

From Menaggio to Porlezza along the former railway track

This itinerary follows the traces of the former railway line that ran, from 1884 until 1939, between Menaggio and Porlezza and connected Lake Como with Lake Lugano. The route runs through the valley Val Menaggio, mainly on paved paths, and touches the Lago di Piano Nature Reserve. It should be noted that some small sections run along roads used by local traffic.

ITINERARY: Menaggio - Grandola ed Uniti - Bene Lario - Carlazzo – Porlezza

STARTING POINT: Menaggio - boat dock in via IV Novembre

LENGTH: 13.5 km

ALTITUDE AT DEPARTURE: 200 m

MAXIMUM ALTITUDE: 377 m

TOTAL ASCENT: 250 m

TECHNICAL DIFFICULTY: easy

The railway line between Menaggio and Porlezza was opened in 1884 in order to attract more tourists from northern Europe to the area. Arriving by train to Lugano the tourists were then transported by steamboat to Porlezza from where the train brought them to Menaggio. After World War I it became a simple working class transit system and was also used to transport timber of the woods of Mount Galbiga and ice of Lake Piano. This lasted until 1939. After World War II the train line was abandoned.

Route: The former railway station of Menaggio is in **Via IV Novembre**, where today the grocery store called Consorzio Agrario stands, just next to the ferry dock. This is where this itinerary starts. Continue left along the side walk along of Via IV Novembre. After 50 meters, at a small parking lot, cross the road and head up the steep ramp that leads to the parking lot of the Menaggio Youth Hostel. Turn left and continue along **Via Privata Frattelli Castelli**. After 400 meters at the fork in the bend, turn right and follow the continuation of Via Privata Frattelli Castelli that ascends steeply along the side of Monte Crocetta.

In order to overcome the incline from Menaggio (207 m) to Cardano (377 m), the train would head south for about 600 m and reverse its direction on a siding (where the locomotive, after being separated, was turned on a turntable to be attached to the rear of the train) to continue northwards.

After 500 meters, at the fork keep left and, after another 600 meters, the Via **Privata Frattelli Castelli** ends onto the main **State road 340** which connects Menaggio with Lugano. Cross it paying attention to the heavy traffic, and follow it to the left, uphill, for just 50m. At the next bend pick up the cycle lane. The track enters a valley and passes a 90 m long tunnel. At the fork ignore the road to the right leading down to the Agriturismo Barcola and continue left. Shortly ahead the track ends onto the **SP8 road of Grandola ed Uniti**.

Cross it and follow the continuation of the cycle lane that runs behind Bar Stazione. At its end turn left and at the traffic lights cross the state road 340. With caution follow the side walk along the road in the reverse direction of travel for about 50 meters. Then enter the cycle lane on the left. You end onto the Provincial road 9 which you follow to the left. After 200 m you pick up the continuation of the cycle path on the right.

You skirt a plain called Binadone flanked by the woody slopes of Monte Crocione (1640 m) and Monte Galbiga. Near the village of Grona the track ends. Continue to the right along **Via Cascine**. When you get to an intersection, take the cycle track right in front of you (sign for Lago di Piano) entering the **Nature Reserve Lago di Piano**. Pass behind the campsite Ranocchio and just past its entrance continue along the lake Piano. The large reedy area is an ideal breeding place for water birds. Among the aquatic species the most easily to be observed are the Mallard, the Coot, the Moorhen, the Mute Swan, the Gray Heron and the Great Grebe.

Soon you reach the visitor centre **Casa della Riserva** with an information office and a small ecomuseum (for information tel. +39 0344 74961). In front of the office there are some nice picnic tables with view of the lake. On the left you notice the drumlin called Brione with the **Castel S. Pietro** at its top. We recommend a small detour in order to visit this old settlement with its houses clustered close to each other. The stone wall and the narrow passages give the idea of a fortress, which is what it used to be in the Middle Ages.

Continuing on the track you will cross a wooden bridge over the river Cuccio. Follow the course of the river until you reach the **main road SP14**. Continue to the right for approximately 100 m and then cross the main road and turn into **Via Prati** that leads to the residential complex called "Porto Letizia." On the left side of the main building take the path that skirts Lake Lugano. After crossing the bridge over the river Val Rezzo, go down some steps to resume the continuation of the lake side promenade that leads to the center of Porlezza. Back the same way.