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GRAUBÜNDEN IN THE NETHERLANDS

Ron Smith



The SRS is not the only Swiss Railways Society – there is a very active one in the Netherlands, the Vereniging Spoorgroep Zwitserland (VSZ) that produces a high quality A4 quarterly magazine ‘*Signalglocke*’. The VSZ have some great modeller members, and one is Niek Talsma who lives in Alphen aan den Rijn. He works as a civil engineer for the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, and this engineering skill is apparent in his railway modelling, something he says he has been doing since his 9th birthday. The fascination with Switzerland started in 1968, when a family holiday (by train of course) was spent there, prompting Niek to change his HO layout to a Swiss theme, a bias that has never faded. In 1990 he changed to HOm when he bought a Bemo RhB Ge4/4 II No.602.

Niek has built a magnificent HOm layout ‘*Graubünden*’, and exhibits it three or four times a year. In February it was at ‘Model Rail Glasgow’ and it will be at the NEC, Birmingham, on November 23rd/24th. The layout has an excellent website www.graubuendenbahn.nl that is well worth a visit. Apart from details of future appearances it gives much more detail than I can write here, and more photos too! The layout has a frontage of 8m x 0.5m and takes up a floor space of 10m x 4m, as trains disappear through tunnels into loops behind the scenes, storage yards and so on. Unusually, Niek operates the layout from the front. It features Schiers station where trains cross, wait, depart in three directions, and make connections with PostAutos. The whole layout was a star of the Glasgow show (where the illustrations were taken) with a steady crowd of people watching the passenger and freight trains, which run at a scale steady speed. There is always something moving to catch the eye and a great many cameo scenes to look for. All the rolling stock is Bemo, with 11 RhB/FO locos, 26 RhBFO coaches, and 35 RhB goods wagons, all from the 1950 to 1980 period. Schiers was chosen for the layout as pre-2000 the station was a standard RhB one with a passing loop, some sidings, and a line going off to a gravel works – this is featured on the layout as a connecting service with the FO. This high quality layout really gives the right impression of Switzerland. Being so large and complicated, it takes six man-hours to erect, and three man-hours to dismantle and fit back into a trailer and a VW

Polo. When at home the layout is too large to be put up, but is repaired, maintained and rebuilt in Niek’s own workshop.

In The Netherlands the VSZ is split into five regions each with its own accommodation for HO and HOm layouts, and meeting either weekly or fortnightly. It also organises visits to Switzerland. The VSZ is currently working on a database of all Swiss stations and the more important bridges. Occasionally there is a joint meeting in Rotterdam of all VSZ regions, where all HOm and HO layouts are linked together – which would be worth seeing! My thanks go to Niek for his help with this article and I will try to bring more news from the Netherlands and the VSZ in the future. 

