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Some hints for railway enthusiasts visiting Eastern Switzerland

by A.E. Hauser-Gubser

It is understandable when railway enthusiasts want to see first and above all regions like the Berner Oberland and its mountain railways, the Grisons with the RhB or the Gotthard and Lötschberg transit routes. Usually, the railway fan then looks for other lines, once these admittedly spectacular lines have been visited. One of the regions which is somewhat neglected, but offers many surprising aspects is Eastern Switzerland, comprising the Cantons of St. Gallen, Thurgau, Schaffhausen, Zürich and last but not least Appenzell Auser-Rhoden and Appenzell-Innerhoden.

Among the SBB lines I recommend to visit are those with S-Bahn (R.T.R. service), the line Zürich-Schaffhausen, Winterthur-Etzwilen, Winterthur-Schaffhausen and Winterthur-Rapperswil, Weinfelden-St. Gallen with the old town of Bischofszell, St. Gallen-Rorschach-Buchs-Sargans and Rorschach-Romanshorn-(Konstanz)-Kreuzlingen-Schaffhausen. All these lines are attractive, of course not of the magnitude of the high alps, but lovely, especially

in May and October. Schaffhausen, Konstanz, Buchs and St. Margrethen are border stations where the international traffic can be observed and where ideas for your layout can be gained. Both Schaffhausen and St. Gallen are old towns worth a visit. In St. Gallen the Cathedral and the Convent library with manuscripts more than 1000 years old are a must for the visitor interested in cultural aspects. Schaffhausen and Stein am Rhein have richly painted houses built in part in the 15th and 16th century. Winterthur possesses two world renowned museums, one the Oscar Reinhardt foundation and impressionists, the other the Reinhardt gallery with German paintings of the 18th and 19th century. Zürich has a good opera house and a well known theatre.

There is a surprising variety of private lines. I mention the Mittel-Thurgau-Bahn (MThB), the Bodensee-Toggenburg-Bahn (BT), the Appenzellerbahnen (AB), comprising the lines St. Gallen-Gais-Appenzell, Gossau-Herisau-Appenzell-Wasserauen, Altstätten-Gais, the Trogener Bahn (TB), the Rorschach-Heiden



Previous page: Appenzellerbahn No.46 at Wasserauen
 Above: The Trogerbahn at St. Gallen.

All photos A.J. Pike OBE

Bahn (RHB), the Rheineck-Walzenhausen railway, the Frauenfeld-Wil Bahn (FW), the Sihltal und Uetliberg railway (SZU) and last but not least, the Poly-Bahn and the Dolder Bahn at Zürich. The Poly Bahn is a three minute walk from Zürich main station and leads to the terrace of the Polytechnicum (Technical University) from where you have a good view over Zürich. It is probably the shortest rack railway trip you can make in Switzerland (3 minutes). Again these lines are attractive and if you should tour the region, then do not miss the diesel railcar vintage 1920 of the AB and a visit to the modern railway workshop at Gais. All private lines have their technical specialities, the Rorschach-Heiden Bahn for instance being a standard gauge rack railway. At Heiden you have a wonderful view over the lake Bodan, on clear days to the German town Friedrichshafen. I recommend to make use of the various opportunities you have with lake boats and with the boats on the Rhine as well as the lake of Zürich. Various cableways such as Säntis-Schwebebahn or the cableway Brülisau-Hoher Kasten offer a panoramic view from the Austrian to the French Alps.

A tramway enthusiast should at least invest

one day to travel the many routes of Zürich tramways: if you prefer trolleybuses, then St. Gallen and Winterthur are the places to visit.

Should you want to photograph as many trains as possible, then visit Eglisau with the imposing railway bridge where you can make fantastic shots from the road bridge in the counter light of the setting sun. At Eglisau station you will find everything, from the double deck S-Bahn train, EC and IC and normal passenger trains to long freights from and to Germany loaded with every conceivable product. Of interest are the long gravel trains, normally hauled by an Ae 6/6 locomotive.

It may sound impossible, but for a railway fan liking a good wine, Eastern Switzerland may be the place, where he may find some rarities. I mention the "Schiterberger" a light red wine, available in limited quantities only and an excellent companion to light meals. It would go too far to mention every brand, but in the Rhine

valley, in Schaffhouse and in the Canton Zürich, several wines are produced which are even, you can believe it or not, exported to France.

Besides the railways I would recommend to make a good use of the bus lines, especially those leading to idyllic old villages on the heights of valleys, like for instance Schwellbrunn. Or you may visit Rheinau with the famous abbatial church on an island in the Rhine.

Railways of different companies can be observed at St. Gallen, Rorschach, Konstanz, Weinfelden, Frauenfeld, Gossau, St. Margrethen, Buchs and Rapperswil, and of course at Zürich.

Should you like to make a short visit to Austria or Germany you have excellent connections to Stuttgart, München, Innsbruck and Vienna.

Hotel prices vary much and I recommend usually a good, small hotel in a village near a larger town, where the prices for an overnight stay with breakfast are considerably lower than in the town itself. Food is available in an enormous price range, but I have to admit it is not always good. I recommend to visit Migros self serving restaurants which maintain a good standard at modest prices. Avoid going there at 12.30 when everybody is lunching: choosing instead 11.30 am or 1.30 pm.

Usually the station staff are friendly and give the required replies. Do not tip railway staff, it is an offence. It happens quite often that the railway staff reply in English. However it may not be as fluently as you wish. Do not cross tracks without permission unless it is at a public

crossing.

Finally note that the weather can change from region to region. If therefore Eastern Switzerland is cloudy and rainy, it is easy to find excellent weather for instance in the western part or in the Canton of Ticino. Both regions can be reached in a few hours.

Below I recommend a few itineraries which you may modify at your "gusto":

1. St. Gallen-Wattwil-Rapperswil-Pfäffikon-Biberbrugg (possibly with a visit to Einsieden's famous pilgrim church)-Arth-Goldau-Zug-Sihlbrugg-Zürich-St. Gallen.
2. St. Gallen-Rorschach-Altstätten-Gais-Appenzell-Herisau-St. Gallen.
3. St. Gallen-Trogen-Heiden (Trogen-Heiden per Bus)-Rorschach-St. Gallen.
4. Winterthur-Weinfelden-Kreuzlingen (or even Konstanz)-Stein am Rhein (visit of the old town, then by river boat down to Schaffhouse-Winterthur.
5. Winterthur-Frauenfeld-Wil-Bischofszell (per bus, visit of the town)-Weinfelden-Winterthur.
6. Zürich-Eglisau-Schaffhausen-Etzwilen-Winterthur-Rapperswil-Zürich-Winterthur (S-Bahn).
7. Winterthur-Gossau-Urnäsch-Schwägalp per bus - Säntis per cableway-Schwägalp-Nesslau per bus - Lichtensteig-Wil-Winterthur.

Below: The Frauenfeld-Wil, at Frauenfeld

