

Walking the Roman Way

The Romans certainly appreciated dramatic scenery when they marched into northern Britain. As they advanced they set up defences against the local inhabitants (Picts) of Caledonia (Scotland) and indeed they had to on more than one occasion retreat back to the safety on the south side of Hadrian's Wall.

This wall stretching from the west coast at Bowness on Solway to the east coast at Wallend was a major engineering undertaking but that was far from all they built. The Romans continued north extending Dere Street as far as the Firth of Forth close to present day Edinburgh. All along this route they established further forts, one of the most extensive being at Trimontium just below the Eildon Hill next to Melrose.



It would be possible to talk about a lot more of the Roman occupation of Caledonia and the more northerly forts and walls, such as the Antonine Wall, but we are going to focus on an area bounded by Hadrian's Wall in the south to Trimontium Fort some 55 miles further north. In this "T" shaped area there are countless Roman structures, fort sites, signalling stations and now modern day exhibitions dedicated to the Roman occupation. But rather than encouraging the growth of touring buses and car loads of visitors, we focus on the active visitors, the ones who will walk the walls and military roads that the Roman's built, and who will walk through the expansive and sometimes wild countryside that rang out to the sound of Centurions some 2000 years back.

The Roman Heritage walking route is 100 miles (160 km) in length and takes the average walker 7 days to complete. The route offers the walker two principal options, either starting from the western corner of Hadrian's Wall on the Solway Firth and concluding at the Trimontium Fort by the banks of the world renowned River Tweed or starting at the eastern end at Segedunum on the River Tyne close to its mouth with the North Sea and again ending at Trimontium. Both options give the visitor the thrill of walking half of the World Heritage designated Hadrian's Wall, ascending all the way from the sea to its central point close to the Roman Fort at Housesteads. Especially in this centre portion of the wall the visitor will see extensive remains of this defensive stone wall and forts build on the edge of the crags. But regardless of which half you walk, there are roman forts to visit and marvel at and several very well presented Roman Museums to enjoy.



Passing across the Wall between Cuddy's Crag and Hotbank Crag the Roman Heritage Way is now common to both route options as it tracks north into north Northumberland and then Scotland. The countryside becomes more varied and the hills more frequent and high although it should never be that strenuous to deter the walker. In reality we think the hills and changing scenery only add to the enjoyment.

The Roman history is never far removed from the walk but at times it is off to the east in the Redesdale Valley as the walking route gradually converges with the line of Dere Street. The walker can look onto the sites of Habitavonm, Dargnes and Brigantium before arriving at the small community of Byrness. The walk is now into the Cheviot range of hills and soon arrives at the remains of the remote Roman Fort of Chew Green. This is adjacent to the Scottish English border and for the next mile or so the walking route is directly on the border, shortly picking up another section of the Roman Dere Street.

For the next day and a half the trail sticks very closely to the line of the Roman road passing the Roman camps at Woden Law, Pennymuir and Cappuck. In the distance the Eildon Hills are distinctive and signal the end point of the walking route. The North Hill was used by the Romans as a signalling station and below and close to the River Tweed are the extensive fields that housed the Trimontium Fort, one of the largest forts in all of Scotland. All that remains of Trimontium is now below soil level but archaeological work over the last 100 years has unearthed a large amount of detail that has allowed interested individuals to know in detail the nature and workings of the Fort.



From the Trimontium Fort there is now only a miles walk along the Tweed valley and past the ruined remains of Melrose Abbey to the centre of this beautiful Border Town, famous for its Abbey and the Founding of Rugby Sevens. In the square the walker can stop and visit a wonderful Museum run by the Trimontium Trust where yet further Roman treasures are to be found.

Even if the interest in things Roman is not all consuming, this walking route takes the visitor across some

very varying and beautiful countryside.

By John Henderson of Walking Support

<http://www.romanheritageway.com>

To access much more on the Roman Heritage Way visit the website www.romanheritageway.com.

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