



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

### STAGE 4 – THE RIDGE OF THE ISLAND LEADING TO THE COMPLEX OF SS. FAUSTINO AND GIOVITA

#### INFORMATION

**Point of departure** Comacina Island, ruins of the Twin apse baptismal hall

**Point of arrival** Comacina Island, complex of Ss. Faustino and Giovita

**Path type** tourism-excursion route

**Total length** approx. 500m

**Travel time (on foot)** 20 min

**Difficulty** tourist-excursionist

**Rise** 10m

**Maximum height** 233m

**Paving** dirt track, grass with outcropping roots and rocks

**Public transport to the point of departure** –

**Public transport from the point of arrival** –

**Parking at the point of departure** -

**Points of interest** Santuario della Beata Vergine del Soccorso (Shrine of Our Lady of Help) and Sacro Monte (Sacred Mount); Abbazia dell'Acquafredda (Acquafredda Abbey); Church of S. Maria col portico (St. Mary with the portico)\*; Church of S. Pietro in Castello (St. Peter at the Castle)\*; Religious complex of the Ss. Faustino and Giovita (St. Faustinus and Jovita)\*

\* building totally or partially in ruins

#### DESCRIPTION

Turn back for approx. 60 metres and reach the end of the grassy open space, where on the left of the lawn you take the uphill footpath called “Sentiero Archeologico (Archaeological Footpath)”, which starts with 5 very irregular stone steps (please pay attention to the unprotected left edge), continues with a slightly uphill grassy section, then with other 15 stone steps and a further uphill section, until you end up on a green area equipped with a table and benches for a rest. We are now on the crest of the Island, where you can enjoy a beautiful panoramic view on the central area of the lake. In particular, on the western shore, you can catch a glimpse of a series of three extremely significant sacred buildings located on land, between the houses and the green areas. Looking to your left, at the foot of the hill above the inhabited area of Ossuccio, on the right bank of the valley of the Perlana stream, you can see the famous **Santuario della Madonna del Soccorso**, an important religious reference point for the Diocese of Como, preceded by a Sacred Mount, which, together with another eight existing at the foot of the Alps, has been included in UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 2003. On the left bank of the Perlana valley, again on the hillside, stands another religious building of great importance for the central Lake Como area, strongly linked to the Island: the **Acquafredda Abbey**, above the centre of Lenno, at the foot of Mount Ossino, dedicated in the course of history to the Virgin Mary, Saint Peter, and Saint Agrippinus. It was erected on land donated in 1142 to the Cistercians of Morimondo by Attone, nicknamed the *Peregrino*, from the Comacina Island; the mortal remains of bishop Agrippinus were transferred here after the destruction of 1169 (although a local tradition has it that the transfer took place earlier, to “put them in a safe place”). By looking down onto the hamlet of Isola di Ossuccio, you see the belfry of the parish church of Ss. Eufemia and Vincenzo, where the inhabitants of the Comacina Island who survived the destruction of 1169 transferred the religious centre of the Parish, together with the relics of the Holy Cross and the Martyr Saints which Abundius is believed to have donated to the church of S. Eufemia on the Island; the original grave slab of Saint Agrippinus was transferred here, too, and is nowadays kept behind the holy water font.

By continuing slightly uphill along the grassy footpath which follows the ridge of the Island (please mind outcropping

rocks), after about 60 metres you come across the ruins of the church of **S. Maria col portico**, starting from the semicircular apse, facing eastwards. This building, dating back to the 11th or 12th century, was erected on a flattened rocky surface; single naved, it was preceded by a rectangular room with a paved floor, identified as a “portico”, the ruins of which can still be seen.

Board the left side of the archaeological area (there is a table with benches nearby for those wishing a rest). Continue to the right, crossing patches of sparse tree line, including specimens of laurel, nettle tree and black hornbeam, with an understory of cornelian cherry and laburnum, always paying careful attention to outcropping rocks and roots and to the left edge, which is unprotected in some sections. After approx. 300 metres, following a deviation of the track going uphill on the right for about 50 metres, you encounter the ruins of the church of **S. Pietro in Castello** which surface above the grass. The building was a single hall with an oriented semicircular apse on rocky surface, erected in the 11th or 12th century probably to replace the remains of earlier buildings, perhaps part of a fortified area.

We are in fact on the highest part of the Island, traditionally known by the name of “Castello (Castle)” or “Castél”, where it is thought that the military headquarters of the Island were located, in contraposition with the religious complex of S. Eufemia.

After bordering the ruins of the church, turn back onto the main track. After another 30 metres you meet the sole apse of the Romanesque church of **Ss. Faustino and Giovita**, connecting with a flat footpath. Blind people have the possibility of physically touching a beautiful example of Romanesque architecture (please be aware that there is a grave behind the apse): it is built in irregular Moltrasio stone blocks, large square ashlar blocks (traces of this covering can still be seen on the part standing alongside the footpath); it has a semi-circular moulded base about 80cm high, on which a polygonal masonry is set, with five sides spaced out by semi-columns, with an oculus and a slit.

Considering the stylistic elements and the type of masonry, scholars believe that this sacred building must have been built after the twelfth century. Despite historical tradition dates back the destruction and total abandonment of the island to 1169, it has been hypothesized that some activities were continued or resumed after this date.

By turning left, at the beginning of the left wall you can see a single-lancet splayed window, flanked by a semi-column supporting a line of small blind arches, typical of Romanesque architecture.

Access to the inside of the church is by the left side entrance, marked by an arch, where one has to cross a low threshold and pass through a small vestibule. The original interior was turned into a stable and divided in two separate areas - one on top of the other - by a barrel vault ceiling: the concrete manger leaning to the south side, where five iron rings are walled in, is still visible. The church had two small inner apses, based on outcropping rock. The upper part can be visited, too, and access is from the outside, through the passage running alongside the apse, where you can see a capital and ruins of arcades belonging to the original vaults of the church.

Beside the church stand the ruins of the old monastery, now converted to the home of the Island’s keeper: public toilets have been set up at ground floor.