

# Steam on the Rigi

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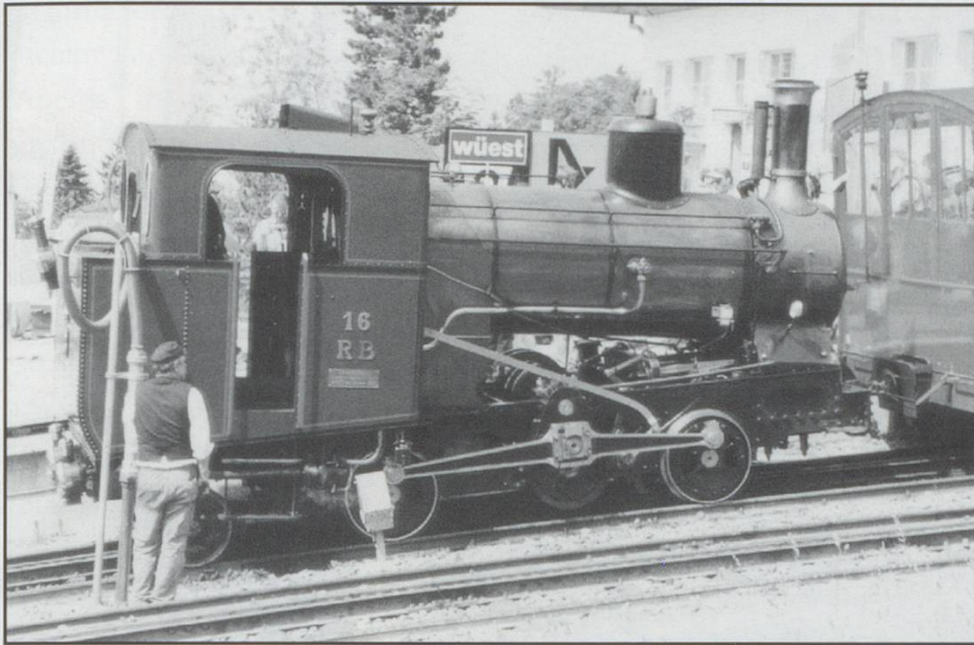
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Rigibahnen - No 16, H2/3 of 1923 takes water while it pauses at Kaltbad, en route to Kulm, July 2000.

Photo: Ron Smith

The Rigibahnen has always been progressive and innovative. It is also very well adapted to its role as a tourist attraction in its own right, a public transport service to the locals, and a feeder to the winter and summer sports areas on the mountain. The services include school runs. Pupils wait on small platforms about a metre long. The railcar stops carefully and precisely to uplift the children and run them down to Vitznau. Then they are taken home for lunch and back to school again for the afternoon session, and finally home for tea. This seems an idyllic school life. These trains are interspersed with the regular power car propelling trailer combinations ferrying tourists (including Swiss ones!) up and down the mountain or to various events. Sometimes they propel flat wagons as well, loaded with supplies. I have even seen one with a refrigerated van taking chilled food supplies to the Kulm hotel. There is the programme of special trains including regular steam, to fill any space left in the track capacity. This busy schedule operates throughout the year.

In 2003 public "turn up and go" steam trains will run every Saturday and Sunday in July, August, and September. On Saturdays the train leaves Arth-Goldau at 10.11, goes up to

the Kulm (summit) and down to Vitznau. On Sundays it departs Vitznau at 10.16 to go up over and down to Arth-Goldau. The trains do get busy and blocks of seats are frequently booked by tour operators, so it would

be prudent to book in advance. The period coaches are very wide, even for the standard gauge track. The locomotives are well maintained and beautifully restored. Numbers 16 and 17 are H2/3 tank engines built in 1923 and 1925 respectively. They also run in January and are a fantastic sight amid the snow, with the crystal cold air accentuating the steam and smoke.

Rising out of the lake near Luzern, the Rigi is an attractive mountain and has always been popular with tourists and pilgrims. However, it still retains its mystery despite 130 years of the railway carrying people up and down. Its popularity made it a prime candidate for a railway, and so Mr Riggenschach invented his rack system and built the first such line in the world from Vitznau.

The Rigibahnen today combines the two lines Vitznau to the Kulm (the red trains) and Arth-Goldau to Kulm (the blue trains) as well as the cable car from Weggis to Kaltbad, where it connects with the trains. The panoramic cars of the cable car have a unique attraction - if pre-booked, the car stops on the way and a meal is served up in the air!

The depot at Arth-Goldau is home to electric rack power car No.6 of 1911. This beauti-

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fully restored wooden panelled car is the oldest operating rack car in the world. It is available for hire for parties when it propels a suitably ancient and elegant trailer serving white wine "Aperos" in special glasses that fit into cut-outs in the tables.

For as long as anyone has recorded, people have wanted to be at the Kulm to watch the awe inspiring natural spectacle of the sun rising over the Alps. Mark Twain recounts his hilarious attempts to do this in his book "A Tramp Abroad". People still do so today, and to cater for those who stay down the mountain a special "Sun Rise Express" train operates from Arth-Goldau on Sundays as below:

25.5.03 dep. 04.40  
 22.6.03 dep. 04.30  
 27.7.03 dep. 05.00  
 17.8.03 dep. 05.30  
 14.9.03 dep. 06.00

The summit of the Rigi is justifiably popular with the incredible views in all directions. Although the railway is open all year round, the Kulm hotel is not, and so the railway built the "Rigi Pic", a self-service café and shop. This has proved immensely popular and the terrace tables are usually busy. There are over 100 kms of paths on the mountain, and great care is taken to protect the environment. One of these paths is the trackbed of what was the third railway on the Rigi, from Kaltbad round to Scheidegg, which operated from 1874 to 1931. Being a trackbed it is easy going, and includes a tunnel and a small curved viaduct. I have walked this in heroic rain, moderate snow, and also in brilliant hot sunshine, and never tire of the views. From Scheidegg a private cable car takes you down to Kräbel to connect with the Rigi Bahn trains between Arth-Goldau and Kulm. This walk was also described by Lester Weeks in the December 1999 *Swiss Express*.

For the enthusiast there is a lot of fascination in this hard working railway, and also a great deal for those whose interests are not entirely railways. Public special trains on the

Vitznau route (other than those mentioned above) in 2003 are outlined below.

**MARCH:** Every Friday evening at 2200 floodlit sledging and skiing by train. On the 15th another special runs to Staffel for a "Belle Époque" evening (with Aperos being served in the 1873 Salonwagen on the way!)

**APRIL:** No public specials.

**MAY:** The 14th has a 10.00 train to Kaltbad for a botanical walk.

**JUNE:** The 18th, a repeat of the above and on the 21st and 28th an 11.00 to Staffel for a nature excursion.

**JULY:** The 2nd, a 10.00 to Kaltbad for the botanical walk. The 12th to Grubisbalm for a festival. The 13th, 19th and 20th have specials to Staffel for the "Swingfest", while the 23rd and 26th have trains to Staffel for Folklore days.

**AUGUST:** The 1st is Swiss National Day, with extra trains to the many celebrations in Kaltbad hotels. The 9th has a train to Grubisbalm for a festival, and 15th to 17th have many specials to Kaltbad for a "Dixie and Swing" weekend.

**SEPTEMBER:** No public specials.

**OCTOBER:** On the 4th at 10.00 a train to Staffel for the Alp Market.

Swiss Passes only warrant a discount on Rigi fares, but there are many fare packages, such as day rovers, and Eurailpass and Tell-Pass also get reductions.

The Rigi Bahn has a very good web site with train details, (and also a live web cam) at:  
[www.rigi.ch](http://www.rigi.ch)  
 Rigi Bahnen, CH-6354 Vitznau, Switzerland  
 Tel: ++ 41 41 399 87 87 - Fax: ++ 41 41 399 87 00



No 16 being prepared for its run, with senior driver Martin Horath making sure that everything is in order. Vitznau 17.00. Photo: Ron Smith