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ÄUGSTENBAHN

Ernst B. Leutwiler introduces Switzerland's newest cable car

Around 1962 the power company Nordostschweizerische Kraftwerke AG (NOK) constructed a hydro electric power station at Tierfeld, Linthal, in Kanton Glarus. Water from a large catchment area that covered the southern part of the Kanton was collected behind a huge dam in the Limmern reservoir. In order to distribute the power a transmission line had to be constructed over the mountains. To assist in building the pylons, moving the cables, etc a small number of temporary aerial cableways were constructed in the area. Once the project was completed most of them were dismantled although the one at Ennenda (part of the town of Glarus since January 2011) was kept by NOK who allowed the local people, farmers and hikers to use it. So was born the "Ennenda - Baerenboden-Bahn". It had just one red wooden open gondola that could hold a maximum of four people and ran with a speed of 3.5 metres per second (inset photo). It operated until 2007 when the equipment needed an overhaul and a new public operating licence. Unfortunately Axpo (the power company who had succeeded NOK) was not interested in spending money on this outdated facility for which they had no further use. However local people did not want to see the end of this useful cableway so they formed the Genossenschaft (Co-operative society) Äugstenbahn to upgrade and operate the facility. Equipment manufacturer Streiff - part of the Doppelmayr/Garaventa group - based in Schwanden just along the valley was contracted to build and install the new cableway which cost CHF2.63m and opened in August 2010.

The former Ennenda Commune (before it merged with Glarus) and the 600 members of the Genossenschaft raised CHF2.43m towards the cost and the new company is on-track to repay the bank the missing CHF200,000 as so many people are now using the new facility.

The Äugstenbahn has two new enclosed gondolas, one painted in blue the other yellow, each of which can hold 8 passengers, or a 1000 kg load, and operate at 5 metres per second. There is normally a 15min service at peak times and a 30 min one at all other times. The base station, which is only ten minutes walk from Ennenda SBB station, is at 485m above sea level and the cableway climbs 961m over its 1640m length in some seven minutes. One person, who also sells tickets, operates the service from the base station. Radiating from the top station area is a series of splendid walks whilst only some 15 minutes away is the Äugstenhütte a mountain guest house (with dormitory accommodation for 21 people) and café open between May and October that is owned by the municipality. The original old wooden gondola has been preserved and it now appropriately stands in front of a retirement home that is located near the base station. For more information go to www.aeugstenbahn.ch 

Editor's Note: Ernst B. Leutwiler lives in Ennenda and is one of our regular Swiss correspondents. He has written the ultimate funicular reference book that covers all 90 Swiss operations. This was reviewed in the June 2011 edition of *Swiss Express*.