

PRESENT AND PAST OF THE VALMOREA RAILWAY

The first idea of a railway along the Olona Valley dates back to the end of the 19th century, when the first workshops for the production of paper and several factories looking for clean and abundant water were built along the upper flow of the river Olona.

In the month of February 1900 the project of a one-track railway line separating from the line Novara Saronno Seregno in Castellanza to reach Cairate - Lonate Ceppino was presented.

On 16th January 1902 the Royal Charter nr. 21, signed by King Vittorio Emanuele III, gave official approval to the construction of the railway line. The line Castellanza - Cairate - Lonate Ceppino was officially inaugurated on 18th July 1904.

The aim of the constructors was to start the first track of a railway line connecting the Province of Varese to Mendrisio, following the upper course of the rivers Olona and Lanza.

The railway was extended by 20 km and twelve years later the tracks reached the border between Italy and Switzerland at the plain Santa Margherita, near the town of Stabio.

The Swiss Federal Government, which had already approved of the project of a cross-border connection between the two countries on 28th June 1906, signed the concession for the use of the railway line in Swiss territory in April 1916.

The works on the track Mendrisio - border were finished in 1926 and on 28th June of the same year the line connecting Castellanza to Mendrisio was inaugurated.

The cross-border railway line had a very short life: the very limited number of travellers and the impossibility to develop freight service due to the decision of the Italian Government not to sign a treaty between the two countries regulating trade along the line led to the suspension of the circulation of trains between Italy and Canton Ticino from May 2nd.

On 1st June 1928 Valmorea station became the new starting point of the track.

After losing its international importance the Valmorea Railway became unprofitable for Ferrovie Nord Milano, the railway company running the service. The company was forced to carry the expenses of a passenger service which was practically inexistent.

The passenger service was suspended in 1952. The freight service allowed the circulation of several trains to the paper and chemical industries of Cairate and Castiglione Olona.

www.amicidellaferroviavalmorea.it

Texts by: Associazione Amici della Ferrovia Valmorea

Translation: Istituto “ Enrico Fermi “ - Castellanza

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Around 1975 the first energy crisis and the one in the sector of the production of paper led to dismantle the big paper factories of Cairate, Lonate Ceppino and Vedano. As a consequence, the Railway Company F.N.M. officially stopped freight service. The last train journey to Castellanza was effected on 16th July 1977.

For some years the history of the railway seemed sadly to have been forgotten. The line was progressively overwhelmed by nature: vegetation covered the tracks and rivers and streams changed their natural courses, causing slides over their banks and leaving some spots of the tracks without a foundation.

Nevertheless, projects were presented to recover and electrify the old railway track in Italian territory.

In Swiss territory the railway line, even if downgraded to mere freight service and transformed into an industrial link, was never abandoned. At the end of the 20th century it started being recovered for tourist service.

During 1989 the Tourist Office of Mendrisiotto and Basso Ceresio promoted the use of steam trains along the short railway track between Mendrisio and the border.

In 1993 the Saint Gotthard Club, an association of amateurs of historical railways established in Tessin at the end of the 1970es, reached an agreement with the Swiss Federal Railways to operate the tourist railway service from Mendrisio to Stabio.

The idea of opening the old customs gate and let the train travel for some metres in Italian territory arose.

On 12th September 1993, during the celebration " *TRENO SENZA FRONTIERA* " (*TRAIN WITHOUT BARRIERS*) the old gate was opened and two wagons were allowed to travel in Italian territory.

Even if the first journey in the Italian territory was very short, this day marked the beginning of the recovery of the old railway track.

Year by year the work of Swiss and Italian volunteers, the support of Local Authorities, the financial support provided by the Region of Lombardy and the Provinces of Como, Varese, and by F.N.M. allowed to recover kilometres of tracks.

The latest achievement was the inauguration of the station of Malnate Olona on 12th May 2007.

At the moment the Valmorea Railway is operated from Mendrisio to Malnate Olona along 7,5 km of railway tracks. All the tracks in Italian territory were completely restored.

After the inauguration of Malnate Olona, the Association Amici della Ferrovia Valmorea is working to extend the tourist railway service to Castiglione Olona, in the County of Seprio, as far as Castellanza.

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Testi a cura: Associazione Amici della Ferrovia Valmorea

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