

VareseNews

What is interesting in our area? The Valganna Valley, with its lakes, history and breathtaking views

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Cover photo, by Isella Bellotti

The **cycle path that connects Cunardo to Valganna** is a mix of experiences to be had. On the one hand, there is evidence of an **ancient past**, on the other, **unique natural heritage** that gives visitors the chance to be surrounded by one of the most important green areas in Varese Province. The **“Campo dei Fiori” Regional Park** marks the southern border, and the **“Cinque Vette” Park**, the northeast.

In the middle, in the valley of the **Margorabbia River**, there are two lakes, the Badia di Ganna (San Gemolo Abbey), the Ghirla Trip Hammer, the Rigamonti Mill (which is still in operation), the kilns, and a cycle path, which connects them all. And it is not just a simple cycle path, but a road that is part of that **network of Italian paths** that once connected the most important cities to each other, and Italy to Europe. In fact, this is a section of the **Via Francisca del Lucomagno**, the path that connects the city of Constance to Pavia and, from there, leads to Rome, along the **Via Francigena**, or to the sea, along the **Via degli Abati**.



The Kilns of Cunardo

The ideal route for discovering all of the pieces of this historical and naturalistic mosaic is undoubtedly the cycle path. Setting out from the **Kilns of Cunardo (Fornaci di Cunardo)**, you come to an ancient building, which is home to a **ceramic workshop**, and whose outside is an important open-air museum. For centuries, people have worked here, creating objects of all shapes and sizes. “The production of ceramics in Cunardo **has a very long tradition**, and it seems that it began during the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius.



The ceramics of Cunardo were particularly appreciated for their so-called “Cunardo blue”, a colour whose secret was known only to the local artisans; pieces decorated with this intense colour are now very rare indeed, a few are kept in museums. (source: Municipality of Cunardo website). **The craft workshop run by the brothers Enrico and Mauro Di Nino, which is located along Provincial Road No. 43, which goes through the village, is currently fully operating.**

The Rigamonti Mill and Ghirla Trip Hammer

Continuing along the cycle path, towards Valganna, passing meadows and woods of chestnut and beech trees (keep your eyes peeled, you may well spot roe deer, foxes, pheasants and even some hares!), you come to the old **Mulino Rigamonti**, perhaps the only mill still operating in the entire Varese Province, which is now an important stopping point on local tourist routes, where **you can see the machinery working, and processes that have remained unchanged for centuries**. The area which is home to the mill, which has respected the surrounding nature over the years, **was included in the Campo dei Fiori Regional Park, in 2010**, the same year in which the activity received the “historic business” label from Lombardy Region.



The Rigamonti Mill

A few tens of metres from the Rigamonti Mill, stands **the Ghirla Trip Hammer (Maglio di Ghirla)**, one of the oldest and best preserved in the whole Province. It dates back to the 18th century, when **Master Ludovico Parietti** decided to buy the building to guarantee a job for his three children in the iron forging sector. The potential was unquestionable: building, agricultural and mechanical tools were produced, exploiting the “channelled” power of the water of the Margorabbia River, which runs alongside it.



The Ghirla Trip Hammer

The children were not interested, **so, in 1791, the Trip Hammer was sold to the Pavoni Family**, who kept it working and productive for two centuries; it continued to work until 1991. Five years later, the Mountain Community of Piambello decided to renovate the Hammer, and today, the building is used as a meeting room for conferences and teaching laboratories, which give new life to one of the symbols of industrial archaeology in Varese Province.

Lake Ghirla



Autumn on Lake Ghirla

Walking along the cycle path, you come to **one of the most evocative places, for its beautiful views and nature, Ghirla Lake**. With its waters, which have been classed “excellent” for swimming, and which are perfect for a refreshing dive during the hottest months, this stretch of water was one of the favourite destinations for the people of Milan during the last century, when it froze over and became a skating rink, with even a “happy hour” service on the ice, as a number of photographs carefully show, photographs which have been gathered and preserved for the future on the website **Valganna.info**.



Happy hour on a frozen Lake Ghirla, 1907, photo from the website Valganna.info

The Badia di Ganna (San Gemolo Abbey)

From here, after a 30-minute walk, following the main track, you eventually come to a point behind the small village of Ganna and its Abbey. The word *badia* refers to the architectural complex which includes the church, the bell tower, the cloister, the guesthouse and the surrounding houses for the monks. It is famous **as a place of worship dedicated to the memory of the martyr San Gemolo**, whose remains are still on display below the church altar.



The Abbey of San Gemolo

History has it that after the martyrdom, the bishop had the remains of his nephew Gemolo buried on a hill, where he had a chapel built some years later. Over the centuries, the Benedictine monks of San Gemolo have worked to improve the land, reclaiming the marshes, directing the water into Lake Ganna, cultivating woodland and subsequently cultivating new land. The church dates back to 1100 – 1125 AD.

The small Lake Ganna and its “torbiera”

Near the Abbey, just a few minutes walk along the paths that start just behind the church, there is **the small Lake Ganna and its “torbiera” (peat bog)**, two important reserves of biodiversity which attract many species of bird (and are home to salamanders, toads, frogs, fish and fireflies) which can be seen throughout the year.



Skaters on the Ganna Peat Bog

The peat bog, in particular, with its water, which is not too deep, and its position in one of the coldest corners of Valganna, is **a popular attraction during the weeks of midwinter, when it ices over completely**, to become the favourite gathering spot for hockey enthusiasts and ice skaters. They should bring back the “bar service on skates”, like in the 1930s!

Poncione di Ganna

For hiking enthusiasts who prefer something a little more demanding, when you come to Ganna, immediately after the Tre Risotti Hotel, take the road up to “Alpe Tedesco” (a part of Cunardo) and then take the path (there are signs along the way, and a place to park as you go up from the only road) which leads to the **Poncione of Ganna**, one of the peaks in the **Cinque Vette Park**. On a clear day, you can enjoy an all-round view, **from Lake Como, to Lake Ceresio, from Lake Maggiore to the Apennines**, including **the Milan skyline**, which can be made out from the outline of its tallest skyscrapers.



Northeast view from the Poncione

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How to get there

BY CAR

State road SS233, in Valganna.

BY BUS

Autolinee Varesine **Line No. 10, Valganna Luino**

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NEAR THE ROUTE

TIGROS SUPERMARKET in Cunardo

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Tel: 39 0332991819

Opening times:

From Monday to Friday, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Sunday, from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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