



COMO – PATH 7 – THE PLINIAN COMO WALK «TANTIS COMPTA MUNERIBUS»

STAGE 1 – FROM THE ANCIENT PORT TO THE SOUTHERN WALLS

INFORMATION

Point of departure: Como, area of the ancient port of the Roman city (Piazza Cacciatori delle Alpi)

Point of arrival: Como, tower of San Vitale (Viale Cesare Battisti)

Path type: urban

Environment: urban

Total length: approx. 1,5 Km

Travel time on foot: approx. 30 minutes (excluding visiting times)

Difficulty: tourist

Rise: none

Maximum height: 200 m

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

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

Trenord Como Lago station in Largo Leopardi; train Como San Giovanni in Piazzale San Gottardo 1

Public transport to reach the arrival point: ASF bus in the surrounding area; train

Trenord Como Borghi station in Piazzale Gerbetto

Parking at the departure point: parking available in Viale Varese, car park in Piazza Jasca and Via Recchi / Viale Cavallotti

Points of interest Roman Como, Ancient Port of Como*, Western Walls*, The Necropolis*, Roman Columns, Porta Pretoria*, Southern Walls*

* structures partially or completely disappeared

DESCRIPTION

This path is dedicated to the Como of Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger, two illustrious fellow citizens who lived in Roman times (I-II century AD). It begins in Piazza Cacciatori delle Alpi, where an introductory panel describes the early history of Como and how the city was at the time of the Romans. Here, under the current road pavement, are the remains of the ancient port, found in 2002 during the construction of the underground car park. The port dates back to the years immediately following the foundation of *Novum Comum* (the “New Como”) by Julius Caesar in 59 BC and confirms the importance of the lake for the choice of the site where the Roman city was founded.

Leave the square on the right side, facing the façade of the church of the B. V. di Loreto of the Gallio College that overlooks you (paying attention to the low stone bollards) and enter the porphyry cube pavement of Via Giuseppe Garibaldi. Follow it for a short distance, then immediately bend into Viale Varese; after a few meters cross the street at the pedestrian crossing, going to the other side of the avenue and continue along the asphalt sidewalk for 50 meters and then beyond, entering the passage parallel to Viale Varese that gives access to the parking spaces. After 90 meters, at the end of the boundary wall of the Institute of the Ursulines San Carlo, turn slightly left and take the path in grit cement tiles of the public gardens that run along Viale Varese and the ancient so-called “Federician” walls of Como¹. Continue for 55 meters, until you reach the intersection with Via Cinque Giornate, paved in porphyry tiles with two stone-paved bands on the sides; turn left here, paying attention to the double series of posts arranged parallel to the street. Keep to the right and, after about ten meters, looking out at the gate at number 63 (which gives access to the building's underground garages), it is possible to observe, below street level, a stretch of about 10 meters of the ancient Roman walls that surrounded the western side of *Novum Comum*, partially covered by the overhang of the building

¹ These walls are called “Federician” because their construction was ordered by the Emperor Frederick I Hohenstaufen, called in Italy “Barbarossa” (i.e. the red bearded), in 1158.

above. This is the only section that is currently freely visible to the public, so it is of considerable importance; it can be seen that the Roman walls stood further back than the medieval boundary wall still visible today. Retrace your steps, turn left, and continue along the path of the Public Gardens for 160 meters. Then cross the end of the Passaggio Giardini di Ponente Luigi Zuccoli (paved with porphyry tiles), which leads to Via Indipendenza, the *Decumanus Maximus* of the Roman city. In this area, in the centre of the western side of the Roman walls, stood a gate surmounted by a round arch, which constituted the *Porta Principalis Dextera* (Right Main Gate); a section of the arch of this gate, which is no longer visible, was found in 1926.

Continuing for another 160 meters along the path of the Public Gardens, we cross Via dell'Annunciata. At the crossroads, turning right, beyond Viale Varese, you can see the spacious building of the Territorial Office of the Lombardy Region (the so-called "Pirellino"), built in the early years of this century between Via Napo Torriani, Via Francesco Benzi and Viale Varese. During the construction of this complex, in 2000, a necropolis was found in this area, consisting of a series of funerary enclosures with monumental tombs. This cemetery area flanked a *via glareata*, i.e. a road paved with gravel, and small brick fragments to consolidate the road surface, which passed north of the current Via Benzi and connected the city centre with the main road axis of the area, the ancient Via Regina.

Around the time of the Plinys, the start of a residential area formed along this suburban road, accompanied later by a monumental building, recently interpreted as a temple dedicated to imperial worship.

Resuming your route, turn right into Via dell'Annunciata (paved in porphyry tiles with two side bands paved in stone, like much of the walled city, where not elsewhere specified). Entering the limited traffic zone, after 70 meters turn right again into Via Alessandro Volta.

Other discoveries of sections of the western walls were made that lined up with the foundations of the internal facades of the buildings in Via Volta 64 – on the corner of Via dell'Annunciata as well as in the complex of Palazzo Mantero, in Via Volta 72-74. After 120 meters, right in front of the entrance to Palazzo Mantero, turn left into Via Parini, follow it for about 190 meters until you come out in Via Cesare Cantù. Crossing Via Cantù, you find yourself in front of the elegant portico with eight *cipollino* marble columns from an important Roman monumental complex, later reused in the former baptistry of S. Giovanni in Atrio, which lead to the entrances of the "Alessandro Volta" High School (at number 57) and the adjacent church of S. Cecilia. Turn right and enter Largo Miglio, which alongside Via Cantù runs along the main north-south axis of the Roman city, the *Cardo Maximus*. The remains of the Roman gate, the monumental *Porta Praetoria* (Pretorian Gate), in the centre of the southern city walls, are located further east, in the basement of the school building between Largo Gianfranco Miglio 8 and Via Giosuè Carducci 8, now occupied by some classes of the "Teresa Ciceri" High School (currently they are not open to visitors). The discovery of this structure took place by chance in 1914, during the construction of the building. In the courtyard (currently also not open to visitors) there is also a section of the southern Roman walls, with the outlet of a sewer channel and a quadrangular base probably pertaining to one of the towers that marked the boundary. Close to these walls, as early as the first century A.D., private houses were built, overlooking a gravel road that passed right around the walls. To get an idea, the southern Roman walls developed in an east-west direction further back than the medieval walls, parallel to the current Viale Cattaneo, Viale Lorenzo Spallino and Viale Cesare Battisti.

After 70 meters, you find the imposing Porta Torre (Tower Gate), built in the Middle Ages (1192); passing on the left side of the tower, turn left and continue for 260 meters along the wide porphyry strip initially running parallel to Viale Lorenzo Spallino and then to Viale Cesare Battisti, which on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays is occupied by the market stalls.

Along this stretch of the route, or not far away, are the remains of walls and of a square tower, protruding into the boiler room situated under the gymnasium of the "Teresa Ciceri" High School (with access from via Carducci 9, but not open to visitors); a further section of the roman walls has come to the light in the garden of the adjoining Institute of the Canossian Sisters (not open to visitors too).