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Landslip disrupts the Brienz Rothorn Bahn

Mike Ellis


A clear view of just what has happened. The track, is some 3-4m out of alignment, completely free of the trackbed and now buried under a thick layer of clay, trees and boulders.

All photos: BRB



On the 24th July severe summer storms and extended rainfall resulted in a major mudslide taking place on the Brienz Rothorn Bahn (BRB) just below the 4km marker on the section immediately above Planalp. The ensuing damage included 70m of track work swept away from the track bed and a layer of debris 2m thick deposited onto, and around, the route. This, together with completely blocked storm drains and an interrupted service, has had quite a detrimental impact on the railway's short summer season. The clearance work naturally took priority over other duties and BRB staff from all disciplines were drafted-in to work on re-establishing the infrastructure to enable services to resume to Rothorn Kulm. Whilst a reduced steam service was maintained for visitors between Brienz and Planalp, works trains, along with imported heavy equipment, were in use to remove the debris and enable an assessment of necessary repair work to be undertaken. The preliminary clearance operation took about a week before service could be resumed to the railway's isolated mountain hotel at 2255m above sea level. With improved weather after the incident the trains resumed timetable running again and were well patronized. The accompanying photos give a good idea of just what confronted the civil engineering team and indicate what had to be done to regain normality on this popular railway in the heart of the Bernese

Alps. The estimated cost of the necessary works, plus loss of revenue, to the railway's fragile budget is currently estimated at some CHF300,000 (approx. £200,000). The railway receives no external financial support so it is hoped that donations will go some way to balancing the loss facing the BRB management. If SRS Members wish to pledge support please contact Michael.ellis@brb.ch

However, as is often the case in such situations, positive aspects are to be found: the affected area is, as luck would have it, not yet refurbished under the project to renew the entire track infrastructure. The railway was also able to maintain, as mentioned, a reduced timetable to Planalp during the immediate aftermath of the incident. Of higher importance of course is the knowledge that no injuries occurred and, that there was no damage to locomotives and rolling stock. Writing in the middle of August the site looks a mess both above the line, and below it where several hundred cubic metres of mud, debris and rock have been deposited. The track though has been replaced, re ballasted enabling normal service to be resumed. 

LEFT: From this vantage point across the valley above Planalp it is clear to see how the natural forces at work culminated in the incident on the 24th July 2014.

BELOW: Amazingly the fishplate bolts have held and this despite the considerable stress upon them. The damage has therefore been unwittingly extended either side of the actual slip area.

