

Around and about in Arosa

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AROUND AND ABOUT IN AROSA

Jim Paterson



An ABDe4/4 486 at Chur Bahnhofplatz awaiting departure for Arosa. July 1997, a few months before the conversion to ac and before the redevelopment of the area had begun. ALL PHOTOS: Jim Paterson

Arosa is situated about 1800m above sea level, at the top of the Schanfigg valley, one hour's journey by rail or road from Chur. The rail journey is rightly famed for its scenic beauty although less so for the incessant squeal of wheel flanges on curved rails as it snakes its way up the valley on a gradient of 6% (1:15), gaining 1100m of height in 25.7km without rack assistance. The spectacular 287m long concrete viaduct at Langwies can be seen and photographed from the train. A similar structure at Grundjitolbel, a few km down the line is much more difficult to see.

Our regular hotel at Arosa has an idyllic location high

above the village and the bonus of a bus stop at the front door. For the wildlife lover, the walk down to the village by the "Squirrel Path" is not to be missed although one needs to be prepared with a supply of nuts as the red squirrels accost you and demand to be fed. In recent years, the birds have been learning from them and also now take nuts from an outstretched hand. Coal tits, great tits and crested tits are all sufficiently agile to do this, but the star performer is the Nutcracker (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*), a

small member of the crow family found in the Alps. Groups of 5 or 6 birds will follow you down the path waiting for the next nut,



Squirrel, crested tit and nutcracker, all taken 17 August 2008. The squirrels vary in colour from red through to chocolate brown.



and some will even perch on the hand and take as many as five nuts in one visit. Also on the mountainside above the village there are marmots and, as in other resorts, the best way to see them is to take a trip by cable car, either the large cable car to Weisshorn or the Hörnliexpress gondola.

Every summer visitor staying in Arosa receives an Arosacard which gives free use of the local bus, cable cars and the railway as far as Langwies (2-stops down the line). Casual visitors must purchase a Day-card for CHF8 as single fares are not available on the buses or cable cars. Needless to say, the



The Arosa Express leaves Chur on a wet Sunday morning, 6/07/2006, double headed by 614 Schiers and 622 Arosa.

Neoplans new about 2000. Nos.5 and 6 were new in the middle 1990s and are also Neoplans, but in a cream livery with blue relief. Nos. 3 and 4 are older Neoplans and along with No.7, an older Mercedes, I have never seen them outside the depot.

Using Arosa as a base for excursions means regular trips down-and-up the line to Chur but we never tire of this. From Chur, the whole RhB system is accessible and the PostAuto station is the starting point for a range of delightful scenic excursions by road. The trip to Davos via Lenzerheide is a particular favourite, and you can continue



Arosabus 1, the Mercedes Benz Citaro, awaits the arrival of the train at Arosa Bahnhof on 15 August 2008.

half hourly bus service around the village is very popular, not least with hikers who can begin or end their walks at the edge of the village. In summer there is a peak vehicle requirement of two vehicles, rising to five in the winter sports season, but falling to one out of season. The whole fleet consists of low floor standee city buses with 3-doors. Three buses are in the same blue livery as the Arosa Express train and the Weisshorn cable car; of these No.1 is a Mercedes Benz Citaro new in 2006, Nos.2 and 8 are



Post Auto at St Moritz preparing to leave for Chur, 13/07/2005.

by bus over the Fluela Pass to Susch in the Engadine, returning by train through the Vereina tunnel. The Albula line train can be taken to St Moritz, returning by double-decker over the Julier pass. A shorter trip from Chur to Flims can be continued by bus to Ilanz, (where many of our fellow passengers were speaking Romansch) returning to Chur by train. Another short but highly scenic route into Chur comes down from Tschierschen which can be reached on foot from Arosa by keen walkers,



TOP: Descending Arosa Express arriving at Litzirüti, 13/07/2005.

MIDDLE: Langwies viaduct from river level, July 1997.

BOTTOM: Arosa Express at Arosa with 616 Filisur, August 2005.



or in a couple of hours walking (all on road) from St Peter Molinis station. Excursions by PostAuto should be planned in advance as many services are only 2-hourly at best.

Anyone without a car will have difficulty experiencing the infamous Chur-Arosa road as there is no parallel PostAuto service all the way. On leaving Arosa there is a sign "Only 360 bends to go" which I make to be at least one every 100 metres! There is a PostAuto service in the lower part of the valley where the road is some distance from the railway, and it can be sampled by leaving the train at Peist and walking to the bus stop in the village. We once managed to find a Bahnersatz (Rail Replacement) bus at Arosa Bahnhof, and used our Arosacard to claim a free trip down to Langwies and back. Apparently after a weekend of heavy rain, there had been a small landslide which closed the line above Langwies for 24-hours.

Arosa was one of the first resorts we discovered in Switzerland, and quickly became our favourite. We are happy to recommend it to readers of *Swiss Express* seeking a relaxing holiday in the mountains.

Arosa Postscript.

There has been mention in *Swiss Express* about the use and non-use of driving trailers on the Arosa line. Before the withdrawal of the eight dc power cars the hourly service utilised four train-sets, with running round at both ends generally the order of the day. One Arosa based set sometimes included a driving trailer and would be used in push-pull mode on services going against the main traffic flows. The

basic set of four coaches was frequently augmented, either by open observation coaches or older centre entrance stock, and these were always attached at the rear and detached on arrival. Bulk cement wagons were also attached at quieter times, whilst double heading was an everyday occurrence on heavier trains.

On conversion to 15,000V ac in November 1997, class Ge4/4^{II} locos took over, and three train-sets of four coaches were refurbished. One set was painted in the blue Arosa livery, and had non-standard interior finish including carpets. The 10.00 from Chur and 17.04 from Arosa were designated the Arosa Express in the timetable, and the blue set always worked the same diagram including these two services. The timetable was substantially the same as before, but a fourth set was saved by having a very tight turn round at Arosa. All three sets included driving trailers and operated in push-pull mode. A Tm tractor was based at Arosa during this period to shunt additional coaches dropped off arriving services and position them to be attached for departure. Unfortunately the tight turn round affected punctuality on the whole line and this continued until the new national timetable in December 2004.

The new timetable gave ample turn round time at both ends, and could have been operated by three train-sets after 08.00, but a fourth set was necessary for the early morning service. The blue set continued on its own diagram



TOP: Postbus turning at Tschierschen on a foggy day in July 1997.

MIDDLE: A tight squeeze, view from top deck, 13/07/2005.

BOTTOM: View from top deck descending Julier Pass, 13/07/2005.





ABOVE: The 0904 Arosa – Chur train leaves Langwies viaduct on 21/07/2002, a 4 coach train powered in the rear by 618 Bergün/Bravuogn and 613 Domat/Ems.

BELOW: Arosabus 5 deputises for one of its newer stablemates, 13/07/2005.



but the three red sets were all used throughout the day. With only three driving trailers available at best, running round again became commonplace and the driving trailers were observed away from their proper haunts. In 2008 the early morning service had again been revised and the service was once again operated by three train sets using driving trailers. Services are still strengthened using the elderly coaches, although

shunting is now carried out by the full train whilst from time-to-time double heading can be observed.

BELOW: Mercedes PostAuto at Laax on service to Ilanz, 11/07/2005.

WHY SWITZERLAND?

It was in 1976, shortly after our marriage, that Lilian suggested that we should have a holiday abroad. "No way" I replied, "there are plenty of places (I really meant buses) in the British Isles that we haven't seen yet". And so it was that in the June we flew to Zurich to join a 7 day tour of Lichtenstein, Austria and Switzerland. At that time, you were only allowed to take £50 in currency and the value of the pound was falling daily. The meals at the hotel in Vaduz were dreadful and things were no better at Flirsch in Austria. Our courier

assured us that the meals would improve to Bivio in Switzerland - and they did! However, by then I had only seen one train (ÖBB) and very few buses so I announced that I was never going abroad again. Our journey back to Zurich Airport took us through the city centre where I was absolutely stunned by the sight of immaculate blue and white trams. "We have to come back here" I remarked. And we did. And then I discovered the trains. The rest, as they say, is history.

Ian Athey – SRS Chairman