

The Isolino Virginia has become a UNESCO World Heritage Site

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One of the **most beautiful places in Varese Province** has rightfully become part of UNESCO's World Heritage List. Yesterday, the **Isolino Virginia** was included among the "Prehistoric pile-dwelling sites of the Alpine range", which also include 111 villages in six countries (Italy, Switzerland, Austria, France, Germany and Slovenia), which are considered the most interesting of the approximately one thousand known sites.

The committee for the World Heritage List recognised the "**particular characteristics which are of exceptional importance** from a cultural and natural point of view", which rightfully justified the inclusion of the Varese site among the **most prestigious places on earth**.

The Isolino Virginia is in the Lake of Varese, and is a wonderful place, **full of history**, where **one of the most important, prehistoric pile-dwelling settlements** was discovered.

The island is triangular in shape, and has an area of approximately 9200 m²; it lies a few metres from the shore of the town of **Biandronno**, and since 1863, it has been one of the most famous sites of European prehistory.

The island is the **oldest pile-dwelling settlement** in the Alpine Range. It has been the property of **Varese town council** since 1962, when it was donated by the Marquis Gianfelice Ponti.

What is unusual about the island is that, although it has a small Prehistory Museum, which depends on the Archaeology Museum of Villa Mirabello, it is itself a museum, insofar as it is a **restricted archaeological and environmental area**.

In the 14th century, it was known as the Island of San Biagio, because of the presence of a small church dedicated to this saint, and was the destination of processions from Schiranna. Later called Camilla Island, in honour of the wife of Duke Antonio Litta Visconti Arese, it has been called Virginia since 1878, in honour of the wife of Marquis Andrea Ponti.

Over the years, multiple excavations have contributed to reconstructing the **most ancient history of the lakes in Varese Province**. In the summer of 2006, on ministerial licence, archaeological research was started again, on behalf of the Archaeology Museum of Villa Mirabello. Along the shores, exceptional wooden structures have been brought to light, including a portion of "flooring" which dates back to 4840-4710 BC.

The monumental Neolithic wooden structures were extraordinarily preserved because they were submerged by the waters of the lake, and, over the centuries, covered by sediments and vegetation. They can be found all round the island, on the side that faces dry land, and along the shores that face Cazzago and Biandronno.

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