

GORLAGO: THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE NOW INCLUDES CYCLING TOURISM

Rediscovering the beauty of the old town centre in the province of Bergamo, a testimony to a past steeped in history and stories

A proposal of cycle-tourism routes, easy to follow also through the Komoot app

Milan, May 2023 – There are little-known places, far from the beaten track, that harbour small treasures that deserve to be discovered, acknowledged and admired, and that inevitably have fascinating stories to tell: sometimes they speak of the dynasties, politics and financial fortunes of an area, but also individuals and their almost imperceptible traces. A precious legacy of tangible monuments and memories.

One of these places is Gorlago. This small village with an aristocratic past is bordered by the Cherio river and only 15 km from Bergamo. It marks the boundary between the plains and the gentle hills of the Terre del Vescovado (Bishopric Lands). With great foresight and passion, it has decided to launch an enhancement of the historic centre and some of its environs. The aim is also to optimise its heritage, making it a resource for the local economy and those who love slow tourism, to be enjoyed by bicycle or on a pleasant outing to explore hidden wonders.

The project that originated from this virtuous redevelopment process - also thanks to having won a call for tenders from the Lombardy Region - is called “Trame Nascoste: arte, nature a pedali a Gorlago” [Hidden Routes: art, nature and cycling in Gorlago] and is a wonderful achievement. It integrates the development of services and infrastructures for slow mobility with a new territorial brand and an Internet portal (www.tramenascoste.it) packed with stories and proposals for visits.

A strategic point for exploration by bicycle, Gorlago and the new Marco Moroni park are hubs for the Milan-Munich and Bergamo-Brescia cycle routes. This is the departure point for the fascinating “Trame nascoste” routes, also developed in cooperation with Bergamo E-Bike and Terre del Vescovado.

“Our territory has a wealth of stories, memories, expressions of ingenuity and the desire to look to the future with the ability to create new encounters. This is why we thought we had the right qualities to benefit from the Lombardy Region’s invitation to tender. This allowed us to create “Trame nascoste”. The Municipality of Gorlago is making a great effort to bring the key features of its historical-artistic heritage together. To make the most of it, we thought of connecting with the surrounding area through an extraordinary mode of transport such as the bicycle, which allows us to appreciate the special qualities of each area we travel through in a sustainable way. Our village also plays a very active role in organising cultural and social events. We would like to see these as another way to involve visitors and provide a reason for meeting. For this type of initiative, we think that the system of cycling attractions and activities is also an excellent opportunity, and we look forward to welcoming visitors who would like to explore the beauties of our historic centre, perhaps also during events such as the chalcography competition or the guided cycling tours that we are going to be organising”, Mayor Maria Elena Grena commented.

The importance of a beauty made accessible through innovative phygital concepts

Right from the start, one very important element that guided the choices related to enhancing the village of Gorlago was accessibility: streets, squares and areas of interest will be equipped with physical information signs, linked to multimedia content and designed to guarantee the highest possible degree of accessibility also for people with disabilities, following the Design for All models: visual-tactile maps, subtitled content or content translated into International Sign Language will be the standards for sharing content. Furthermore, the design of the web portal, the first point of access and meeting for most visitors, received special attention. The development was entrusted to Progetto Yeah!, a social cooperative specialising in accessibility, particularly in the digital sphere. The portal, designed and developed to ensure high standards of legibility and use of content, can also be navigated by the visually impaired through the use of screen readers and voice synthesisers, and will offer information on services related to the reception of anyone wishing to visit and explore Gorlago.

The treasures of Gorlago - history, art and nature

To better understand the spirit of “Trame nascoste” and the secrets of this small village of medieval origin, it is worth becoming acquainted with a few details of its past and the places to be discovered, to round out the stories a little: the Romanesque church of Sant’Andrea with its medieval views and atmospheres; the precious traces of the Bergamo Renaissance in the monumental works of Giovan Battista Moroni; the late 19th-century atmospheres in the drawing rooms of the Siotto Pintor and Bolis villas.

Gorlago’s once-strategic location boasts a past rich in art and history, when the lives of prelates, patriots, aristocrats and artists intertwined: the free Comune or Municipality was founded around 1000/1100 and several citizens of Gorlago were among the first consuls of Bergamo.

After 1166, it fell prey to the vengeance of Barbarossa, who decided to restore order among the cities of the Lombard League. Despite the victory over the imperial army, unlike Bergamo, it was subjected to the feudal constraints imposed by the citizens who had led the Comune at its inception. However, it was during the Middle Ages that the town became the centre of numerous social and political events. In relation to its position, at the mouth of the Val Cavallina, along the road coming from Valcalepio, the village, which belonged to the Ghibelline faction, was repeatedly attacked by the Guelph faction, which aspired to control it, and by numerous other enemies. For this reason, several fortifications were built, including a castle, to protect the area and its inhabitants.

Peace and serenity did not return until the advent of the Venetian Republic and the consequent end to the rivalries between different factions. Problems resurfaced at the beginning of the 19th century, when the village again experienced major setbacks due to a famine that claimed many lives. Unfortunately, due to fires and looting, it is not possible to give a precise date as to when the Comune of Gorlago was established, since no historical documents prior to 1872 have survived.

All that remains of that past, at times enthralling and at times all too eventful, are villas with refined colonnades, elegant grounds and gardens, and churches adorned with Renaissance frescoes and canvases. Their dialogue with the present gives us a palimpsest that invites us to delve into the unique details of those layers of history. Some of the buildings are private and can be visited on certain special occasions: however, it is well worth having a look at them even if only from the outside to appreciate their special atmospheres and features.

Church of San Pancrazio

Built in the 15th century and renovated in the 18th, it is distinguished by its single nave with an elliptical layout. Inside, it is home to an important collection of 16th-century paintings that adorned the previous

15th-century church: works by great Lombard artists such as Moretto, Giovan Paolo Cavagna, Carlo Ceresa and Giovan Battista Moroni. The noteworthy works by Moroni include the famous Last Judgement, an unfinished work connected to the legend of the nearby Casa della Torre [Tower House], and the Adoration of the Magi, one of the artist's finest achievements and a source of inspiration for the Street Art that characterises the new park on the Cherio River. The monumental canvases by Venetian artist Francesco Polazzo, painted on the occasion of the 18th-century rebuilding of the church, complete the tour of this exquisite picture gallery.

Church of Sant' Andrea

The Romanesque church of Sant'Andrea al Castello is situated in an ancient district of Gorlago. Only its ancient doorway reveals its presence. Originally built as the chapel of the Lanzi family's castle, its interior features a unique palimpsest of decorations: early medieval frescoes stand beside the work of Giovan Paolo Cavagna, one of the best examples of mannerist painting in Bergamo. Since 1760, this small and precious religious building has also been known as the "church of Sant'Anna" in reference to the rain that fell on 26 July after a long and detrimental period of drought: even today, the community of Gorlago celebrates that date by bringing the streets of the district to life with events and a social gathering open to everyone.

Villa Siotto Pintor

The name of the Villa Siotto Pintor - which can be visited on request - reveals the Sardinian origin of its last owners. In fact, the Siotto Pintor family arrived in Gorlago in the mid-19th century, in the service of the new Kingdom of Italy. When they moved to the mainland, as a reminder of their homeland, they brought with them a young cork oak. Since then, the tree still grows in the courtyard of the villa, where it welcomes visitors. Although the building has ancient origins, what is most striking about it is the eclectic style of the façade, the finely decorated interior and the late 19th-century furnishings. Crossing its threshold, the original furnishings and accessories immediately give one the feeling of time standing still and it almost seems as though one could meet the owner of the house, Diodato Siotto Pintor, at any moment, in his full-dress uniform as an officer in the Army of the Kingdom of Italy.

Villa Bolis

Villa Bolis, which can be visited inside on special occasions, is named after its last owner, the tenor Luigi Bolis, who bought it from the noble Piatti family in the second half of the 19th century. The memorabilia and heirlooms collected and carefully preserved by the heirs are very interesting. The oldest part of the Villa, consisting of several buildings, dates back to 1500 and still preserves traces of the original frescoes, embellished by the stone frames of doors and windows. Over the centuries, the building has been extended, changing its appearance and adapting to the fashion of the time, in neo-Romanesque forms. The new turret and chalet are part of a specific landscape design, and here the lush garden extends towards the Roman bridge and the Cherio River, which has always bordered the grounds of this charming villa.

Palazzo Gaurneri-Gozzini

Palazzo Guarneri-Gozzini, a private estate that can only be visited on certain special occasions, stands in a strategic position, where the ancient castle of the Lanzi family once stood: on a cliff overlooking the Cherio

River, and in a position from which the entrance to the valley and the Colle degli Angeli could be dominated. Even today, one can still catch a glimpse of that same landscape, framed by the village's architecture. Over the centuries, the ancient fortress lost its defensive role and took on the appearance of a refined aristocratic palace. The inner courtyard, distinguished by a double loggia with columns and round arches, contains priceless frescoed rooms. All that remains of the ancient castle is the base of the tower, made of massive square blocks of stone: a scenic backdrop that completes the view of the Contrada Castello.

The Casa Quadra

The Casa Quadra, a private building that can be visited at certain times of the year, is an austere architectural design in stone, recognisable by the massive square-based tower that rises above the other buildings. Contrary to what one might think, the name derives from the term "Quadra" used to identify an administrative jurisdiction during Venetian rule. At that time, the representative of the Quadra of Trescore resided in this very building, an expression of wealth and power. The ancient splendour, largely lost, is still reflected today in the 16th-century frescoes by Giovan Battista Castello depicting the Stories of Ulysses: detached and preserved inside the Prefecture of Bergamo, it is possible to see them today thanks to a Virtual Tour.

Villa Gozzini

Villa Gozzini dates back to the 16th century. From the street, it appears to be austere and compact: its refined elegance is revealed to those who have the privilege of walking along the paths of the private grounds, which, like the villa, is opened on special occasions. On the exterior are fine terracotta and marble decorations, while the interior rooms still preserve mannerist frescoes by Giovan Paolo Cavagna. The two decorated wings and the double loggia of the central body sit harmoniously amid the monumental trees in the garden. Immense Cedars of Lebanon and majestic Holm oaks alternate with unexpected Palms and numerous tree species, creating a special green space that bears witness to the glorious past of this villa, the nearby castle and the village in which it is located.

The new Moroni Park

The new Moroni Park, on the Cherio River, is a place for recreation and a hub for those travelling along the Milan-Munich and Bergamo-Brescia cycle routes: an extension of the cycle path from Val Cavallina that leads to the historic centre of Gorlago. The park combines nature, street art and history in a total creation immersed in the landscape, welcoming people with new tree-lined areas, playground equipment and relaxation spaces: a grassy basin is ideal for lying in the sun and enjoying an autumn picnic, while children can play safely a short distance away. The shady corner of a wood is designed for warmer days. The street art work is by Paolo Baraldi (Il Baro) and is part of the StreeArtBall Project (SAB), an urban regeneration and public space enhancement project where street-art meets streetball, street basketball. Nearby are e-bike charging stations and a cafeteria. An infopoint is also coming soon.

Malmera, Montecchi and Colle degli Angeli Park

The Cascina Alpina (also open seasonally with a cafeteria service) is the gateway to the PLIS - Parco Locale di Interesse Sovracomunale del Malmera, dei Montecchi e del Colle degli Angeli: this protected area offers visitors the chance to enjoy lush nature, accompanied by the sound of flowing water. Dense woods

alternate with sunny terraces, bearing witness to an ancient farming vocation and the skilful work of men who for centuries shaped the landscape to cultivate grapevines. The shady slopes, on the other hand, reveal the care that has never been lacking for the forest and its wild plants, making it possible to preserve the original ecosystem. There are interesting paths for walking and hiking, such as the flat paths along the banks of the Cherio, or the one that climbs the hill up to Castello degli Angeli. From there, the village of Gorlago and the Po Valley can be glimpsed.

Municipal library

Also worth visiting is the municipal library, a meeting place, very active in the cultural sphere (Gorlago hosts an important chalcography competition). Housed in the old 20th-century building, it was once the headquarters of the Town Hall and the Royal Post and Telegraph Office, which has preserved a number of Art Nouveau inscriptions and decorations.

Explore the territory by bicycle and also indulge in some gourmet delights

And to unveil Gorlago's hidden paths, which intersect the great discoveries of the surrounding area, in addition to walks in the historic centre, the ideal means of transport is the bicycle: the creators of "Trame nascoste" chose it for its eco-sustainability and because visitors can calmly enjoy little known attractions, whose details are well worth exploring, transforming even a few kilometres into a journey.

Choosing the bicycle as the key to re-enhancing Gorlago also reflects the village's unique location: it is at the crossroads of numerous cycling routes, such as the Bergamo-Brescia cycle route and the route that leads from Val Cavallina to Val Camonica, continuing on to Munich. The new Marco Moroni park is equipped to recharge e-bikes and from there travellers can set off to explore the Terre del Vescovado and surrounding area. They can then push on to the Bergamo Hills and lower Val Seriana or pedal through the Valcalepio hills and along the Serio river, to arrive within sight of the castles of the famous military leader Bartolomeo Colleoni.

To this end, the "Trame Nascoste" project proposes well-documented and easy-to-follow bicycle touring routes through a cultural landscape to be rediscovered and savoured thanks also to the excellent food and wine on offer. From the villages, vineyards and hills of the Serio, united under the aegis of the Terre del Vescovado, to the area around Bergamo and Lake Iseo: set out from Gorlago and return to it, taking advantage of a convenient and easily accessible parking area.

On your way to or from Gorlago, after a reconnaissance of the centre, don't miss a stop at the historic *Giò e Marzia* pastry shop, which offers an excellent selection of sweet and savoury treats, or at *Divino InVino*, a wine bar with a kitchen housed in a historic building whose enormous fireplace can still be admired. The spaces are warm, the ceilings are vaulted with white plaster or exposed brickwork, the shelves overflow with bottles from Italy and around the world, with a truly remarkable variety, and delicacies that can also be purchased before going home: fine vinegars, sweets, compotes and jams, pickles... Everything is of the highest quality and carefully chosen, as are the dishes and platters. The service and selection of wines by the glass, which also includes important bottles, deserve special mention. In short, if you are cycling not only to explore, but also to indulge in the pleasures of the palate, Gorlago is the right place to put on your agenda for this reason too!

6 cycle paths ranging from 5 to 71 kilometres suitable for everyone: from the route around the old town centre to the major uphill climb on the route to Lake Iseo

Ingeniously planned, the variety of tracks (currently six, but set to expand) provides cycling satisfaction for families with young children just learning to ride, for those who want medium-length tours that are not particularly demanding, and those who like to tackle technically difficult terrain with significant differences in altitude.

Worthy of special mention is the accuracy of the trails, which were developed using the intuitive and easy-to-use Komoot app. In addition to distance and differences in altitude, the app provides detailed information on the type of terrain and the extent of paved roads, unpaved trails and mixed sections. Detailed and precise suggestions on how to move along the different tracks are provided even if you don't have a navigator or the app.

There is also a wealth of information on the main points of interest. All the tracks can be followed completely independently, but during the course of the year, activities linked to "Trame nascoste" also include organised outings accompanied by professional guides and with the possibility of hiring suitable e-bikes.

Itinerary 1

Trame nascoste: arte, natura e pedali [Hidden routes: art, nature and cycling] - 5 km route with no particular difference in altitude

A route that explores the historic centre of Gorlago and all its points of interest, also touching on the Malmera, the Montecchi and Colle degli Angeli Park. Points of interest: the Cascina degli Alpini, the parks, churches and villas of the ancient village of Gorlago.

Itinerary 2

Romanesque architecture in the lower Val Cavallina - Easy route of around 19 kilometres with 200 metres of difference in altitude, mainly on paved roads

A circular itinerary that explores the Romanesque architecture of the lower Cavallina Valley, following the Romanesque Bicitour created by inValcavallina and Terre del Vescovado.

Points of interest: the church of Sant'Andrea and the ancient village of Gorlago, the Romanesque churches of Trescore Balneario, the Lupi Castle of Cenate Sotto and the Romanesque churches of San Paolo d'Argon.

Itinerary 3

The hills of Bergamo and Moscato - A route of medium difficulty of around 58 kilometres with 540 metres of difference in altitude, mainly on asphalt.

A circular itinerary that explores the hills where the precious Moscato di Scanzo wine is produced, going as far as the Venetian Walls, in the heart of the city of Bergamo, along one of the four routes that make up the Quadrifoglio cicloturistico delle Terre del Vescovado (Bishopric Lands Cycling Route).

Points of interest: the ancient village of Gorlago, the Moscato di Scanzo hills, the Upper City and the Venetian Walls of Bergamo, the Lower City, the Serio Regional Park.

Itinerary 4

The castles of Bartolomeo Colleoni - A route of medium difficulty of around 60 kilometres with 230 metres of difference in altitude that alternates between paved sections and long stretches on a dirt cycle track

A circular route that follows the River Serio as far as the castles of the lower Bergamo plain, where the famous military leader Bartolomeo Colleoni lived. It runs along one of the four routes that make up the Quadrifoglio cicloturistico delle Terre del Vescovado.

Points of interest: the ancient village of Gorlago and its castle, the Serio River Regional Park, the castles of Malpaga and Cavernago, the Camozzi Vertova castle.

Itinerary 5

Mount Misma and the Argon hills - A demanding route of around 46 kilometres with 770 metres of difference in altitude, alternating between paved sections and long stretches on a dirt cycle track

A circular route, along one of the four routes that make up the Quadrifoglio cicloturistico delle Terre del Vescovado, leading from the slopes of Monte Misma up to the summit of the Colle d'Argon, which offers a breath-taking panoramic view. The route has uphill and downhill stretches that require good technical skills and the use of an appropriate mountain bike or gravel bike. Points of interest: the ancient village of Gorlago, churches and sanctuaries on the Argon hills and Mount Misma, the panorama and view of the Po Valley.

Lake Iseo - An especially demanding route of around 71 kilometres with 1250 metres of difference in altitude, alternating between paved sections and long demanding stretches on cycle paths and dirt tracks

The circular route goes all the way to Lake Iseo, along one of the four routes that make up the Quadrifoglio cicloturistico delle Terre del Vescovado. The route features uphill and downhill stretches that require good technical skills and the use of an appropriate mountain bike or gravel bike.

Points of interest: the ancient village of Gorlago, the Argon hills, Lake Iseo, the southern slopes of Mount Misma.

How to get to Gorlago the green way:

Gorlago can be easily reached by public transport, using the Ferrovie Nord railways, from the Bergamo and Brescia stations. The relevant stop is Montello Gorlago.

For more information and details: www.tramenascoste.it

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