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Autor: Jäger, Jakob
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ZÜRICH'S MOUNTAIN RAILWAY

Jakob Jäger

A panorama of Zurich from the Uetliberg

PHOTOS: Jakob Jäger

Zürich, Switzerland's commercial capital. Banks and the Bahnhofstrasse. The Lake and the Limmat. What mountain? What railway?

High above the western side of the city - looming above the lakeside suburbs - is the Uetliberg, at 871m the northernmost peak of the long forested ridge that rises above the Sihltal. The Uetliberg is one of the favourite boltholes for us city dwellers. On hot summer evenings, or at a weekend, its woods and walks offer a cool retreat. Its slopes are an outdoor gym for energetic mountain bikers and those who seek fitness through jogging. When it snows in the winter there are numerous opportunities for cold weather activities right on our doorstep. For the less fit the summit terrace has a bar and restaurant with a panorama that encompasses the Black Forest to the north and the Bernese Oberland to the south. I happily settle for coffee and cake - and the view - although I can be persuaded to walk down!

To go high first you must go low - down to Platform 2 in the basement of the Hauptbahnhof. From here the smart, modern, standard gauge EMUs of the SZU (Sihltal Zürich Uetliberg Bahn) climb on Line S10 some 400m to Uetliberg station, some 57m short of the summit of the



Uetliberg service waiting to leave Platform 2

mountain. The route is just over 9km long and has a maximum gradient of 7% (1:14) which is worked entirely by adhesion. The line is electrified at 1200V and it is unusual in that the overhead power supply cables,

and the collectors on the EMUs, are asymmetrical. The reason that they are offset to one side is that the other line of the SZU, the Sihltalbahn (S4) out to Langnau-Gattikon and Sihlwald, is electrified on the Swiss standard system of 15,000V. The power collection equipment on this line is offset to the opposite side to allow the trains to run on the same tracks where necessary.



Zürich service at Triemli. Note the offset pantograph

Following the underground exit from the heart of the city the line runs alongside the Sihl to near Zürich Giesshübel station where it splits off from Line S4 to call at Zürich Binz, its first stop. From here it climbs on a double track section to Friesenberg and then reverts to single track as it passes through Schweighof and on to Triemli, the site of a large Cantonal Hospital. Nearby is the terminus for Trams on Lines 9 and 14 and these services offer an alternative way of leaving the city centre. For much of the day there are four trains an hour to Triemli but from here to the

terminus the normal service is half-hourly. Climbing hard now the trains leave the built-up area and travel on to stops at Uitikon Waldegg and Ringlikon, two nice village suburbs splendidly sited in the wooded folds of the hills. There is another short section of double track approaching Ringlikon after which the trains squeal through two tight reverse curves as they cover the last section of the route to Uetliberg.

The terminal station is well located with views out to the west and has the usual kiosk and café. From here there are marked paths and cycle routes up to the summit and the Uto Kulm Hotel with its terrace, conference centre and café and the view back down to our starting point. As I noted the whole area is laced with paths and bike routes. One good 2-

hour walk is along the path that follows the ridge south to Felsenegg where the cable cars of the LAF (Luftseilbahn Adliswil Felsenegg) will take you down to near Adliswil Station on Line S4 and a swift run back to your starting point.

When you next visit our city I urge you ride on what must be one of the nicest suburban railway trips in the world - Zürich's Mountain Railway.

Zürich service at Uetliberg Station

