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Lugano - Another funicular

Bryan Stone



ABOVE:
The funicular prior to closure.

LEFT: The Lugano-Angioli Funicular in early days.

RIGHT: Artworks up the track of the funicular in January 2017.

All images:
Bryan Stone



The March *Swiss Express* contained a description of the opening of the completely rebuilt funicular linking Lugano FFS/SBB and the centre of the Old City. Many of today's visitors to Lugano do not know that another funicular, some 300m further south along the lake shore, had until 1986 ascended to the Via Maraini and that its track is still in place. This was built in 1913 by the proprietor of the Hotel Bristol, a luxurious hotel with mainly British clients, which stood in a dominant position on the Via Maraini and the upper station was within the hotel garden. The hotel opened in 1903, closing its doors in 1981, finally being converted to apartments in 1995. The lower station was at the Piazza Bernardino Luini, alongside the Santa Maria Degli Angioli Church. This superb building was built around 1500 and is graced with superb murals across the reredos portraying the 'Passion and Crucifixion' by the Italian artist Luini, a disciple of Leonardo, who subsequently had the Piazza named in his honour.

The line climbed 53m in a length of 142 m, with a maximal gradient of 4408 ‰, and had a track gauge of 1,000

mm. As only one car was provided there was no crossing place, resulting in a curious system, where the car was balanced by a weight on a cable that was driven by an electric motor in a tower over the upper station. This balance weight descended into a deep vertical shaft as the sole car came up. In practice it was better described as an inclined lift rather than a funicular. The lift/funicular was originally reserved for hotel guests and those visiting St Edward's Anglican Church located across the Via Maraini from the hotel. It was later taken over by the Lugano Municipality as part of its transport system, but as the years passed it became little used resulting in its closure on 5th October 1986; however its infrastructure was never dismantled at the time. The equipment in the upper station was present until recently; the sole car was at the lower station until 2012, whilst the track was still in-situ during a visit in January 2017, at which time there were various art exhibits spaced out along it, that could be viewed from the adjacent set of steps that follow the course of the line. 