

In “pension” after 130 years, new rails on Monte Generoso

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You still can read a number on the rails: **1889**. It was the year when the rails were built on Monte Generoso. It was the year of the construction of the line and those rails are the ones which, trip after trip, brought up and down millions people for 130 years. But in the last weeks has opened one of the biggest yards **in the history of the narrow-gauged rack railway which climbs up the mountain, and the construction will continue until 2023.**

It will take 4 years indeed to replace all the 9 kilometres, with men and machines that will challenge snow and frost. **“We’re going to do it in winter, from March to November, using the closure period of the railway** and the weather indeed will be the biggest incognita of that work”, says the project manager Pietro Brenni. Big jobs, explained by numbers: “At least 1,400 tons of iron will be removed and brought down, and 2,000 tons of iron will be brought on the top and laid between the 17 kilometres of rack and same number for rails, 7 full changes and 13,500 sleepers; moreover there will be 10,000 cubic metres of gravel for the rails ballasts”, continues Brenni.

22 million francs were provided by the program “Percento Culturale Migros”, of which the railway is part since 1941 thanks to Gottlieb Duttweiler, the founder of Migros **for a work that through iron, rocks and steel is still very artisanal.** “Considered the logistic difficulty, the majority of the work is made by hand. The joints of the sleepers with the rails and the rack are made with absolute precision and it will be made by a dozen of men who can lay about 30 metres per day”, underlines Stefano Rossi, director of the headquarter in Lumino of Sersa Group AG.

The material for the first phase of the construction is already on the mountain after 6 months of work to produce it. “First we cut the old rails, sleepers and racks and then we begin to dig”, explains Roberto Ballina, manager of Tensol Ral. “Part of the embankment is cleaned up in place and used again immediately for the base of the excavation and then the workers lay down the new structures”. It’s a work that requires high precision “**because we had to make coincide the new rack with the old one**, so that it can connects with the existent part and allow the normal functioning of the railway in those years of work”.

The construction, which among the staff of Monte Generoso railway is experienced as a new page of story for the project born to connect Hotel Schweizerhof to the top at 1704 metres and for which today anyone can participate by **“adopting” a part of the rails**. Another time with other numbers: “If we want to make a comparison then with 2 million francs in just 16 months the 9 kilometres rails were built starting from zero, since March 1889 until June 1890. Today, also thanks to the great attention to the environment, the project has begun 4 years ago and it will take 4 years to finish. **The hope is that it will last 130 more years**”.

di Translated by Lorenzo Seveso (Reviewed by Prof. Robert Clarke)