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100 years Chur-Arosa

Salon train 'Alpine Classic Pullman Express' at Chur, one of the attractions of Arosa jubilee.

All photos: Mario Gavazzi

Mario Gavazzi reports on how the RhB went 'flyedelweiss'!

The weekend of December 13th/14th marked the happy end of the Rhätische Bahn's (RhB) beautiful jubilee year and was the occasion when the company marked the 100th anniversary of the opening of the line between Chur and Arosa. It also marked the start of a new era as the RhB opened a renovated Arosa station that has been kept as near to the original 1914 layout as possible. Now passengers who wish to access the Weisshorn cableway can use a new bridge from Platforms 1 and 2 that leads directly to its main entrance, where Arosa Tourism's desk is sited.

Tourism has always been the driving force in modern Arosa and it was to cater for the influx of tourists that took place at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries that initiated the project for an electric railway to link Chur to this booming holiday and ski sport destination. Following

A regular special train - 'Edelweiss Arosa Express' entering Chur station.

some years of projecting and planning the Chur-Arosa company achieved a concession to build the line, and construction work commenced in 1912. Over 2,000 people were involved in the mammoth task of building the line through the difficult terrain of the Plessur valley, whilst the 284m long elegant reinforced concrete Langwies Viaduct was like a construction and design revolution a hundred years ago. The line opened on December 12th 1914 giving visitors an 89 minute trip up from Chur rather than the 6 hour journey that had to be endured previously using the horse-drawn Mail Coaches.






In 1942 the private company was taken over by the Rhätische Bahn. Most of the regular passenger services are now operated by the RhB's new, powerful Allegra units, whilst there is still quite a lot of freight carried on the line due to the condition of the narrow and winding access road up the valley.

During the anniversary weekend, in addition to the regular train service, the RhB offered three creative and historic train operations: the 'Alpine Classic Pullman Express'; the 'Lichtzug' – or light train – a special train on Saturday evening with no light inside the train and giving beautiful sights on illuminated sections along the line; and the 'Edelweiss Arosa Express' formed of Ge4/4¹¹ No.618, coaches B2301, B2304 and B2305 and the four-axle panoramic car B2111. All these services attracted large numbers of local residents as well as railway friends from all over the world. On the station areas of Chur and Arosa the RhB organized public attractions and children were invited to participate on a trip led by "Cla Ferrovia" – the RhB's "oldest train-master": the Swiss songwriter Linard Bardill.

The 'Edelweiss Arosa Express' a joint initiative by the RhB and a jointly-owned subsidiary of Swiss and Lufthansa Edelweiss Air who work together in other areas. One of Edelweiss Air's Captains, Daniel Hauser, also works as a locomotive driver for RhB and spends his time 50% with the airline and 50% with the RhB. The livery of Ge4/4¹¹ No.618 is sponsored by the airline so it was arranged that Daniel Hauser drove this loco on both jubilee days as it headed the 'Edelweiss Arosa Express'. Stephanie Keller and Sabrina Zingg, two of Edelweiss Air's cabin crew members served the on-board drinks and snacks that were offered by the airline company. Another very good idea was the Christmas Casino set-up at Arosa railway station, and also organized and sponsored by Edelweiss. The first prize was a trip to Las Vegas – not by RhB train, but on board an Edelweiss airplane!



The Chur-Arosa event was the final one of the successful '125 years RhB' programme that started in January 2014. An important aim of the RhB in planning this year of activities was to encourage people to use the resources of the Rhätische Bahn, to explore the beautiful areas in Graubünden in both summer and winter and realise that a train trip is also interesting in modern trains like the Allegra units, the Glacier and Bernina Express special vehicles, and in historic trains! At the end of jubilee year 2014 we have to thank everybody in RhB company who organized all the attractions and events, and also to thank organisations that co-operated with RhB Historic, including: Albula Bahn Club Bergün; club 1889; Verein Dampffreunde Rhätische Bahn; Interessengemeinschaft Zügen/Landwasser; Pro Salonwagen RhB; Freunde der Schmalspurbahnen. 

1. The captain and his crew - special staff of the 'Edelweiss Arosa Express' with Stephanie Keller, Daniel Hauser, Sabrina Zingg and Hans-Peter Heiniger.
2. Welcome on board - young RhB staff at Chur.
3. The free drink and snack service on board 'Edelweiss Arosa Express', offered by Edelweiss Air, was served in the cabrio-car B2111 – open-air service in winter; thank you Sabrina Zingg (r.) and Stephanie Keller!
4. A nostalgic horse coach at Arosa, remembering the period before the Chur-Arosa-Railway opened.
- 5 and 6. 'Fight against snow' in past and present times: old Xrot d 9213 and new "rotary" 95401 in 'action'.
7. The renovated station Arosa was re-opened on December 13/14.



Timeless time in Koblenz Dorf

Robert Amstutz

Koblenz Dorf station is a simple single platform that sees a regular service of two trains/hour each way on the line between Baden-Koblenz-Bad Zurzach-Winterthur. The station was only opened in 1997 and is much closer to the village than the original Koblenz station, the junction for the line over the Rhein Bridge to Waldshut in Germany, some 1.4km away. Facilities are basic, comprising a full service ticket machine, a smallish passenger shelter, no car or bicycle parking but – this being Switzerland - a chocolate vending machine.

During last summer the SBB platform clock ceased to function. After a few days, a member of SBB Infrastructure came along, climbed up his ladder, and covered the clock with a plastic bin bag. Expectations were high that with usual Swiss efficiency, a replacement clock would soon be provided. Weeks went past and nothing happened. Several passengers enquired of the SBB as to what was happening. No one at SBB seemed to know exactly why the clock was not being repaired or replaced. It was claimed that it was not a financial



The local appeal bin, notice and out of service clock..

Photos: Robert Amstutz



issue, but probably a problem of lack of spare parts. Either way, no timepiece, but at least the trains continued to serve the station, apparently even on time.

In an act of desperation Herr Hans Frei, a retired engineer, set about fund raising from passengers and local residents to pay for the repair, or even buy, a new clock. He placed a large plastic bin on the platform, together with a block of paper and a pen, and encouraged people to pledge an amount and drop the pledge form into the bin. His initiative paid off and by late October over CHF 500 had been pledged. This action was picked up not only by the local papers, but also by the national papers and local TV. Fastnacht (Carnival) will be with us in February and this clock story is guaranteed to be one of the local subjects to be lampooned, as is the tradition. The SBB was obviously embarrassed by the story and, at the end of October 2014, a new station clock, complete with the traditional red second hand, had quietly been installed. The world of Koblenz Dorf is in order again! 