

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Railways Society  
**Band:** - (2014)  
**Heft:** 118

**Artikel:** Südostbahn Byways  
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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854131>

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# Südostbahn Byways

Jason Sargerson



SOB RABe 526 at Nesslau station.

Photos: Jason Sargerson

In 2012 when staying in northeast Switzerland I wanted to visit Nesslau-Neu St Johan, but on the day I had free I missed the chance because of a cancelled *Voralpen Express* from St Gallen. The following year (2013) I was again keen to reach Nesslau, travelling from Filisur via Chur to Ziegelbrücke, and then on to Uznach. Here I met the first difficulty, the *Voralpen Express* connection to Watwil was nowhere in sight. On consulting staff on the platform, it appeared that there was a bus to replace the train. On the scenic journey by bus it became clear that the bus would not make the train connection at Watwil. I thought, of course, the train would be held or the timetable altered, but no such luck. So at Watwil I had 50 minutes to wait for the next train to Nesslau. Eventually I was on my first SOB train of the day on the branch down the Thur valley to Nesslau. The serrated fingers of the Churfirsten range provide a fine backdrop to the valley. Nesslau is a religious centre with a Benedictine Abbey and a Baroque Church. There are also many walks from here along with onward bus connections.

Back to Watwil and on the bus again to Uznach. There were superb views of the Zürichsee, down to Rapperswil and the islands. At Uznach, there was a 45-minute wait for the *Voralpen Express*, so I took the train to Rapperswil, changing there to travel to Pffafikon and on to Wädenswil. At Wädenswil, another bus replaced the train to Biberbrugg, this time an expected change. Normally this is an effortless, smooth uphill ride in the Flirt RABe Class 526 4-car EMUs. These are superb units with a special Darth Vader-like breathing – I always expect ‘the voice’ for the train announcements! Again there are fine views back across the blue Zürichsee, back towards the causeway and Rapperswil. I always think of the Zürichsee as a friendly lake, with lots of people sunbathing and swimming, and plenty of birdlife including Great Crested Grebe and Herons. Biberbrugg is the

junction for Einsiedeln, the *Voralpen Express* stops here on its way to Luzern and there are many walks on the famous Rothenthurm moor. I took the *Voralpen Express* back to Pffafikon, changing onto the *Glarner Sprinter* to Ziegelbrücke, then onto the connection to Chur and back to Filisur. A excellent day on lesser travelled routes, when even the bus trips were good. +

BELOW: The *Voralpen Express* headed by Re 456 at Uznach.

BOTTOM: SOB RABe 526 at Wattwil.

