

VareseNews

What's interesting in our area? The Lanza Valley and Molera Quarry

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A view from the air: discovering the Lanza Valley

The area of Malnate hides more than one treasure as far as nature and landscapes are concerned. A short distance from the town, the **Lanza Valley** begins, and gives an opportunity to dive into nature that, in places, is uncontaminated, and to discover the signs of human activity in the area.

The **Lanza Valley Park**, which was created in 2002, is a protected area of supra-municipal interest that extends over the Valley of the River Lanza (which is also known as Gaggiolo or Ranza), which has its source on Monte San Giorgio, in Canton Ticino, and which flows into the Olona River, in Malnate. The area is characterised by wetlands, grasslands and woods, rural buildings, churches and buildings of cultural interest, and old quarries of molera stone.

In the park, there are the tracks of the **Valmorea Railway**, which once connected the towns of Mendrisio and Castellanza, and which has been partly reopened for touristic purposes by Mendrisio and Malnate.

The walk along the whole length of the river is lovely, as it twists and turns **from the Folla area of Malnate, eventually reaching Mendrisio**, and can also be covered by mountain bike. Around this main path, a network of other paths allows you to walk for hours, immersed in nature and in the silence that is only broken by the sound of water.

ON FOOT TO MENDRISIO

The river, the historic railway, the green areas and the vineyards are the main features along **the path from Malnate to Mendrisio**, more than **half of whose 17 km lies inside the Lanza Valley Park**.

The path starts in the Folla area of Malnate, just outside the restaurant "Regina", on the curve before heading into town. Here a tip we would like to give you is to start at the Malnate railway station, where you can return to by train, from Mendrisio.

This walk presents no difficulties, it is completely safe, with no particular differences in height. A good part of it is surrounded by green areas, on both the Italian and Ticino sides.

From Malnate to Mendrisio on foot

THE ROUTE

On leaving the streets of Malnate, heading towards the cemetery, take the path that runs along the Lanza River, which will accompany you all the way to the border. After the large meadows, the path narrows and comes to the Molera Quarry. After less than 4 km from the beginning of the path, on the edge of Cagno, you come to the Trotto Mill, a characteristic structure that is kept open by the volunteers of the Ecological Guards of the Park. The house, with its two rooms, bathrooms and kitchen, is available also to host small groups.

The history of the Trotto Mill in the Lanza Valley

After the mill, you still have to cover a few kilometres to reach the old Valmorea Station, the railway that went from Castellanza to Mendrisio. Until a few years ago, the section from Folla continued to operate, to carry tourists.

From here, the road to the border in Santa Margherita is short. From the starting point, it is just 9 km, and it is a little more than 7 km to the station of Medrisio. Stay in the wood, and then enter the vine-growing area, and from there, continue on to Genestrerio. Go under the new railway and along the local streets and paths, and you will come to the station, where you can catch the return train.

THE Molera Quarry

Walking along the Lanza River, you will come to one of the most enchanting areas in Varese Province, which has been declared a natural monument of the **Natural system of the Molera Quarry of Malnate and Cagno**.

(below: the Molera quarry, photograph by Luca Sacchet)

This is an area of 165 hectares, which was created to preserve the sandstone outcrops and the ecosystem that developed around them.

Sandstone (“molera”) has been extracted, in this area, since the 13th century, by exploiting the outcrops on the sides of the valley. This activity has left deep caves, some of which can be visited and are delightful.

At the beginning of February 2022, the VEGs (Voluntary Ecological Guards) of the park made **an exceptional discovery**: another molera quarry came to light near Como. It lies along the path between Malnate and Cagno (which is part of the municipality of Solbiate con Cagno), between the Trotto Mill and the Mazziotto Mill, and for years, it had been hidden by thick vegetation.

The quarry is a genuine, natural spectacle, although **entry is now forbidden, due to the danger of falling materials**.

THE Gurone mills

From Folla, in Malnate, it is also possible to go in the opposite direction, to the **Gurone Mills**. This is an easy path, which goes under the delightful Malnate railway bridge, and, in a few minutes on foot, takes you to the Gurone Mills.

Until 1800, in the place of the Gurone Mills, there was the Varenna Cotton Mill. Then, in 1900, the Calderoni Vita Family arrived, bringing the “Spunzun”, a dialectical term used locally for the smell caused by grinding animal bones. The Gurone Mills were remained in operation until 1970; here, wheat was ground and the energy from the water also powered a joiner’s workshop.

The mills are the headquarters of a development project, in which the Italian environmentalist association, Legambiente, has a leading role in the project “Casamatta”, which takes place in the evocative setting of the wall built to protect the old town from the river; this project is called “L’anello sul fiume” (Ring on the River), which is also mentioned on the website of **Lombardy Region, in the section Open Innovation: “Casamatta, da ‘ecomostro’ a Centro per sostenibilità ed economia circolare”** (Casamatta, from ‘eco-monster’ to Centre for sustainability and the circular economy).

Sentiero Italia

Is 17 km a little short for you? No problem! The park is also crossed by the **Sentiero Italia, or Grand Italian Trail**: 7000 km of **one of the longest trekking routes in the world**.

In our area, Sentiero Italia is known as the “Sentiero Confinale”. Designed and created by Italia Nostra and today maintained by the Bizzarone branch of the CAI (Italian Alpine Club), it extends for about 90 kilometres along the wooded strip of the Italian-Swiss border, connecting Marchirolo to Monte Bisbino in seven stages. The 7th stage starts at the San Maffeo hill (Rodero), crosses the **Lanza Valley Park**, the Somazzo hill (in the municipality of Ronago and Ugiate Trevano) and the Mulini Valley, and ends in the Spina Verde Regional Park, in Como.

If you think that no one would be so “crazy” as to walk along the whole trail, you’re wrong, the members of **“Va’ sentiero”** did it in two years, and **Elia Origoni, from Varese, walked it, alone, from February to October 2021**.

BY TRAIN

The easiest way to reach the beginning of the route is not by car, but by train. It is about 1.2 km, from the Malnate railway station. To return from Mendrisio, you can always take the Tilo, which arrives in Varese after stopping in Stabio, Gaggiolo, Arcisate and Induno Olona. The cost of the ticket is CHF 6.80.

For timetables and further information, visit the **Trenord** website.

BY BICYCLE

Work is currently ongoing (spring 2022) to build “Ti Ciclo Via”, the cycle path that will connect Mendrisio to the Olona Valley, passing through the park. As a result of the work on this interregional project, some areas between Folla in Malnate and the Trotto Mill may be temporarily closed to the public.

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