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SWISS POST AND "THE LITTLE RED ONE"

Michael Farr



As Swiss Express celebrates its one hundredth issue, it seems appropriate to feature a stamp issued twenty years ago to mark the centenary of possibly the most popular Swiss railway – “The Little Red One”. The Rhätische Bahn appeals to both followers of the metre-gauge prototype and those who spend their time modelling HOm-gauge examples, helped no doubt due to its attention to making the public – and especially we railway enthusiasts – most welcome. For those who like facts, the RhB is the largest private narrow gauge railway in Switzerland which each year carries more than 9 million passengers and moves 700,000 tonnes of freight. The highest altitude on the system is reached at Ozpizio (2253m) and the lowest at Tirano (429m) both on the Bernina line.

In readiness for the centenary in 1989 of the first line from Landquart to Klosters Swiss Post produced an 80c stamp illustrating a train crossing the 285m long Landwasser Viaduct. This is certainly one of the most famous of the 494 bridges on the 397km system, although some may prefer the Brusio spiral viaduct. First day covers were cancelled at Filisur with a hand-stamp which included a sketch of the viaduct.

Ten years later the company started

publicising another milestone with the number puzzle 191111999 which appeared on all sorts of publicity. This was the date when the first new RhB line for 85-years years – the Vereina Line and Tunnel - was due to open and, this being Switzerland, it naturally opened on time with due pomp and ceremony! Chris Harnett and Sue Knight recorded the events for *Swiss Express* in the March 2000 issue. Now there was a direct route through to the Lower Engadine so the population of that splendid area no longer relied on the road over the Fluela Pass, so often blocked in winter. The opening of the tunnel resulted in huge time savings for many journeys. For instance, Chur to Scuol-Tarasp now took only 90-minutes instead of 190, and Lower Engadine residents could visit Zürich just for the day (160 minutes instead of 255). Fares also saw considerable reductions – the record being Klosters to Susch which fell by 66%!

Instead of issuing a special stamp to mark this important event Swiss Post decided to print a pre-paid picture postcard with an imprinted stamp showing RhB loco No 623. First day covers for collectors were stamped with a circular cancellation at Klosters. This also carried the names of Lavin and Susch, the stations at the other end of the Vereina Tunnel.