

The coal-bunker of N° 1 is full and renovation work may soon start.

The high-profile sponsoring campaign for the first and oldest RhB steam locomotive from 1889 has been successfully completed. 595 rail enthusiasts from 11 nations have donated almost one million Swiss francs to the independent 'RHÆTIA project group' enabling the Rhaetian Railway's founding locomotive to steam again. For the project group, the key phase of physically restoring this valuable steam locomotive now begins. When completed, the locomotive will be back on the RhB rail network conveying guests and enhancing the historical tourist travel on offer in the Swiss canton of Graubünden.

Hearty volunteer work generously rewarded

The 'RhB steam friends association' from Bonaduz and the Samedner 'Club 1889' stated: "We receive many historical vehicles from the Rhaetian Railway" and in 2018 started a big fundraising campaign with much passion and motivation under their Bergüner umbrella organization 'Historic RhB'. Under the motto 'N° 1 needs coal' and with a dedicated donation homepage, we reached out to many rail enthusiasts and those interested in preserving steam technology.

These people, internationally, have been very generous in their support for the first and oldest steam locomotive with the attractive name "RHÆTIA", which has been out of service since 2014 due to a multitude of age related problems.

The donation campaign started in November 2018 and by March 2021 donations had accounted for 940,000 francs. This matched the budgeted sum for full restoration. In order to save money, the fundraising campaign was carried out solely by volunteers pooling much creativity and dedication. The two associations are pleasantly surprised that the fundraising campaign can end after only two years.

The RhB helped with coal collection

What the two associations have achieved in just two years under the joint 'Project Group RHÆTIA' is not to be underestimated and indeed testifies to the wide interest in the historic rolling stock of the RhB internationally. On November 9, 2018, the RhB presented the project group with large-scale advertising on one of its locomotives at the start of the fundraising campaign. This was done in November 2018 as part of a small celebration in the main workshop in Landquart officially inaugurated when RhB Director Renato Fasciati handed it over to Christian Meyer, President of the Steam Friends. It was then that the nickname 'coal locomotive' was coined.

This more modern electric RhB locomotive has been a successful ambassador for donations. Locomotives with large-scale advertising attract a lot of attention from rail enthusiasts at home and abroad and are much photographed, discussed in Internet forums and modeled. The central element of the 'coal locomotive' is a donation barometer, which consists of a bar with 19 white fields. Every time more than 50,000 francs was collected, a symbolic charcoal briquette was added.

Spontaneous solidarity and original support

Just a few weeks after the coal locomotive was launched, four German model railway manufacturers became aware of the fundraising campaign. They were spontaneously ready to have the advertising locomotive produced in different scales and to put part of the sales proceeds into the project group's appeal.

Several private collection campaigns illustrated that there were almost no limits to the imagination: The donation campaign also included the Schiers August village festival in. A two-day donation excursion on the 28th + 29th September 2019 ran with a steam train from Samedan via Davos to Landquart. The trip met with a great response in the specialist media and two major sponsors: The Raiffeisenbank Engiadina Val Müstair presented a major check on the platform in Samedan to Fredy Pfister. President of Club 1889 Christian Meyer received a check for 25,000 francs from the Prättigau / Davos region at Davos Platz station, which represented one franc per tax-paying resident.

In addition to these bigger events and partnerships, there were countless smaller but all the same important, creative, innovative initiatives and events that contributed to achieving the donation target. The final sixty francs being donated by rail enthusiast, ten year old Niklas.

Graubünden sets preservation status on the locomotive

The canton of Graubünden announced in a press release on the 22nd August 2019 that it was supporting the restoration project of RhB steam locomotive N° 1 with a maximum of CHF 160,000. For this commitment the RHÆTIA project group submitted a dossier in advance, which helped sway the cantonal monument preservation team. The canton of Graubünden emphasizes the benefit of restoring 'RHÆTIA', a founding element from the years 1889 to 1897, which will brought both the technical and tourist boom and Rhaetian Railway to life.

Work will soon start

It is expected that the project group will be able to tackle and commission the main work of the refurbishment from the second half of the year: The boiler will be overhauled in Great Britain and must be equipped with a new, copper firebox. This 'energy center' of the steam locomotive, where the fire burns, has to be rebuilt carefully and with a lot of expertise by experienced specialists.

Members of the Club 1889 have refurbished important fittings from the locomotive during the past few months. For examples: the historical speedometer and numerous valves and controls on the steam boiler.

The RHÆTIA project group would like to thank all donors, patrons and sympathizers from the bottom of their hearts. Last but not least, the people of Graubünden for their unbelievable 'genorosity' that was shown to the organisers.

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