

New funicular at Neuchâtel

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Opening day - lower end - cable wheel, detectors etc.

Just before I left for Switzerland, a good friend told me that a new funicular running from the main station to the Jardin Anglais, near the University and the lakeside, was to be opened on 27 April as part of the celebrations surrounding the completion of renovation which had been in progress for a couple of years. He suggested that I might be able to meet him there after the return of a trip by the official party on an ICN, named that day *Jean Piaget*, in recognition of a world-renowned neuchâteloise psychologist, to Biel and back.

By sheer chance, I arrived just as the official party was making its way to the upper terminus of the new line which is situated at the lake end of the main subway connecting the platforms at the main station.

In difficult conditions, I did my best to take some pictures of the event with the *Swiss Express* in mind then joined the last run of the cable funicular cars which took the party to the official dedication and opening ceremony in the spacious hall of the lower terminus.

Because of some slight operating difficulties, it did not get there until after the speeches had started. The biggest laugh was when one speaker said he would be brief!

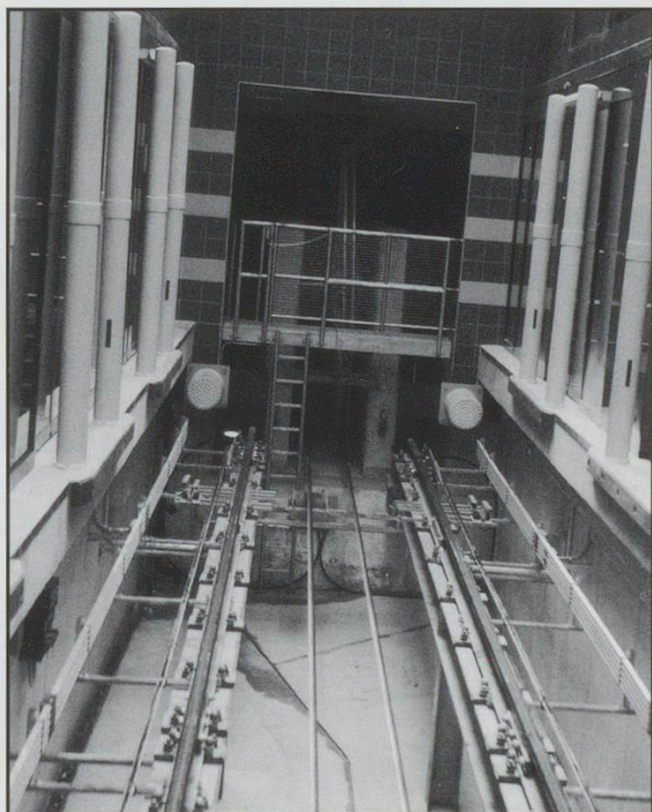
Planning for the funicular, which rejoices in the title "Fun'ambule" - I take that to mean literally, a walk-in funicular - began four years ago and construction two years later. It is a great credit to designers and engineers that this difficult project was completed so quickly.

The route had to burrow under houses, a street and public gardens and describes a winding course with varying gradients which can be well appreciated as the cars pass through the broad tunnel lit throughout its length.

Operation is fully automatic. Travel is smooth and speedy, the journey time being just over one minute which allows for a service interval of three minutes.

A very interesting feature is that the cars, which are fully accessible to incapacitated persons and each capable of holding 126 people, have a self-levelling arrangement which is

Approach to lower terminus.





Crowded car No. 2 at Neuchâtel Gare about to leave.

claimed to be unique although I have seen a rather more crude system in use on a short line to a hotel near Karlsruhe.

The constructors worked closely with local archaeologists. Artefacts from earlier years included shards of pottery, vases, flint arrow heads and animal bones some of which dated back 6000 years. Near the lake, five metres below the surface of the soil, a Neolithic village

site dating from 3500 BC was unearthed. Some examples of the finds are mounted in a glass cabinet at the lower station.

A haut-relief, by the Spanish-born artist, Wavier Vilató, adorns the main hall of the lower station. The artist was noted for adopting the material of the modern age, plastic, in performing his various works and which he developed from 1969. His son gave an account of the earlier life of his father and the particular work which is finished in copper.

End of opening ceremony at lower station - Jardin Anglais. The haut-relief sculpture is very prominent.



The funicular is the remnant of a much more ambitious scheme part of which would have involved the extension of the tramway from Place Pury to the foot of the funicular although, unsurprisingly, no mention of this was made at the opening. The choice of Neuchâtel for the site of Expo 2002, which will be on the lake, helped the funicular project. It cost SFr 13.5 million of

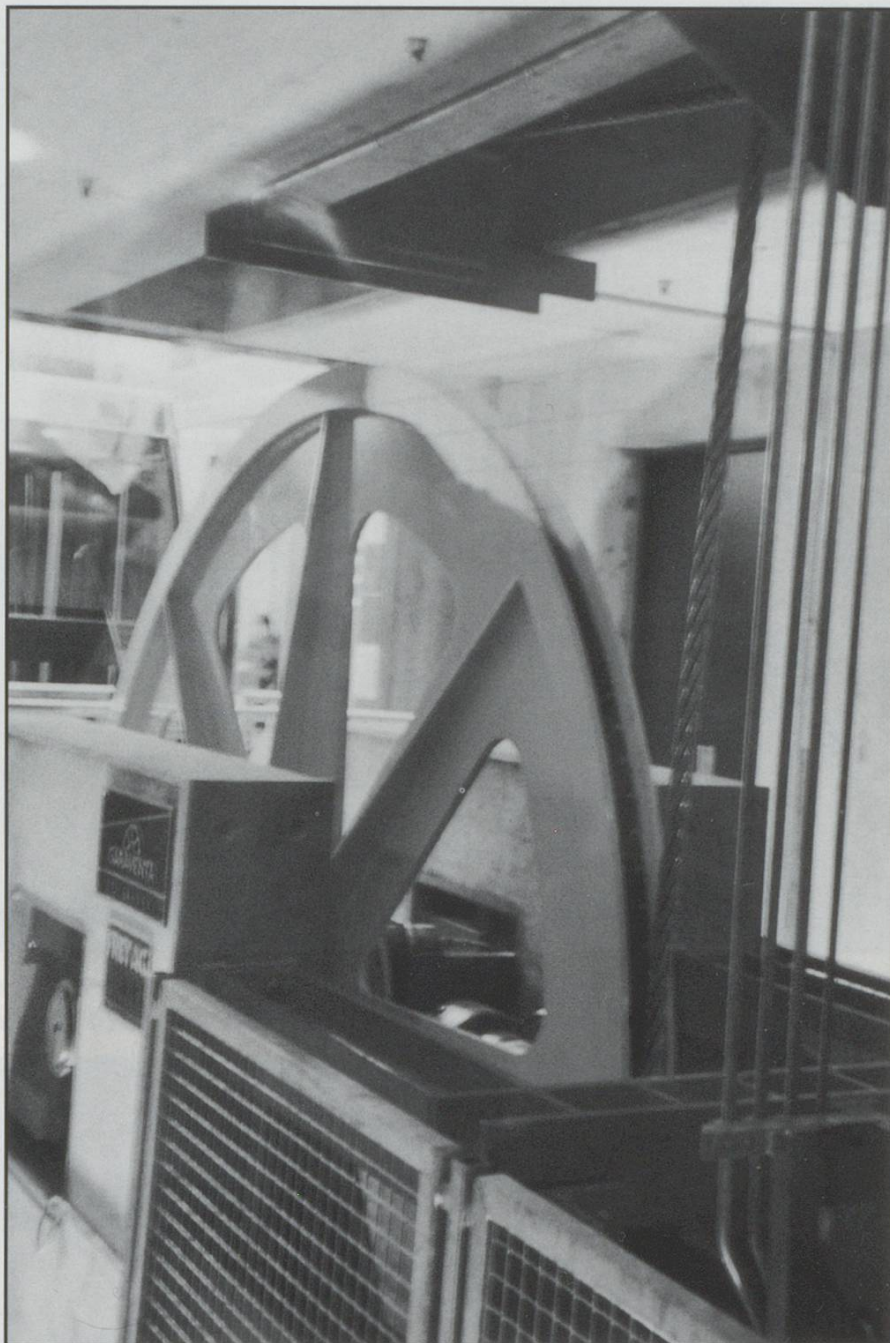
which 20% was contributed by the organisers of the Expo as the funicular will be on one of the main access routes to the event.

It will, however, have a permanent benefit as the result of the opening of an entrance to the main station subway to the north of the line during the course of station improvements. This provides a valuable and quick link between the high town and the lakeside.

Despite being provided with a great deal of paper, there is little technical information available to me at present. If such data becomes available to any member, perhaps the Editor would be kind enough to print it.

Other very significant facts about the CFF in the area emerged. Neuchâtel ranks 17th on the CFF for income producing SFr 24 million annually.

Developments include the lengthening of platforms 2 and 3 and raising the height to 55 cm. to accommodate trains of two sets of ICN. From 19 November 2000, a new signalling system, Siemens SIMIS-C, replaced the electrically-controlled equipment installed in 1941. The computer-based system with track diagrams on colour monitors controls 140 signals and 159 points in the Neuchâtel area including Onnens-Bonvillars, Corcelles-Peseux and Cornaux. Some 500 trains are handled daily Mondays to Fridays. At the close of the ceremony, I was pleased to assist with the disposal of large quantities of tasty snacks and good white wine. I deplore any waste of food and drink!!!!.



Part of winding gear at Jardin Anglais.

My thanks go to Monsieur Jean-Philippe Schmidt of the CFF Service aux Médias Lausanne for providing me with documentation on which this account was based. Any errors are entirely my fault and almost certainly arise from my interpretation and translation of the documents.

All the photographs in this article are by Alan Pike and were taken on 27/4/2001. More technical information is in the pipeline.



On the next two pages are four pictures by Maurice Portsmouth taken around Bex and Aigle. **Above:** the BVB's local tram is snapped in Béveaux. 29/10/1999. **Below:** A BVB train is pictured at Villars. 28/10/1999.





Above: At Aigle on 23/10/1999 an Aigle-Leysin driving trailer 353 leads into the terminus. The “Deux Chevaux” adds to the atmosphere. *Below:* ASD BDe 401 waits to leave Aigle for Les Diablerets. 23/10/1999.

