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Blüemlisalp ire Sommernacht

A few times in my life someone joked: Maybe you are from the milkman? And every time I could say: Actually, I am!

My dad was not only the milkman but also the baker of our village: Kiental, a beautiful village at the foot of the majestic Blüemlisalp. My great great-grandmother built the bakery in the late 1800s. Apparently, the women in my family were always emancipated, which, in those days, wasn't always pleasing the rest of the villagers.

It was my great-grandmother Adeline, another entrepreneurial Zurbuegg daughter, who decided to rent a small hut in Golderli to open a little grocery store and restaurant for the farmers who stayed up on the mountain during the summer months.



Die Pension Golderli, kurz nach der Eröffnung 1925

The first postcard of Golderli – in the background is the majestic Blüemlisalp

The farmers would walk their cows up to the Griesalp every spring; a journey that would take 6-10 hours for some. Beautifully decorated little Christmas trees were on the cows' heads and huge, loud bells around their necks.

We used to get up in the middle of the night for every "Alpauzug", to wave from the window and acknowledge their amazing parade.

Their walk up to the Griesalp was also the steepest post bus route in Europe, requiring purpose-built busses to make it up the gorge. This is a really impressive journey at a gradient of 28%.

I still remember the days when the hairpin curves were too tight for the busses to go round in one go, so they had to reverse a couple of times to manoeuvre the vehicle around the bends.

After a few years, the roaring trade had outgrown the little store my great-grandmother ran. This was about the same time when my great aunt Alice Zurbuegg returned from her trip to England – one of the only ladies in Kiental who could speak English and travelled in those days.

As she wasn't married at the time, her mother decided to build the "Golderli" for her, which she could run as her own business.

And so it all began: In 1925, they celebrated the grand opening of the new Golderli, an alpine restaurant and lodge with some rooms for guests to stay the night, as well as a grocery store for which my great great-grandfather would deliver the bread and goods 2-3 times a week.

In summer, the Golderli area would turn into a bustling little village, with hundreds of hikers stopping by. There was even an alpine school for the farmers' kids which opened for 3 months of the year. Golderli also has a tiny little chapel to celebrate Sunday mass – it has two rows of benches and seats for no more than 10 people inside. A real picturesque landmark.

A few years later, Alice married the Knorrli sales representative, but she remained the boss and heart and soul of the Golderli for over 65 years. Her grand-daughter, my cousin Trixi, took over the Golderli in the 90s, but it was eventually sold a few years later – a sad end of an era of the Zurbuegg family.

I wouldn't want to miss the wonderful memories I have of the Golderli in those days. I spent many, many Saturdays and Sundays up there with my dad who had to deliver bread and other supplies on a daily basis during the busy summer season.



The grand opening of the Golderli in 1925 – the small hut lower down on the right hand side was the "old" Golderli

My great aunt Alice was blind for the last ten years of her life and died at the age of 99. The last time I visited her, she still insisted on speaking English to me, since I was following her footsteps and just returned from my overseas travels.

By Tanja Latham-Zurbuegg

Griesalp and Golderli – the farthest end of the valley Kiental in the Bernese Alps became part of the UNESCO World Heritage Jungfrau–Aletsch–Bietschhorn Site in 2004.