trafo*, sidings, and with a big Landwasser-inspired curved viaduct at one end.

The layout is evidently intended more for operational fun for club members than an accurate location model like the wonderful HOm layout at Bergün of the Albula line spirals (another "treasure" which we stumbled upon during a previous holiday trip, and rightly also



The Bernina Krokodil Ge4/4 RhB No.182, partly dismantled and being restored by Club 1889. (August 29th 2001)

recommended by Mark Fox). The mostly LGB RhB-outline rolling stock of the CEAV layout was supplemented by some non-RhB items by LGB (Brünig and Austrian Zillertalbahn locos), and by some non-LGB items, including some fine scratch-built coaches by a young club member, a Bernina railcar No.52, supplied by a specialist Swiss maker (I've long wished LGB would make one of these!), and by live steam models of the G4/5 series of RhB tender locos (cf. Nos. 107 - 108, above). An as yet unpainted brass R/C live-steam 2-6-0+0-6-2 Garratt, optimistically bearing RhB plates, built by another club member, tore round the layout at an impressively unprototypical speed, seemingly about to hurl itself off the viaduct. Britain was represented by two Roundhouse live steam locos in the sidings.



George watches operations at Surava station on the CEAV club's G-Scale layout in the former Co-op premises, while Thomas Hirschli of the club, helps another young visitor with the controls. (August 30th, 2001)

Our CEAV hosts were very welcoming and friendly, and all children who came, were invited to take turns at driving the electric trains with the Zimo digital controller. A large drawing of the Bernina Krokodil was mounted on the wall, and visitors could contribute to Club 1889's restoration funds, and put a sticker with their name on it, on the particular bit of the loco that they wanted to "sponsor". Information and exhibits about the aims and progress of the other rail preservation projects in the area were posted around other parts of the room, along with addresses of various other railway project groups and societies in the region, including details of an historical railway museum project based on Preda and the Albula line. A live steam model-maker in Schaffhausen, Hans Bendel, had a photo-display advertising

Thomas Hirschli of CEAV, hands resting on Surava station, gives George and other visitors a chance to take the controls of the club's G-Scale layout in the former Co-op premises. (August 30th 2001)



his hand-built G-Scale live-steam RhB locos (also seen in the booking hall at Samedan station) - very fine indeed, but at SFR 18,000 (did I read that right?), too much for most enthusiasts' pockets.

In 1994, the CEAV produced an excellent booklet celebrating their 20th anniversary, and this is full of interesting local information relating to railways and railway modelling

in the area. The Club obviously provides a focus in Samedan for a whole range of diverse railway activities, including rail trips to regions beyond, and interactions with numerous other societies. As a G-Scale RhB modeller (mostly) myself, it was particularly good to see the club layout and learn of specialist suppliers and G-Scale societies in Switzerland . . . but I'm still looking for someone who makes a G-Scale Swiss Post bus!

For those interested, CEAV can be contacted through Thomas Hirschli, San Bastiaan 31, CH7503, Samedan.