

# Breithorn and the BVZ

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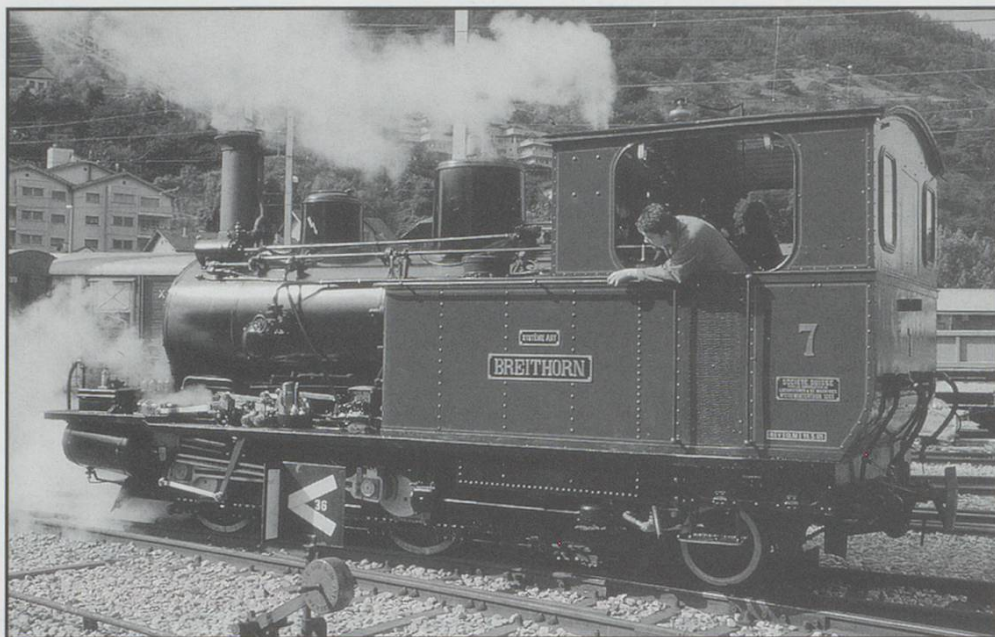
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*Breithorn* on a test run in the depot. Some concern is being shown over a steam leak.

All photographs by Colin Jarman

As readers will know, the present Brig-Visp-Zermatt- Bahn (BVZ) will merge with the F.O. on the 1st January 2003. The name of the new company seems to be a secret; at least at the time of writing this article everyone I speak to seems not to know the proposed title. The colour is still to be red but in a different shade

On the 28th September 2002 I was a guest of the BVZ. The purpose being to see *Breithorn* back in action and to take some photographs for forthcoming slide/ talk shows.

### THE BACKGROUND HISTORY

The B.V.Z started life as the VZ (Visp - Zermatt Railway). People were being attracted to the area by the wild and mysterious world of the majestic snow-covered mountains. One peak in particular fascinated the early adventurers more than any other: the Matterhorn. It stands like a citadel at 4485 metres and even the first ascent in 1865 was surrounded in mystery. It acted like a magnet for keen travellers and people were fired with enthusiasm. It was inevitable that a form of transport was necessary.

So it was in 1886 that a banking firm applied for a concession to build a narrow-gauge railway from Visp to Zermatt and on the 3rd July 1890 it came into service as far as Stalden. The railway progressed to St. Niklaus by August 1890 and finally reached Zermatt on

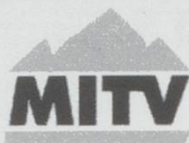
the 18th July 1891. Because of the difficulties of the steep inclines the planned operating system was a combination of adhesion and rack, using the Roman Abt system.

Initially operations were placed under the management of the Suisse Occidentale-Simplon Railway and the Swiss Federal Railways. The number of passengers steadily increased, in fact in the first year of operation the number of visitors to Zermatt tripled. At that time the railway registered 33,000 passengers. (Before the first train arrived in Zermatt only about 12,000 tourists visited the area.)

To begin with, in 1890, four steam locomotives were ordered but it was soon found that to maintain the transport services necessary a further four steam locomotives had to be purchased. Each locomotive was provided with its own rolling stock and coaches. All the locomotives were required to be able to operate in both adhesion and rack modes. They were all coal-fired and, from the research that I have done, it seems that they consumed some 1200 kg of coal per trip from Brig to Zermatt.

In 1929/1930 the whole network was electrified to a single-phase supply of 11,000V and 16 2/3 Hz and the steam locomotives were retired and replaced by the 'Crocodile' - type





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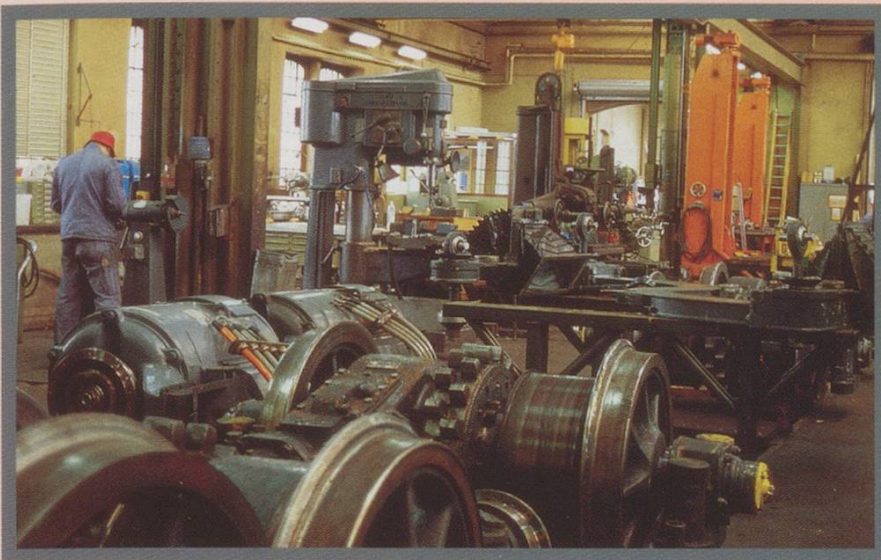
ABOVE: *Breithorn* pulling away from Stalden with its load of passengers on a scheduled run to Zermatt.  
RIGHT: *Breithorn* at rest at Stalden

locomotives. In 1930 the railway was extended into Brig. However it was not until 1933, when galleries were built, that regular winter runs to Zermatt became possible.

Six of the eight steam locomotives built were broken up. Five were dismantled immediately and one later in 1935. This left just two. (Number 6 *Weisshorn* and number 7 *Breithorn*). Number 6 became a works loco at Hovag Ems before being placed in the grounds of Herold School in Chur. In 1989 the locomotive was restored to operating condition for use on the steam-operated Dampfbahn Furka-Bergstrecke DFB. Number 7 *Breithorn*







therefore became the only one of these engines to survive with the BVZ.

The BVZ now runs between Brig (at 672 metres above sea level) and Zermatt (1,605 metres above sea level). The distance is 44kms, and of this 8.9kms are rack section. Maximum gradients are 12.5%. It crosses 39 bridges and 8 avalanche galleries. It has its own fleet of 184 rolling stock items, including 10 electric locomotives, 9 rail cars, 6 diesel shunting locomotives, diesel tractors and service vehicles. There are 57 passenger carriages plus some 70 open, closed or special goods wagons. And just one steam locomotive, which is of course number 7.

*Breithorn* was built in 1906 by SLM, Winterthur. Its maximum speed on the rack is 12 km/h and on adhesion is 32 km/h. However for reasons of fire safety and environmental protection it was no longer possible for the BVZ to continue to use the engine as a steam-fired locomotive. It was therefore rebuilt in 2001 and adapted to burn light oil with a new boiler.

With the reconstruction completed *Breithorn* has now been brought back into service, and with an interesting mix of coaches. It now steams again as a scheduled service or can be chartered. I can thoroughly rec-

ommend this trip, which takes roughly three and a half hours on the climb from Brig to Zermatt. There are stopping points to take on water and crossing points. This enables the scheduled service trains to overtake, which, using them, is an excellent way of getting ahead of the steam train in order to get some good photographs.

Details of the public runs from Brig to Zermatt, and return, have appeared in earlier editions of *Swiss Express* and these runs will continue into 2003.

The rolling stock used might vary according to the time of year but mainly it comprises the following:

Saloon coach old-timer carriage (AB 2121) "Premier Glacier Express"  
 Group travel coach (B2225) "Belle Époque"  
 Bar and catering coach (WR-S 2227) Bar carriage "Steam Pub"  
 Open observation coach (B2226) Open panoramic view carriage "Open-air"

[Reservations can be made on ++41 (0)27 921 45 10]

My thanks and appreciation must go to the BVZ Zermatt-Bahn for all the help extended to me.

ABOVE: Inside the BVZ workshop in Visp. This is presently their repair depot, but things will change with the merger and it is likely that this depot will close.

BELOW: This is the interior of the BVZ Maintenance depot between Visp and Brig. In the photo can be seen the "Open-air" coach B2226 ; "Belle Epoque" B2225 ; and "Premier Glacier Express" AB2121. (Note the red lights on the overhead wires.....this indicates that they are 'live'.)

