

Through the Sihl Valley and up to the Uetliberg – memories of the 1970s



Photo parade on the occasion of the upcoming centenary of the SZU Uetliberg line, above Ringlikon on 23 November 1974. Be 2/2 No.21 + B2 No.224 + B2 No.223/BDe 4/4 No.11 + B No.212/Bt No.112 + B No.211 + BDe 4/4 No.13 pose for the camera.

Bernhard Studer recalls his student days working as a temporary train attendant. All photos by Bernhard Studer.

ORIGINALLY, THE UETLIBERG RAILWAY (*BZUe – Bahngesellschaft Zürich – Uetliberg*) and the Sihl Valley Railway (*SiTB = Sihltalbahn*) were independent enterprises. The abbreviations BZUe and SiTB disappeared when the two railways merged in 1973. The new company was called the SZU (*Sihltal–Zürich–Uetliberg–Bahn*). However, this change had no effect on the staff. Prior to 1973, employees had already been flexibly deployed on both railways and both railways were jointly administered and managed.

From 1972 to 1976, during my studies, I worked as a temporary train attendant on the BZUe, the SiTB and also later on the SZU. A wonderful time that I remember fondly. We were a good dozen students who were allowed to do this work – especially at weekends, when the trains were full of excursionists, and during the term holidays. Our professional colleagues, *ie* the locomotive drivers, the other train attendants and those employed at the stations, in the railway service and in the maintenance workshop, were always very friendly and

VIEWS FROM THE UETLIBERG



Parade of vehicles in front of the BZUe-depot at Giesshübel, which no longer exists: From left to right on 2 December 1978 are BDe 4/4 No.13 (1960), BDe 4/4 No.11 (1939), BDe 4/4 No.12 (1950) and Be 2/2 No.22 (1923).



Above: The date is 18 February 1973. The city of Zürich lies under a stubborn blanket of fog, but on the Uetliberg the sun is shining. The crowds on the trains of the Uetliberg Railway are correspondingly large. As a temporary train attendant at the time, I was given the task of clearing out and cleaning BZUe Be 2/2 No.2 at the Zürich Giesshübel depot, together with a car driver. Normally, this railcar was only used for snow ploughing. We were making it available together with the two summer cars B2 No.22 + B2 No.21, as the last reserve. No sooner were we ready and the photo taken than I was called to the phone – and off we went, as train 1141a from Binz station up the mountain! We arrived at Uetliberg with a full train. Stationmaster Burri made quite a long face when he saw us arriving with the snowplough railcar. We had broken the peak of peak traffic, but now the demand already seemed to be subsiding. And so we were ordered back to the depot empty, with just this one trip with passengers. What a pity!

Right: Be 2/2 No.1 + B No.62, still showing the old company designation "Uetlibergbahn", near Ringlikon on 10 November 1973.

Below: Mountain bound shuttle train, propelled by BDe 4/4 No.12, at Schweighof on 3 June 1974.



Be 2/2 No.22 + B2 No.224, between Berghof and Uitikon-Waldegg on 2 December 1978. The asymmetrically arranged pantograph is clearly visible. The catenary of the Uetlibergbahn is laterally offset, because between Zürich Selnau/Hauptbahnhof and Giesshübel both direct current operated Uetliberg Railway trains and alternating current operated Sihl Valley Railway trains operate on the same track.

helpful. The working atmosphere was exemplary. Even today, almost 50 years later, I am still friends with several colleagues who also were temporary train attendants at the time.

At that time, the BZUe ran from Zürich Selnau for 9.1 km to the 400 m higher Uetliberg, the viewing and hiking paradise high above the city. The line has a maximum gradient of 79‰ (1 in 12.65), making it the steepest standard-gauge adhesion railway in Switzerland. Opened in 1874, the railway was electrified in 1923 at 1200 V DC.

The SiTB, opened in 1892 and electrified at 15 kV AC in 1924, also ran from Zürich Selnau for 17.4 km through the Sihl Valley to Sihlbrugg, where there



was a connection to the SBB trains to Zug and to Thalwil.

As a temporary train attendant, I was allowed to accompany passenger trains on both routes, to carry out brake tests, to dispatch the train after each stop, to advise the passengers and to sell and check tickets. On the Sihl Valley route I also worked on the goods trains. I always particularly enjoyed working on the goods trains, every time it was a feast.

Since then, the SZU has changed dramatically. New residential areas and many new jobs have been created along its tracks. The two branch lines, which were still quite cosy, clearly laid out and single-track throughout, are now part of the Zürich S-Bahn system. The original Zürich Selnau station no longer exists. Since 1990, the trains of the SZU have had their new starting point at Zürich's Hauptbahnhof, in an underground section of the station. From there, they

Left: Exceptional use of Sihl Valley Railway's steam locomotive E 3/3 No.5 Schnaaggi-Schaaggi (so named by former SiTB director Werner Stricker) on the Uetliberg line on 21 May 1977 with a special as far as Uitikon-Waldegg. Be 2/2 No.22 is on the right.



BDe 4/4 No.12 + B No.215 + B No.112, en route between Zürich Selnau and Giesshübel. Visible in the foreground is the siding to the then still existing Hürlimann brewery. The date is 7 April 1974.



In 1995, Ce 2/2 No.2 and B2 No.41 (both from 1923) were restored as an historic train. The beautiful train was used for special trips. Due to the increasingly dense timetable and the slow speed, the special trips were then discontinued, unfortunately. Today the train is in Winterthur, as the restaurant "les Wagons". This view dates from 9 November 2008.



A relief train, encountered at Ringlikon on 31 December 1972. The motor coach BDe 4/4 No.11 (1939) is on its way with the two two-axle coaches B2 No.22 and No.21. The windows of these coaches could be removed. During the summer they were used as open-air observation cars.




Two-car multiple unit Be 8/8 No.31 at Ringlikon on 30 May 1979. The two railcars of this type, purchased in 1978, were scrapped in 2016.



Uetliberg Railway today: shuttle train consisting of three Be 4/4 railcars and a passenger coach, at Schweighof on 2 April 2019.

travel through a double-track tunnel under the former Selnau station to reach the old lines shortly before Zürich Giesshübel. In the meantime, both lines have been equipped with several double-track sections. All this has led to an enormous increase in traffic: On the Uetliberg line, the SZU now transports almost five times as many passengers as in 1975, and on the Sihl Valley line about two and a half times as many!

There is no longer any freight traffic on either line. There have also been no connections to the SBB trains in Sihlbrugg since the end of 2006, when services on the 4.2 km Sihlwald–Sihlbrugg section of the Sihl Valley line, which had always been very lightly used, were withdrawn.

Today, when I visit the SZU, I remember with great pleasure “my” time when I was a student and when I was allowed to work here. At the same time, I am also very proud of the great development that has taken place since then. SZU is currently planning several further expansion steps. The enormous increase in traffic requires the construction of further double-track sections and new rolling stock is being procured. The power system of the Uetliberg line is being adapted to that of the Sihl Valley line. Work to convert it from 1200 V DC to 15 kV 16.7 Hz AC started in April 2022 and is expected to last several months. Once the conversion is complete, only Class Be 552 multiple units will run up the Uetliberg. 



After the conversion of the Uetlibergbahn line to AC operation has been completed, only Class Be 552 multiple units will run up the Uetliberg. These trains are already equipped for both power systems, for the old DC- and the new AC-system. Six such trains (Be 552 511–516) were delivered in 2013/2014 and five more (Be 552 571–575) are currently in course of delivery. All the older trains are being withdrawn. Be 522 514 is seen at Uetliberg station on 8 March 2022.

VIEWS FROM THE SIHLTAL



Above: Sihl Valley commuter train on 7 April 1974 between Giesshübel and Zürich Selnau. Today, the trains run underground on this section of the line.



Left: Steam train *Schnaaggi-Schaaggi* with the E 3/3 No.5 near Sihlwald on 31 July 1974.

Originally the SiTB owned seven steam locomotives. After electrification, three locomotives remained in service and provided shunting services at Zürich Giesshübel until 1962. In the same year, 70 years of the Sihl Valley Railway were celebrated. On this occasion, the steam train *Schnaaggi-Schaaggi* ran for the first time. The beautiful train still runs today, since 1997 under the direction of the then newly founded association *Zürcher Museumsbahn*.



Above: A reminder of freight traffic in the Sihl valley: De 3/4 No.41 shunts in the siding of the SAPT spinning mill in Sood-Oberleimbach on 23 December 1974.

Right: A special train for railway enthusiasts, travelling between Sihlwald and Sihlbrugg on 5 October 1974. BDe 2/4 No.62 is on its way with B2 carriages Nos.261, 263 and 262 as well as the baggage car D2 No.342.





A reserve train for evening peak traffic is provided at Zürich Selnau station on 3 January 1975. BDe 2/4 No.61 entered service in 1924. In 1982 it was restored to its original condition. Since then it has been in service as historic FcE 2/4 No.84.



In 1955 the shuttle train consisting of CFe 4/4 No.91 and Ct No.51 joined the Sihl Valley Railway. Here the train is seen on 3 August 1977 in Langnau-Gattikon, in 1970s condition and designated BDe 4/4 No.91 + Bt No.51. In 1989, this train was sold to Austria, where it was used as ET 13 on the Peggau-Übelbach line of Steiermärkische Landesbahnen. The train was scrapped in 1995.



Ce 4/4 No.312 was built in 1920 for the GBS (Gürbetal-Bern-Schwarzenburg-Bahn), leased to the SZU in 1974 and bought by them in 1977. It is seen at Gontenbach on 3 August 1977.



Four-car shuttle train on its way to Zürich Selnau, at Gontenbach on 20 August 1978.



FcE 2/4 No.84 arrives at Sihlwald with a museum train of the association Zürcher Museumsbahn on 12 September 1981.



An SZU commuter train at the lonely Sihlbrugg station on 12 September 1981. This station is no longer served by any trains. SZU trains now all terminate at Sihlwald. All SBB trains pass through here today, without stopping.



Above: SBB Red Arrow RAe 4/8 No.1022 – a rare visitor to the Sihl valley – on an excursion extra in the Sihl valley on 1 July 1976. At Adliswil station it meets an SZU shuttle train.

Left: Two trains meet at Langnau-Gattikon station on 5 May 1978. On the left a train led by a BDe 4/4 railcar of the series 91-96, on the right the luggage railcar De 4/4 No.51. This railcar has an interesting history: It was built in 1940 for the SBB (RFe 4/4 No.601). In 1944 the SBB sold it to the Bodensee-Toggenburg-Bahn (BT Fe 4/4 No.51). It was not until 1978 that it was sold on to SZU. In 1994, it was transferred to the Oensingen-Balsthal Railway, where it was restored to a historic vehicle and re-designated SBB RFe 4/4 No.601. Since 2004, the railcar has been owned by the Swisstrain association.

Below: De 3/4 No.41 with a goods train at Sihlwald station on 25 October 1975.



A modern SZU train, led by a Re 4/4 locomotive from the 1990s, photographed between Langnau-Gattikon and Adliswil on 20 May 2014.



Where's Heidi?

Question:

Outside which station would you find this fast car that's not going anywhere?

Photo: Heidi Marriott

