

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2016)
Heft: 125

Artikel: Luzern's Gütschbahn returns
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854007>

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1. Part way up with views across Luzern. 2. One of the small cars nears the top. 3. The top station. 4. Near the top of the Gütschbahn with the Hotel in the background.

All photos: Ernst B Leutwiler

Luzern's Gütschbahn Returns

Ernst Leutwiler

The Château Gütsch has perched since 1884 high above the city of Luzern and at the time, as a contemporary access to the site, a typical water ballast railway with two parallel tracks was built. The first bottom station was located above today's mainline tracks and was reached by a staircase from the Baselstrasse. Around 1890 the Gütschbahn publicised that it carried about 300 people every day. In 1897 the building of today's SBB railway bridge took place with the Gütschbahn being extended under it to a new station at Baselstrasse 21a. Because of several landslides the line was not in operation between 1943-1948 and by the end of the 1950s, the water ballast train did not go in the winter. With some technical difficulties it was changed in the years 1957-1960 to electric drive. Again between 1974-1975 the operation was interrupted due to a landslide. From 1990 the Gütschbahn operated automatically, and only once intending passengers had not paid their fare. This system helped to exclude fare dodgers - or confuse at least! However the line had seen its best times and in the last years of operation you were often travelling alone. The banking giant UBS acquired the hotel (and the line) in 2005, selling it to the Russian investor Alexander Lebedev (Château Gütsch Immobilien AG) in August 2007. On 11th April 2008 the

Château Gütsch Immobilien AG announced the "temporary" cessation of Gütschbahn from 23.30 on the 21st April. In autumn 2012, the valley station, the racks and the 2-cars of Gütschbahn were dismantled, with the old racks going to the Rigibahn where they continue to be used. Unfortunately for the original 1884 cars there was no salvation. They ended up as scrap metal in the Gotthard Schnyder AG in Emmen near Lucerne and were 'recycled' there.

Between 2008 and 2014 it was highly questionable whether the Gütschbahn would ever be reinstated, however on the 30th November 2014 the people of Luzern said YES to spend CHF1.7m on a new Gütschbahn. So during early 2015 the line was rebuilt, by the famous cable car company Inauen-Schätti, as two fully automatic parallel inclined elevators. The new railway was opened on 26th September 2015. A ride on the new Gütschbahn takes exactly 100 seconds for the 162m long climb from the new station on Baselstrasse at 435m to the Hotel Gütsch at 519m. The Gütschbahn is in operation daily from 04:30 to 01:15. A single ticket is CHF 2.50, or CHF 4.00 for any number of journeys within 60 minutes, i.e a return ticket. Luzern Zone 10 day tickets and the GA are also valid. 