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A truly dramatic picture of the Pilatus Cable Car reaching the summit. Luzern is in the background.

Photo: swiss-image

Most of us know about the Pilatus Bahn, the world's steepest rack railway and climbing from Alpnachstad on the shores of the lake to Pilatus Kulm. There is another route however and which is available all year by taking Luzern trolleybus route 1 to Linde Pilatus and taking a short walk following the signs.

Opened much later than the railway in 1954 the first stage is a 4900 mtr long gondelbahn from Kriens to Fräkmüntegg with an intermediate stop at Kriensegg. 132 cabins carry a maximum of 750 passengers per hour for 18 minutes at 4.5 metres per second and which I think works out to about 16.2 km per hour.

For those of us (and there are quite a few) with families Kriensegg has a large recreation area with a great playground for the younger children together with a terraced restaurant. Fräkmüntegg on the other hand has the longest *Rodelbahn* in Switzerland. "What's a *Rodelbahn*?" you ask. Well it's a toboggan run (1350 metres) without snow! Wheeled toboggans race down a

metal trackway with a return lift to make the inevitable second run easy. Older children, myself included, will love it and younger ones can travel with parents in complete safety: the toboggans have brakes. Another excellent restaurant with a terrace is available here. Try the local Sbrinz cheese with some wine as an aperitif.



The Rodelbahn on the Pilatus. That could almost be me.

Photo: Pilatus-Bahnen



The top station at Fräkmünegg on the first section of the cableway to Pilatus Kulm. May 2001. Photo: Editor

The second stage is an exciting ride from Fräkmünegg to Pilatus Kulm. Opened in 1956 the two cabins have a potential capacity of 480 passengers per hour and take 5 minutes to lift one 717 metres at 6.5 metres per second on a cableway 1389 mtr long, about 23.4 km per hour. The final ascent to the Kulm is dramatic in the extreme as can be seen from the accompanying photograph.

The legend of the Pilatus is extraordinary. The name derives from rumours that Pontius Pilate had been laid to rest in the mountain's lake. It is known that Pilate returned to Rome later in life but what eventually became of him is well . . . open to conjecture. For hundreds of years the government of Luzern banned anyone from climbing the mountain. Sightings and legends about dragons abounded, hence today's logo and the name 'Pilatus-the Dragon Mountain'. Eventually in 1594 the lake was drained, spirits were exorcised and four centuries were to pass before the watercourse was once again dammed and the lake formed again.

At the Kulm (2132 metres) there are two hotels, both open to the public, and which are much in demand for conferences, weddings, seminars etc. Several walks lead into

(literally) and around the mountain and can be easily followed.

Many of us visit Luzern and the surrounding area and this year the Pilatus-Bahnen have introduced a couple of new ideas. Lunch with a Swiss Folklore theme and, of particular interest to the more romantic of us, a Sunset Dinner every Friday and Saturday with a late evening ride down the cog railway.

Another idea I personally thought of is to follow the example of the animal herds and graze on the mountain.

Have a coffee and cake at Kriensegg, an aperitif at Fräkmünegg and then lunch at the Kulm in one of the two hotels. The recently refurbished Hotel Bellevue Panorama restaurant is particularly impressive. By then continuing what is marketed as the 'Golden Trip' down the cog railway this would make a great day out, particularly if you finish with afternoon tea at Alpnachstad or on an SGV boat sailing back to Luzern. Perfect.

Further information

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Pilatus Kulm at the start of May. The snow has been cleared by hand! Photo: Editor

