REVIEWS

THE WORLD OF THE / DIE WELT DES GLACIER EXPRESS

Photographer: Robert Bösch. Authors: Iso Camartin and Paul Caminada. Published by: AS Verlag, Buhnrain 30, CH-8052 Zürich. Languages: English and German. 240 pages, 200 photos, mostly in colour, 9.5x12 inches, hardback. ISBN 3-909111-12-2. Price: SFr 78 or E49.80

That the forthcoming jubilee of 75 years of the Glacier Express would prompt a lot of publishers into action was to be expected. From our point of view, it is very fortunate that AS Publishers, well known for their beautifully produced books on the Railways of Switzerland, have decided to produce this book with English text as well as German!

Although I have made the journey on the "slowest express train in the world" many times, it is still quite an experience. Every year, a quarter of a million passengers make this 7 hours 30 minutes journey between the world famous resorts of St. Moritz and Zermatt. The scenery is breathtaking, with views as varied as those from the deep Gorges of the Rhine to the barren heights of the Oberalp Pass. In my opinion, you should break the journey at least once and continue next day. After reading and especially viewing this book, you will want to take a whole week anyway. To get the best views, you should - as the makers of this book have done - travel in the direction from Zermatt to St. Moritz. As this is contrary to the main passenger flow, you usually have more space too! Still, make sure you travel in a first class reserved seat in a panoramic coach - the only way to really appreciate how high the surrounding scenery is. The only pity is that you can no longer see the Glacier of the river Rhône, the original reason for the name of the train, as between Realp and Oberwald you are in a very long tunnel. To see the Rhône-Glacier itself, you will have to take a trip on the "Furka Bergstrecke" Steam Railway, operated by volunteers, which in summer still goes over the Furka Pass. In winter, huge avalanches and 40 to 100 foot snowdrifts make this journey impossible, which was the main reason for building the tunnel. The book dedicates ten pages to this route over the summit. The photographer has managed to capture the grandiose scenery particularly well. The tiny steam train in the narrow valley between the vast barren slopes, which still have traces of snow on them even in mid summer (p.75), is very typical of the journey. But landscapes are by no means the only theme of this book. No railway can exist without technology, and in the Alps this includes a lot of structures. Of the 91 tunnels and 291 bridges on the line (easy to remember, 200 more bridges than tunnels…), quite a few are shown. All are beautifully framed in the landscape. They are a fitting tribute to the many engineers and workers who originally build the line and those who still maintain it today. Some time ago, I was fortunate to have an unforgettable supper on an open car on the Landwasser viaduct. Even though we were all in a harness chained to the bottom of the car, sitting there over 200 ft above the valley floor, you get the impression of floating in the air. Imagine the masons of a hundred years ago, standing on a flimsy platform 200 ft in the air. The steel bars which originally supported the scaffolding, can still be seen a hundred years later, protruding from the stonework. It is clear the photographer is an experienced mountain climber. I know from where he must have taken many of the photos and would, even in my younger days, never have considered going up there myself! Some views are only possible with a helicopter. The view of Andermatt station from the air (p91) is a dream for all modellers! I could go on and on, but the editor has limited space. So don't just take my word for it, go and buy this great book for yourself! That is, if you cannot find anybody to give it to you…

This grand and heavy book (4.5lbs!) is the combined effort of three people. Robert Bösch is the photographer. The fact that his name is the only one on the cover shows how important the photographs are in this book. Mr Bösch, although working as a professional photographer, specialising in outdoor work, has diplomas in both geography and mountain climbing. In 2001 he climbed Mount Everest. But however beautiful the photographs are, the book would not have been complete without text. Of the co-authors, Iso Camartin is a lecturer on the various dialects of the Rätoromansch language. He is also an expert on the history and culture of the Canton of Graubünden. Paul Caminada is a civil engineer. He has written several books on the building of the Rhätischen Bahn, the Glacier Express, the development of the winter sports in the Alps and, yes, even on the construction of roads in the Canton of Graubünden. The text gives a lot of information, both historical and technical, yet is easy to read. That it sometimes becomes a bit lyrical can be excused. Anyone having experienced the grandiose scenery of the Alps will know what I mean.

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