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Bürgenstock Funicular Reopens

Ernst B. Leutwiler




Approaching the summit of the line at the new Bürgenstock Resort.

Photos: Ernst B Leutwiler

After an hiatus of some six-years the historic funicular that links Kehrsiten Pier on the Vierwaldstättersee with the mountain resort of Bürgenstock re-opened on the 28th August 2017. The closure of this metre-gauge 930m long funicular, that climbs some 440m at an average gradient of 58%, took place in 2011 when its reconstruction became an integral part of the massive project to completely remodel the historic Bürgenstock resort. The first part of the resort, owned since 2008 by a Qatari investment organisation, re-opened in September 2017, with the official opening of the CHF550m project coming in the spring of 2018. The completed resort will comprise some four hotels, residential suites; a large Alpine Spa complex and medical and 'wellbeing' centre, a golf course, tennis facilities, together with some 12 restaurants and bars, plus residential accommodation for the staff. The 64ha resort will be almost car free and its primary means of access will be via the funicular from the lakeside pier. Apart from the up-to-sixteen calls a day that the regular lake ships will make the resort has commissioned a new CHF6m catamaran from the shipbuilding subsidiary of the shipping company of the Vierwaldstättersee AG (SGV) at Luzern. This new vessel arrives in 2018 to operate a direct hourly Luzern-Kehrsiten service that is scheduled to take just under 30 minutes for the trip.

The line from Kehrsiten up to the Bürgenstock plateau was first opened in 1888 and the earliest operation relied upon the use of an Abt rack laid between the rails for breaking. After several up-gradings of the system during the first half of the 20thC the use of the rack was abandoned. Now the fully automatic funicular has been completely rebuilt at a cost of CHF15m under the project management of Garaventa. This includes two new 56-seat passenger cars built by Ship Tec AG, who also are building the new catamaran, the designs being based around the plans of the previous cars, but equipped with all the latest technology. The new cars were

delivered to Kehrsiten from the builders by barge before being placed onto the tracks by a 90t barge-mounted crane. The new ship and funicular service will have a varying set of fares and packages. Hotel guests will travel free of charge; employees, special groups and seminar guests will all enjoy reduced tariffs; the second class through fare from Luzern to Bürgenstock, using the dedicated ship connection will be CHF42.20 single and CHF84 return; the same trip in first class will cost CHF51 and CHF102; the simple return fare on the funicular from Kehrsiten is CHF50. Children, holders of GAs and half-fare cards will all travel at half price. At Kehrsiten, the waiting room at the pier has been turned into an interesting museum together with one of the old cars that has been cut-away to show its workings. It is also possible to visit the Bürgenstock resort using the PostAuto from Stansstad station. The new development, that spreads along the ridge 500m above the lake, unashamedly advertises itself as a Luxury Resort so visiting it will inevitably be a costly exercise. However this is probably the shape of things to come as older establishments are modernised to meet the expectations of today's tourists, who travel to Switzerland from all corners of the world. 

The magnificent view back over Lake Luzern.

