



## **MENAGGIO – PATH 1 – A VILLAGE AND A CASTLE, UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE MAGI**

### **STAGE 2 – FROM THE CHURCH OF ST. STEPHEN TO THE VISIT AROUND THE VESTIGES OF THE CASTLE**

#### **INFORMATION**

**Point of departure** Menaggio, provostal church of St. Stephen

**Point of arrival** Menaggio

**Path type** urban-excursion mixed route

**Total length** approx. 700 m

**Travel time on foot** 25 min

**Difficulty** Tourist-Excursionist

**Rise** 50 m

**Maximum height** 250 m asl

**Paving** cobbles, asphalt, stone slabs, stone setts

**Public transport to the point of departure** bus service nearby

**Public transport from the point of arrival:** bus service nearby

**Parking at the point of departure:** no

#### **DESCRIPTION**

After crossing the – very busy – via IV Novembre on the zebra crossing, you immediately come to five low stone steps leading to the left side entrance of the provostal church of **St. Stephen**, a parish of very ancient origin, rearranged on many occasions. In the interior, above the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary, at the head of the left aisle, a photograph of the painting of the *Madonna and Child with an angel* (16<sup>th</sup> century) by Bernardino Luini is exposed. The original painting, which adorned the Calvi family chapel, was sold at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to Count Carlo Firmian, in exchange for the transferring of the Magistrate's Court from Tremezzo to Menaggio. At the Count's death the painting was purchased at an auction by Marquis Arconati Visconti of Milan; in 1914 Maria Arconati Visconti donated it to the Louvre, where it is to this day. Exit the church from the left side entrance. Keep to the right and descend the five low stone steps, entering via Enrico Caronti da Blevio, a street paved with stone setts. After crossing the street on the zebra crossing you reach the street level pavement on the left hand-side. The old stately home at number 3 (not open to the public), which hosts a flower shop at ground level, has a small inner yard with a nymphaeum; walled into the building is a stone 14<sup>th</sup> century bas-relief slab of the emblem of Menaggio castle surmounted by a crest, from which long festoons branch off. After walking along via Caronti for approx. 50 metres you come to a street level roundabout formed of a cobbled circle bordered by a stone sett circumference. Cross the street again and take via Leone Leoni, a street going uphill, about 3.5 metres wide with a 25 low step stairway (which is best to avoid), keeping to the left (please note that cars are allowed on the street). The street is flanked by beautiful 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, with interesting wrought iron details (railings, bars), creating a very refined and elegant overall effect. After about 30 metres, on the left, going uphill, take via Castellino da Castello, named after a priest from Menaggio who lived between the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the founder of the "Schools of Christian Doctrine", charitable institutions for the children of the lower classes. The cobbled street is surrounded by imposing stately houses which reveal a past splendour. At number 3 is the mansion which hosted Benito Mussolini and Claretta Petacci on the night of the 26 of April 1945 during their escape on Lake Como; taken in Dongo the following day, they were shot in Giulino di Mezzegra on April 28th. At number 7 you may admire a sandstone arch, enclosed by a wrought iron gate leading to a small yard with a portico supported by a beautiful stone column. At number 9 is the entrance of the former "*Meneghett*" Hotel and Restaurant, a three floor, imposing and austere building, with a granite portal at the top of three steps, the second of which hosts two flower holders. On the opposite side of the street, on the right, at the height of number 18, there is a concrete fountain dated 1889, with a semicircular basin leaning on the boundary wall of a private property. A lion's head surrounds the fountain's inlet; beside it there is a stone bench, all of which is located above a step the height whereof varies between 30 and 60 centimetres (depending on the slope). After approx. 50 metres from the beginning of

the street and having passed number 20, the right hand-side of the road is flanked by a low porphyry tile stairway, made of 45 steps the width of which ranges between 60 and 30 centimetres, and the tread between 60 centimetres and 1 metre (please mind the one metre iron barrier at the beginning, parallel to the stairs). After a further 60 metres, at number 26 of via Castellino da Castello, on the right hand-side, at an angle with via *Streciou*, stands the house where Father Gabriele Malagrida, a Jesuit from Menaggio was born. He preached the Gospel in Brasil, and was a martyr in Lisbon in 1761 under the rule of the Marquis of Pombal; a memorial stone carries his name. The beautiful wood portal, with iron knobs and an elegant knocker shaped as a bearded and crowned head, is worthy of note. You then reach a crossroads, which marks the end of the steps at the side of the road. In front, at number 25, you can see the arched entrance (with a reproduction of a cave) to the garden of the “Riccardo Mantero Nursery School”, established in the premises of the former Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia (*National Maternity and Infant Care*) established by the textile entrepreneur, who had a factory here. The municipal institution has now been transferred to near the lake. Carry on along via Castellino da Castello (the second street on the right) for approx. 35 metres; then turn left into via dei Fabbri, a cobbled street named after a craft (Fabbri is the Italian equivalent of Blacksmiths) that was widespread in Menaggio. We are at the base of what must have been the **Castle of Menaggio\***, destroyed in 1523 by the Grisons: the stones of the original walls were used for the construction of new buildings and of the terracing that nowadays support vegetable gardens and gardens, however, this part of town continues to preserve the flavour and charm of the ancient fortress. The first section of via dei Fabbri is made of steps: at first you encounter 10 low steps, approx. 32 metres wide, with a 1 metre tread; please mind the first step, as in the centre there is a 70 centimetres high and 25 centimetres wide stone post. At number 1 was the entrance of the “Casa della madre e del bambino (*Home of the mother and the child*) Lina e Riccardo Mantero”; 5 metres down the same road, on the opposite side, is the Fountain of the “Saviour”. The fountain, with a stone basin preceded by a step, is housed under the small balcony of a private home. A recovered Romanesque sculpture, believed to be Jesus Christ holding what is thought to be a globe, possibly of 12<sup>th</sup> century origin, has been used to form the keystone of the arch overlooking the fountain. On the right a plaque says that the fountain was made *«In the interest of the public»* and carries the date 1621; however, at the base of the arch on the left there is also the date 1642. Continue by walking inside a vaulted passage and uphill, bordering a series of old buildings probably constructed by following the pattern of the walls of the old fortified settlement. At number 10 there is a plaque above the door with the engraving of the date 1856, and the wall at number 12 shows signs of an evident buttress. After about 50 metres from the beginning of the road there is another low step, where a narrow lateral cul-de-sac opens to the right; after the cul-de-sac the road starts to border a boundary wall in undressed stone which stops after a further 10 metres with a large pillar limiting, on the right, a passage parallel to the road, accessible by a gate. A small 12<sup>th</sup> century marble sculpture of an animal’s head, probably a bull, with a hole in its forehead and another at the height of its mouth (possibly used as an outlet for a fountain jet), was walled into this pillar, at the base of the pyramidal pinnacle at its summit. At the sides of the sculpture there are two slabs carrying the engraving of “*BORROMAEUS* (Borromeo)” on the right, and “*MONOCEROS* (Unicorn)” on the left, probably because this animal was present in Borromeo’s family emblem, or due to the meaning of purity, and humble strength which characterized the Milanese Saint. Federico Cereghini and his students, in the book *Il Castello di Menaggio (Menaggio Castle)*, suggest that one of the entrances to the castle was located in this area. Continue for a further 40 metres, slanting northwards, bordering on the right a tall retaining wall (approx. 8 metres) which at regular intervals presents robust buttresses and has at its foot a grass flowerbed of variable width with olive trees. This wall acts as an embankment, defining the clearing at the top of the hill; it is partly made of squared stones, and partly of various types and kinds of large river pebbles. After leaving behind a waste separation and recycling area with underground containers on the right, turn left after 10 metres and cross via Sauro on the zebra crossing; continue on the pavement on the opposite side of the road for 40 metres, then cross again at the following pedestrian crossing. Here you take via Castellino da Castello once again (mind the small step), a cobbled street going uphill. After 5 metres, on the right, limited by a retaining wall, you may see traces of a jamb: another entrance to the fortress was probably located here. In this section, for approx. 40 metres, the left edge of the road is protected by an 80 centimetres high iron railing. At the end of the enclosure, bend right and climb the 4 steps leading to the churchyard in front of the **church of St. Charles**, one of the first to be dedicated to the Milanese Saint, which was built on the ruins of the castle in the years immediately following his canonization (1620) thanks to the desire of nobleman Cinzio Calvi. The churchyard has a gravel base, with a 3 metres wide cobbled strip (please mind the two 60 cm high and 25 cm wide stone posts which stand at the beginning of the central strip). The churchyard is secluded by walls of old buildings: a white marble polygonal slab, in remembrance of the assignment of the church to the *«administration of the Order of the Canons and Apostles of Saint Charles Borromeo»* is walled into the building on the left, when facing the façade. The undressed stone façade of this building is at number 69 of via Castellino da Castello; it is well visible on the left when you descend, five metres from the churchyard. It is a three floor building, preceded by a 10 cm high porphyry tile pavement, with seven small arched windows (four on the first floor and three on the second), underlined by terracotta bricks. Into the façade, too, a small white marble square slab is walled. It is surrounded by antique terracotta brick ledges, with the engraving of a mitre over a pastoral crossed with a staff; under it, the letter C surrounded by letters S. C. (above) and M. P. (below). This was probably where the Canons’ monastery stood. After approx. 10 metres from the church, on the opposite side of the road, at number 56, two stone sculptures have been walled in, probably dating back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century: a winged feline and a couple embracing each other. These sculptures, according to Federico Cereghini in the book *Il Castello di Menaggio*, came from the nearby **church of St. James\***, with the annexed Benedictine convent, now no longer visible. Via Castellino da Castello now descends, circling around what is thought to have been the old fortress. After a further 10 metres, a road forks on the right (inside a private property), with a

cobble and concrete base, at the beginning of which, on the right hand-side, there is a fountain with a concrete basin. Looking to the left, you will see yet another small white marble slab, similar to the previous one, walled into the façade of the building at number 51, a sign that it was once owned by the Canons. On your right you may admire the left wall of the church of St. Charles, with a side window and the characteristic Spanish style bell-gable. Keep on via Castellino da Castello; walk past an underpass with a wooden beamed ceiling and turn right after 10 metres, taking a fork road leading to a small car park (in porphyry tiles at first, then in concrete tiles). While keeping to your right (please be careful, as the left edge, overlooking the car park, is unprotected) continue for 15 metres. Beyond a gate there is a grass clearing formed when the Castle walls were filled in: on the east side, towards the lake, in the retaining wall, you can still spot the vestige of the upper part of a large arch opening, the protruding keystone of which is still visible. On the West wall, too, next to the gate, you can see another filled arch opening. Turn back and continue along via Castellino da Castello, where, after 25 metres at number 42, you will come to a beautiful undressed stone house, with a small yard embellished by flower holders, with geraniums and cacti, on the surrounding walls. After further 10 metres, passing number 40, you may see yet another filled arch opening on the wall. From here the lake is visible once again, and, as you walk along, the horizon widens, offering a spectacular view on the central part of Lake Como, including Bellagio Point. After another 100 metres, passed the crossing with via dei Fabbri, the tour around the former of Menaggio Castle ends at the crossroads below.