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The Bahnmuseum Albula in Bergün

Bryan Stone



Autumn in Bergün. All photos Bryan and Hanna Stone

The 20th October 2017 was one of those unforgettable Alpine autumn days, which make everything worthwhile! Deep blue sky, gold and brown larch forests, meadows and harvest, early snow gleaming high above, and clear sharp air. In our memories it was always so - but here it was again real. We had left home in the dark, and Basel at 07.33, to be in Bergün and in front of the Bahnmuseum Albula at 11.15 on this glorious day.

The Albula mainline of the RhB will, for well-travelled SRS members, need little description, but the Museum was an inspired feature when the line from Thusis to the Bernina was recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Much of the public information and background on this is now

concentrated at the Museum, which has also become a centre for tourism and culture of the Albula valley. Visitor totals are already very encouraging. The Museum has now, on its fifth anniversary, some 20,000 admissions per year, putting it in the top league of museums and galleries in Graubünden, and ensuring worldwide awareness. A well-stocked and well-served café (with bookshop) in the entrance hall offers some fine traditional meals. It is probably a marked improvement on what the former occupants – the Swiss Army – would have provided! Museum admission is with Edmondson card tickets, a delightful touch; the museum has the RhB's former printing equipment in its possession.

The Bahnmuseum Albula, opened in 2012, is housed in the former military depot adjacent to the station. This is a solid and traditional structure; large and heavily built, its facilities are good, and included the original siding connections to Bergün station. Nevertheless, a museum it was not. Money and effort, as well as exhibits and public access, were needed. Overall financial and corporate responsibility is in the hands of the Museum Foundation, with president Yves Broggi, a well-known Bergün businessman. The


Crocodile No.407 in the new gallery.



Foundation has invested some CHF6.7m, financed by major loans from Canton Graubünden and from the RhB, as well as private and corporate donations. Active promoter of the new museum was, from the start, the Albula Bahn-Club, a small organisation with their own village museum and model railway in Bergün. From the start of the project they mobilised extraordinary resources and energy, to help secure the depot building, the goodwill of RhB, the military, the valley community, and tourist interests. Today they supply many volunteers, as well as regular management of museum affairs. They also brought together many exhibits.

That brings us to the event on the 20th October. A large and solid exhibit, which the Club offered on a long loan to the Museum Foundation was RhB Ge6/6 No.407, one of the 15 RhB 'Crocodiles' which characterised RhB operations for 50 years. No.407 was built in 1922, weighing 66t, with one-hour rating 1076 hr, and a maximum speed of 55kph. This engine, once accustomed to battling through Albula winters, was withdrawn in 1985 and since August 1994 had stood in a field alongside the road access ramp to Bergün station. Externally cared for by the Club, it had survived weather and vandals, but on 24th November 2011 it was moved to the museum's siding near the entrance. A condition of the loan was that it should, as soon as possible, be protected from the weather. Six years later, and thanks to CHF650.000 of donations, this has now been achieved. A gallery structure, over the museum track, largely open on the valley side and with more supports on the station side, now allows No.407 to stand protected from storm and snow. Later, after external restoration in the RhB workshops in Landquart, Ge2/4 No.205 will also take its place under the gallery. No.205 is even older, built in 1913 and withdrawn in 1974, only 300hp and weighing 37t. The Ge2/4s were used at the start of RhB electrification and some survived a long time, radically rebuilt, as shunting locomotives. No.205 is practically in original condition; it was first exhibited in Winterthur, and later stored in the open in Arth-Goldau, so needs serious care.

In his opening speech before numerous regional and national representatives Yves Broggi spoke emotionally of the financial and material support from all sides, and of the

milestone that the new gallery represents. Local craftsmen using regional traditions and materials, with the timber being from Bergün, proudly built it. Hans-Jakob Schutz, President of the Albula-Bahn-Club, and representatives of the design team, were also present and spoke warmly. The SRS congratulates the Albula Museum on its achievements, and has no doubt that members will follow its development closely. Your correspondent, who has visited Bergün frequently over 50 years, wishes them all 'golden days' such as the one we this year enjoyed. 

1. RhB No.650 (the 'UNESCO World Heritage' locomotive) entering Bergün.
2. Yves Broggi, president of the Museum Foundation.
3. Bryan with Roman Sommer at the Bahnmuseum Albula.
4. Bryan with Walter Sommer, working the Albula line simulator on No.407.
5. Crocodile No.407 in the new gallery.

