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Crossing one of the viaducts in the Albula Pass.

Photo: Bill Salter

David Stowell looks at the Modellbahn-Meiringen

Readers with good memories may remember the extensive 'Om-gauge' model railway that used to be on display close to Interlaken West station. It is some 10 years since the exhibit closed however, as mentioned previously in *Swiss Express*, it is now seeing a new lease of life under new ownership in Meiringen. During a recent visit to Switzerland I, along with several other Society members, was fortunate to join a private viewing of the rejuvenated railway organised by David Weidler, a member from North America.

The model was originally constructed by a group of local enthusiasts over a period of time, in an old wooden barracks close to Interlaken West station. It was later moved to the

upper floor of a modern SBB Historic building at the same location, but unfortunately SBB's plans for the building subsequently changed and they decided to lease it out. Without a home the railway was dismantled and stored for 5 years in nearby Wichelstrasse. Eventually the owners decided to sell the entire exhibit to a private individual near Winterthur, who unsuccessfully sought somewhere where it could be exhibited again. During this two-year period the various parts of the railway were stored in poor conditions and some parts of the model deteriorated quite badly due to exposure to the weather.

In early 2015 Stefan Schläppi, a PostAuto driver from Meiringen, hearing that the owner had to vacate the storage site by May, quickly negotiated the purchase of the railway including locos and rolling stock. Its size was such that it took

four truckloads, plus five journeys with a car and trailer, to move it to Meiringen. Initially Stefan did not have anywhere to house the railway so he purchased a large marquee and set about restoring parts of the layout in there for display to visitors. Subsequently the railway has moved into more permanent accommodation above the Meiringen PostAuto garage at Zueghausstrasse. The size of some sections of the layout is such that a large road crane had to be hired to lift 17 of them in through the roof of the building. Incidentally the marquee is now available for hire for parties and special events! The railway was officially opened in its Threading through the Albula Pass.


Photo: Bill Salter

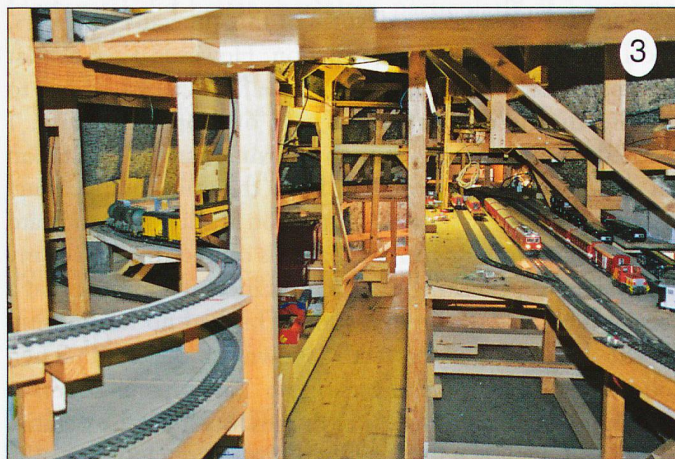


new location in November 2015, with some 1,800 people visiting last year. Amongst these was one of the people who built the original in Interlaken and who had not heard that the layout had found a new home. He was surprised and delighted to see it being resurrected once again.

Modellbahn Meiringen consists of a number of “modules”, or tableaux, depicting various parts of the RhB and MGB metre-gauge network. Smaller modules include the Landwasser and Solis Viaducts, whilst the largest represent parts of the Albula Pass, Disentis and Grenchiols. The latter section is so large that it has to be split into two for transporting – even by truck! Behind the scenes all the various modules are interconnected, resulting in a continuous run which currently is 600m long taking a train 40-minutes to traverse in its entirety. During this time the line takes a train on a journey through many loops, spirals, tunnels and hidden storage yards, as it climbs from just above floor level almost to the rafters. This run is still being extended as Stefan, assisted by his son Tim, and another “old hand” Roland, rehabilitate and restore further parts of the old layout and add new. Some modules, notably the climb to Nätschen on the MGB above Andermatt incorporating a rack section, were so badly damaged by exposure to the weather while in storage, that they are only suitable now as a source of parts for new construction. Stefan and his team are putting a considerable effort into building up the exhibition and last year alone they spent over 1,100 hours on the project. The most recent addition was the Bergün module in 2016, and a further “surprise” is planned for 2017.

The original layout had analogue controls for all the train power, point work and signalling. Rather than face the daunting task of trying to untangle, decipher and re-instate the resultant spider’s web of wiring, it was decided to start again and install a DCC digital control system. Tim is the mastermind responsible for this innovation, which requires far fewer wires than before. The entire layout is now all controlled from a laptop, running train control software from Freiwald. A total of 13 trains can be operated automatically at any one time and the system controls their speeds so that they reach and pass at the single line loops with the same proficiency as their full size Swiss counterparts! Future plans include fitting a camera in one of the locos to give a live, driver’s eye view of a journey around the layout. Behind the scenes there are another 20 trains available for use, so there is no shortage of variety and action for visitors to see.

Modellbahn Meiringen is open on most Sunday afternoons between April and December and also on Tuesday and Thursday evenings between May and October. For detailed opening times see www.modellbahn-meiringen.ch or check on Facebook. Stefan Schläppi is also happy to open up all year round for pre-arranged group visits - however there is minimal heating in the winter! Contact details are on the website, or call + 41 (0)79 311 21 16. The railway is situated above the PostAuto garage at Zeughausstrasse 19e, on the site adjacent to the Seilbahnen Schweiz (SBS) training school. It is about a 15 minute walk from Meiringen station, or a couple of minutes from the Meiringen Gilli stop on PostAuto Line 174. 



1. A view showing the height of the Disentis module with the main station at the lower left.
Photo: David Stowell
2. The Glacier Express crossing the impressive model of the Landwasser Viaduct.
Photo: David Stowell
3. Inside the Disentis module showing the hidden storage sidings and multi-level loops.
Photo: David Stowell
4. Disentis station.
Photo: Bill Salter

