

REALITY & BEYOND

Highlights of Hadrian's Wall

1-5 September 2025



This five-day tour takes in some of the most significant Roman forts and museums along Hadrian's Wall, with three short but memorable walks to view some of the most spectacular stretches and significant places. While this journey focuses on the Roman world, we will also explore the artistic and spiritual transitions from the Roman empire to the Anglo-Saxons and later medieval kingdoms, from the pagan to the Christian world.

Hadrian's Wall is the most famous of all the frontiers of the Roman Empire, and the most important monument built by the Romans in Britain. Built on the orders of the Emperor Hadrian in AD122, it crosses the narrow neck of northern Britain for 73 miles (80 Roman miles) from Bowness-on-Solway in the west to Wallsend on the River Tyne, marking the north-western most frontier of the Roman empire. After the end of Roman rule in Britain in the fifth century, local chiefs or warlords used the old Roman forts as their bases and the area continued to be disputed, dangerous border country into the modern era.

While the Wall was built as a military installation and its history largely written in terms of conquest, occupation and warfare, we are also left with fascinating evidence for the daily and religious life of the people who lived on and around the Wall, during the Roman period and afterwards. Right into the 20th century, stones from the Wall were used to build castles, churches, farms and field walls and we will discover many fascinating re-uses still in place today, where pagan stones were used in the construction of a very different Christian world.

Itinerary

Day 1

Meet Carlisle station just before 2pm (to coincide with London train). Drive to **Birdoswald**, about 30 minutes' away. Birdoswald was one of 16 forts built as part of the Hadrian's Wall frontier system. Today its defences are the best preserved of any along the Wall. The excavation of wooden halls from the obscure period after the end of Roman Britain revealed evidence for local war leaders during the so-called Dark Ages. By the 16th century Birdoswald was a fortified farm vulnerable to raids from reivers. From at least the third century, a cohort of Dacians (from what is now Romania) were stationed at the fort and left fascinating evidence that they retained a connection with their homeland. We then venture just north of the Wall, to **Bewcastle**, the site of the Roman outpost fort stationed by the Dacians in the second century. In the atmospheric churchyard there stands an Anglo-Saxon Cross of outstanding craftsmanship, the style of which suggesting sculptors imported from Mediterranean and connected to the great monasteries at Monkwearmouth and Jarrow. Introductory talk by tour leader at our hotel. Dinner at a local pub and o/n at our hotel cont/

Day 2

Today we visit **Housesteads**, the best-preserved fort on the Wall, set in a spectacular position with far-reaching views, one of the greatest sites anywhere in the Roman empire. We will walk from here to Steel Rigg, a challenging but spectacular walk with some steep descents and ascents but taking in some of the most dramatic views on the Wall as well as the now infamous Sycamore Gap (just over three miles; about three hours). Picnic lunch on the way. Afternoon visit to **Vindolanda** where some of the most spectacular discoveries have been made – and continue to be made – in the Wall zone, including the astonishing series of letters which have shed so much light on daily life in Roman Britain. In addition to the letters, the museum contains many other extraordinary finds, including shoes, textiles, armour and wooden objects. In August 2019, the fragments of a lead chalice, covered in Christian imagery, were found within a late building. Thought to be of early 7th century date, it is a remarkably rare relic of Celtic Christianity from the very last stages of the fort's occupation.

Return to our accommodation for dinner and o/n.

Day 3

A change of scenery today, as we travel to the tranquil valley of the North Tyne. If the weather is fine in the morning, we will have a gentle 2.5 hour walk along the line of the Wall and visit the Mithraic temple of Carrawburgh - memorable whatever the weather - which lies en route to the Roman fort of Cilurnum, in the parkland of **Chesters**, once home of the great antiquary John Clayton, who helped save the central section of the Wall and excavated Chesters from the 1840s to his death in 1890. As well as the best-preserved example of a Roman bath building in Britain, there is an Edwardian museum exhibiting Clayton's collection of some of the most important finds from the Wall, including the extraordinary finds from the Mithraeum and nearby Coventina's Well. We then continue to handsome **Hexham** with its rather astonishing Norman gaol and ancient abbey containing, among its many treasures, a sixth-century crypt built out of stone from the Roman town of nearby **Corbridge**, which we will visit in the afternoon. Free time for lunch and to explore this charming town. We then proceed to nearby Corbridge, where we visit the site of the Roman fort, town and legionary supply base just south of the Wall. There are some remarkable remains to be seen, including an ornate fountain, a market, and well-preserved granaries together with a museum containing one of the largest and most impressive collections of finds from the Wall.

Dinner and o/n at our accommodation.

Cont/

Day 4

This morning we return to the place we started our exploration of the Wall, Birdoswald, from where we enjoy a gentle walk to the village of Lanercost (just over three miles/ two hours' walk with a short climb). The ruined 12th-century priory contains inscriptions from the Wall incorporated into its fabric and was caught up in Border warfare in the medieval period. Part of the church continued in use by the parish after the Dissolution. Cont/ After a light lunch we visit a private house with a medieval fortified tower and fine gardens. Dinner at a nearby inn. Return to our hotel for o/n.

Day 5 Depart after breakfast to Carlisle to visit the Roman galleries at Tullie House Museum and the Cathedral. Carlisle was an important Roman hub on the Northern frontier - the original Roman fort now lies under the castle but thrilling discoveries are presently being made around the site of the nearby fort of Stanwix, with the discovery of a huge bath house at Carlisle Cricket Club and increasing evidence that this was the base of the Emperor Septimius Severus and his wife Faustina during their campaigns in the North in the early third century. When St Cuthbert visited Carlisle in the sixth century, he was shown 'a marvellously constructed fountain of Roman workmanship'. There will be free time after seeing the cathedral and Roman Galleries to explore more of Carlisle independently, or to grab an early lunch or sandwich before a short walk to Carlisle Station to be met with our luggage at 1.35pm in time to catch trains.

Bronwen Riley, Tour Leader

Bronwen is a writer and editor with a special interest in the Classical world and Romania, both life-long passions. Bronwen worked at English Heritage for over a decade, where she was head of guidebooks and curatorial content, and oversaw the publication of new guidebooks to all the English Heritage sites along Hadrian's Wall. She recently devised and curated a travelling exhibition and creative writing project, 'Voices from the Wall', telling the story of the Dacian soldiers on Hadrian's Wall in parallel with the lives of Romanians living in the North West today. Bronwen is the author of *Transylvania* and *Journey to Britannia from the Heart of Rome to Hadrian's Wall*. She is creative director of the Transylvanian Book Festival and a regular contributor to *Country Life*.

Practical Information

The tour price outlined here includes four nights' accommodation, transport as stated by minibus, all visits, four dinners, two lunches, tea during private visit, and transfers between venues (as stated), and will be accompanied by the tour leader. We include all entrance fees in the price but if you are a member of English Heritage and bring your membership card with you, then we will refund you the cost of the entrance tickets to those EH sites we visit. Cont/

How strenuous is it?

There is a considerable amount of walking every day on this tour, not just on the three 'set' walks along the Wall, but also while visiting the forts themselves which cover wide areas of ground on uneven terrain and with the odd climb/descent. The most strenuous walk is on day 2 when there are some steep ascents and descents and rocky, uneven ground. We will take all the walks at a very gentle pace, but you will need to be able to walk three miles in three hours; and also to be able to stand and walk for at least 30 minutes at a stretch. Comfortable, waterproof boots and strong knees are essential! Please contact us with any concerns you might have about fitness levels, and if you would like to join the tour but sit out the longer walks.

Accommodation

We will stay at Warwick Hall, a country house B&B run by its owners, situated on the River Eden and a short drive away from the Wall.

The price for the tour is £1660 which includes

Four dinners (two at our hotel; one pub supper and one dinner at an old inn); two lunches (picnic lunch on Day 2; light lunch on Day 4); morning coffee on day 3 and refreshments on our private visit on day 4.

Transport by 16-seater minibus; tour leader on all walks and visits; entry to all historic sites, museums and private visits; tips

The price does not include

Lunches on Days 1, 3 and 5; alcoholic or soft drinks other than the wine and water provided at table for dinner.

For more information, please contact lucy@realityandbeyond.co.uk.