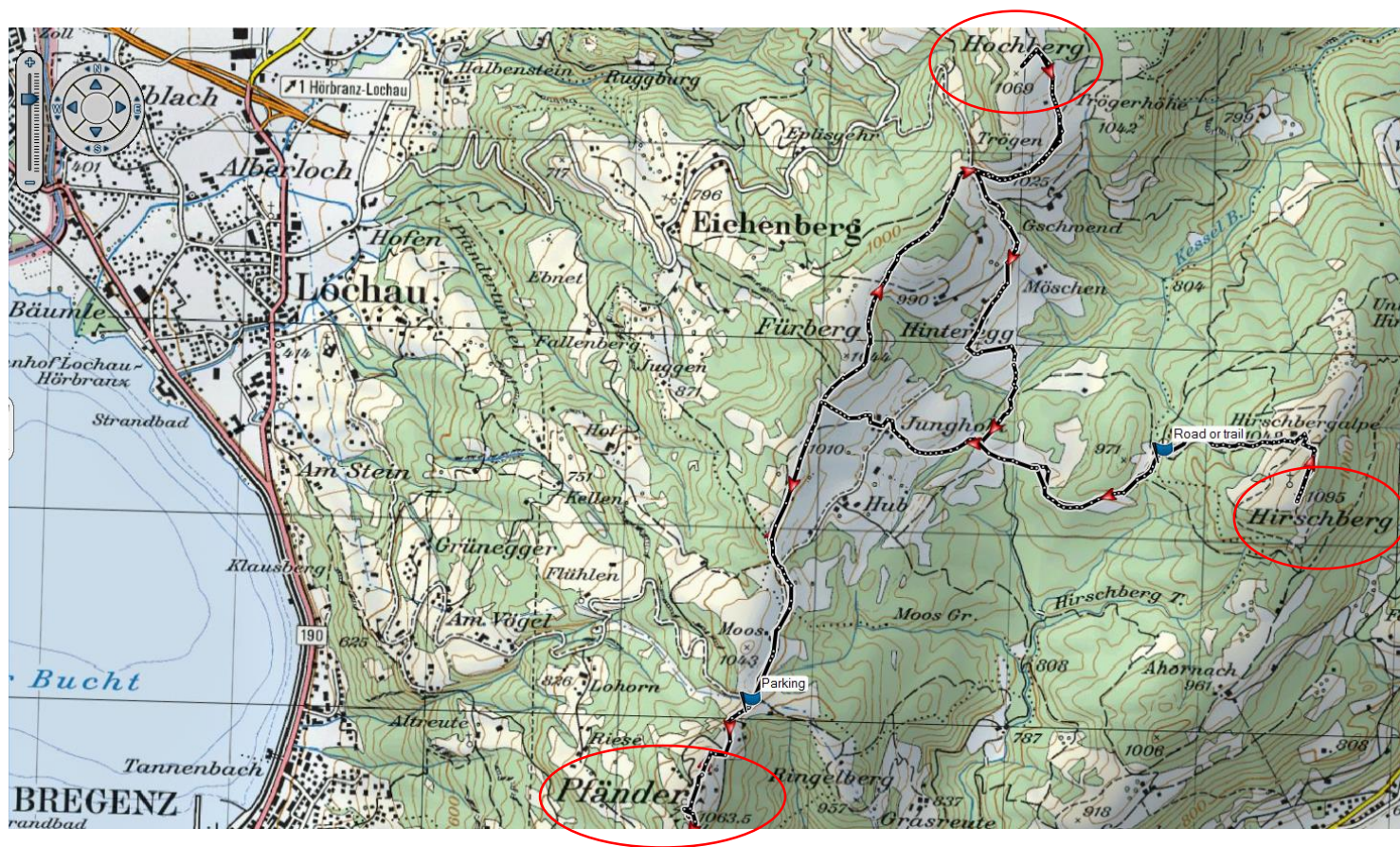


Pfänder (OE/VB-512), Hochberg (OE/VB-511) and Hirschberg (OE/VB-509)

Thursday, May 8, 2014

Summary: Pfänder involves taking a cable car from Bregenz on Lake Constance and then hiking at most 10 minutes, but there are two other summits nearby. Adding Hochberg makes for a pleasant half-day excursion, one even a non-athletic partner could enjoy, while adding both Hochberg and Hirschberg entails a full day and a reasonably long hike.



This was clearly the nicest day of the week, and I decided to play hooky from work. I've been to Bregenz several times and looked up at the Pfänder and knew it was a summit I would soon want to activate. Reviewing the SOTA Mapping Project, though, I saw two nearby summits and decided to try activating all three in one day. Not counting time for the activations themselves, I ended up hiking for just over 4 hours (the tourist brochure estimates 5 hours, but I take few breaks), covering 17 km. None of it was particularly tough, just long.



Pfänder cable car valley station



Moosegg parking lot; the Pfänder communications tower in the background.

Pfänder itself is easy – just take the cable car up, then a 10 minute hike to the summit. There are many restaurants in and around the summit area if you choose to have a beer or a snack. Getting to the cable car station from the main train station is also easy: Bus 1 (1.40 euros 1 way) goes directly to the valley station. The teller at the train station where I bought my ticket thought I was crazy because it's a 15 minute walk through the city to the cable car station, but I knew I had a long day ahead of me and bought the ticket anyway. The fee for a round trip on the cable car itself costs 11.80 euros; the trip is 6 minutes. For those of you who prefer to drive up close to Pfänder, there is the Moosegg parking lot, which you reach through Lochau; there is then a 20 - 30 minute walk to the Pfänder summit.



View from the starting point at Pfänder to summit 1, Hochberg (the pasture area on the far distant hill in the background).



Final approach to Hochberg from the road through the pasture.



My station set-up on Hochberg.

From Pfänder to Hochberg, my first summit of the day, it took me 1h15. This is following the Höhenweg trail. (Throughout the day I found all the trails to be very well marked, it's tough to get lost even without a map.) Most of it is on roads, much of that paved; only on the final approach do you march through a pasture. There is a bench to which I attached my mast as well as an attractive summit cross. Comment: This would be a good summit to bring along a partner guest who is not terribly athletic. The hike is not trivial but not difficult, and it would give them a good idea of what activating a SOTA is like. The views from the summit, while nice into the mountain scenery, do not include Lake Constance.



View from Hochberg to Hirschberg (summit 2 for the day, the green pasture area on the summit in the middle).

From Hochberg to Hirschberg takes a bit more effort. My hike time was 1h25, and it involves starting at the summit at 1069 m, dropping down into a valley at 882 m and then back up to the next summit at 1095 m – but even so, not terribly difficult. The first half is on roads. But at the point on the map marked “Road or trail” you have the option of taking one or the other (I took the trail through the woods, which if there is rain would be very wet on the feet and slippery).



Map waypoint “Road (yellow arrow pointing right) or Trail (red arrow)”.

At the summit there is a cross, but because it has much metal on it that would disrupt my antenna, I chose to use a nearby fencepost for the mast support. In case of bad weather, there is also a chapel just off the summit that provides a windbreak and limited protection.



My station set-up on Hirschberg.



The chapel just off the Hirschberg summit.



View from Hirschberg to Pfänder, look for the communications tower in the middle (summit 3 for the day).

From Hirschberg to Pfänder involves again going down into the valley at Point 882 and ascending up to 1064 m – again, not terribly tough. This hike took me 1h36. When you get there, the actual summit is very limited for space, and on a busy day you'll have trouble finding space for an antenna. Right near the massive communications tower there is an area with a number of benches. I chose to set up there. Yes, I had massive QRM from the tower, but even so I was easily able to work a pileup including two S2S contacts. In fact, during this day I had a total of ten S2S contacts. Interestingly, three of them were with DL/F5HTR/P – each time we were both on a different summit. All my operations were on 40m and 30m, and I always had the standard pileups to work through.



The actual Pfänder summit area. On a nice day, this small area can be packed with people.



My station setup on Pfänder, about 25 meters from the communications tower with its QRM. Nice view of Lake Constance from this point. The antenna wire goes downhill towards the lake to avoid interfering with the many visitors.

When done, I took the cable car down to the valley (it runs at least every 30 minutes), waited just several minutes for the bus to the train station (they didn't check my ticket in the morning, so I was going to use that one again, and again nobody checked) and then took the train to Zurich and my home in Thalwil. It was a long day (left at 6:45 a.m., got back at 9:00 p.m.) but a very enjoyable triple activation without too much effort – no great summits to climb, just a lot of time on my feet. And for those who just activate Pfänder and then Hochberg, it would be a very pleasant afternoon double-activation.

Final note: all of these summits should be readily accessible in winter on snowshoes to get the winter bonus.