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Aussichtswagen at Davos during the RhB Centenary celebrations in June 1989. Photo C.J.Freezer

## The Happy Wanderer

*Notes on the open top coaches of the Rhätische Bahn*

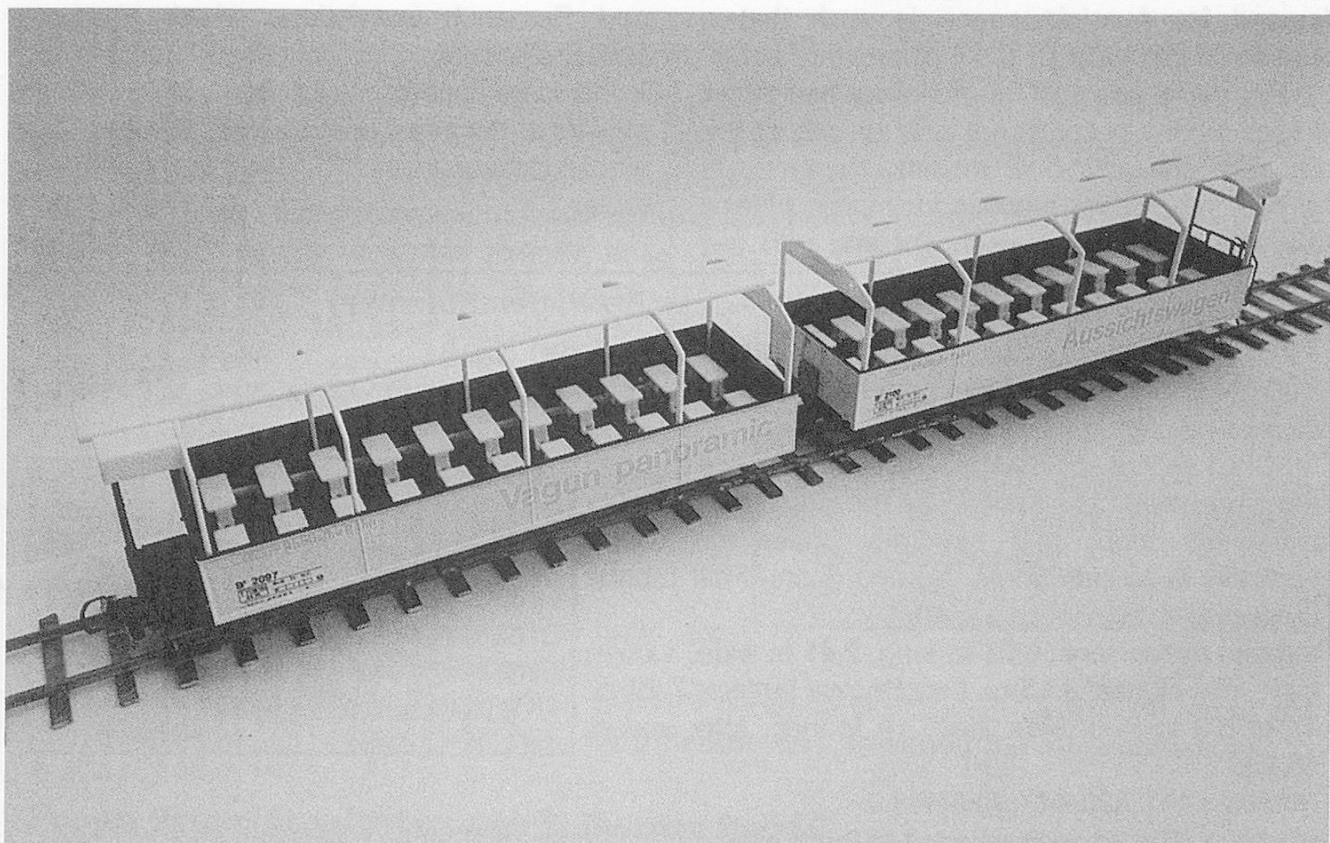
by M.South

When the BBC was making test colour broadcast transmissions in the early 1960s, every afternoon during the former shutdown period between 1pm and 4:30pm, it seems they showed the same test film. This was a 15 minutes or so documentary by, I believe, one of the major oil companies and told how the opening of the cable car between Bernina-Diavolezza and Diavolezza in 1955 had revitalised the war-depressed economy of this part of Graubünden in the south-east of Switzerland. For me, the part that stuck in my mind was a view of an open wagon on the rear of a Rhätian railway (RhB) Bernina line train, full of over-cheerful trippers singing *The Happy Wanderer*.

British Railways have, on the whole, been too staid (and perhaps too safety conscious) to deliberately employ roofless, open top passenger cars during the 20th century; the less said about the pre-Parliamentary conveyances of the 19th century, the better. Several British

tramway networks did have just such open top, single deck observation vehicles and, yes, I know about the Leek and Manifold Railway's transporter wagon to passenger car conversions and the Ashover Railway's ex-Wembley *Neverstop* railway cars. I also know about the Vale of Rheidol's *Lion's Cage* open mesh side cars and the Glyn Valley and Talyllyn Railway cars, but they all have/had fixed roofs. Perhaps the nearest we ever came on a 20th century public railway to an open passenger coach were the ex-Penrhyn 4-wheeled workmen's cars when, during a short period in the 1950s, they ran roofless in public service on the Talyllyn.

But I digress. A steady diet of this film at a tender age, over a five week period whilst confined to my bed, has forever burned it into my subconscious. I determined to find out more about these strange goods-cum-passenger wagons.



The Bemo HOm models of Aussichtswagen, without passengers. *Photo C.J.Freezer*

The attractions of such a vehicle to the Traffic department must be obvious. To meet passenger peaks, goods vehicles can be pressed into passenger service and then returned to goods revenue service for the rest of the year, thus minimising the amount of capital that would otherwise be tied up in two mono use vehicles.

On what became the Rhätian railway system, the Bernina Railway first introduced their Aussichtswagen, or open-top convertible passenger/goods cars, in 1926 with six purpose built vehicles, L381-L386. At the same time, four earlier 7-plank goods wagons, L351-L354, were lengthened and made convertible. There most useful saving in tare weight on the fiercely graded and curved Bernina line when compared to conventional coaches, plus their instant popularity with summer tourists, led to a further three 3-plank goods wagons being converted in 1929. These were L301, L303 and L306, which after conversion were renumbered M407, M408 and M410 respectively.

Meantime the Chur-Arosa Railway tested the water in 1927, but by 1931 all of their open

top passenger car conversions were back to dedicated goods only service. Perhaps this route's tunnels were too daunting for too many intending travellers.

Ultimately, in 1981, the *de-facto* permanent nature of the Bernina conversions was recognised when these three cars were re-sided, revamped and permanently added to the RhB's passenger stocklist as B2 2091, B2 2092 and B2 2093. All the Bernina cars have been cleared to operate over the entire Rhätian system, though in practice they never seem to have strayed off the Bernina line proper.

#### Editor's notes

I question the advantages of conversion, this would involve a good deal of work removing and replacing the seats and supports for the canvas covers, and mean that the wagons would need a thorough clean before putting back into service. They obviously are retained as passenger vehicles throughout the year.

Whilst they are not in regular use over the main Rhätian system, they do appear in special trains. They have also returned to the Arosa line and, from personal observation, appear to

be extremely popular. Indeed, on fine days the demand for Aussichtswagen is such that a case could be made for a supplementary fare!

For many years HOM modellers had either to scratchbuild or try to get hold of one of the very rare specialist-built models. However, in the past year Bemo produced a model, obtainable with or without passengers and with two

types of lettering, as the vehicles carry Italian and Romanch inscriptions. Hardly had the Bemo model reached the dealers that it was followed by another model, from D&R. Both are models of the latest conversions, B2 2097-2100 whose details are not included in the following tables.

### Rhätian Railway Aussichtswagen Summary

#### First batch (Aussichtswagen 1) Chur-Arosa Bahn (ChA)

Built 1903 by SWS, original panelling/siding detail not known. Centre vertical hung side doors / single end platform.

Modified as Ausschitswagen 1 in 1927 for use in open top observation car service by the addition of double passenger steps and handrails under the centre vertically hung side doors. No end doors. Four tubular crosswise safety hoops added.

Internal dimensions: 6.01 m long, 2.41 m wide, 1.00 m high. Wheelbase: 3.15 m. Length over buffers: 7.29 m. Tare: 5.9 tonnes. Max.Load: 10 tonnes. Max speed: 55 km/h.

Photos: L141 A20/447; A20/448.0

The wagons reverted to their original numbers in 1931 when transferred back to goods service. They were renumbered in 1943 by the RhB.

ChA	ChA	ChA	RhB
c.1914	1927	1931	1943
L161	L141‡	L161	Ek6041
L162	L142‡	L162	Ek6042
L163	L143‡	L163	Ek6043
L164	L144‡	L164	Ek6044

‡ Aussichtswagen 1

#### Second batch (Aussichtswagen 2/3) Bernina Bahn (BB)

Built in 1908 by SIG as (left to right) 4-panel single full length drop doors / end platform. All panels 4 + 2x1/2 horizontal planks high. Photos: L303, A20/319.

Rebuilt for open top observation car service (Aussichtswagen 2) and lengthened in 1929 to (bottom to top) 3-plank double full-length drop-side doors, two additional full length boards, one board space (solid on ends), one full length board; (left to right) 5 panels / end platform. End passenger 'stile' doors at both ends. Two overhead crosswise signs, one at each end of the vehicle + two intermediate crosswise safety hoops.

Internal dimensions: 7.23 m long, 2.33 m wide, 0.45 m high (to top of first three planks). Wheelbase: 5.5 m. Lrngth over buffers: 8.94 m. Tare: 5.3 tonnes. Max.load: 10 tonnes. Max.speed: 55 km/h.

Photos: A20/3; A20/7; A20/39; A20/70; A20/306; EA 7/81, p.433, photo 10; SAR pp158-7, plate 84.

Rebuilt in 1981 with solid 7-plank sides, no panels, single end platform and end passenger stile doors retained. Overhead crosswise signs and safety hoops removed and replaced by six overhead crosswise safety hoops with small central longitudinal roof. Sides lettered red on bright yellow; (blind end) 'flying snail' RhB logo + Vagun Panoramic (platform end) 'flying snail' RhB logo + Aussichtswagen (blind end).

BB	BB	RhB	RhB
1908	1929	1943	1981
L301	M407@	Kkl7125@	B2 2091§
L303	M408@	Kkl7126@	B2 2092§
L306	M410@	Kkl7127@	B2 2093§

@ Aussichtswagen 2

§ Aussichtswagen 3

Photos: B, page 69 lower (colour); B, page 83 lower; B, page 83 lower; B, page 157 lower right; EA9/81, page 567, photo 21.

Renumbered in 1943 when the Bernina Bahn was absorbed into the Rhätian Railway system.

### Third batch (Aussichtswagen 4) Bernina Bahn

Built 1911 by SWS as (left to right) 2 panels / 2 panel vertical hinged side doors / 3 panels / end platform. All panels 7 horizontal planks high. Photo: A20/320.

Rebuilt for open top observation car service and lengthened in 1926 (Aussichtswagen 4) to (left to right) 3 panels / 2 panels vertically hung side doors / 3 panels / end platform. All panels 7 horizontal planks high. End passenger 'stile' doors at each end. Two overhead crosswise signs, one at each end of vehicle + later two additional crosswise safety hoops added. Internal dimensions: 7.63 m long, 2.33 m wide, 1.00 m high. Wheelbase: 5.4 m. Length over buffers: 9.3 m. Tare: 5.6 tonnes. Load: 10 tonnes. Photos: A20/16; A20/18; A20/33; A20/139; A20/307; B, page 4; B, page 30; B, page 88 top right.

BB	BB	RhB	RhB
1911	1926	1943	1986
L351	L351†	Ek6057†	B <sub>2</sub> 2094
L352	L352†	Ek6058†	
L353	L353†	Ek6059†	
L354	L354†	Ek6060†	B <sub>2</sub> 2095
† Aussichtswagen 4			

Renumbered in 1943 when the Bernina Bahn was absorbed into the Rhätian Railway system.

By 1973 Ek6058 & Ek6059 had reverted to purely goods service; Ek6057 & Ek6060 remained as Aussichtswagen 4. In 1986 they were rebuilt and reliveried as Aussichtswagen 3 B<sub>2</sub>2094/2095.

### Fourth Batch (Aussichtswagen 5) Bernina Bahn

BB	RhB
1926	1943
L381	Ek6063
L382	Ek6064
L383	Ek6065
L384	Ek6066
L385	Ek6067
L386	Ek6068

Built in 1926 by SIG as Aussichtswagen 5 with (left to right) 3 panels / 2 panels vertically hung side doors / 2 panels / end platform. All panels 7 horizontal planks high. End passenger 'stile' doors at both ends. Two overhead crosswise signs, one at each end of the vehicle + later two additional crosswise safety hoops added. Internal dimensions: 7.73 m long, 2.33 m wide, 1.00 m high. Wheelbase: 5.5 m. Length over buffers: 9.3 m. Tare: 5.6 tonnes. Load: 10 tonnes. Max. speed: 55 km/h. Photos: A20/46; A20/37; A20/309a; A20/310; A20/321; B, page 59 lower.

Renumbered in 1943 when the Bernina Bahn was absorbed into the Rhätian Railway system.

By 1973 Ek6063 and Ek6065 had been withdrawn from service, Ek6064, Ek6067 and Ek6068 had reverted to purely goods service and Ek6066 remained in service as Aussichtswagen 5, reverting to goods service by 1989.

#### Key

SIG	Schweizer Industriegesellschaft of Neuhausen am Rheinflall, Switzerland
SWS	Schweizer Waggon- und Aufzügefabrik AG of Schilieren, Switzerland
A20	Archiv Nr. 20 Die Electricen und Diesel- Triebfahrzeuge Schweizerischer Eisenbahn <i>Die Gleichstromlinien Der Rhätischen Bahn</i> ; Verlag Eisenbahn; Villingen AG, Switzerland. ISBN 3-85649-020-5.
B	Bernina by Henning Wall, Verlag Schweers + Wall, Aachen, Germany, 1982. ISBN 3-921679-27-3.
EA	Eisenbahn Amateur monthly magazine, Bühler Druk AG, Postfach 8027 Zürich, Switzerland.
SAR	Switzerland's Amazing Railways by Cecil J. Allen. Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd. London, 1960.