

Walk number: Three

Route: Brusino Arsizio to Capolago via Meride and Riva San Vitale.

Brief description:

This walk takes you from the top of the Serpiano cable car, through the woods to Meride and down back to Lake Lugano at Riva and Capolago.

Unlike most walks here it avoids climbing Monte San Giorgio (thus missing views of Lake Lugano from the top). I decided to take this route as it seemed that the whole world was making their way up the mountain. As it happened no other walkers were seen on the very pleasant route described below.

The first part of this walk is in forest and it is easy to lose your way! Please use a compass if possible otherwise you might end up going in circles. It is an easy walk except for the descent into Riva San Vitale which is steep in places (last mile in forest). A walking pole would be helpful especially in wet weather.

Grade: Easy but see note above.

Distance: About 7 miles.

Time: 3 hrs 20 mins walking.

Start: Lugano or Paradiso

Finish: Capolago Railway or Ferry Station.

How to get there: By ferry across Lake Lugano from Lugano or Paradiso. Ask for a combined ticket with the Brusino Arsizio cable car.

How to get back: By ferry from Capolago or train from Capolago FS to Lugano.

Map: Locarno - Lugano Composizione no. 5007; Lugano Excursion Map from Lugano Tourist Office. Routes 23, 24 and 25 cover parts of this walk.

Refreshments: Top of Serpiano cable car, Meride (shop open before 12.00 or after 16.00; Osteria closed), Riva San Vitale, Capolago, Ferry.

Notes:

All timings for this walk are from Lugano Central Ferry station.

1. Cross the lake from Lugano or Lugano Paradiso. The journey takes one hour from Paradiso.
2. The cable car runs from a station 100 metres from the ferry landing place. Cable cars run regularly during the summer. The journey takes about 10 minutes to the top (1.30).

3. From the top of the cable car station (650m) start out on the path to Alpe di Brusino.
4. After a minute or so a footpath sign points to Serpiano and Meride. This is a bit difficult to spot so look carefully for it! Head in the direction indicated.
5. A little further on, follow the sign labelled “Sentiero Serpiano” (1.40). You are now on an easy woodland path. If you have a compass your direction to follow for the next mile or so is roughly SSW.
6. By the side of a red bench follow the next sign in the direction of Meride (1.45).
7. The path crosses a series of rickety wooden bridges (1.50).
8. Don’t miss the sign on your left down the nature trail. **Ignore** the path beckoning a 20 metres ahead of you. Your way leads gently up here (1.55).
9. Follow the sign to the nature trail. Your route descends (2.04). Two minutes later you come across a nature trail information board in Italian (2.06).
10. Follow the sign left containing two carved figures and a tree. The path is heading downhill (2.12).
11. Go left at the next finger post and descend to a tarmac road at a hairpin bend (2.16). If you hit the road anywhere else make your way to this hairpin to get your bearings! If you look at the map it is the very tight hairpin. You might also find some cars parked here. At this point it is tempting to follow the road **downhill** – DON’T! You follow the road **uphill** (compass direction SSE). Note that this road is quite busy and is serviced by a post bus route from Mendrisio. You’ll hear the post bus well in advance because of its loud klaxhorn. By the way, if you end up by Serpiano Parish Church or in the hamlet of Serpiano you have gone the wrong way. Turn around and head south for Crocifisso!
12. After 15 minutes along the road you reach the shrine of Crocifisso (2.31). Take the path on right to Meride/Spinirolo.
13. Head left into the forest at a blue sign about leaving litter (2.36).
14. At the next sign follow the Meride nature walk – the path descends through pleasant woodland (2.40).
15. The path skirts past a children’s camp site with a brown wooden sign pointing to Meride (2.41).
16. The path becomes stoney and starts to descend (2.45), soon there are lots of loose stones (2.46).
17. You reach the Bolle Campagna information board. Plants: clematis, geranium, euphorbia; animals – hares. You are at 625m above sea level (2.49).

18. The path is now a dampish sunken track (2.52).
19. Open farmland is reached – crops and fruit trees (2.53).
20. Within three minutes there is a lovely mountain backdrop on your right with farms on both sides. A tall chimney is seen on the right (2.56).
21. You pass Camino Spinirolo (with the tall chimney), a vacation centre now, but once a factory producing “Saurolo” ointment from a local bituminous substance known as ichthyol (2.57).
22. Fontana Meride is reached after 5/6 minutes.
23. You enter the village of Meride passing a small chapel on your right. Turn left at the next road junction into Meride (3.12). See Gazetter below.
24. Coming out of the village head along the road signed “No Through Road”. Follow signs to Riva San Vitale (3.20). The road turns into a grassy track and before long you reach a shrine and two red benches
25. Before long the track becomes stoney and a little steep. Noise from the motorway in the valley starts to intrude (3.30).
26. The path levels and then skirts a ravine on your right (3.40).
27. You cross a dried-up river bed. Look out for the footpath markers painted on the rocks (3.41). There must be a waterfall here in winter.
28. You start a tricky stoney section (3.50) which becomes steep in places.
29. Turn right down a broad track (4.07). A sign points to Monte San Giorgio upwards.
30. Take the lower path when a choice is offered (4.10). A paint marker confirms your route part way down.
31. You soon come to a shrine and a bench (4.15).
32. Follow a sign on the right that points downhill (4.17).
33. The track turns into a concrete then metalled track and the first houses of Riva San Vitale appear. The road runs down into the valley amongst vineyards only spoiled by the sharp hum of the motorway in front of you (4.22).
34. Turn left at the road junction (4.28), then walk into the centre of picturesque Riva.
35. In the centre of Riva follow the road sign to Lugano. After half a mile you reach Capolago with access to boats and train (4.50).

Gazetteer

Brusino Arsizio

Brusino is an old village on Lake Lugano occupied since Roman times. Fishing and the felling of timber on the hills behind it were the main occupations. The Parish Church is dedicated to San Michele. Over the last few decades holiday villas have proliferated and the building of the cable car has boosted tourism.

Serpiano

Is a hamlet in the commune of Brusino, high above the lake. It has a church, some shops and hotels. It is about 15 minutes walk from the top of the cable car.

Meride

This is a quiet agricultural hill town surrounded by vines and fruit trees.

There was no bar or shop open at lunchtime. It's a sleepy place, once famous for its master builders. Many of their architectural treasures are hidden behind village doorways. There is a fossil museum here because many have been found on Monte San Giorgio. On the edge of the village there are vineyards.

Riva San Vitale

Lakeside village with interesting churches (including one of the oldest in Switzerland, the 5th century Baptistery) and an ancient centre. Behind the village are hills cloaked in vineyards.

Capolago

A lakeside hamlet across the water from Riva San Vitale. It has a railway connection with Lugano and Chiasso and a busy motorway thundering by.