Hadrian’s Wall Country boasts a spectacular coastline, stunning rolling countryside, vibrant cities and towns and a wealth of Roman forts, museums and visitor attractions.

The sites detailed in this booklet are open to the public and are a great way to explore Hadrian’s Wall and the coastal frontier in Cumbria, and to learn how the arrival of the Romans changed life in this part of the Empire forever.

Many sites are accessible by public transport, cycleways and footpaths making it the perfect place for an eco-tourism break.

For places to stay, downloadable walks and cycle routes, or to find food fit for an Emperor go to:

www.visithadrianswall.co.uk

If you have enjoyed your visit to Hadrian’s Wall Country and want further information or would like to contribute towards the upkeep of this spectacular landscape, you can make a donation or become a ‘Friend of Hadrian’s Wall’.

Go to www.visithadrianswall.co.uk for more information or text WALL22 £2/£5/£10 to 70070 e.g. WALL22 £5 to make a one-off donation.
Hadrian’s Wall is the most important structure built by the Romans in Britain. It was constructed on the orders of Emperor Hadrian to mark the northwest limit of the Roman Empire and to control the passage of people and goods across the border.

In the AD 70s, well before Hadrian built his famous Wall, the Roman army advanced into northern Britain. The first forts along the Cumbrian coast were probably established at this time to protect a chain of harbours that supplied the army.

By the AD 80s the Romans controlled much of what is now Scotland but had to transfer troops to deal with problems along the Danube River. The army fell back to the isthmus between the Tyne and the Solway and constructed a line of forts along a military road – the Stanegate. Hadrian’s decision to build the Wall was part of his policy of consolidating the Empire’s frontiers after he became Emperor in AD 117. Evidence suggests he inspected work on the Wall in AD 122.

The Wall extended across the narrowest part of the country – from Bowness-on-Solway in the west to Wallsend in the east – a distance of 80 Roman miles or 73 modern miles (117 km). From the River Irthing to Bowness, the Wall was initially constructed of turf and, along with the coastal defences, may have been the first part of the frontier to be built in response to threats from native tribes.

The military structures were highly organised. Major forts were located 8.2 Roman miles (11.5 km) apart. Between these were smaller fortlets (milecastles), one Roman mile apart, with two small turrets or lookout stations between every milecastle. Communications were relayed using beacons and semaphore signals. The cross-section drawing below reveals further defensive structures including the Vallum.
As the coast was vulnerable to sea-borne attack, the defences extended southwards to Ravenglass. The coastal fortifications were not linked by a wall but consisted of separate forts, milefortlets and turrets following the same defensive pattern as on the Wall, with a road linking them together. The fort and port at Ravenglass was connected by road to forts at Hardknott (Mediobogdum) and Ambleside (Galava).

How long the coastal system remained in use is uncertain. Many smaller structures seem to have been abandoned shortly after being built, but the main forts and some milefortlets were in use for much longer probably because of their importance in supplying the frontier by sea.

The garrison included regiments of auxiliary soldiers recruited from different parts of the Empire. Along with merchants and traders who arranged supplies for the army, the northwest would have been a multicultural area reflecting the diversity of the Empire. As well as the military presence, each of the major forts attracted a civilian settlement that sprawled out from one or more of the main gateways.

Hadrian’s Wall was abandoned when the new Emperor, Antoninus Pius, ordered an advance into Scotland and the construction of a new frontier made of turf, between the Firth of Forth and Firth of Clyde – the Antonine Wall. A generation later the army had returned to the line of Hadrian’s Wall. Following a major campaign north of the Wall under Emperor Severus, the northwest frontier was peaceful compared with other parts of the Empire for much of the third and early fourth centuries.

Troubles began again in the fourth century as the Empire faced increasing instability on all frontiers. Centralised administration of Britain from Rome ended around AD 400. Evidence suggests many of the forts along Hadrian’s Wall were occupied into the fifth and sixth centuries possibly providing the power base for local warlords seeking control and security in the absence of centralised power. Over time Hadrian’s Wall and the coastal defences fell into disuse, with the stones re-used in other buildings.

1. Birdoswald (Banna)

(Gr. NY615663)

One of the best preserved forts along Hadrian’s Wall. The partially excavated site clearly shows the outlines of the fort, its gated entrances and internal granaries. The east gate is one of the best preserved on the Wall, with a particularly fine section of Hadrian’s Wall nearby (easily accessible from the car park). West of the fort a section of the turf wall is clearly visible, whilst a magnificent view over the Irthing Gorge can be gained by walking up the hill from the south gate.

Regiments from Dacia (modern Romania) and Thracia (modern Bulgaria) were based at Birdoswald in the early 3rd century AD. By the 5th century, the north granary had become the site of a large timber building, probably a hall, suggesting the continued use of the fort site as a base for a local warlord.

Small visitor centre, gift shop and tearoom. Admission charge.

www.visithadrianswall.co.uk/birdoswald

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Above: Birdoswald Roman Fort
Andrew Hepworth

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Small visitor centre, gift shop and tearoom. Admission charge.

www.visithadrianswall.co.uk/birdoswald
2. Banks East Turret and Pike Hill Signal Tower

(GR. NY574647)

The excavated foundations of this turret and a stretch of Roman wall are among the first tangible remains of Hadrian’s Wall in Cumbria (if travelling west to east). To the south, the line of the Vallum can be made out. A short walk away is Pike Hill signal tower. This watchtower pre-dates Hadrian’s Wall but was incorporated into it as the Wall was being built – hence the offset alignment of the base stones. The panoramic views from both sites are stunning.

Free access. Adjacent car park.

Nearby Lanercost Priory was founded c.1169 and is largely built of stones from Hadrian’s Wall. Admission charge. www.visithadrianswall.co.uk/lanercost

Lanercost Tearoom is adjacent to the priory and has a large car park.

Below: Reconstruction of Pike Hill signal tower
Based on an illustration by English Heritage, redrawn by Juliet Whitworth.

3. Bewcastle (Fanum Cocidii)

(GR. NY565747)

This was an outpost fort, built six miles (10 km) to the north of Hadrian’s Wall. The most distinctive feature of this fort is its hexagonal shape. Unusually, the bath house is situated within the fort’s southeast corner (normally it is found outside the fort’s perimeter). A regiment from Dacia (Romania) was based here in the 2nd century.

The fort has been the focus of community life in Bewcastle for 2000 years with a church, motte and bailey castle and a farm all located within the perimeter.

Free access.

St Cuthbert’s Church dates to the 13th century. Its graveyard holds one of the finest Anglo-Saxon crosses in Britain, referred to by the scholar Nikolaus Pevsner as one of the greatest achievements of its date in the whole of Europe. Dating from the late 7th century, the cross has runic inscriptions, ornamental reliefs and three figures depicting Christ, John the Baptist and probably St John the Evangelist. Free access; donations welcomed. Car park in front of the church.

Above: Bewcastle Church with the Anglo-Saxon cross to the right. Anna Gray

4. Carlisle (Luguvalium)

(GR. NY396561)

The Roman fort of Luguvalium (‘fort of Lugh’) at Carlisle was established in AD 72 on a site between the castle and Tullie House Museum. It became the focus for a thriving civitas, complete with forum, temples and baths. Following the decline of centralised Roman rule in Britain, Luguvalium continued as an administrative centre, reverting to its Celtic name of Caer Luel (later corrupted to ‘Carlisle’).

A second fort (Uxellodonum) was built at Stanwix. This was the largest fort on the Wall. It housed a 1000-strong cavalry regiment called the Ala Petriana – a crack force of Roman soldiers trained for rapid deployment along this section of Hadrian’s Wall.

Hadrian’s Wall Path National Trail follows the south bank of the river Eden in Carlisle and is accessible through Bitts Park.

Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery is built partly over Luguvalium. The new underground Roman Frontier Gallery tells the story of 400 years of occupation on the Roman Empire’s northerly frontier. The interactive and family-friendly displays invite visitors to consider the effect of Roman rule on Britain and the impact of constructing a frontier on native people through comparisons with modern frontiers and barriers across the globe. Other Roman finds from Luguvalium are on display elsewhere in the museum. Admission charge. Café and gift shop. www.visithadrianswall.co.uk/tulliehouse

Carlisle Castle also straddles over the fort and Roman stonework can be seen in its masonry. First constructed at the end of the 11th century, the castle was a major stronghold on England’s border with Scotland and saw many sieges and battles, the most important being during the second Jacobite uprising against George II of Great Britain in 1745. Admission charge. www.visithadrianswall.co.uk/carlislecastle

Carlisle Cathedral is built largely of Roman stones taken from the fort, which contrast starkly with the red sandstone of later building work. The Cathedral was built in the 11th century and the choir rebuilt in the 13th century. At its eastern end is the largest and most complex decorated Gothic window in England, which retains much of its original stained glass. Free access; donations welcomed. www.visithadrianswall.co.uk/carlislecathedral

www.visithadrianswall.co.uk
Above: Roman auxiliary soldier, c. AD 125

ROMANS IN CUMBRIA

HADRIAN’S WALL AND THE COASTAL DEFENCES

Roman site described in booklet

Other Roman sites with public access

Roman site with no public access

Hadrian’s Wall (course of)

Roman road (course of)

North Pennines

Area designated as a World Heritage Site

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Hadrian’s Wall Country can be explored by train, bus or cycle. Go to www.visithadrianswall.co.uk for timetables and journey planning information.

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5. Beaumont (GR. NY348593)

The medieval church of St. Mary’s stands on the site of a 12th century Norman motte and bailey castle, which in turn was built on top of a Roman turret. The square building stones of the church are clearly Roman in origin. Inside are information panels describing the history of the site and surrounding area.

Free access. Donations welcomed.

Below: Stages in the development of Beaumont
Juliet Whitworth

6. Burgh-by-Sands (Aballava) (GR. NY329591)

The cavalry fort of Aballava underlies the eastern end of Burgh-by-Sands. It was built to guard a major crossing point over the Solway Firth, and garrisoned by regiments from northern Europe and North Africa. The road follows the original east–west access route through the fort.

St Michael’s Church incorporates Roman masonry in its construction. The 14th century tower was built to provide a place of refuge for inhabitants during Scottish raids. Note its thick walls, heavy grid-iron door, Roman diamond hatching on internal stones and the curious animal carvings set into the wall. A series of interpretation panels in the tower undercroft explain the history and heritage of this fascinating village. Free access; donations welcomed.

Burgh-by-Sands is strongly associated with Edward I (the ‘Hammer of the Scots’). The ailing king had made his way to Burgh-by-Sands to cross over the Solway Firth to Scotland, but died on 7 July 1307. His body was laid to rest in St Michael’s Church before being taken to Westminster Abbey for burial. A monument was built on the spot where he died (GR NY326609).

7. Drumburgh (Congabata) (GR. NY265598)

A small fort at the western end of Burgh Marsh was built to guard the Sandwath crossing over the Solway. Nothing remains of the fort today as the stones were looted to build Drumburgh Castle.

The stones of the Pict Wal wer pulled down to build Drumuygh.
For the Wal ys very nere yt.

John Leland, c.1542, Vol. vi, fol. 69

The imposing edifice of Drumburgh Castle once commanded extensive views over Burgh Marshes. The original tower house was built almost entirely of stones from the fort and Hadrian’s Wall. See if you can spot the two Roman altars from the road.

The pavilion at The Banks marks the western end of Hadrian’s Wall Path National Trail.

St Michael’s Church lies outside the southern boundary of the fort and is built of Roman masonry. The original bells were stolen by Scottish raiders in the 17th century. Under pursuit, the thieves jettisoned the bells in the Solway Firth where they lie to this day. In retaliation, Bowness villagers took the bells from two other churches in Scotland, which can be seen at the back of the nave. The highly ornate Norman font is a church treasure worth close inspection. Free access; donations welcomed.

8. Bowness-on-Solway (Maia) (GR. NY223627)

The Roman fort of Maia (meaning ‘larger’) lived up to its name as the second largest fort on Hadrian’s Wall. It was built to guard an important crossing point over the estuary (the Bowness wath). The north wall has since been lost to the sea, but the original east–west passage through the fort is followed by the present-day road. A Roman road heading south to Kirkbride has been identified in the field opposite the church.

Above: Ceramic head of a female
found at Burgh-by-Sands
Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery Trust, Carlisle

Above: The Staffordshire Moorlands Pan bearing the names of Maia (Bowness) and Coggabata (Drumburgh)
British Museum

Above: Outline of Roman fort of Maia overlying present-day Bowness-on-Solway. Based on an original map by Paul Austen.
Juliet Whitworth

www.visithadrianswall.co.uk
9. Kirkbride

(KIRBRIDE) (GR. NY229574)

The timber fort at Kirkbride marked the western end of the Stanegate (an earlier Roman road established about AD 105 under Emperor Trajan) and was linked by road to the fort at Bowness-on-Solway. The fort probably fell into disuse when Hadrian’s Wall was built.

Kirkbride Church, dedicated to St Bride (or St Bridget), is likely to be of Anglo-Saxon origin. It is sited over the west gate of the fort and contains Roman masonry in its construction. Opposite the church is a narrow gulley or ‘wynd’ cutting through the western ramparts of the Roman fort. This would have been used to bring supplies into the fort from ships anchored in the bay. Free access; donations welcomed.

Below: Reconstruction of Milefortlet 21. Based on an original illustration by Kate Wilson Juliet Whitworth

10. Swarthycroft Hill (Milefortlet 21)

(GR. NY067400)

This is the only site along the Cumbrian coast where the layout of a milefortlet is clearly visible. The turf rampart and ditches are easily recognisable, along with a road cutting east–west through the centre. Free access. Follow directional signs from the cycle path then continue along the footpath to the milefortlet.

Below the milefortlet are the remains of the Crosscanonby salt pans. There were many salt pans along the north Cumbrian coast, but the ones at Crosscanonby (built c.1650) are among the best preserved in England. Free access to site.

Crosscanonby Nature Reserve is a diverse mix of habitats rich in bird and insect life. Circular walk around site with interpretation panels. Free access to site with adjacent car parking.

11. Maryport (Alauna)

(GR. NY038373)

This large fort is believed to have been a major supply base for the northern frontier. The fort and its large civilian settlement to the north are located on a hill with spectacular views across the Solway to Scotland and the Isle of Man. The site of the original Roman port is not known but it may have been to the northeast in a now silted-up inlet. Alauna at Maryport was connected by road to Derventio, the Roman fort near Cockermouth.

Around 1870, a series of altars were unearthed from pits outside the fort. Recent excavations have revealed that the altars had been re-used for the foundations of a large timber building constructed on the highest point of the hill. The altars were dedicated to Jupiter, king of the Gods, by the commanders of the regiment garrisoned at the fort and probably came from a nearby temple.

The altars may form part of an annual series dedicated by officers and provide a fascinating insight into the multicultural nature of the Empire and the career paths of its senior officers and administrators. Officers at Alauna came from Italy, Provence (southern France), Noricum (modern Austria), North Africa and possibly Spain with each officer commanding a regiment for three to four years before moving on to a new posting.

The adjacent Senhouse Roman Museum contains the largest collection of altars (currently 23) ever recovered from a single site, with most dedicated to Jupiter. A watchtower provides extensive views over the fort. Admission charge.

www.visithadrianswall.co.uk/senhouse

Above: Inscription to Jupiter. It reads: ‘To Jupiter, best, greatest, Capitolinus, for the welfare of Antoninus Augustus Pius. Postumius Acilianus, prefect of the First Cohort of Dalmatians [set this up].’

Senhouse Roman Museum

Left: Altar to Jupiter discovered at Maryport in 1870

Juliet Whitworth

English Heritage

Above: Fine example of a Roman samian bowl found near Maryport

Anna Gray

Above: Aerial view of the fort at Maryport

www.visithadrianswall.co.uk
12. Moresby (Gabrosentum)

(GR. NX982211)

Situated to the north of Whitehaven, Gabrosentum occupies a classic fort site formed by a low promontory overlooking the sea to the west. Regiments from Thrace (modern Bulgaria) and northern France were stationed here. The ramparts are still visible in the field to the west of the church.

Free access.

13. Ravenglass (Glannaventa)

(GR. SD088959)

Ravenglass was an important Roman port and supply centre for the inland forts. From here a road ran inland, connecting the forts at Hardknott (Mediobogdum) and Ambleside (Galava). These forts may have been built to control mining for lead and silver in the mountains of the Lake District, with Ravenglass providing the port facilities for export by sea. The fort at Whitley Castle (Epiacum) near Alston was similarly constructed to control the supply of lead and silver from mines in the North Pennines (www.epiacumheritage.org).

Ravenglass is best known today for its bath house, the walls of which stand nearly 13ft/4m high and are the highest of any Roman domestic building in northern Britain.

Little remains of the fort itself other than some faint earthworks. However, recent excavations are revealing further evidence of Roman occupation at this site.

Free access. To reach the bath house, cross the footbridge over the railway and turn left on reaching the private road. The bath house is a quarter of a mile further along.

Nearby Muncaster Castle stands on an elevated platform, thought to have been the site of a Roman signal station. Admission charge. www.visithadrianswall.co.uk/muncaster

The relative remoteness of Hardknott Fort (Mediobogdum) on its spectacular rocky mountain platform has helped preserve many of the internal features, with the headquarters building, commandant’s house, bath house and parade ground all clearly visible. The fort was connected to Galava at Ambleside by a Roman road over the tortuous Hardknott and Wrynose passes. Free access.

Below: Plan of Ravenglass bath house from the 1881 excavation. Re-drawn by Juliet Whitworth

Below: Plan of Ravenglass bath house from the 1881 excavation. Re-drawn by Juliet Whitworth

Below: St Bridget’s Church lies just outside the east gate of the Roman fort, replacing an earlier Anglo-Saxon church; the solitary chancel arch being all that remains of the earlier structure.

Nearby is Moresby Hall with its imposing classical frontage added around 1620. This was the home of the Moresby family and then of the influential Fletcher family between 1576 and 1721. The original hall was built of stone taken from the fort. Moresby Hall is now a country guesthouse.

Below: St Bridget’s Church at Moresby with old chancel arch in foreground.

Anna Gray

Below: Ravenglass bath house

Peter Hughes