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This and That

World's steepest classic funicular railway opens in Switzerland



18 December 2017

Villagers in Stoos in the canton of Schwyz were among the first to travel on the world's steepest funicular, the new Stoosbahn, which finally opened to the public in December.

Swiss president Doris Leuthard officially opened the Stoosbahn on a weekend of celebratory events in the region including free rides for local residents.

The new funicular whisks passengers from the Schlattli valley station up to the village of Stoos, a height difference of 744m. Despite a maximum gradient of 110 percent, the train's unusual design keeps passengers upright during the

four minute journey thanks to its four cylindrical carriages which rotate as it climbs the 1,720m track.

The funicular replaces an older facility and took five years to construct after financial problems held up the project for two years. It was budgeted at 43 million francs but costs spiralled to 52 million.

The Stoosbahn is the world's steepest classic funicular railway, meaning a system by which two trains, each connected to a cable, travel in opposite directions at the same time, passing half way down. The trains balance each other out meaning only a small amount

of force is needed to drive them.

The Scenic Railway in the Blue Mountains, Australia, has a steeper gradient (122 percent) and claims to be the steepest passenger railway in the world. However it does not operate like a classic funicular but is a single train that is winched up and down on a cable.

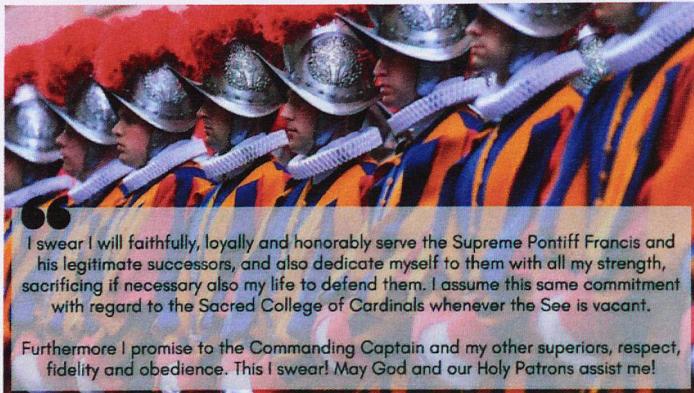
Switzerland is used to record-breaking engineering projects.

It's also the home of the world's steepest cogwheel railway (Pilatusbahn) and the world's longest train tunnel (Gotthard Base Tunnel).

news@thelocal.ch



Forty new Swiss papal guards sworn in



In May 2017, 40 new Swiss guards were sworn in at the Vatican in Rome. They swore to sacrifice their own lives to protect the life of the Pope if required. Born from an alliance between the Swiss and Holy Roman Empire, Pontifical Swiss Guards have served since 1506.

In 1874 a revised Swiss Constitution banned foreign military service, officially ending a long history of Swiss mercenaries. The only exception to the ban was the Pontifical Swiss Guard stationed at the Vatican. The modern Papal Swiss Guard is both a ceremonial unit and a bodyguard.

Recruits must have either a high school or professional degree, be Catholic single males with Swiss Citizenship, aged between 19 – 30 and be at least 174 cm tall. They must have had basic Swiss military training and are further trained in unarmed combat and small arms. Guards use both traditional weapons such as swords and halberd and modern weapons such as pistols and submachine guns.

Their brightly coloured uniforms in shades of blue, red, orange and yellow are reminiscent of Renaissance period.