

For our 1st class passengers

Our on-board staff will be happy to provide any extra information you require. All you have to do is ask!

If you are travelling from Oberwald to Realp, simply read the guide in reverse order.

Note: *Standing on open platforms* is permitted, but entirely at your own risk. **Be aware of sparks coming from the chimney of the engine.** In tunnels, please remain in your carriage and close the windows.

Realp – Tiefenbach

Shortly after departing the DFB station building, you will see our support yard with its canteen, depot, workshop building, coaling station and water standpipe on the right. This is where we service and repair our locomotives and carriages, most of which are over 100 years old.

On the right, you will (briefly) see the historic entry signal for Realp, a Hipp's turning disc. An electrical impulse releases a weight which turns the disc to the correct position (stop or go). After 20 rotations, the weight has to be pulled back up using a crank. As no mechanical cables are required, this type of signal was very popular on the alpine railroads.



Around 1 km out of Realp, our climb begins at an 11% gradient. The train will travel at walking pace until the cogwheels on the locomotive and carriages lock into the gear rack.

We cross the Furkareuss river for the first time on the *Wilerbrücke* bridge. This steel girder bridge replaced the original stone arch version which collapsed in 1955.

The next part of the line (with three short tunnels) is built along a number of retaining walls which are often eroded during floods. The stretch is constantly undergoing extensive and expensive renovations.

400 m after the third tunnel, you will see the Steffenbach Gorge, a notorious avalanche path, on the left. The *Steffenbachbrücke* stone arch bridge was built here in 1913, but was destroyed before the first train could cross it. A steel replacement was constructed in 1925. It is formed of three parts. The central part of the bridge is folded down every autumn using cable winches and pulleys, and brought under cover behind the abutment on the valley side. The upper and lower thirds are then lifted and pulled back along the rails to minimise avalanche damage to the line.



Far below you on the right, you will see a water catchment system. Water from the Furkareuss is guided through an 8 km long tunnel to the Göschenalp reservoir, and then on to the Swiss Federal Railway's hydroelectric power stations at Göschenen, Wassen and Amsteg.

The locomotive will be topped up with water at Tiefenbach station. We will stop for around 7 minutes, giving you plenty of time to get off for a couple of snapshots.

Tiefenbach - Furka

We will now cross the Furkareuss and Sidelenbach waterways on beautiful stone bridges. The line follows a sloping path to the north of the Furkareuss, gaining height continuously. Enjoy the view over the mountain landscape and flora (alpine roses bloom until mid-July) and don't worry if the stoker has to shoo a couple of cows from the line with his shovel.



Depending on the timetable, the train will stop for 20 to 30 minutes at Furka station, 2160 m (7086 ft) above sea level, as some of our locomotives have to be turned for the descending part of our journey. This will give you plenty of time to get a drink and snack from our buffet, pick up a memento at the souvenir stand, or maybe purchase some local dried sausage or alpine cheese to take back to your friends at home.

Furka - Muttbach

The 1,874 m long *Scheiteltunnel* slopes downwards towards the Valais side at a 30 - 35‰ gradient. Travelling in the opposite direction, a diesel locomotive from Muttbach station helps to push the train along as the line has no gear rack at this point.

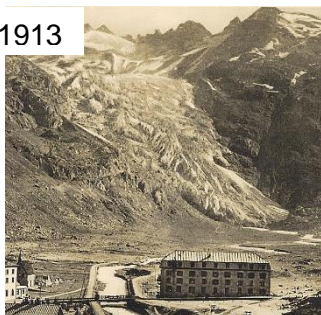
Geologically speaking, the tunnel is unfavourably positioned between the Aar and Gotthard massifs. The stone here was shattered and crushed when the Alps were thrust into existence. When the tunnel was built 100 years ago, the excavation was incredibly difficult, and continuous, expensive renovation work is still required to this day.



There is often a build-up of avalanche snow at the tunnel entrance in Muttbach. At the start of our 2015 season, the snow lay 8 metres deep here. In 1999, it was up to 18 metres.

Muttbach - Gletsch

1913



Soon after we depart Muttbach-Belvédère station, you will see all that remains of the formally imposing *Rhône Glacier*: a stark rock face. From 1930 to 1981, passengers on the famous Glacier Express were astounded by the sight

of this great mass of ice, which in those days reached down to the bottom of the valley.

After crossing Furkastrasse, the line gradually descends towards the valley floor at Gletsch. In 1965, steam locomotive no. 10 was travelling along here driving a snow plough when an avalanche fell, throwing it down into the valley. The

stoker and two passengers were killed, and the driver seriously injured. Our drivers always sound the whistle and lower their caps at this point to remember their unfortunate colleagues.

We are now approaching the *Hotel Settlement of Gletsch*. The Hotel Glacier du Rhône, opened in 1856 by a Zermatt hotelier named Seiler, was at that time only around 100 m away from the front of the glacier. The entire valley, including the hillsides and the glacier itself, belonged to him. When Joseph Seiler had to give up some of the land for the railway to be built in 1910, he arranged a contract to ensure that every train would stop for an hour in Gletsch, and that the last train of each day would terminate there.



The locomotive will be topped up with water at Gletsch, giving you some time to take a few photos. The small station building has been kept as it was back in 1914 when the then BFD (Brig - Furka - Disentis) railway between Brig and Gletsch was opened.

Gletsch - Oberwald

After another crossing with Furkastrasse, the line again slopes downwards towards the Rottenschlucht canyon, with a 557 m long helical tunnel to counteract the steep gradient. Before we enter the tunnel, look out to the right to see 56 metres down the rails at the tunnel exit.

Once we exit the tunnel, we cross the Rotten (as the Rhône is called here), as it foams wildly out of the canyon.

The journey through the larch and pine tree forest that follows is not particularly difficult for locomotives travelling towards the valley, which by this point are starting to run on a low fire. Climbing the mountain, on the other hand, sees a lot of sparks coming from the chimney. For this reason, there is a *sprinkler system* in place to protect the woods from damage. In dry weather, every steam train travelling towards the mountain is followed by a diesel locomotive with a fire extinguishing system and fire crew on board.

Before we arrive at Oberwald station we cross Furkastrasse once again, this time within the gear rack track. The gear rack sits 6 cm above the street. However, if no train is coming, the only mechanism of its kind in Europe lowers it to street level.

DFB staff are all volunteers. We hope that you have enjoyed your journey with us, and thank you for your visit. You can find plenty of mementos to remind you of this special day in our souvenir shop (next to the post bus stop on the station square).

Please recommend our service to your friends, neighbours and relatives, and come back and see us soon. We wish you a safe and pleasant journey home.

- Travel distance Realp – Oberwald 17,630 m
- Height difference Oberwald – Furka 794 m
- Coal consumption approx. 600 kg (easy journey)
- Water consumption approx. 5,000 l (easy journey)
- Year of construction Locs. 1, 4 and 9: 1913; Loc. 6 1902
- 1914 Brig – Gletsch section opened (BFD)
- 1926 Gletsch – Disentis section opened (FO)
- 1941 Electrification (coal shortage)
- 1981 Line abandoned (Base Tunnel)
- 1990 Loc. 1, 9, 704, 708 brought back from Vietnam
- 1992 - 2010 Gradual restart of steam train operations on the Realp - Oberwald line

For more information on timetables, reservations, employment opportunities (as volunteers) and donations, please visit www.dfb.ch.