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DFB

Peter Allman enjoys the steam experience



Furker Oberalp HG 3/4 No.4 at Realp ready to take the afternoon train to Oberwald. All photos: PeterAllman taken on 9/9/2011


A trip on the *Glacier Express* in 2010 was a truly wonderful experience, although afterwards there was a feeling that it was not complete. In pictures of early trains I noticed how the destination plates on the coaches included the name Gletsch, plus the fact that the highest point on the old FO line is 2163m, higher than the current Glacier Express goes. I felt I had been robbed of an important section by the Furka Base Tunnel. However, hearing that the final leg of the DFB from Gletsch to Oberwald had been opened, I knew I could complete my quest so last summer, during our walking holiday in the Goms, my Swiss friend Eliane and I took a day out to ride on the DFB from Realp to Oberwald.

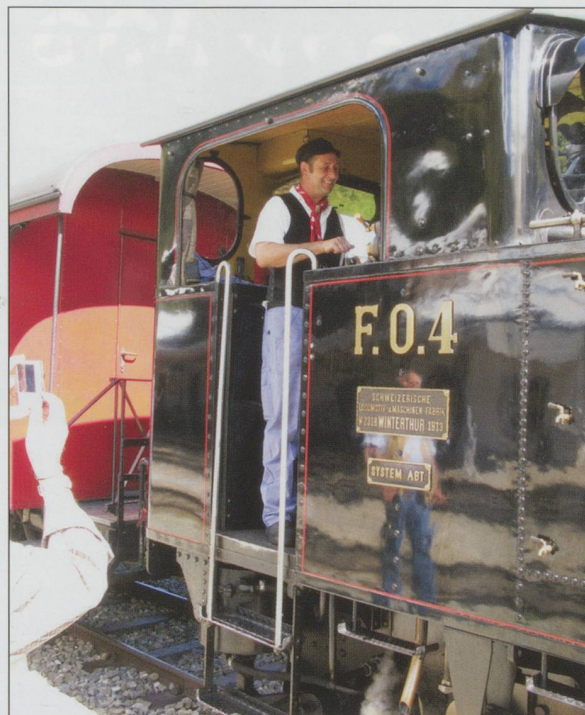
On arrival at Realp the first thing we noticed, apart from FO No. 4 gently steaming and the superb presentation of the whole train, was the traditional uniforms of all the staff and how enthusiastically helpful they were. Having had to pre-book we found our reserved seats in coach BD2502 immediately behind the engine. Each coach has framed information showing its rebuild and the names of all those who worked on it, which is a nice touch. With the open steps at each end of the carriage, the slide down windows, plus in the case of BD2502 the large luggage doors, this is a photographer's dream.

At precisely 14.15 the engine whistle sounded and the trip started during each section of which an attendant supplies

relevant information. Soon we were crossing the Wilerbrücke, the first landmark from my magazine collection, then through the three Senntumstafel tunnels with everyone rushing to close the windows. Across the famous and unique Steffenbachbrücke (it folds during winter for protection from avalanches) to Tiefenbach for a short stop whilst No.4 took on water for the climb to the top. After Tiefenbach the valley starts to open-out and as we headed to the Sidelenbachbrücke there were some splendid views of the road heading up to the pass. As we approached the highest point on the line at Furka DFB, where there is a half-hour stop with refreshments available, we got our first view of the summit tunnel. Soon after our arrival DFB No.1 appeared out of the tunnel with the Realp-bound train that was also scheduled for a half-hour stop. With the two steam engines there you can imagine the sudden photographic activity. On-time we started off through the tunnel to Muttbach-Belvédère, then down the long ramp to Gletsch with views of the Rhone Glacier opening to our right. At Gletsch there was a 5-minute break whilst FO No.4 took on water and then we were off again, through the Loop tunnel, over the Rhône and Lammern viaducts down to Oberwald. But on this section I must give a warning. If you are outside taking photos beware of the track-side sprinklers (similar to those used on golf courses) for, if like me you are concentrating on taking a picture, you could suddenly find

you are quite wet! But it was a bonus being in the coach immediately behind the engine, as standing at the forward end we could watch the driver and fireman at work.

Apart from the wonderful experience of making this 17.8km trip with its beautiful views all the way, the thing that strikes you most is the incredible work completed by some 700 volunteers over the years. Not only the refurbishing of engines and rolling stock, but the relaying of track, rebuilding of bridges, stations, turntables, and relining of tunnels. The overall size of the rebuilding project is incredible – and not to forget the snow and avalanche clearance necessary at the start of each season. Eliane and I were both mightily impressed by what has been achieved and strongly recommend this wonderful experience, but in doing so would stress that at certain times it is important to look carefully at the timetable and you must make a reservation. We made our reservation in the MGB ticket office at Oberwald and purchased round trip tickets, MGB to Realp through the Furka Base Tunnel with the return on the DFB. There are souvenir shops at Realp and Oberwald that are worth a visit as they have some excellent magazines and DVDs etc. Finally if you are stopping in Gletsch the Tourist Office has some interesting free leaflets, including copies of the Verein Furka-Bergstrecke organisation's magazine. There is also a very good museum with historical pictures of the Rhone Glacier. How incredible it must have been to travel on the *Glacier Express* when the ice came almost to the valley bottom. 



TOP: HG 3/4 No.4 at Realp with driver ready to pull the afternoon train to Oberwald.

LEFT: HG 3/4 No.4 at Realp.

BOTTOM LEFT: HG 3/4 No.4 taking water at Gletsch.

BOTTOM RIGHT: HG 3/4 DFB 1 at Station Furka (2163 m.)

