

The Gonzen and Palfries Region

Alvier (HB/SG-016) and Gauschla (HB/SG-051)

Gonzen (HB/SG-030) and Fäderä/Tschugga (HB/SG-048)

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Summary: From the valley near Sargans, you see Gonzen as an almost vertical wall of stone and the summit looks impossible. From the rear side, however, it's not difficult at all to activate, and in fact this region offers four summits that are not terribly difficult. Further, since the Palfries cable car started operation in the spring of 2016, these summits can be reached much more conveniently.

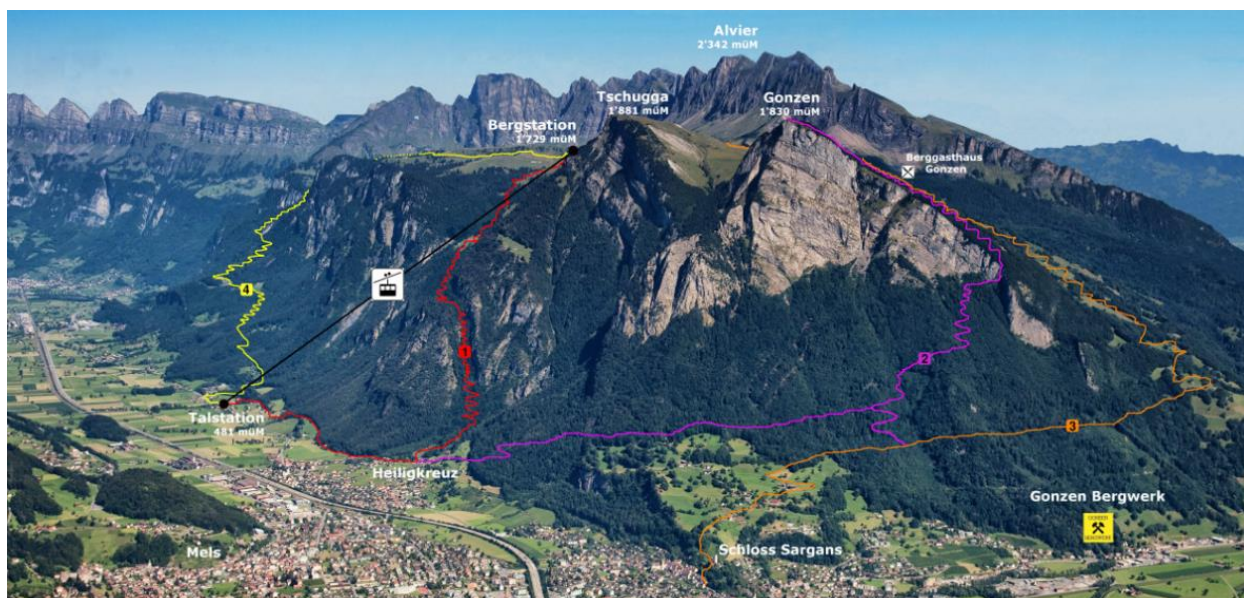


Gonzen and its vertical rock wall as seen from Sargans.

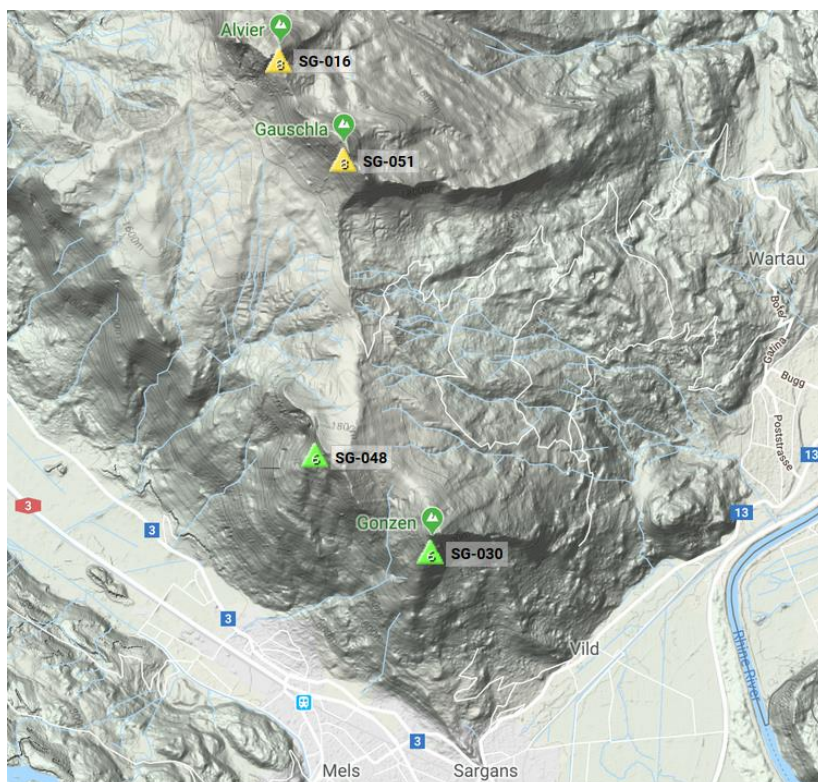
I've traveled through Sargans many times, and each time I looked up at Gonzen with its impressive wall of rock and thought, "that's one I'd really like to activate." I also know people who have done it, so it's not impossible. Actually, from the rear side it is not hard at all. Furthermore, until recently, public transportation up to Gonzen was not very good and that meant a very long hike.

In the spring of 2016, a group of volunteers took what was previously an out-of-commission military supply cable car and upgraded it for commercial passenger traffic. The cable car runs from mid May until mid November. The parking lot is located at 47.0717 / 9.3932, and there is also a bus stop very close by (Heiligkreuz, Ragnatsch). The cablecar seats only 8 people and it is very popular, so reservations are virtually mandatory (for both the ascent and descent); reservations can be made on the website www.seilbahn-palfries.ch or by calling +41 081 599 43 79.

Because of this cable car, four summits are all quite readily accessible. You can do two in one day and two on another day without much problem.



The brochure issued by the cable car foundation shows several hiking routes, which are uninteresting to us for SOTAs. Here, though, you can see the location of the cable car, which travels up to the "Bergstation" (summit station). You can also see the relative position of three SOTAs: Alvier, Tschugga, and Gonzen; the fourth, Gauschla, is not marked but is just to the right of Alvier. Finally, as noted below, about 10 minutes from the cable car summit station is the Bergasthaus Palfries which not only serves food and beverages but also has sleeping accommodations. This might make a good overnight spot if you plan to do all four activations in two days.



Alvier SG-016

Probably the most famous and frequented summit of the four is Alvier, where there is an Alpine hut where you can get food/drink and also spend the night. It is a very popular hiking destination.

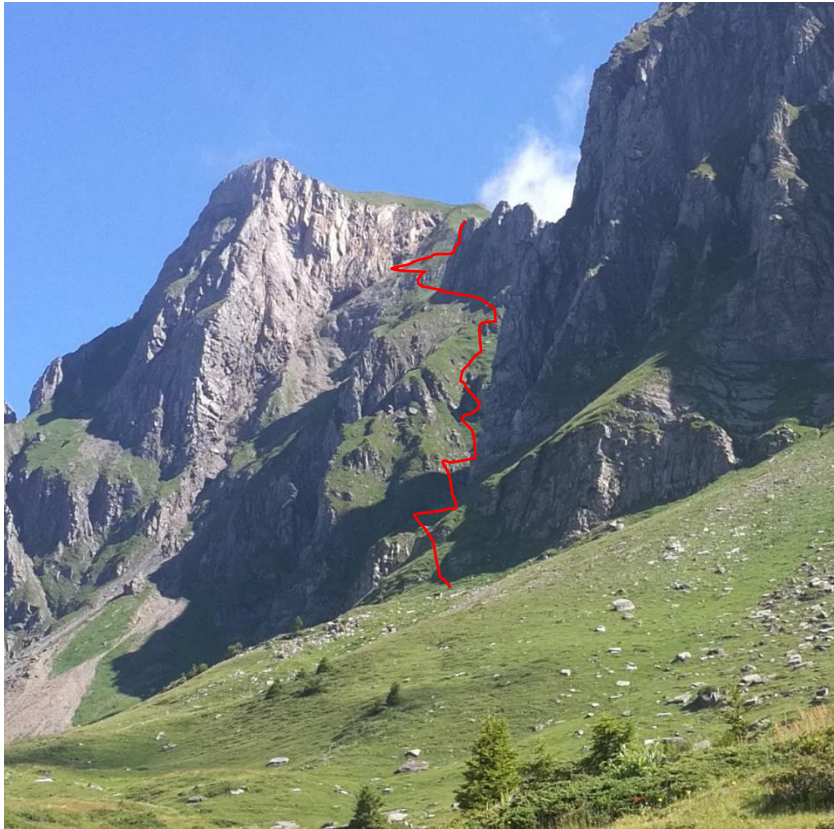


A drawing of the hiking route to Alvier.



A SwissTopo map of the hiking route from the cable car station: 3.3 km, 660 m ascent, average hiking time just over 2 hours (but I needed a bit more because the route is so steep).

The first portion of the hike up to Point 1889 is just a slight rise and is very easy. Next you follow a zig-zag path up a steep incline:



This climb up the steep slope culminates in a wooden ladder that is actually very sturdy and should not present any problem to most hikers:



At the top of the ladder (Point 2184), you turn left to start the ascent to Alvier, or go down into the "bowl" to find the starting point of the trail to Gauschla.

The trail up the mountainside to Alvier is steep and in a few spots requires your hands to steady yourself, but for most experienced hikers it is not a big challenge; you will see a number of children scampering up at high speeds. This is also the most difficult portion of any of the four hikes described in this report.

The top of this climb brings you to a pleatau with the Alvier Hut (open only in nice weather) and a large activation area.

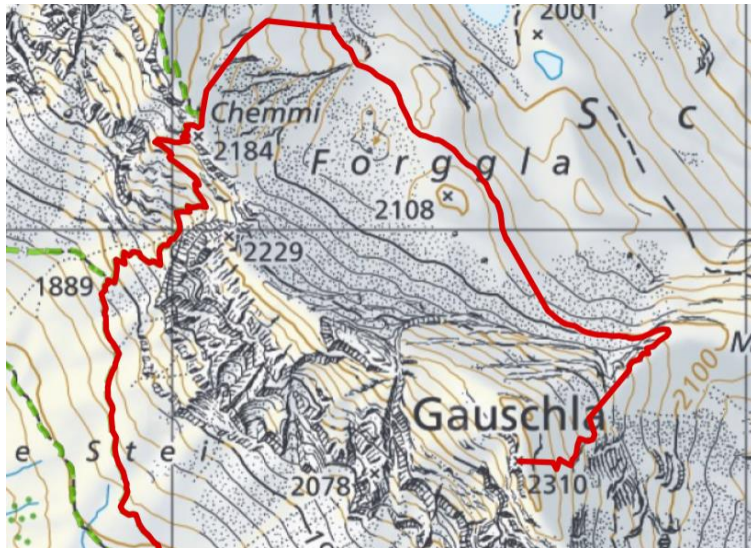


My operating position on Alvier SG-016.

Gauschla (HB/SG-051)

To get to this summit, you follow the same route as for Alvier as far as the top of the ladder at Point 2184. Note that while there is no official trail to the summit, down near the center of the "bowl" that you can see from the ladder, there is the start of a very good unofficial trail to the summit. The trick is finding your way to this starting point, which is at 47.10617 / 9.42136 (roughly just behind Point 2108).

Getting there involves making your own path over and around boulders and herds of sheep. At the hairpin turn on the right side of the map is where you start ascending the grassy slope.



Shown here is the trail starting at the GPS coordinates given in the text.

After the hairpin turn, there is a distinct trail on the right side of the grassy slope that then zig-zags up to the summit:



At the summit, the only antenna support is a large cairn made of rocks, but it is easy to find a good place to insert a mast:



From the top of the ladder to the summit is roughly 1.8 km, and ascent of 283 meters and will take just over an hour (depending on how fast you find the start of the actual trail).

Gonzen SG-030

From the cable car station, you head southeast to get to the other two summits. I recommend you first activate Gonzen and then bag Tschuggen on the way back to the cable car station. Going directly to Gonzen is 3.6 km with an easy ascent of 258 meters and requires roughly 1 hour 15 minutes



Final approach to Gonzen; in the foreground, Clemens HB9EWO.

The views from the summit into the Rhine valley are spectacular because you are literally at the top of the vertical rock wall you see from the valley. There is a summit cross which could be used for an antenna support, but this summit is a very popular hiking destination so there will likely be plenty of

people around. However, the activation zone is relatively large, and there are shrubs and trees which you can use to support a mast or into which you can simply throw a wire antenna.



From the summit of Gonzen: view into the valley, and view over to the next summit, Tschugga, HB/SG-048.

Fäderä/Tschugga SG-048

From Gonzen you can look across and see that Tschugga (HB/SG-048) is not far away at all, and it is basically on the way back to the cable car station. From the barn at the low point between them (Point 1668) it is a climb of 214 meters up relatively steep pasture land; it's not technically difficult, but take your time.



The barn at Point 1668 and the somewhat steep route behind the barn leading to Tschugga's summit.

We needed somewhat less than an hour to go down from Gonzen to the barn at Point 1668 and then up to the summit. There is no summit cross on Tschugga, but there are plenty of fence posts to which you

can lash a mast, and the activation zone is relatively large so multiple stations could spread out there. From here you again get very nice views of the valley and also of Gonzen and then also Alvier in the other direction.



A stone cairn at the summit of HB/SG-048; in the background to the left is Gonzen HB/SG-030.



The descent from Tschugga to the cablecar station takes just a little bit more than half an hour.