



OSSUCCIO – PATH 1 – A SMALL ISLAND AMIDST GREAT HISTORY AND OLD WALKWAYS

STAGE 3 – THE AREA AROUND THE CHURCH OF S. GIOVANNI

INFORMATION

Point of departure Comacina Island, Casa Torre

Point of arrival Comacina Island, ruins of the Twin apse baptismal hall

Path type tourism-excursion route

Total length approx. 300m

Travel time (on foot) 10 min

Difficulty tourist-excursionist

Rise 20m

Maximum height 220m

Paving dirt track, grass with outcropping stones, roots and rocks, stone slabs, stone setts

Public transport to the point of departure –

Public transport from the point of arrival –

Parking at the point of departure –

Points of interest Basilica of S. Eufemia (St. Euphemia)*; Church of S. Giovanni Battista (St. John the Baptist); The Feast of St. John; Aula battesimale biabsidata (The Twin Apse Baptismal Hall)*

* building totally or partially in ruins

DESCRIPTION

From the remains of the Casa Torre continue slightly downhill, overcoming 5 even steps; the left edge of the footpath is still limited by a 1.20 metre high wooden fence for approx. another 30 metres, and then left unprotected. Continuing on, you should pay special attention to outcropping roots and rocks; descend other 4 very narrow stone steps to find yourself on the shore of the lake, preceded by a short section of a pebble beach, at which the left edge is unprotected to allow access. When the lake level is low, you can see alignments of large blocks of Moltrasio stone, which seem to show traces of ancient environments.

Continue along the dirt track that runs along the shore, now protected on the left side by a 1.20m high metal railing. After about 30 meters you will reach the most easterly point of the island, facing the *Antiquarium*, where the railing stops to allow access to the lake via a staircase. As you carry on bordering the lake, the path called “Footpath of S. Eufemia” begins to go uphill, its right side still being protected by a metal railing about 1 metre high. Here you should pay attention to the irregular base (concrete, stone) and two low steps that interrupt the climb.

After approx. 150 metres from the lake you once again reach the large grassy open space where you can see the most significant archaeological remains of the whole Island. Here stood the **Basilica of S. Eufemia**, the most important and remarkable monument on the Island. The ruins you see here were part of the Church built in 1031 by Litigerius, bishop of Como, and demolished by the people of Como in 1169. Archaeological excavation has revealed the existence of an earlier religious building, erected during the Early Christian period or the Early Middle Ages, and older ruins dating back to Roman times. According to tradition, in fact, this church was founded by St. Abundius in the 5th century and rebuilt in the 7th century by St. Agrippinus, thirteenth bishop of Como and great Christianizer of central Lake Como. First you find the outside of the apse, facing westwards, with the crypt, made in Moltrasio stone and bricks, characterized by three curved openings; leaning on the apse one can still see the excavation of a grave with a stone covered interior. The footpath then borders, on the right, the area occupied by the Basilica, and its front: a sight which gives a faint idea of the past splendour and magnificence of this building. The Basilica was preceded by a portico, where several graves are still visible; the inside had three naves (the bases of the dividing columns) and three apses; nowadays a monumental limetree grows amongst the large Moltrasio limestone blocks.

Keep to the left and follow the grassy footpath leading uphill for about 30 metres, where the only existing church on the

Island, dedicated to **St. John the Baptist**, built - as we can see it today - on the remains of older buildings in the 17th century, stands. Of a clear white colour, it has a single nave and is preceded by an airy portico which welcomes the visitor; inside, an altar frontal painted with chalk paste (scagliola) depicting St. John the Baptist (to whom the church is dedicated) deserves a mention. In 2009, at the end of the latest restoration work, the church was reconsecrated and returned to the faithful for worship; the Holy Mass is solemnly celebrated every year on the Sunday nearest to June 24th, the day of St. John, as part of a great **feast**, one of the oldest and most important to be held on Lake Como.

Walk along the left handside of the church for approx. 15 metres; first on the lawn (pay attention to the series of stone archaeological finds lined approx. 2 meters from the side wall of the sacred building), then crossing a stone platform (beside which, on the side of the church, a small water fountain with a granite basin has been placed), and finally a paved passage (please take care, as on the left and at the end there is no protection). Here one can see up close the partially enclosed area hosting the remains of a **Twin apse baptismal hall**, aligned east-west, dating back to the 5th century and refurbished in the Early Middle Ages, between the 8th and 9th century, with the construction of the two apses and the reworking of internal decoration (mosaics and frescoes, which are still visible). The remains of the baptismal octagonal pool built of bricks mixed with cocciopesto and clad with marble are still visible. The existence of this building (destroyed together with the other buildings on the Island in 1169) is particularly significant, as it testifies the importance of the Island as the “cradle” and core for the spreading of Como’s Christianity.