

From our own correspondent

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The usual eclectic mixture from George includes funiculars, chocolate and walking. I feel sure that there is a connection there somewhere!

FUN'AMBULE - 2 ADDING TO THE STORY

The young people of Neuchâtel selected the name in a competition. In French, *funambule* means tightrope walker. The spelling with the apostrophe also includes the "fun" and "movement" elements. This new funicular railway has several innovative features and even a world first, which are of special interest:

1. There was practically no space in the CFF station, built in the '20's and partly under conservation restraints. Only the tension-control wheels are installed here (under the tracks) and the whole 744 kW drive and control mechanism are in the lower station, quite unusual for funicular railways.

2. As it had to be built in a totally built-up area, with sedimentary areas at the bottom end, the normal solution of a bored or blasted straight tunnel was not possible. The cost of achieving the necessary stability and safety would have been prohibitive. The final 358 m (392 yards) long route chosen to overcome the 46 m (151 ft) difference between the levels of the CFF station and the Jardin Anglais partly follows a road. This section was built as "cut and cover" greatly reducing costs. It does, however, have an S-bend in it. (See drawing no. 1)

3. The middle section, where the vehicles pass each other, is on a bend. This means that track no. 2 is 173 cm (68 inches) longer than track no. 1. As both vehicles, which are permanently fixed to the cable, must come to a halt at exactly the same spot in both stations, the pivoting points of the cable-return wheels must be adjusted each cycle. This is achieved by mounting the return wheel on a sliding bed, controlled by a hydraulic cylinder. Both the top and the bottom return wheels each move 87 cm (34 inches) outwards, to take up the extra length one end of the cycle.

4. Variations in the gradient of the running tracks create also a concave section. Special rollers keep the cable down and stop it from whipping into the air. The cable runs underneath these rollers, which are fixed only at one end; the fixing to the vehicles must pass at the other end. In most installations of funicular railways, the cable runs on top of the rollers.

5. The gradient varies from 0% (level) to 35% (1 in 3). For people in wheelchairs, transport becomes uncomfortable at tilts in excess of 6% (1 in 17), so more innovation was needed. And again, Garaventa of Goldau, the only

Swiss constructor solely committed to building cable cars and funicular railways, was up to the challenge. They came up with a world first: a special frame on bogies, from which four separate cabins are suspended inside, like



Drawing 1: The sinuous route from the CFF station to the Jardin exit to the Rue des Beaux Arts, close to many schools and the Expo 2002 site.

© City of Neuchâtel

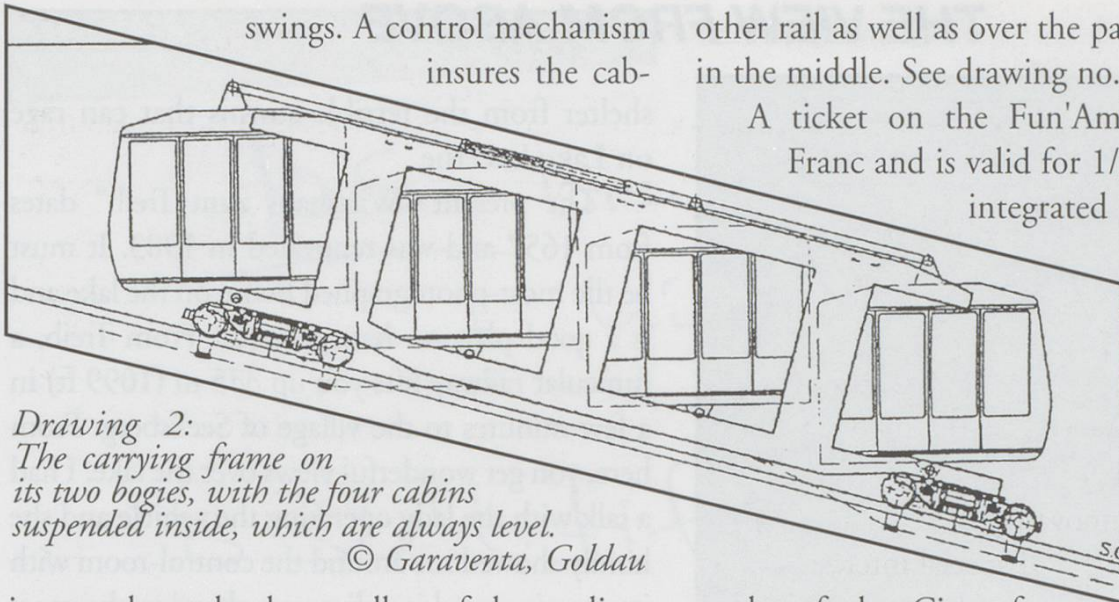
swings. A control mechanism insures the cab-

other rail as well as over the passing trackwork in the middle. See drawing no. 3.

A ticket on the Fun'Ambule costs one Franc and is valid for 1/2 hour, but it is integrated into the TN-

system and thus the Swiss Pass is valid.

A huge "merci beaucoup" is due to the department of



*Drawing 2:
The carrying frame on
its two bogies, with the four cabins
suspended inside, which are always level.*

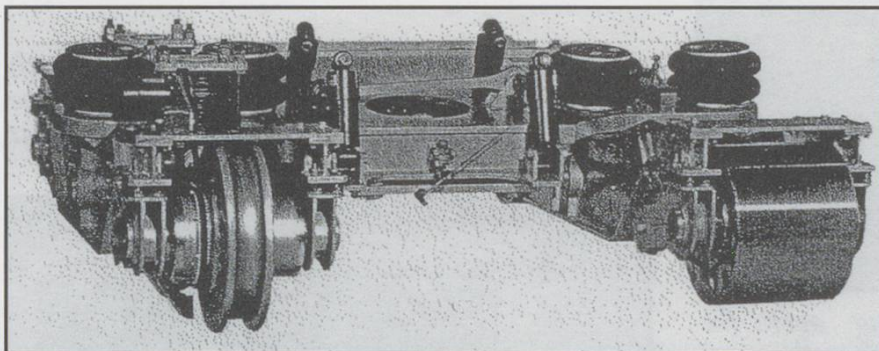
© Garaventa, Goldau

ins are always level, regardless of the gradient the frame is on at the time. See drawing no. 2.

6. The bogies have air suspension, rather than the more usual mechanical one. Funicular railways have axles with a double-flanged wheel on the outside, hugging the through rail, and on the other side a simple roller, to roll over the

works of the City of Neuchâtel and its deputy Antoine Benacloche, who sent me almost 300 pages of information. Their website (in French) gives lots of information:

www.ne.ch/neuchatel/tp/bt/travaux/funambule



Drawing 3: The air-suspension bogies. Typical for funicular railways: on the one side a double-flanged wheel; on the other side a roller.

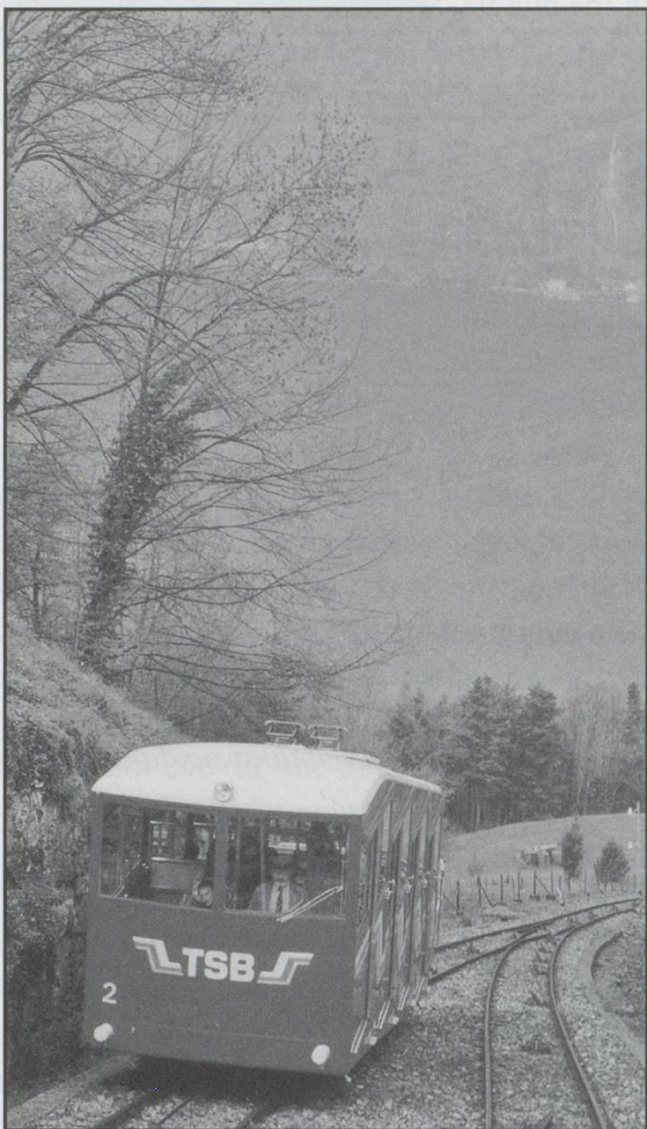
© Garaventa, Goldau

BLOCKING THE VIEW

I have nothing against advertising on rolling stock of public service vehicles; it all brings much-needed revenue to a service that is just as essential as schools, fire departments, hospitals and the like. One "rule", though, ought to be observed at all times. "NEVER let the 'decorations' go over the windows and block the passengers' view." This examples from the inside of a BLS vehicle, with passengers either not able, or only barely able to enjoy the view of the Rhône valley from the Lötschberg south ramp, ought to be a lesson!



THE VIEW FROM ABOVE



Treib-Seelisberg funicular, rising over the Vierwaldstättersee. It definitely beats walking up.

During a wonderful trip through central Switzerland your Editor and myself were invited on in early May, there was also a trip on a paddle-steamer to Switzerland's most historical site, the Rütli meadow. I am sure, David will tell you all about the occasion. *[And so I will in . . . March?]* I myself however, am not a great fan of large commemorative gatherings with lots of speeches (although I do enjoy the dinners!), so I stayed on the boat and told David I would see them all "from above". I got that usual "now what. ." look.

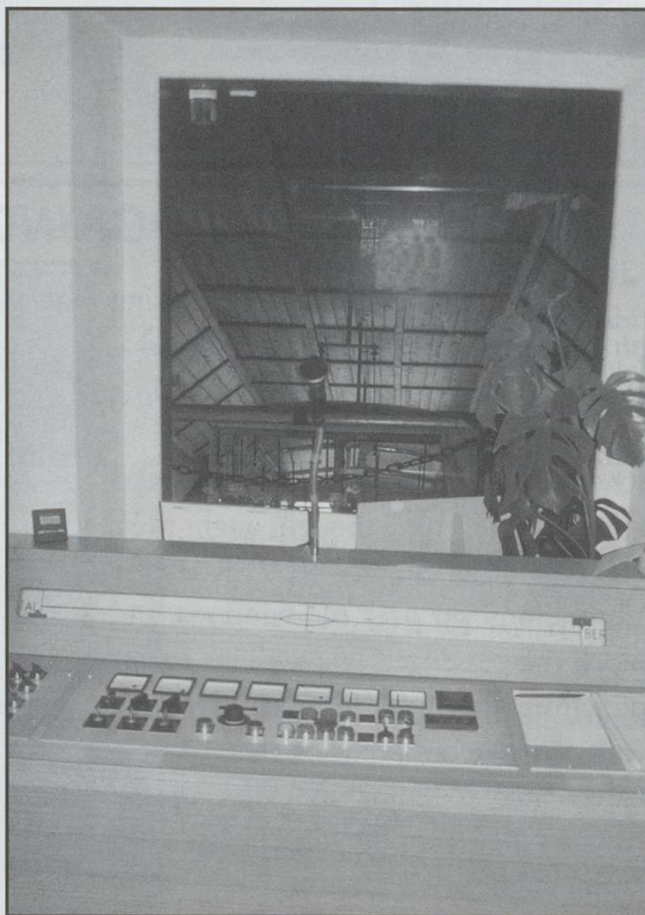
Well, I did stay on the boat till the next stop, Treib, well known for its boatman's house. There has been a harbour and inn here at least since 1365, where the boatmen could take

shelter from the terrible storms that can rage on Lake Lucerne.

The present "Wirtshaus zum Treib" dates from 1657 and was renovated in 1983. It must be the most-photographed house on the lake and is a good place to have a snack. From Treib, a funicular railway lifts you up 335 m (1099 ft) in a few minutes to the village of Seelisberg. From here, you get wonderful views over the lake. I had a talk with the lady operating the vehicle and she kindly showed me around the control-room with its amazing working diagram, showing the exact location of the two cars on the line at any time, as well as the ticket-office.

A few years ago, they still used cardboard tickets here, of the Edmondson-format so loved by the collectors. Sadly, like everywhere else, the paper-printing machines have taken

The control room. The exact position of both cars can be seen on the moving display: at the moment, one car is at the "Berg", the other at the "Tal" station.





Some of the old Edmondson-style cardboard tickets still find a use as key fobs.

over. I did see two cardboard tickets used as key-fobs, though. I took a photograph of them for our contributor and ticket-collector Michael Farr. This got the attention of the guard of the second vehicle. I asked him where all the old tickets had gone - you never know, in ex-EastGermany, I once got a sack with 500 of them. Anyway, no luck, all had been sent to the recycling mill! But, he thought, they used to keep the numbers 00000 as samples, -there might be some of them left. After almost 20 minutes, he did come back with half a dozen, all No. 00000 and stamped Muster (sample).

Anyway, the reason I came up here, was to walk up the road that turns around the cliff

and then look down on the Rütli. This is part of the "Weg der Schweiz", literally, the Swiss Path, from the Rütli via Seelisberg, Bauen, Isleten, Seedorf, Flüelen, Sisikon, Morschach to Brunnen. They were celebrating the 10th anniversary of this path, down below on the meadow. I had forgotten, how far it was and how much the road rises, but I made it in the end. Looking down on the Rütli, I did not see anybody: by the time I had finished talking to the people at the funicular and had walked all the way up there, the guests on the Rütli were all in the tents, having their lunch. So, hungry, I travelled back down to Treib to catch the boat picking up the well-fed guests from the Rütli. Oh well, you cannot win them all - at least Michael Farr was happy with his tickets.

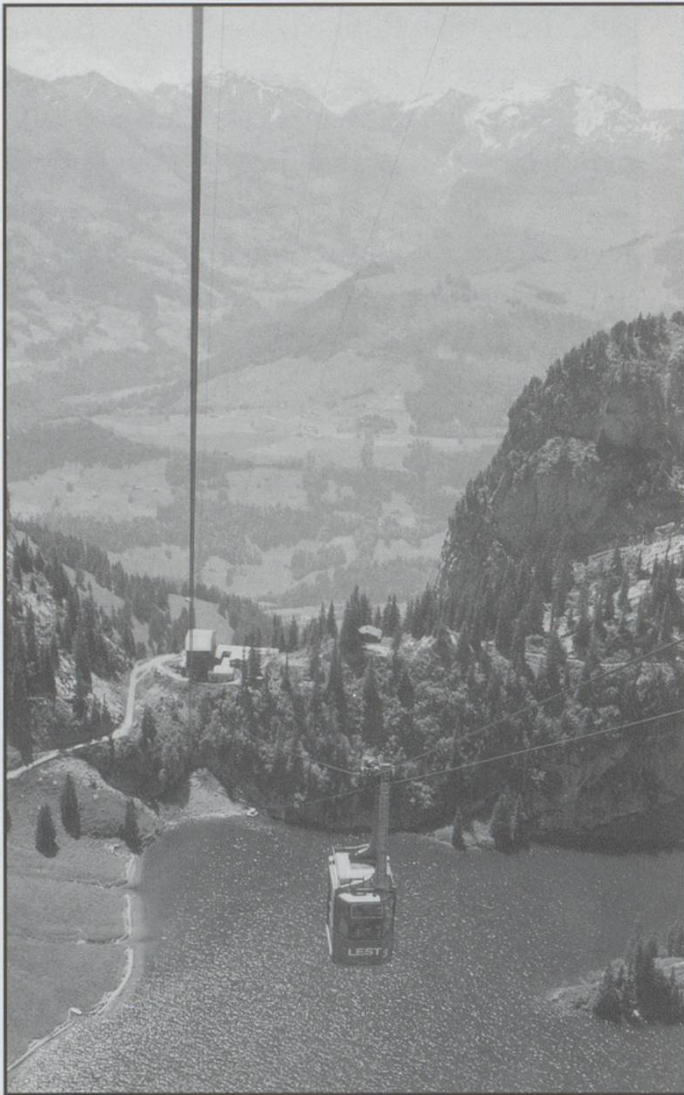
For more Information:
Treib-Seelisberg Bahn
Bahnhof, 6377 Seelisberg CH. Internet:
www.seelisberg.com
E-mail: tsb@seelisberg.com

All photos: George Hoekstra-May 2001

The famous "Rütli" meadow, prettily framed with blossoms and paddle steamer, seen from above at Seelisberg. The reason hardly any one of the several hundred guests can be seen, is they are all in the tents, having lunch, unlike your correspondent.



THE STOCKHORN

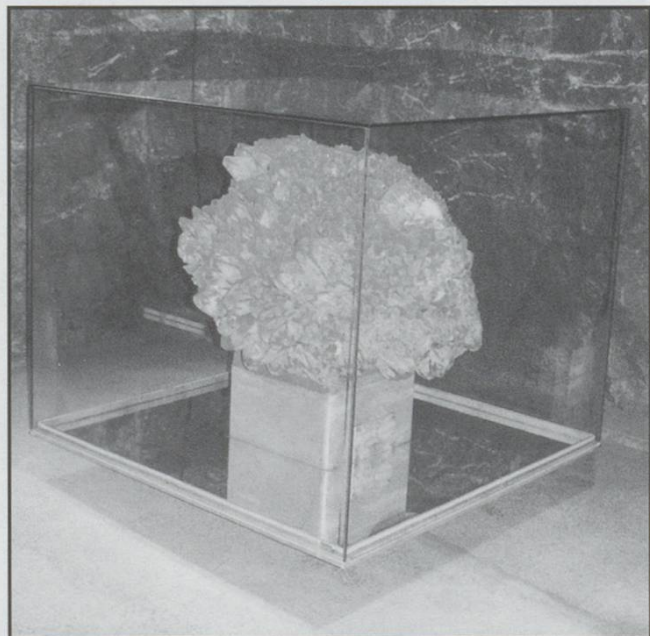


View from the second section of the Stockhornbahn, down onto the Hinterstocken lake and the alpine flower path.

All pictures by George Hoekstra. June 2001

not with tarmac, but with natural materials). Both restaurants, at Chrindli or Stockhorn, are moderately priced and both provide child portions. There is also a children's playground at Chrindli. The big news this year is the 70 m long tunnel with two large viewing windows, cut straight through the Stockhorn at the summit. It took 5000 man-hours, the transport of 225 tonnes of materials and half a million francs to build this attraction. Inside, a huge crystal weighing several hundred kilograms is exhibited. The tunnel enables the less able to climb straight to the top, which is quite steep and not really suitable for the elderly, to see the spectacular views of Thun and its lake, as well as into the Aare valley on the north side. The tunnel, both restaurants and naturally the cable cars are fully accessible by people in wheelchairs. For the summer of 2002, a special nature adventure trail is planned. Information: Stockhornbahn, 3762 Erlenbach im Simmental CH. Internet: www.stockhorn.ch

The huge crystal displayed in the new tunnel.



From Erlenbach im Simmental, on the line from Spiez to Zweisimmen (take the Regionalzug), it is about 15 minutes walk (up to the village, then left in the direction of Zweisimmen) to the Stockhorn cable car. This is not on the main tourist run, but is well worth a visit. It is reasonably priced, and from its intermediate station Chrindli (you change cable cars here), at 1642 m (5387 ft) there is a wonderfully easy walk around the Hinterstocken lake, with a special path of alpine flowers to see (not to pick!). There are 70 km (43 miles) of easy and more demanding hikes from here, like around the second lake, the Oberstockensee, as well as down from (or up to. . .) the Stockhorn-summit at 2190 m (7185 ft). Most of the paths have recently been upgraded and newly surfaced (no, don't worry,



At the end of the new tunnel, there are two "eyes": two perfectly safe windows, giving views over Lake Thun and the Gürbetal. The viewing is perfectly safe for small children and people suffering from fear of heights.

STAMPS FOR CHOCAHOLICS

We have had clean-smelling tickets (see *S.E.* June 2000, p. 37); now we have stamps that give off a chocolate aroma when rubbed. To commemorate the 100th anniversary of "Chocosuisse", the Association of Swiss Chocolate Manufacturers, the Swiss Post issued a sheet of 3 x 5 stamps in the form of a chocolate bar. A special coating of artificial chocolate aroma, captured in microscopic bubbles, was added in the last pass through the printing press. WHEN RUBBED, THE TINY BUBBLES BURST AND THE AROMA IS RELEASED. At first it was planned to add the aroma to the gum on the back as well, but that idea was abandoned. Apart from concerns about hygiene, it was believed too many people would lick all the gum off. I know quite a few people like that, mostly female. . . I cannot really blame it all on the fairer sex though as every year the Swiss (men, women and children) eat 10.9 Kilos (that is an incredible 24 pounds) of chocolate each!!

