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Appenzeller Bahnen



Richard Jones explores the railways serving two of Switzerland's smallest cantons

BDe4/4 No 41 waits at Wasserauen with a Gossau service October 2015.

Photo: Bryan Stone

I fell in love with Switzerland and her railway network half a century ago and have courted her many times over the intervening fifty years. I never tire of the grandeur of the vistas, the charm of the countryside and still have a thrill travelling, what have now become classic rail routes, through the Alps. However, this year I was determined not to be complacent and go back, once again, over well-known tracks. I dug out my Swiss rail atlas and found something, to me at least, completely new. In the north east of the country there seemed to be a very compact and almost self-contained network. Not overlooked by the high and famous peaks, but certainly surrounded with enough altitude to warrant a few cable cars and 76km of various gauge railways worthy of investigation.

In terms of population the two half-cantons of Appenzell are among the smallest of the Swiss cantons. With just over 15,500 people Appenzell Innerrhoden (AI) is the 26th, and

smallest; and after Basel-Stadt is the second smallest in area. Appenzell Ausserrhoden (AR) is the 21st with 53,000 people and 23rd in size. Its capital is Herisau at 771m, whilst that of AI is Appenzell town itself at 775m, surprisingly the highest cantonal capital in the country, with Herisau being the second highest. The cantons both joined the Confederation in 1513 and are completely surrounded by Canton St Gallen (SG). All the guidebooks describe Appenzell as unique, while still encompassing just about everything that hallmarks Switzerland. They are the location of the Appenzeller Bahnen (AB), at least that is what the network of six lines became in 2006, when the number of constructing and managing companies finally totally joined up under one umbrella.

I entered this magical land by transferring from the main-line SBB at St Gallen itself and taking the 20km ride on the AB to Appenzell. I am not an expert on motive power details but the whole system normally seemed to be worked by three-car trains, generally a motor coach, a trailer car and a driving trailer. The half-hourly service departs outside St Gallen's main station and before long moves onto a 940m section of rack-assisted (Riggenbach) track for its climb out of the main valley. As has been reported in *Swiss Express* (No.128 – Dec.2016) work is currently in hand to replace this section with an adhesion line running in an 'S' alignment tunnel underneath the current route. This section of route operates very much like a tram running next to the road, or even in the road, for most of the journey to Gais. Here a 7.6km self-contained spur line comes in from Altstätten (SG), utilising a section of Straub rack to assist on the steep 450m climb out of the Rhein Valley, as it serves seven intervening halts en-route on its hourly 19 minute trip. Two dedicated motor coaches (BDeh 4/4 Nos.16/17), just with driving

Descending to St Gallen on the soon to be replaced, 10% grade Riggenbach rack section Oct 2015.


Photo: Bryan Stone



trailers, work this line. Having left Gais the “through” train we took terminates in Appenzell, having taken 43 minutes for its journey.

There is an alternative AB route to the SBB main line (at Gossau), with trains originating from Wasserauen some 7km from Appenzell, the hourly service taking 39 minutes and travelling via Herisau, where they connect with Südostbahn services between St Gallen and Luzern. However, some care is necessary if looking for main line connections as not all SBB trains stop at Gossau. This route is more scenic than the run from St Gallen. My journey, in February 2016, drifted through a snow-covered landscape in almost total silence - gone, it seems, is the screech of flanges on sharp curves. Spring and summer with alpine blooms and hundreds of waymarked walks could certainly draw me back.

The AB line between St Gallen and Trogen is very much a tramway using straight forward adhesion units and serving several urban halts before ending in the fresh air resort of Trogen. When the new tunnel is completed this line will become an extension of the route from Appenzell, with new Stadler EMUs running through a rebuilt St Gallen station. Work on this was in progress during last winter. Further east the AB line between Rheineck & Walzenhausen is more interesting and has been featured in *Swiss Express*, most recently in No. 127 – September 2016. This one-car train running less than 2km gives the impression that it should be a funicular, particularly on arrival at the top station. It is not, but until a major rebuilding in 1958 it was, and a clue to this is its unusual gauge of 1200mm. The original 1.4km very steep 25% - 1 in 4) funicular section is now controlled by a Riggenbach rack system, whilst its 600m flat section into the SBB station at Rheineck was once a tramway. The final section of the AB that serves the cantons is the standard gauge Rorschach–Heiden Bergbahnen, a Riggenbach rack-assisted line for most of its 5.7km length. The AB also manages the Frauenfeld-Wil Bahn that traverses parts of cantons St Gallen and Thurgau, but that is another story!

Truly the Appenzell Region has much to offer, it is a world within a world, miniature Switzerland inside little Switzerland. It has its own character but still offers everything that can be found in the country as a whole, including railway variety and interest. 

APPENZELLER BAHNEN

Line	Date Commenced/ Date Electrified	Length	Height climbed	Gauge	%Rack Assisted
St Gallen to Appenzell via Gais	1889/1931	20.0km	116m	1000 mm	4.7
Gossau to Wasserauen via Appenzell	1875 to 1912/ 1933	31.1km	234m	1000mm	0.0
Altstätten to Gais	1911/1911	7.65km	450m	1000mm	42.6
St Gallen to Trogen	1903/1903	9.8km	330m	1000mm	0.0
Rorschach to Heiden Bergbahnen	1875/1930	5.47km	396m	1435mm	96.3
Rheineck to Walzenhausen	1896/1958	1.96km	272m	1200mm	64.0



1. BDeh/4 No 14 with all over advert enters Appenzell from St Gallen Jan 2017. Photo: Richard Jones

2. The strub rack and 16% grade starts as trains leave Altstätten Stadt station. Photo: Bryan Stone

3. Driving trailer 121 waits to leave Appenzell Oct 2015. Photo: Bryan Stone

4. BDe4/4 No 41 waits at Wasserauen October 2015. Photo: Malcom Bulpitt