

Switzerland's highest : John Jesson investigates the Sitter Gorge Bridge

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Switzerland's Highest

John Jesson investigates the Sitter Gorge Bridge

The bridge is more dramatic from the level of the river. The southbound Voralpen Express is worked by an SBB Re 4/4 and has a mismatched driving trailer leading the formation.

Photos: John Jesson

It is, perhaps, a little surprising to find that the highest bridge in Switzerland is not in the high Alps, but in the northeast of the country. It was also not built by one of the SBB constituent companies, but between 1908 and 1911 by the standard gauge Bodensee-Toggenburg Bahn. This railway became part of the Südostbahn in 2001, and its landmark structure is situated just a short distance from St Gallen, crossing the deep gorge of the River Sitter. The actual 120m long inverted bowstring girder bridge is actually the central span of a 365m long viaduct, the majority of which is a series

of masonry arches. The structure is some 99m above the valley floor at its highest point.

Back in 2001, I decided to find out if I could get some photographs of the bridge. When I am doing something like this, I arm myself with the relevant 1:25,000 Landeskarte; in this case Sheet 1094. Although the Sitter gorge (running north-south at this location) is right on the edge of the sheet, it shows enough to know what to expect when you reach the site. The nearest station is Bruggen, on the SBB main line between St Gallen and Gossau. This also crosses the Sitter

gorge on a masonry viaduct, but at a lower level and a few hundred metres to the north. North of this structure is the much lower bridge of the canton road and north of that the high concrete viaduct carrying Route 1 of the Swiss motorway network. From Bruggen station, it is only a short walk to the edge of the gorge, where a road branches off to drop steeply down into it, allowing access to a small electricity works before passing under the SOB's bridge. Immediately after passing under the bridge, the river turns sharply east and the road crosses it over a wooden covered bridge

The only freight of the day turned up just as I had climbed the path out of the gorge – a short cement train hauled by a BT railcar.



and climbs back towards the southeast. After a few metres, a path splits off, crossing the Urnäsch tributary by means of another covered bridge and climbs out of the valley as a forest track to the high ground to the west.

Both of the railway bridges cross the gorge on a roughly northeast – southwest alignment so, as the weather was cloudy but with a fair amount of sunshine, I made use of both paths and the river crossing, as they are south of the high bridge, to get the advantage of the light. Photo spots are few, mainly because of trees, but there are a couple of decent locations. After photographing trains on the bridge for some time, and utilising the covered footpath bridge across the river to shelter from one of the day's infrequent showers, I used the footpath to gain height to the west, joining a local road close to SOB's Gübsensee halt. It is then a walk of about 4 – 5 km into Herisau. On the way, there is a view from the road of the railway as it approaches a very short tunnel. At Herisau, the SOB (former B-T) line crosses the River Glatt on a viaduct. The sun had moved westwards by this time, so I crossed the river and circled round to get a decent viewpoint of the viaduct and settled in to take more photographs, moving position a few times for variety. In the end, rather than walking back to the station at Herisau, I continued a further 3 – 4 km to Schachen and returned to my base from there. Altogether, it was a successful and enjoyable day.

Editor's Note: *For members who have the 1972 edition of Cecil J Allen's book "Swiss Travel Wonderland" a splendid aerial view of the gorge and all its bridges can be found between pages 64 and 65.* 🇨🇭



TOP: The viaduct at Herisau with one of the BT 4-car units approaching the station.

MIDDLE: BT Re 4/4 in Radio Aktuell livery works a southbound *Voralpen Express*.

RIGHT: From the road between the gorge and Herisau, a *Voralpen Express* approaches the very short tunnel, propelled by the BT Re 4/4 with Vogele advertising.