

The Albula line

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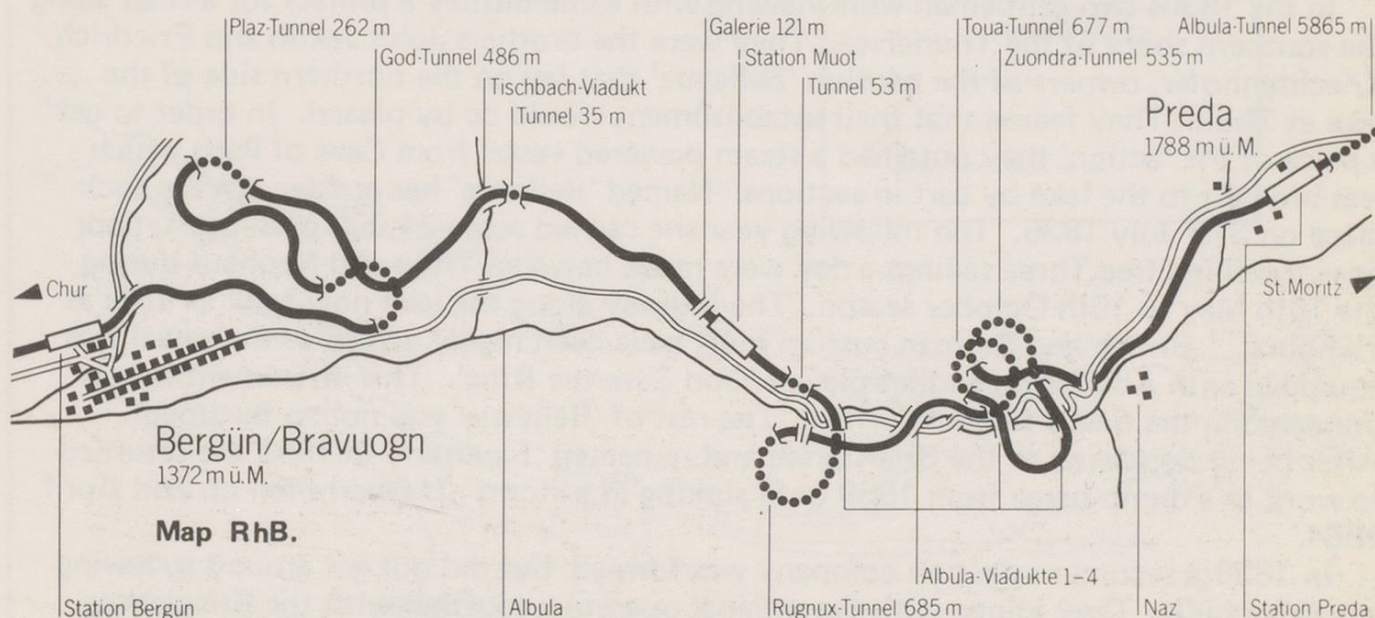
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THE ALBULA LINE by D.F. Arthur

The Albula line between the Rhine valley and the Engadine on the Rhaetian Railway, is rightly judged to be one of the railway engineering wonders of the world. It can be seen from the train to quite good advantage, but the best part can also be walked. The railway has established, and maintains, a foot-path which allows intimate contact with the line between Bergun and Preda, where it climbs the Albula valley in a spectacular series of spiral tunnels and viaducts. In the 4 miles direct distance between Bergun and Preda the line climbs 1365 feet and travels almost 8 miles to do it.

We started the walk from Preda after leaving the train from Samedan which had brought us through the Albula tunnel. The path follows the valley of the Albula river, at first down a gentle gradient, to the village of Naz, where the valley descends abruptly. Leaving there, the path is never far from the railway and seats have been thoughtfully provided at suitable vantage points. Providing excellent views of the quite frequent trains. In the meadow below Viaduct 2 there is not only a seat provided, but also a timetable of the arrival of trains at the viaduct and a copy of the operating diagram of the line. The path finally passes over the lower mouth of the spiral Rugnux Tunnel, providing the unique sensation of hearing the train above and behind you, followed by seeing it below and in front, (or vice-versa as the case might be).



Beyond Rugnux Tunnel the path is not so close to the railway and unfortunately the going gets rougher, which is bad news when you are tiring. Eventually the path crosses the meadows to Bergun, with the final loops and tunnels in view across the valley. Bergun turns out to be a very quiet and pretty little town, with many of the graffitto decorated houses typical of the Engadine region. According to my 'big' timetable there was no train from Bergun to Samedan between 14.59 and 16.13, but when we got to the station at 15.30 we found that the local timetable showed a train at 15.42, marked with a symbol which meant 'Goods train with passenger accomodation'. In due course it appeared, a crocodile with one wooden-seated, open-platform coach and a string of goods wagons. The whole thing was conducted by a driver and a man in an orange duster coat, who donned gloves at each station and coupled or uncoupled the goods wagons as required. He punched the tickets, and since everyone who got on seemed to know him, he also shook hands ! The 'croc', which was one of the Ge 6/6 locos introduced between 1921 and 1929, made quite good time over the spirals and through the Albula Tunnel, although we had to wait at Preda for the Bernina Express to come out of the tunnel. At Samedan we rather reluctantly parted company with the 'croc' and its crew, to catch the shuttle train to Pontresina.