

THE FUNICULAR OF REGOLEDO

Suddenly the path gets past a deep and large man-made wall: it is what remains of the funicular which, at the beginning of the century, linked up the railway station to the imposing hydrotherapeutic place, founded at Regoledo by Francesco Maglia in 1858. The Grand Hotel Regoledo, as was called in those times, had renowned guests among which Arturo Toscanini, Ippolito Nievo, Amilcare Ponchielli, padre Agostino Gemelli, Massimo D'Azeglio, Antonio Stoppani, Cesare Cantù. The strange building, very long and narrow, is now a branch of the Istituto Sacra Famiglia of Cesano Boscone and can be seen high up, dominating a wide green clearing.

A LITHOLOGICAL BOUNDARY

Looking closely at the walls along the track, you will notice that at a certain point the stones become different from those seen before. At first they are greyish calcareous stones or purple red porphyries then there are very clear granitic stones (gneiss and schist). The fact is that you have got past the partition line between the sedimentary cover, typical of the foothills of the Alps and which was formed in the Triassic period (250 - 210 millions of years ago), and that of the crystalline base that here emerges.

The path, always duly marked with modest monuments to the popular faith, lowers toward the railway station, gets over a small bridge on the dell of Biosio and goes down in sight now of the Pioverna delta where Bellano lies. The quiet

Cappella della Madonna Addolorata (Chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows) comes before the junction with the provincial road 62. This must be walked up for a few dozen of metres on the right to pick up the track again and to cross the bridge of San Rocco over the Pioverna stream that just here under forms the Orrido di Bellano (Bellano Ravine) recently brought back to its original beauty. This ravine, the provostal Church dedicated to the Saints Nazaro, Celso and Giorgio, the wooden statues of the small church dedicated to Saint Marta, the alleys and the narrow, shady yards of the old town centre will at last take up any wait for the train to come back to Varenna.

Varenna, February 2009

Text by Albano Marcarini and Paolo Ferrara
Photographs by Paolo Ferrara
Translation by Maria Piera Malvezzi



Grafica PIFERUS
di P. Ferrara e P. Rusconi

Stampa: Grafiche Rusconi Bellano



Provincia di Lecco



Department of Tourism and Sport

Corso G. Matteotti, 3
23900 Lecco
Tel. 0341.295516 - 509
Fax 0341.295501
turismo@provincia.lecco.it
www.provincia.lecco.it

Tourist Information Office Lecco

Via N. Sauro, 6
23900 Lecco
Tel. 0341.295720 - 721
Fax 0341.295730
info.turismo@provincia.lecco.it
www.turismo.provincia.lecco.it

Tourist Information Office Barzio

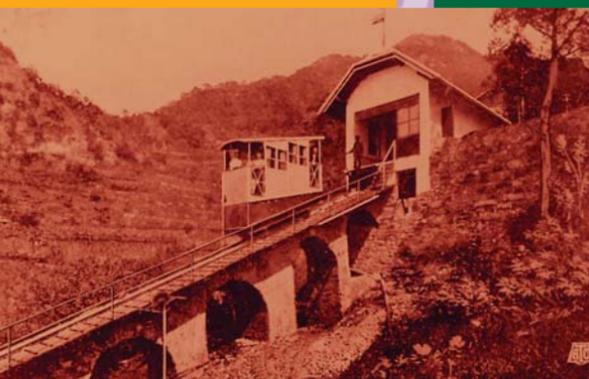
Piazza G. Garibaldi, 12
23816 Barzio - LC
Tel. 0341.996255
Fax 0341.910103

The author wish to thank all the Volunteers who, with their enthusiasm, constancy and lots of hard work, keep this fascinating path well practicable: an inestimable and irreplaceable effort.

He therefore thanks Albano Marcarini, friend and master, for his helpfulness and collaboration.



Provincia di Lecco



The path gets near Bellano. Now and then some clearings arranged in terraces open out with rows of wines or thin strips of grass.



THE BOUNDARY STONES

They are on the edge of the mule track. They are three and are engraved with the date 1732 and the initials of the municipalities of Perledo and Bellano that border here. Further on you will find again other stones because the administrative limit ran along the path. Near the stones there is a modest chapel that has a precious Crucifixion of the XV century.

Going on you will notice a settlement crossed by the path and set on three levels along the slope. The higher up building has signs of a certain distinction with a decorated portal and a nice small balcony. Known as the Fabbrica it had different uses in the past: tavern, "bigattiera" (the place where silkworms were kept), farrier's workshop and cellar — still used today — for wine making.

Time needed
Half a day, considering the different stops

Suggested period
Autumn, spring



This walk is a short, but attractive part of a much longer excursion route, fitted out in 1989 and called “Wayfarer path”. It runs from Varenna to Bellano along a thin mule track that winds along the side of the mountain among chestnut woods and mild cultivated slopes. In a few hours time it collects the best of the landscape characters in this part of Lombardy: majestic landscapes, botanical and geological peculiarities, tokens of faith, places of the popular imagination, scraps of fields, rustic houses, vineyards and olive groves which create a frame that has been sung by poets and writers at length and for a long time. Not least there are the very works of the route — that is the pavement, the large steps, the bridges — that show a building science that has never been codified in rules, but has been shared owing to the daily practical use much before the invention of the piston engine. To stop for a while on the meaning of these routes in history will help to enjoy better the zest of the route. Through the centuries Lake Como has been a favourable natural link for the trade from Milan towards the regions beyond the Alps. We must remember, in fact, that before the advance of the Adda delta (XV century) in the lower part of the Valtellina and of the drainage of the Chiavenna Plain, the Lario extended itself much more to the north than now. So Como, or Brivio (according to the preference for one or the other of the two branches of the lake) could be linked with a certain rapidity, by waterway, with the port of Riva di Chiavenna and from there, by land, to Coira crossing the Spluga Pass or that of Settimo. At least up to the second half of the XIX century, when the great postal road from Milan to the Stelvio was built by the Austrians, on the shores of the lake there were only difficult mule tracks. Only on the western shore of the lake it seems to have been verified the existence of an ancient road, called Regina, from Como as far as Chiavenna. The coastal villages themselves had a town plan-

ning scheme always facing the water, with narrow allies and steps which steeply went down to the landing places. Among the villages they mostly communicated sailing along the coast. However not all the wayfarers could afford a boat, or were in a position to pay a transfer and in those turbulent times there was also the frequent need to move troops and animals that were obliged to follow a land route. For these reasons, along the eastern shore of the lake, from Lecco to Colico, it was outlined a track that had each time the most different names to testify its indefinite identity: “horse route”, “Ducal route” “Napoleonic route”, “wayfarer route”. All these names have been found by historians on old cadastral maps which have been used to reconstruct that ancient track calling it with its most charming name: precisely “the Wayfarer’s Path”.



At Olivedo, behind a hotel, just next to an old marble plate of CAI, signposting the Capanna Monza, we take Via della Croce. So the stepped rise toward Vezio begins and it will be followed as far as the small settlement lying on a saddle at about 150 metres above the lake level. In Vezio it is advisable a short diversion towards the castle, before walking along the Wayfarer’s Path.

And now it is time to start our walk.



From Piazzetta Belvedere in Vezio, where the signposts can clearly be seen, the path gets down with cobbled steps (on the sides wide patches of allium ursinum which smell fills the air in spring) and it crosses the valley of the Esino stream. Opposite an industrial area, the Wayfarer’s Path goes immediately uphill to the charming small church of Madonna di Campallo, passing under its porch adorned with two cypresses. Then it reaches Regolo (320 m.), a lovely village that in its centre hides a medieval house-tower and the baroque church dedicated to Saint John the Baptist. Going along Vicolo Stretto it gets out on a sharp turn of the carriage road which must be followed downward nearly as far as the next turn of the road where it takes Via alla Cava Bassa. Not far away, wonderful views straight to the lake can be savoured, in spite of the building intervention that has badly upset what a few years ago was a place full of charm and of history.



The lake has the power to mitigate the climate and often, also in full winter, an excursion in these places reveals in advance the first warmth of spring. The path is well marked with orange metal arrows and plates and this saves many boring descriptions.

THE VEZIO CASTLE

It is set in a splendid position, dominant the Centro Lago, of which it was one of the most important signaling points. It is a castle-enclosure dating back to the XII - XIII century, with a square tower surrounded by a pentagonal circle of walls with towers at the corners. In ancient times a second wall wrapped up the whole and went down to include and guard the built-up area of Varenna. Even today one can find traces of this in the cadastral maps. Vezio is hamlet of Perledo while the Castle is under the town council of Varenna.

THE BLACK MARBLE QUERRIES OF VARENNA

The abbot Amoretti, in 1824, stated to be “that hard and pretty marble that we call occhiadino, because it by many eyes seems formed and it is composed of blackish marble and white spar, that now and then fills the openings left by the sea bodies intermingled”. Divide Bertolotti, in 1821, noted down in his Journey on Lake Como: “Then we walked by the quarries of marble which layers, overwhelming the lake in a nearly perpendicular line, make the work of extraction hard and risky; so that you often see workers, tied in the air with ropes, hitting with the tools on the hard stone, hanging on the precipice.”



The path goes on and soon it becomes a mule track climbing a short slope on the right, after an old house, and then it joins the road of Regoledo near the rustic Cappella Maglia (XVIII century) that has been recently restored. The thick chestnut wood towering above is called Bosco delle Streghe (Witch-wood); if during the day it has really nothing disquieting, at the sunset the dark branches of the very old chestnut trees suddenly seem to become skinny hands of witches outstretched toward the sky... The road gets down to a junction, where the mule track starts again on the left: among the trees one can perceive, far away, the wide deltaic plain of Dervio and, beyond the lake, the mountains of Alto Lario. The almost flat route now edges the valley of Rio Masna, dotted with small settlements hidden in the vegetation among which Gittana (322 m.), with the parish church dedicated to the Holy Borning Virgin that can clearly be seen above the built up area and Cestaglia (392 m.) that is just touched by the path.

The thick chestnut wood towering above is called Bosco delle Streghe (Witch-wood); if during the day it has really nothing disquieting, at the sunset the dark branches of the very old chestnut trees suddenly seem to become skinny hands of witches outstretched toward the sky... The road gets down to a junction, where the mule track starts again on the left: among the trees one can perceive, far away, the wide deltaic plain of Dervio and, beyond the lake, the mountains of Alto Lario. The almost flat route now edges the valley of Rio Masna, dotted with small settlements hidden in the vegetation among which Gittana (322 m.), with the parish church dedicated to the Holy Borning Virgin that can clearly be seen above the built up area and Cestaglia (392 m.) that is just touched by the path.



THE DRY STONE WALLS

Up to now, walking along the path, you will certainly have had the chance to notice the beauty of the walls that delimit it. They are mighty manufactured works that sometimes are nearly two metres high. The stones keep and balance themselves simply by compression without the need of mortar or of other binder. Where they do not fit exactly thinner stones are inserted so to make the wall solid and compact. In fact it is exposed to very strong pressures and you can verify this where, by fault or by neglect, the walls are belly-flopped, that is where the soil succeeds in expanding them until they “explode”. In the cracks small plants grow; they are varied and among them the tancy (Tanacetum parthenium), the stonecrop (Sedum acre), the red valerian (Centranthus ruber) and the crane’s bill (Geranium robertianum).



The track goes always at a certain height above the lake: looking backward one can see the Punta di Morcate, where the seasonal presence of some pairs of mountain swallows (Hirundo-pestris) has been observed.

