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Heard of the Flat Earth Society? Well, there's a little known group of it alive and well amongst railway enthusiasts. They think the world ends at Scuol-Tarasp, and the only thing worth attention there is the next train back. Sad people!

It has to be said that hyphenated stations are to be treated with caution, since they are often equally inconvenient for both halves of their name. Scuol-Tarasp is one such contradiction in terms (like Oldham Athletic). It's way out of Scuol and miles from Tarasp. But at least it's by the railway. Terminus of the RhB Engadine it may be, but the post bus will reveal much beyond. As the Vereina tunnel now makes access easier from the rest of Switzerland, I intend to describe a pre-Vereina day out in the area, in the hope that the odd Society member may wish to follow in my tyre marks.

On an idyllic August day in 1997 I caught the 08.55 from Samedan. Two station stops are worth recalling. Madulain had a vintage right-

hand drive Saurer post bus parked on the platform advertising Willis Romantikreisen. Then there was the brief halt to allow visitors to explore the part-built Vereina tunnel (but why would anyone want to go into the bowels of the Earth on such a glorious day?).

On arrival at Scuol-Tarasp station the train was met by the small post bus for Tarasp. Off we went down to the valley floor and up the other side (via the obligatory hair pin bends) to the tranquil village of Tarasp. There were beautiful views across the valley to Ftan on the opposite side of the river and of the RhB viaduct. The whole scene was dominated by the impressive castle towering above the village. Magical!

Returning half an hour later on the same bus (driver suitably refreshed by coffee in a convenient hotel) allowed me to explore the split personality of Scuol itself. There is the old part down by the river where time has stood still and the snazzy modern part higher up the main road. Over a snack lunch I had time to peruse the bus

The vintage right hand drive Saurer Post Bus pictured at Madulain. 8/97

Photo: Rob Morrey





The Post Bus stop at Martina with the Mercedes Post Bus awaiting departure for Scuol on the return from Samnaun, August 1997.

Photo: Rob Morrey

timetable and map. There was a 13.17 from the Post Office to Samnaun, which seemed a good bet. I guessed from the map that Samnaun would be a quiet isolated mountain village untouched by progress. How wrong can one be?

There was little hint of things to come as the standard single deck post bus bowled along the main road to Austria next to the sparkling waters of the River Inn. Then came Martina, where we went passed (and ignored) the Swiss Customs Post, before turning off left up what can only be termed a mountain road, through deserted countryside.

We climbed a series of hairpins, but not just ordinary hairpins. These were in tunnels hewn out of rock and literally only centimetres bigger than the bus. The procedure was:

- a) engage first gear
- b) put head lights on full beam
- c) creep forward at less than walking pace
- d) check roof and mirrors still on vehicle.

Because of the very sharp bends and the over-head hang of the front wheels, the windscreen seemed very close to the rock face ahead!

After several repeats of this hair raising procedure, Samnaun was finally reached (it's an eighty minute journey from Scuol). What an eye-opener! Samnaun is no haven of peace - it's a tax-free area so there are lots of shops selling all the goods associated with airport duty-free shops. And there was a coach park (full). And car parks (very full). Quite remarkable !!

The return journey was by the same bus with the same driver through the same hairpin tunnels. We kept our roof and wing mirrors though the driver once got out to check! There were few travellers, but one caused a fuss. He boarded at Samnaun and asked for a ticket to Landeck (change at Martina on to an Austrian bus). The ticket machine didn't want to play, denying the existence of a through booking. The passenger insisted - but so did the ticket machine. Impasse. Then the gentleman produced his previous ticket, issued by the Austrian bus driver for the whole journey from Landeck to Samnaun. With Swiss pride at stake the Swiss driver consulted various documents

and resolved the matter amicably by writing out a ticket by hand. Austria - 1, Switzerland - 1.

At Martina, there was a brief customs check (for passengers going from Switzerland to Switzerland!) and passports were scrutinised (the SBB timetable warns of this necessity) then we headed back to Scuol, incorporating a detour via the gloriously unspoiled village of Sent. It hardly needs saying that the connection with the Samedan train was made without a problem..

Thus ended a superb tourist-free (apart from Samnaun village) day out, with the Swiss Pass once again proving its versatility. I intend to return to the Engadine - but what will you do when you leave Scuol?

As a foot note I would also recommend the following bus rides. (I have omitted the obvious well known Passes, like Furka)

- a) Neuchâtel - Le Locle (does not follow the railway and is operated by luxury coaches)
- b) Boltingen - Bulbe (via the Jaunpass)
- c) Châtel St Denis - Vevey
- d) St Gallen - Heiden
- e) Zernez - Mustair

And if you can tear yourself away from the RhB
f) Chur - Lenzerheide - Tiefencastel - St Moritz (again, doesn't follow the railway at all)

Bon voyage.

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