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CLIMBING ABOVE THE CHEESE

Keith Scotland



ALL PHOTOS: Keith Scotland

Tucked away in the Fribourg Alps some 5km above the picturesque medieval cheese making town of Gruyères, and part of that Commune, is the small alpine resort of Molésion. Served by a very un-Swiss irregular bus service provided by the TPF (Line 263) from Gruyères station this small community, which also has a 17th C cheese factory open to visitors, is home to a modern funicular that dates from 1998. This is only the second funicular to be built in the Canton, the other being the tiny 121m long St Pierre operation in Fribourg itself. Starting in Molésion-Village at 1110 metres above sea level, the 12 year-old system climbs some 1368m entirely on a raised track (to keep it free from the snow) to Plan Francey at 1520m. It is built to the unusual gauge of 1200mm; has a maximum gradient of 52% (1:2); a high operating speed of 10m/sec; and it is fully automatic with no on-board personnel. The two 80-person cars give the line a capacity of up to 1200 people/hour in peak operation. From Plan Francey, a cable car continues up to the summit of Le Molésion at 2002 m. Prior to the construction of the funicular the link between Molésion-Village and Plan Francey was maintained by a gondola

system with small four-person cabins that dated from 1963, but which could not provide sufficient capacity at peak periods due to the growing popularity of the area for winter sports. In a CHF13m construction contract Von Roll (part of the Doppelmeier Group of Austria) used the biggest Swiss helicopter, a Kamov KA-32A, to transport the seventy-seven 4.7t steel supports up to their mountainside location. The selected track bed route, with its four curves, was necessary to maintain an equal longitudinal profile and to avoid clearing too many trees. This is in an attractive part of French-speaking Switzerland that is often overlooked by British visitors, but is well worth a visit.

