

A round trip around

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Ron Smith describes a recent trip including most types of public transport. The pictures are out of order due to the way I have to make up the magazine, The Dampfbahn pictures are on the colour pages!

While our politicians are trying to make all mention of “integrated transport” slip quietly into obscurity, the Swiss are efficiently getting on and doing it. I was staying in Erstfeld at the Hotel Frohsinn, who advertise in this magazine, and are great value for money. I wanted to go over the Furka, as the extension through the summit tunnel and down to Gletsch had not been opened the last time that I was there. The hotel is right by the station, which of course is also the bus stop, so I caught the 08.30 bus to Göschenen.

This is operated by the red buses of Auto AG Uri (Uri being the canton here) The bus was full of chattering people and we immediately ran into stop / start congestion. I began to wonder if I would make the connection at Göschenen, knowing how connections in Switzerland are. At Silenen most folk got off and the rest at Wassen. The driver turned round to ask disbelievingly if I was going to Andermatt. I

nodded, and he revved up the engine, squared his shoulders and we dashed into Göschenen station yard in fine style. A quick snap and onto the FO train and it was off. This rack line up to Andermatt is spectacular, climbing steeply up and over the Gotthard Tunnel mouth and gripping its way up a gorge to emerge, curve sharply round into Andermatt and join the FO main line across the roof of Switzerland.

The passengers who knew how long we wait there wandered off and returned with coffee and *gipfels* (croissants). Eventually the local shunter had attached a coach and a van onto the back and we set off. It's not far to Realp and here the base tunnel car shuttle was loading as I took the short walk to the Dampfbahn Furka Bergstrecke station. This was quite busy and with only twenty minutes between trains it needed all the time to buy a ticket, a *nuss stengel* and a cup of tea and find a place on the train. It really is tremendous what the DFB have achieved in such a relatively

The five minute pause at top the of the Grimsel Pass. The reservoir on the right is where clouds are made. 28/9/03

Photo: Ron Smith



short time, especially as there is not a lot of work that can be done during the winter at such an altitude. With a packed train we briskly set off. After crossing the famous Steffenbach bridge, which is taken down each winter to let the avalanches through, we rolled into Tiefenbach where a water stop is made. Everyone jumped off into the thin wet snow for a photograph shoot, then a toot from the engine (2-6-0 tank no. 9) made everyone scramble back



A PTT Neoplan Skyliner decker slides through the Old Grimsel Pass road.

Photo© Der Post

on board. Off we went with the snow getting thicker and the air colder, and this on September 28th. We carried on upwards until we reached the tunnel mouth. A half hour break here gave time for more photographs and food. The building here looks like a World War 2 bunker crouching in the hillside, and probably needs to be! The DFB had a barbecue going which was amazingly good at that altitude. More tea and home made *nuss stengels* later, and the crew were gently shepherding everyone aboard. Then we plunged noisily into the tunnel.

As soon as we emerge (and it is a long tunnel!) we stop for more photos, though on this side of the hill the wind is razor sharp so it is quickly over and we all lean over to watch the stump of the Rhone Glacier. It looks dirty and stunted and not much of a thing to look at, as has receded to a smudge on the top of the hill opposite. Then we descend to Gletsch, which is a solid hotel and a couple of extraneous buildings in a deep cleft in the landscape.

Here I could not decide what to do. Catch a postbus to Oberwald and continue on the FO?, go back on the DFB?, or take the postbus to Meiringen? I decided to take the first one to depart, which turned out to be the postbus to Meiringen. This very modern luxurious coach proved to be an excellent choice.

We zigzagged up the side of the mountains with the DFB station and train turning into Z gauge before heading over the deep snow covered summit to stop at the Grimsel Pass for five minutes. Here is where clouds are born. Beside the road and hotel is a reservoir which was steaming. This vapour was being collected by the wind and pushed over the edge of the mountain. The snow here is piled over 6 feet high. Back on the bus and we tipped over the edge in one of those crazy zigzag descents that only the Swiss would consider a sane thing to do. It is a really incredible journey. It is difficult to balance out the perspective as the mountains are too big, sheer, jagged and threatening and when we descend we are still high in the air or over and under steep reservoir retaining walls.

Eventually we drop down to Innertkirchen and more zigzags over the hill and down into Meiringen. En route we pass that awe-inspiring walk through the sheer crack in the mountain with the river roaring through it known as the Aare Schlucht. We calmly roll into Meiringen station square as if nothing extraordinary has happened to us, and I go to look at the timetable. Just over half an hour to wait for a Brünig train. Time to make a return trip on the MIB but, as a plan is forming, I first go into the tourist office to check the boat times at Luzern.



Having sorted that out, the MIB had gone, so I went up the street for more *nuss stengels* (I think I am addicted).

At 14.00 the liveried "Golden Pass" set rolls in from Luzern, and I'm tempted, but stick to the plan and join the 14.05 to Luzern. Up and over the Brünig Pass with consummate ease, and the slow-footed careful descent down the stairs to Giswil. At two places the Swiss are busily tidying up their landscape where some hillside has decided that it would like to try horizontal instead of vertical. In this permanent war with nature, my money is still on the Swiss to win. After Giswil it is safe to have a dash and act like a train again. At Sarnen a Luzern-Stans-Engelberg set is in a siding just to confuse us, and we stop at Hergiswil where there are genuine connections with Stans and Engelberg, and then on down to Luzern.

There is one hour before a boat leaves for Brunnen at 16.25, and so I ask at the boat station if it picks up at the Verkehrshaus. The man confirms that it does, at 16.35. I asked him which trolley bus goes to the Verkehrshaus. With disdain he tells me that I should walk, it is a beautiful walk around the lake, walking is

good for you, and anyway one hour is not enough time to visit the splendid Verkehrshaus. I humbly admit that I want to visit the shop, so he condescends to tell me it is bus 6 or 8. I hang my head and go over to the stop. Now a new experience waits for me. No.6 trolley bus has a trailer bus attached, and I get in this. Passengers in trailers are not allowed in the UK. The illicit journey is made in a suitable uncanny silence as we trundle round to the Verkehrshaus. Heroically I manage not to buy anything and content myself with ogling the Gotthard HO layout which was in operation. I work out that I could have a layout the same size in our house, providing the internal walls are removed, and everything else come to that. Suitably deflated I go and catch the MV Schwyz which placidly moves over the water from Luzern and sidles up to the landing stage. There seem to be few "real" passengers. One of several large groups has reserved all the best tables for a Spartan coffee and *gipfel*. At Beckenried there is a calamity! A boat is at the landing stage, another is waiting, and we are approaching! The one at the landing stage hurriedly heads off for Luzern in embarrassment,



PREVIOUS PAGE: A crew member checks the motion of No.9 at Furka.

ABOVE: Gletsch. No.9 is uncoupled to run round. Stump of Rhône Glacier above roof of far building.

Both the above - 28/9/02 by Ron Smith

BELOW: Gletsch viewed from the Grimsel ramp, Z Gauge or what?

Photo: Gerald Savine

the smaller one, hovering, darts in to deposit some people who will transfer to us, then shoots off to slowly circle us as we nip in, exchange passengers and majestically power off across to Weggis. The smaller one now nips in behind us to pick up our refugees. We continue, passing the schizophrenic car ferry shuttle that does not know if it is coming or going between Gersau and Beckenried. Eventually we end the voyage at Brunnen, in the elbow of the lake, where the luxurious Waldstätterhof Hotel

dominates the waterfront. It is a short walk to the station for the local train to Erstfeld, which is reached at 19.25. Now it is time for some of the Frohsinn's great goulash soup. I think it is also justified to raise a glass or two of Dôle to a fully integrated multi modal, punctual and comfortable transport system.

