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Going round in Circles

Number 1

Steve Buck starts an occasional series of articles about Ticino trips

Photos: Steve Buck

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For many people a visit to Switzerland means a holiday in the Bernese Oberland around Interlaken, or in the Graubunden to see the RhB in all its splendour. There is another part of Switzerland where the sun shines warmly and there are not too many tourists. This is the area south of the Alps, namely the Ticino, where Bellinzona is the Cantonal Capital and Locarno and Lugano the main towns. As someone who has spent quite a few holidays staying in Lugano I know there are many excursion possibilities in the area; many can be made into circular trips to add to the variety. None of them involve early starts or late finishes. In other words you leave after breakfast and are back in time for your evening meal.

Leaving Lugano at 09.12, with 20-minutes to change platforms in Bellinzona, you arrive in Locarno at 10.13 with time to spare to wander down the stairs to the Centovalli line platforms ready for the 10.49 departure to Domodossola.

Those who want to spend longer over their breakfasts can leave Lugano at 09.27 and changing at Giubiasco still catch the 10.49 which is one of the SSIF-operated (the Italian partner of FART, the Swiss organisation that runs the Centovalli line) panoramic trains. Sadly these attract a €2/person supplement for travel. You will find a description of the route in Martin Fisher's superb Swiss Travel Guide No.5 which covers the Ticino and is still available from SRS sales. What the book does not tell you is that, as noted in Kursbuch Table 620, this panoramic train conveys a buffet for part of its journey serving delicious Italian coffee. Just as the metre gauge train is smaller than its standard gauge cousins, so the buffet is a very small trolley to go down the narrow gangways and light enough to be heaved on and off trains at intermediate stations having low platforms.

Just as the starting station in Locarno is an underground cavern, so the terminal platform in Domodossola, where you



arrive at 12.36, is akin to a small cave, from which stairs (or a lift) lead up to the Italian State Railway (FS) platforms above. Assuming that the train is on time from Milan (not always a wise assumption!), departure on a Class 610 Pendolino is at 12.48 as far as the next station stop at Brig. As much of this journey is in the Simplon Tunnel, there is not much scenery to look at on this leg of the trip. However things get better on arrival in Brig at 13.16 where, on turning left from the station forecourt along Nordstrasse, we find the Migros restaurant where a superb lunch, either snack or full, can be obtained at very reasonable prices.

Having been rested and refreshed, it is back to the station forecourt, where the trains of the Matterhorn Gottard Bahn (MGB) can be found for the next leg of our scenic journey through to Andermatt, and on to Göschenen. Boarding the train due to leave at 14.23 we travel through the Goms calling at every station, until we come to the Furka tunnel entrance at Oberwald. Hopefully you get a clear run through because there's nothing pleasant about sitting on a stationary train in the middle of the tunnel and hearing another train rumbling towards you, getting louder all the time. As it rushes past, you realise that you're sitting in a passing loop, and still have to wait for a second train to pass before starting off towards the tunnel exit at Realp, with its view of the preserved line over the Furka Pass. Running down the Reuss Valley you soon arrive at Andermatt, where after an eight minute wait for connecting trains you depart down the steeply inclined rack line to arrive in Göschenen at 16.42. As the MGB trains arrive in the station yard, you have eight minutes to find the subway and cross to the centre platform for the 16.50 inter-region towards Bellinzona and Locarno. You might be lucky to find this headed by a Re 4/4II still in red and grey 'Swiss Express' livery, and the train may have one of the SBB's superb 1st Class 'Panorama' coaches for the 63-minute journey to Ticino's capital. Here a "TiLo" FLIRT will be on the 18.03 S10 all-stations service to Lugano arriving at 18.33, just in time to freshen-up for dinner. 



1. Tilo Flirt 524005 at Locarno on arrival from Bellinzona.
2. FART ABe 4/6 unit Number 53 arrives at Ponte Brolle.
3. SSIF panoramic unit en route.
4. SBB Class 610 Pendolino at Brig.
5. MGB train from Brig on its arrival at Göschenen.

6. No.11109 heads an inter-region train for Locarno at Göschenen.
7. An ICN unit at Lugano.
8. Tilo Flirt 524014 at Bellinzona.

