

Snapping the Gotthard at Sisikon

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David tries some new angles on this famously photogenic railway. Being something of a master his angles work out correctly. Needless to say David took all the pictures in this article.



Re 4/4^{II} 11350, Passing Sisikon station and backed by Urnersee and the mountains which rise from behind Bauen on the opposite side of the lake. By selecting the highest vantage point available I succeeded in bringing the lake into the shot which is also enhanced by the attractive station building, partly in shadow, and the colourful camellia on the right.

Hopefully, *Swiss Express* readers will remember that I described my walk from Sisikon to Flüelen last year, finding some excellent photographic vantage points on the way. This year it was my plan to re-visit Sisikon in a morning while the sun was still between east and south in order to seek some new vantage points from the east side of the line. Fortunately the weather was excellent throughout the week apart from the threat of an isolated thunderstorm in the mountains in the late evenings and a tendency for a slight haze to develop during the afternoon over the lakes and river valleys. Otherwise there were long periods of sunshine each day but with a few white clouds, which I much prefer to a plain blue sky as this adds interest to any photograph. My efforts were well rewarded and the following is a brief guide to

the sites that I found with a few examples of the type of shots that can be obtained.

On Wednesday 4th June I spent a little time photographing at Erstfeld and then took the 10.01 "Personenzug" for the 13 minute journey to Sisikon, formed by the recently re-liveried driving car and drive end trailer (not the centre trailer) of the former SOB unit 566400 now re-numbered 566077. That was just one visible change since last year and it may be appropriate at this point to briefly detail the main changes in the general use of motive power on the Gotthard following some locomotive transfers between SBB Passenger and Cargo sectors.

Re 6/6's are now entirely SBB Cargo-owned and therefore their general use on passenger workings has ceased. Our only Re 6/6 passenger train

sighting of the week was the 17.00 Sundays Only Chiasso – Zürich train running about 20 minutes late at Baar behind 11663. At least half of all Gotthard line passenger trains are now class 460 hauled. The remainder are mainly in the hands of single Re 4/4^{ns} but there are diagrams for at least two pairs of these latter locomotives, which work some of the heavier EC/IC trains. At least five Re 4/4^{ns} still retain the red and cream *Swiss Express* livery, 11103/06/08/09/13 being noted at various

ly the whole week at Erstfeld depot pending an “event” after we departed on the Saturday), Re 4/4, Re 6/6 and on one occasion this year an Ae 6/6.

However, the once common sight of pairs of Re 460s on intermodal trains is virtually no more. Indeed the only such pairing was seen on our seventh day when 460107/115 were detached from a southbound intermodal at 07.00 at Erstfeld and went to the depot. This working may have also been in connection with the above “event”. Such



The 10.41 local to Erstfeld formed by RBD 560043 arrives at Sisikon as the 1046 SGV boat to Flüelen approaches on Urnersee. The highest peaks, on the far side of the lake, are those of the Gitschen and the snow-capped Uri-Rotstock.

locations during the week with at least two of these on Gotthard line workings.

Freight traffic is almost entirely in the hands of Re 10/10 formations, the RM class 436 Re 4/4's still being used in a few of these pairings, though single Re 6/6's do work some of the lighter freights and the odd Ae 6/6 still appears on local freight or infrastructure trains, the occasional intermodal as well as a new regular postal working late evening. Few trains appeared to require banking assistance south from Erstfeld. When this was required anything available was used for such duties producing Re 460 (460118 in Alp Transit livery spent virtual-

pairings are now far more common on Basel – Lötschberg line freights where several of the remaining SBB Cargo-owned 460s appeared to be operating alongside BLS Re 4/4s, 465s and 485s and from Spiez northwards also DB 185s.

Conversely, a pair of BLS 465s now head a daily freight from Basel to Chiasso and back. A BLS driver from Spiez is outstationed at Erstfeld for a week at a time and stays at the Hotel Frohsinn. He works the southbound train from Erstfeld to Chiasso departing about 07.00 and arrives back at Erstfeld with a northbound train about 17.00.



A northbound freight, headed by an Re 10/10 formation with 11163 leading, takes the south bound line just north of Sisikon station.

The 482s appear to be still outstationed in the Köln area but we did see 482000 in the yard between Basel Rangierbahnhof and MuttENZ standing alongside the latest gleaming SBB Cargo livery conversion, 620087, no doubt a special publicity event of some kind. The new SBB Cargo livery had been applied to a few Re 6/6s with consequent re-numbering to class 620 and also a few Re 4/4^{II}s in the latter series (11371-81/83-397) which have become class 421s denoting ability to operate over DB metals. The exception is the former 11276 which has lost its light green Cargo livery and become a class 420, a definite improvement in my eyes. A few Re 4/4s and Re 6/6s retain their original dark green livery, 11105/17/58/60/364 and 11633/46/51/86/88 being some noted examples. So there are quite a variety of liveries on offer despite the Re 4/4 and Re 6/6 dominance.

On arrival at Sisikon I found that the entrance on the northbound platform had been changed from the south to the north end and two workmen were busy dismantling the old wooden

steps that led down from the former. I immediately turned right under the railway (limited head clearance, tall persons beware!) alongside the fast flowing river that races down under the southbound platform and came across a couple of lizards scurrying over some rocks in the warm sun. Back in 1975 I saw dippers on this river but none obliged on this day. I stopped at the pedestrian river bridge a few metres up stream to weigh up the possibilities of a shot. I took two photographs. The second, an Re 4/4^{II} passing over the river with the main station building on the left and a rather eye-catching camellia on the right hand side of the shot, was taken from slightly higher ground allowing Urnersee and the distant village of Bauen to come into shot above the loco which gave a more pleasing effect.

Over the years I have become aware of some useful photographic techniques that have definitely improved my results and what follows are just some of my personal preferences in trying to achieve that aim.

RIGHT: A superb setting for pan-shots just to the south of Sisikon station. An Re 10/10 formation with 11632 Däniken and recently repainted and renumbered 421735 head a southbound intermodal.

BELOW: A similar setting, but standing back a little to include the curved pathway and the attractive street light mentioned in the text. 460023 approaches Sisikon, on time, at 11.52 with IC 936, the 08.25 Milano-Schaffhausen.

I do find that it is important to try to be aware of objects of potential for enhancing the overall effect of any picture rather than concentrating solely on the main subject of the shot. Shots of locomotives that completely fill the frame and

the like that will give the appearance of growing from the top of the train can often be avoided by changing ones stance slightly or selecting a lower view point, though there are some locations (the



make it impossible to ascertain the type of terrain let alone the location where the shot was taken I find frustrating. Standing back a little to allow a small area of background on at least one side of the subject generally makes for a far more interesting and informative picture. Noting poles and

north end of Olten station is one example) where such intrusions cannot be avoided. Including suitable objects in the foreground where possible also adds depth and framing a picture by making use of foliage or branches on the edges of shots can also make a scene more attractive. Lighting is



Partially repainted and renumbered SOB RDe 566077 enters Sisikon with the 12.14 local to Zug in a slightly less dramatic setting. What a difference a few metres in height can make to a picture, but not always for the best of course!

also important and if the sun is illuminating a picture from the side, rather than from directly behind the camera, shadows are partially cast on any buildings that appear in the shot which again can give a far more interesting effect. I certainly do not succeed in capturing the perfect image every time, in fact far from it and seldom am I completely satisfied with the result. However, attention to such detail does increase the chances of coming up with the occasional shot that exceeds all one's expectations.

Last year I spotted a path/narrow road leading up the hillside on the north side of Sisikon, which I thought might have potential, so this year I investigated further. I continued up to the busy Axenstrasse, the main road that passes through the otherwise tranquil village, turned left, and crossed to the other side. After a few metres I took a right turn near a pedestrian crossing and followed the *Weg der Schwyz* signs, the Swiss Way which takes a higher route north to Brunnen via Morschach. This road climbs away from the main road and after a short distance I took a sharp left hand turn up a narrower road on a steeper gradient. After a few min-

utes a striking view overlooking the village, railway and Urnersee unfolded, magnificently backed by the Gitschen and the snow capped peak of the Uri-Rotstock.

There was a limited area which gave a suitable view. My first shot of the 10.41 local to Erstfeld included an SGV Luzern – Flüelen boat service due Sisikon at 10.46, both on time of course. Unfortunately several boats by-pass Sisikon which only has a two-hourly service in each direction at best and therefore a considerable amount of luck is needed to include one in a shot. I tried different stances and was quite pleased with a shot of a northbound freight headed by an Re16/16 trio displaying three generations of liveries, namely red, dark green and the new blue Cargo respectively. Early to mid morning northbound freights often have multiples of motive power at the helm as this is the most economical method of working locomotives back to Basel when, as is often the case, there is an imbalance of freight traffic with more tonnage heading south than north.

I walked back down to the main road, turned right towards the north, crossed over and took a left turn after a few metres where a short track

leads to the lineside. The northbound line tunnel between Sisikon and Brunnen has been closed for several months while work on lowering the trackbed to accommodate larger containers takes place. All trains between these points were therefore subject to single line working over the southbound line but, although trains were frequent, delays were rare and very few trains came to an actual stand to await clearance of the line by another train. I tried a couple of portrait shots here of southbound trains as well as a landscape shot of a northbound Re10/10, which had just crossed onto the single line section. The background for this latter shot included snow capped peaks and was partially backlit. I think that it will probably be an easier shot to manage when trains revert to using the northbound line.

Luck deserted me momentarily as I headed back towards the station missing the opportunity to photograph an Ae 6/6 hauling a single van northbound. I continued on a path/track that runs parallel to and a few metres from the east side of the line between the station and the south tunnels. This track appears to belong to the nearby hotel on the Axenstrasse, allowing public access to the rear of the hotel but I stayed on the

track and avoided the fenced grassed areas. This was a magical location for pan shots, again with snow capped peaks as a backcloth and chance to include an isolated but attractive street lamp. I am delighted with the results I obtained here. The nearside overhead wire supports at this location are conveniently positioned between down and up lines and are therefore far less obtrusive from this side angle. I used 1/500th of a second exposure for these shots though my normal preference is 1/250th and a smaller aperture. I tried different positions with very pleasing results. Just for the record I use a Canon EOS 3000 SLR with a 35-80mm zoom lens and have been faithful to Agfa CT 200 colour slide film (or previous equivalent) for over 35 years. I also carry a 70-200mm zoom lens but I am not a fan of distorted distance shots and it sees little use. There is a tendency for the camera to under-expose when using the lens at 35mm but I have found that this can be overcome by adjusting the camera film speed setting from 200 to 160 ISO. I also find this facility very useful when the subject matter is predominately white, e.g. an ICN or Class 520, which is another threat to under-exposure.

Re4/4 III43 passing Sisikon with the IC *Mediolanum*, 11.10 Basel-Milano.





A northbound freight headed by an Re 16/16 trio in three generations of liveries: red, green and the new *Cargo*. It has just crossed to the southbound line as the northbound tunnel towards Brunnen was closed while work on lowering the track to accommodate larger containers takes place. The scene is backed by the Gitschen and the snow-capped Uri-Rotstock

I followed this session with some shots from the grass bank leading up to the Axenstrasse but I was not so pleased with the results here, new house roofs and more uniform mountain background giving a less pleasing effect. Shots from above the south tunnels are much better taken after 12.30 looking down onto the west side of the line but vegetation above the tunnel portals has thickened and grown in height since last year. This, together with a new aerial mast that has appeared near the entrance to the southbound tunnel, now makes shots a little more difficult than was previously the case.

Readers may find an aerial view of Sisikon useful for enhancing my descriptions and there is one available on the SRS web site home page. Go to "Links", "General" and click on the first item "Aerial Views of Switzerland". Click the right hand heading on the following page "Aerial Photography from Switzerland" then "Uri" and "Sisikon".

The aerial view is from above Urnersee looking east/south east. The most easily defined features are the railway, the Axenstrasse main road

around the rear of the village and the river flowing down into Urnersee. The station lies just to the right of the river. The narrow road on the left with a sharp left hand bend is the one to take to obtain a view over the village and lake looking south. Further to the left, just about out of picture, is the track leading off the Axenstrasse to the lineside north of the station. The green area adjacent to the railway on the right of the picture is dissected by the path from which I took the pan shots. The south tunnel entrance is hidden in shadow where the railway disappears on the right side of the picture.

All in all I was extremely pleased with my four hour exploration and remarkably all the diverse vantage points I found were within a short distance of one another, no more than a 10 minute walk between any of them and many just two or three minutes from each other. I do have a feeling that a few more locations close by still await discovery and of course I shall set aside some time in next year's itinerary to explore further.