



COMO – PATH 6 – THE PATH OF INVENTION

STAGE 1 - The City center

INFORMATION

Point of departure: Como, birthplace of Alessandro Volta (via Volta 62)

Point of arrival: Como, Tempio Voltiano (Viale Marconi 1)

Path type: urban route

Environment: urban

Total length: about 3000 m

Travel time (on foot): 45 min

Difficulty: Tourist

Rise: none

Maximum height: 200 m

Paving: asphalt, porphyry tiles, porphyry cubes, stone slabs, cobblestones, grit concrete

Public transport to reach the point of departure: ASF bus in the surrounding area

Public transport around the point of arrival: ASF bus; train station Trenord Como Lago in Largo Leopardi; boat

Parking at the point of departure: parking lot in Viale Varese

Points of interest: Birthplace of Alessandro Volta, Gattoni Tower, "Alessandro Volta" High School, S. Donnino, Former Jesuit College; Monument to Alessandro Volta; "Giosuè Carducci" Institute and "Nobel Hall"; The Volta's Exhibition of 1899; "The Life Electric"; Volta's Temple

DESCRIPTION

The first stage of this journey dedicated to the great physicist Alessandro Volta, inventor of the battery, begins in via Volta 62 in Como (in the ancient Contrada di Porta Nuova), where the **house** where Volta was born on February 18, 1745 and died on March 5, 1827 is located. Looking at the façade of the austere neoclassical building, now the seat of the Order of Engineers, offices and private homes, on the right of the entrance door a plaque recalls: «This was / the ancestral house / of / Alessandro Volta / The Town Hall p.». Turn left and continue along Via Volta, paved in porphyry tiles with two bands paved in stone on the sides (characteristic pavement of the streets of the walled city), for about 25 meters, then take Via dell'Annunciata on the right (with the same pavement), so called because it leads to the Basilica of the same name placed outside the walls. After about 50 meters you leave the walled city from the passage where Porta dell' Annunciata once stood; the pavement becomes cobblestone (on which the outline of the forepart that protected the door, demolished in the 1800s, is highlighted by stone slabs) with two paved guides in the centre. After a few meters, turn left and take the path in grit concrete tiles of the Public Gardens that run along Viale Varese and the ancient walls of Como, named "Federiciane" after Emperor Federico Barbarossa, who promoted the reconstruction of the city walls between 1158 and 1192. After about 200 meters, the driveway bends slightly to the right and enters the wide porphyry strip that on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays is occupied by the market stalls, leaving on the left the lawn strip around the pentagonal Porta Nuova Tower. This tower is better known as **Torre Gattoni**, from the name of the canon Giulio Cesare Gattoni who in the second half of the 1700s set up a museum with stuffed animals, minerals and archaeological finds, a physics laboratory and a meteorological observatory. Gattoni had

encouraged and supported his young friend Alessandro Volta in his first experiments on natural phenomena, the properties of gases, electricity and meteorology. Turning left around the Tower, you continue to walk through the market area, this time along Viale Carlo Cattaneo. Cross the asphalted Via Volta after 80 meters (where Porta Nuova was located) and after another 100 meters Via Diaz; after another 100 meters you reach Porta Torre, one of the symbols of Como, the imposing medieval tower (1192) which for centuries represented the entrance to the city from the south, or from Milan. You pass the gate passing under one of the two arches that open the southern side (be careful, because the opening of both is occupied in the middle by a granite cube, placed as an anti-intrusion barrier) and enter the walled city again (limited traffic area), taking via Cesare Cantù, paved with porphyry tiles. After about 50 meters you will find on the right the portico with eight *cipollino* marble columns from the former baptistery of S. Giovanni in Atrio, which lead to the entrances of the **“Alessandro Volta” Lyceum** (at number 57) and the church of S. Cecilia. In 1865 the only Institute of higher education in the city at the time, was named after Alessandro Volta, who in the Royal Gymnasium at the former Jesuit College had been professor of Experimental Physics from 1775 to 1778. The Lyceum preserves a valuable collection of scientific instruments from the Volta era, also originating from the endowment of the Royal Gymnasium and from the bequest of Canon Giulio Cesare Gattoni. Continue along Via Cesare Cantù for another 80 meters and turn left into Via Giovio, the ancient Contrada of S. Donnino. After about eighty meters, at the intersection with Via Diaz (formerly Corso di S. Donnino), turn right and thirty meters on you will find on your left the entrance to Palazzo Volpi, seat of the Civic Art Gallery, and on your right, raised with steps above the street level, the church of **S. Donnino**, where the future inventor of the battery was baptized on February 19, 1745. Volta very often attended this church, near the family home, where he taught catechism to the children; in this church as well, on March 7, 1827, his funeral rite was celebrated. Continue along Via Diaz, passing the intersections with Via Giuseppe Rovelli, Via Natta / Via Raimondi and Via Indipendenza; after about 300 meters turn right into via Lambertenghi, formerly Contrada di San Benedetto. After another 100 meters, turn left into Via Primo Tatti, in the ancient Contrada del Gesù, named after the church of the same name with the adjoining former Jesuit convent, in which a college, dedicated to the higher education of young people from the city aristocracy, was established in the second half of the sixteenth century. The young Alessandro Volta studied here for a few years. When the Society of Jesus was suppressed in 1773, the government arranged to acquire the college and to continue lessons as early as the school year 1774-1775, transforming it into the Royal Gymnasium. In 1774 Alessandro Volta had been appointed Regent of the Schools of Como and the following year he was assigned the chair of Experimental Physics in the Royal Gymnasium, which he held until his move to the University of Pavia in 1778. After about 80 meters from the church of the Gesù, take Via Cinque Giornate on the left, follow it for about ten meters, and then turn right into Via Vitani, with a cobbled bottom and two central stone-paved guides. In this narrow stretch, bordered by houses of medieval origin, you will savour the atmosphere of ancient Como; after a hundred meters, on the right, at number 13, stands the building purchased in 1853 by Giovannina Franchi, founder of the Congregation of the Nursing Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows, cradle of her work at the service of the neediest. After 140 meters from the beginning of the street, turning left, you enter Via Francesco Muralto at a widening where, on the side of a building, stands a large *mural* with a ceramic work created in 2002 by Nino Lupica of the “Aldo Galli” Academy of Fine Arts in Como. A plaque explains the reason for the work: *“The Cortesela. The red thread of memory. Memory of a demolished neighborhood.”* The mural reminds us that here stood the Cortesella district, dating back to ancient Roman times, which since the Middle Ages was one of the most important economic centres of the ancient city (also due to its proximity to the port); it was literally gutted by a “rehabilitating” intervention devised in 1937 by the new Town Plan of the Municipality and its inhabitants were transferred. Continue on Via Muralto, keeping to the right after the intersection with Via Olginati (the ancient Contrada di San Nazario), up to Piazza Volta, formerly Piazza Jasca. Once in the square (paved in concrete, stone and porphyry), you come across the **Monument to Alessandro Volta**, inaugurated in 1838; the statue, which portrays the scientist standing near his battery, it is the work of Pompeo Marchesi, while the massive base is by Francesco Durelli. Crossing the square, you go to its western, paved part, crossing it on the pedestrian crossing; then take via Giulio Rubini, which you follow on the mainly paved sidewalk on the right side. The four-storey building on the left side of the street was the headquarters of La Subalpina, the main electricity company active in the Lake Como area before the nationalization and foundation of ENEL (Ente Nazionale Energia Elettrica).

After 140 meters, you cross Viale Felice Cavallotti. At the intersection you turn right, cross the avenue at the

traffic lights given the pedestrian signal; after crossing, turn right and continue along the avenue on the tiled sidewalk which, separated from the road by a narrow long flowerbed with trees and bushes, runs alongside the complex of the "Giosuè Carducci" Institute. At the three access gates to the complex, attention must be paid to the iron poles that, on the sidewalk, signal access to the respective gates. The first pair of these poles, at the pedestrian crossing, mark the gate that gave access to the garden. The second pair, after about 50 meters, mark the access gate to number 5, flanked by a bust of Felice Cavallotti (to whom the avenue is dedicated), a detached seat of the Faculty of Law of the University of Insubria; in this part of the building there is the "Guido Casartelli" Circulating Science Museum, set up in the so-called **"Nobel Room"**, so called because the International Congress of Physicists was held here in September 1927 during the celebrations for the centenary of the scientist's death. The third pair, after another 30 meters, mark the access to the oldest part of the complex, the current number 7, headquarters of the "Carducci" Association, whose entrance is surmounted by a bust of the poet. At the end of Viale Cavallotti, after about 100 meters from the beginning, the pavement of the sidewalk becomes porphyry cubes; turn left, continuing for about ten meters along Viale Fratelli Rosselli and, at the traffic lights, cross the avenue on the pedestrian crossing. Turn slightly to the right and enter the pedestrian Viale Guglielmo Marconi, with a porphyry cube bottom, which crosses the lakeside gardens, an area that in 1899 was chosen for the great **Volta Exhibition**, the first of the city's initiatives organized in homage to the great physicist. After 40 meters, turn right, cross the paved strip and then, bending slightly to the left, take the avenue parallel to Viale Guglielmo Marconi, with a porphyry cube bottom. Keep straight on, leaving the Monument to the Resistance on your left, until you meet the Lungolago Mafalda di Savoia, made of porphyry tiles. Turn left, continuing for about twenty meters, then, turning right, you enter the breakwater dedicated to the Como physicist "Pietro Caldirola", also paved with porphyry tiles, which extends into the first basin of Lake Como, completed in 1868. Follow it for 350 meters and at the end, in the widening, you will find the monument in honour of Alessandro Volta **"The Life Electric"**, built in 2015 by the architect Daniel Libeskind. Retrace your steps and, at the end of the breakwater, turn right continuing on the Lungolago Mafalda di Savoia and leaving on the left the monument to Mafalda di Savoia and "to all the women who disappeared in the concentration camps", made in 2002 by Massimo Clerici on commission from the Como Delegation of the National Institute of the Guard of Honour at the Royal Tombs of the Pantheon. After about 130 meters, turn slightly to the left, reaching after another 20 meters the **Volta Temple (Tempio Voltiano)**, commissioned by the industrialist Francesco Somaini and built to a design by Federico Frigerio in 1927, celebrating the centenary of Alessandro Volta's death. Inside are preserved memorabilia of the great Como physicist.