

Book and video reviews

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Gotthardbahn – Ferrovia del San Gottardo

Authors: Robert Bösch, Iso Camartin, Kilian T. Elsasser and Paul Caminada. Published by Heinz von Arx, c/o AS Verlag A.G., Buhnrain 30, CH - 8052 Zürich. Languages: German and Italian. 240 pages, 189 photographs in full colour. Format: 9 _ x 11 _ inches, hardcover. ISBN: 978-3-909111-34-3.

Price in Switzerland: SFr. 88, or 55. Internet: www.as-verlag.ch

It is hard to believe, but the world-famous railway line up to and under the Gotthard Pass is already 125 years old! It is fitting that Editor and Publisher Heinz von Arx, well known for publishing notable books about both railways and mountaineering at the "AS Verlag", has brought out this book right on time for the celebrations.

I have to apologize to the authors, but for my readership a book like this will be bought mainly for the photographs and you could hardly find a better qualified photographer than Robert Bösch. Mr. Bösch is not only a gifted photographer; he is also a chartered Geographer and Mountain-Guide who climbed Mt. Everest in 2001! His photographs have graced other AS titles like "Glacier Express" and "Switzerland Experience". In this book, the beauty of the line is shown in all four seasons and at all times of the day, as well as at night, whilst many of the viewpoints could only be reached by an experienced mountaineer. Looking at many of the photographs in the narrow valleys, that are now overpowered by the huge structures of the motorway, I count myself lucky that I can still remember them without all that concrete. There are also many photographs of the people and structures that are essential for the smooth operation of the line - as well as some cute line site features. At the only unguarded crossing left on the line, signs not only warn of trains. Another sign reads: "Warning! Free roaming dog. If dog comes, lie down and wait for help. If no help comes: best of luck!" Things have improved though. A notice chalked in Italian on the side reads: "He's dead" - to avoid a more sinister implication, there is an arrow pointing to the dog...

The text is both in German and Italian - the two languages of the Gotthard. If your knowledge is limited, at least try to read the captions - both - as the combination of Germanic and Latin languages will sometimes reveal the content to an English speaking person! For those of you able to understand one of them there is much to enjoy. Iso Camartin writes about his impressions during the trip and Paul Caminada describes the points of interest on the way.

The last part of the book deals with the history. Kilian T. Elsasser, who has been for many years curator of the railway collection at the "Verkehrshaus" in Lucerne, provides a fascinating insight into the huge technical difficulties and political wrangling that accompanied the building of the line from 1872 - 1882. Yes, incredible as it is, it took only ten years to complete! True they have been improving on it ever since, but the fact remains that even today it is still regarded as a masterpiece. GMH

Sursee Triengen Railway

DVD or Video, 70 minutes, Ernst Leutwiler, Olberg 5, CH-8755 Ennenda, Switzerland. Available in the UK from The Signal Box, 1 Albion Street, Anstey Leicester LE7 7DD. Phone 0116 2362901 or Email signal.Box@talk.21.com Price £21.95 including postage and packing to UK addresses.

The Sursee Triengen Bahn (ST) is the only Swiss standard gauge line that has never been electrified. This has helped it to retain its charm and motive power. The action starts with No 5 on a wedding special train. It stops for a photo shoot (in the pouring rain) by the small airfield, with church bells sounding appropriately in the background. There then follows a lengthy loco servicing sequence, showing the dirty work that goes with steam engines that is rarely seen by the public. This includes a shed view with E3/3 No. 8522, that was converted during WW2 to operate using electricity from the overhead wires for steam raising. Then we see another wedding trip with the red set of 6-wheeled coaches. We then see more preparation work, including wiping finger marks off the coach windows - a real labour of love! One of the line's diesel shunters shuffles around, while crew members explain the background to the railway. We then take a cab ride to Sursee, and this is followed by sequences in the main line station there. There is a historic section of the DVD, showing a 1985 sequence with the diesel shunting the industrial area at Sursee (now carried out by SBB) and the method of operation at Sursee before the ST area became a car park. This is followed by images taken in 1962 in the snow and wonderful 1958 and 1960 filming of the unique FZm 1/2 No. 11. This wonderful steam railcar had a parcels compartment at one end, and a side balconied mail compartment at the other, with the steam boiler in the middle. The driver also operated the loco, so at station stops, he scuttles along the balcony, shovels some coal, and returns to the cab to set off again. It is such a pity that this unusual machine was not saved. The final sequence is modern day; with the onboard live musicians playing us out as we journey along the fairly level Suhrental. RS