

THE PALAZZOLO S/O – PARATICO SARNICO RAILWAY

The railway from Palazzolo s/Oglio to Paratico Sarnico starts from the fourth platform of Palazzolo station (which lies not far from the town of Bergamo) and it soon leaves the Bergamo - Brescia line winding along the Oglio river; it develops through an at intervals outstanding landscape (since 1988 it is a preserved Regional Park) and ends up on the southern shore of the Lake Iseo which is also called Lake Sebino.



This 10-km-long stretch was opened on the 31st August 1876 and was basically meant to substitute the means of transportation of the goods produced around the lake; these goods had been carried so far by barges on the Fusia canal which is used today only to irrigate the plain. Later on the tourism increased and the railway became an important and fast connection between the Lake Sebino and Bergamo, Brescia and Milan.

The goods traffic has always been characterised by a special service combining railway with navigation: the railway waggons would be loaded on barges which were carried by slow tugboats and brought the goods to the various landing places of the lake. This peculiar service has been the last example of its kind in all Europe: after supplying the stealworks in Lovere, it has been abolished in March 1999. The track which reached the lake shore has been interrupted but there still remain some facilities (for example the mobile embarcation wharf) which have turned to rare industrial archaeology remains.

The goods traffic experienced lucky and unlucky days but survived throughout the years. The passenger traffic, on the other side, was suspended in 1966; the increasment of private cars and the blind politic of the so-called "dead branches" were the reasons. After years of oblivion some volunteers managed to let the stretch be covered one more time by a passenger train. On



the 26th May 1991 this historical train was carried by the steam locomotive 940-022. In the wake of this event the "Committee for the reopening of the Palazzolo s/O - Paratico Sarnico Railway" was founded. It tried over many years with many initiatives to restore the passenger traffic on this stretch by presenting it also as an important alternative to the chronic choked roads leading to the lake.

In 1994 the Committee became a non-profit volunteer Association and changed its name into "FBS - Ferrovia del Basso Sebino (Southern Sebino Railway)". With the support of the State Railway and some sponsors a service was experimented on the 3rd July of the same year and it was repeated for 9 more summer sundays. This initiative enjoyed an unexpected success and so it was repeated during the following years for a longer lapse of time, from april to september, under the new name "TrenoBLU". This was made possible especially thanks to the help of the volunteers who today still promote and organize the service, survey the rail crossings, manage

the selling of the fares, the publicity, the integration with the lake navigation and the coordination with the involved private and public bodies, the cleaning of the stations and their adjoining green areas.

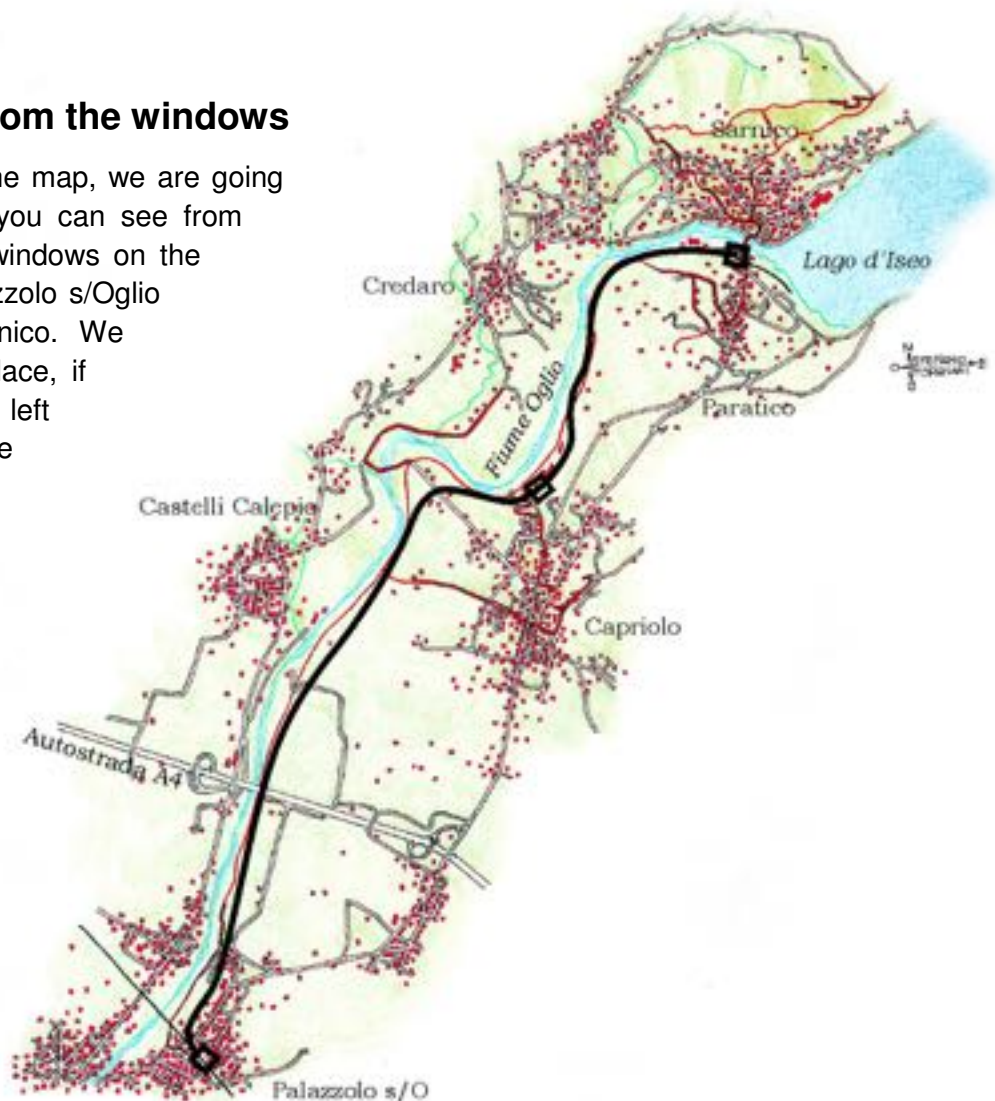


While this association took national dimensions, a new project was presented by the new founded group "FTI". "FBS 2000" purposed to restore and exploit the areas and buildings of the Paratico and Palazzolo s/Oglio stations. Finally, after moving to the City of Paratico the property a big part of the areas and buildings of the station, it seems that works for the restoration and renovation of the former locomotive depot and the adjoining dormitory are coming from. The project is intended as an upgrade and enhance functional recovery of the whole area, where the old building will become the new station with multi-purpose functions (small dining area, little museum, small thematic library and tourist accommodation) and the adjacent area, including the new rail terminal, the site of potential exposure of railway materials of historical interest.

At the same time we experience year after year an increasing demand for steam trains from Bergamo, Milan, Brescia, Lecco, Cremona, Lodi and some more cities. Through the next projects and the further strenghtening of the association, "TrenoBLU" claims to become an innovative and important instrument to develop a kind of tourism that stresses art, landscape, environment, culture, gastronomy and wine as the resources on which a fair economy and social growth founds.

What to see from the windows

With the help of the map, we are going to describe what you can see from the "TrenoBLU" windows on the line between Palazzolo s/Oglio and Paratico Sarnico. We suggest to take place, if possible, on the left side of the waggons in order to have a better view of the landscape accompanying us to the Lake Iseo.



What to see from the windows: description



We leave Palazzolo station turning with a wide curve to the right and we soon see on the left side the remainings of the first Italian cement works; it was founded in the middle of the 19th century in order to supply the construction of the railway line between Venice and Milan. Soon after that we see the Oglio valley (which will accompany us as far as the terminus in Paratico Sarnico) and the small village Cividino on the opposite shore.

We keep on driving along the side of the valley, where wide cultivated fields and farmsteads lie on the right side, until we reach the underbridge of the A4 highway connecting Milan to Venice.

After running through a wood, the line drives again along meadows and vineyards typical of the Franciacorta region, while the first Pre-Alps mountains of the Bergamo and Brescia provinces stand out clearly against the horizon.

The line now carries on through low banks which obstruct for a few seconds the view on the surrounding landscape.

Straight beyond it anyway, one of the most amazing glimpses of the whole line opens suddenly on the left showing a wide air view of an Oglio bight dominated on the opposite side of the valley by the beautiful Calepio castle which was built in the 15th century.

The line gets now into a deep green cutting in a cuve and, after a glimpse of the river below, it reaches Capriolo station; the meaningless buildings of a textile plant obstruct the landscape.

Heading for the lake, the line runs beyond the Fusia channel and almost licks the Oglio river in a completely different and extremely amazing nature dominated by palustrine vegetation where many water birds have their natural habitat.

The rail departs slightly from the river and leaves the channel behind; it then runs through vineyards while we can catch a glimpse of the elegant nobility residence of Castel Montecchio on the Bergamo shore through the age-old trees.

We cross a cutting and face on the left a beautiful view of the small and lovely outlying administrative division of Sarnico called Fosio, a village looking on to us, and the low dam holding the waters of the lake. In a few hundred meters we reach the terminus.



Once in the station we soon understand the reason of the double naming: Paratico, with its modern and lively promenade, harbours the railway facilities, while Sarnico, a lively city arisen around the old town centre, lies right beyond the bridge facing the railway building and is the southern terminus for the Iseo Lake boats.

Before leaving, for railway enthusiastic people and for all those who are simply curious, over the building of the old station now owned by the municipality, there is an interesting small turntable. The turntable dates back to 1876, when the line was opened, and hasn't been operating for many years. Furthermore the peculiar pier, also from long time abandoned (today well integrated into the beautiful park recently completed), where the rail waggons would be loaded on lake barges and be transported to Lovere, as we hint before, deserves as well a visit. The pier is very easy to find: walk to the Sarnico bridge but don't cross it; just walk on your right along the Paratico promenade to the end and here you will find the old mobile embarcation wharfs.