

Quo Vadis?

We are all familiar with the peculiar shape of the British Isles. It is an image constantly refreshed each time we watch the weather map on the television, when we subconsciously fix our gaze on that part of the map where we believe ourselves to be, our own little kingdom somewhere in the middle. Looking outwards from this vantage point we have a pretty good idea of the position of the major centres, - that Bournemouth, say, is at the bottom and Inverness towards the top. Making reasonably short journeys, to Manchester or Liverpool, Harrogate or York, causes us few problems of orientation or navigation. We know which way to go.

But if we wish to venture further from our geographical comfort zone, then we need some extra help. For my generation this takes the form of maps. The smart phone addicts rely on the sat-nav, not always wisely so in my opinion. When I lived in New Mill I would occasionally offer solace to a truck driver who was convinced by his sat-nav that he was in New Mills, Derbyshire. He took some persuading that a little “s” could make such a difference. And only this week a Romanian driving a gigantic monster got into a right pickle outside my home at Victoria Mills, Holmfirth. Although we had five languages between us we still couldn’t understand each other, but I managed to work out eventually that he wanted to reach Victoria Mill, Golcar. That nasty little “s” again! I made him a cup of tea and sent him, hopefully, in the right direction.



When I came to live in my new home in Meltham in the early 1960s I would make regular journeys back to my old home at Winchester. Although it wasn't quite the Cairo to Cape Town marathon, in those pre-motorway, pre-dual carriageway, pre-by-pass days it was nevertheless an exhausting bit of driving which took the best part of a day. At that time you would ask the AA to suggest the best route for the journey and they would send a series of strip maps highlighting the quickest way. These were based mainly on A roads first built as turnpikes for coach travel in the 18th century, leading through every town and village between Yorkshire and Hampshire, so that the overall average speed was hardly faster than a stage coach, certainly less than 30 miles per hour. Which brings us to the Romans, (of course). They held the tenancy of this country for almost four centuries. Did they, or at least their administrators and bureaucrats, have a map of Britannia on the office wall resembling our modern weather map? I rather doubt it. As long as they could safely make the crossing from Boulogne to Richborough and then up the Wansum river to London, the external rim of the country was probably of little interest to them. Internal communications was what mattered - the construction and management of at least 2000 miles of good quality roads crisscrossing the country. And for this surely there must have been the Roman equivalent of the AA

guides, - some kind of map which pointed the way to Aquae Sulis (Bath) or Clausentum (Southampton), what was down south and what was up north.

One such road guide survives: **the Antonine Itinerary**

In Britain it divides the road system into some 15 routes (Iter). Here, for example, is Route (Iter) 3, familiar today for the traveller to the continent - London to Dover.

(ITER III)

*Item a Londinio ad portum Dubris
mpm lxxvi [sic]*

[Likewise from *Londinium* to the port of *Dubris*
sixty-six thousand paces *thus written*]

Durobrivis	xxvii	[= <i>Dvrobrivae</i> = Rochester, Kent]
Duroverno	xxv	[= <i>Dvrovernvm</i> = Canterbury, Kent]
Ad portum Dubris	xiii	[= <i>Portvs Dvbris</i> = Dover, Kent]

(Total 66)

Our own local stretch of Roman road crossing the Pennines from Castleshaw to Slack at Outlane is part of Route 2, a very long route from Hadrian's Wall to the Roman port at Richborough in Kent. It seems to suggest that the Roman name for Slack fort was Cambodunum and appears as such on the OS maps. (But see footnote at end).

(ITER II)

*Item a vallo ad portum Ritupis
mpm cccclxxxi [sic]*

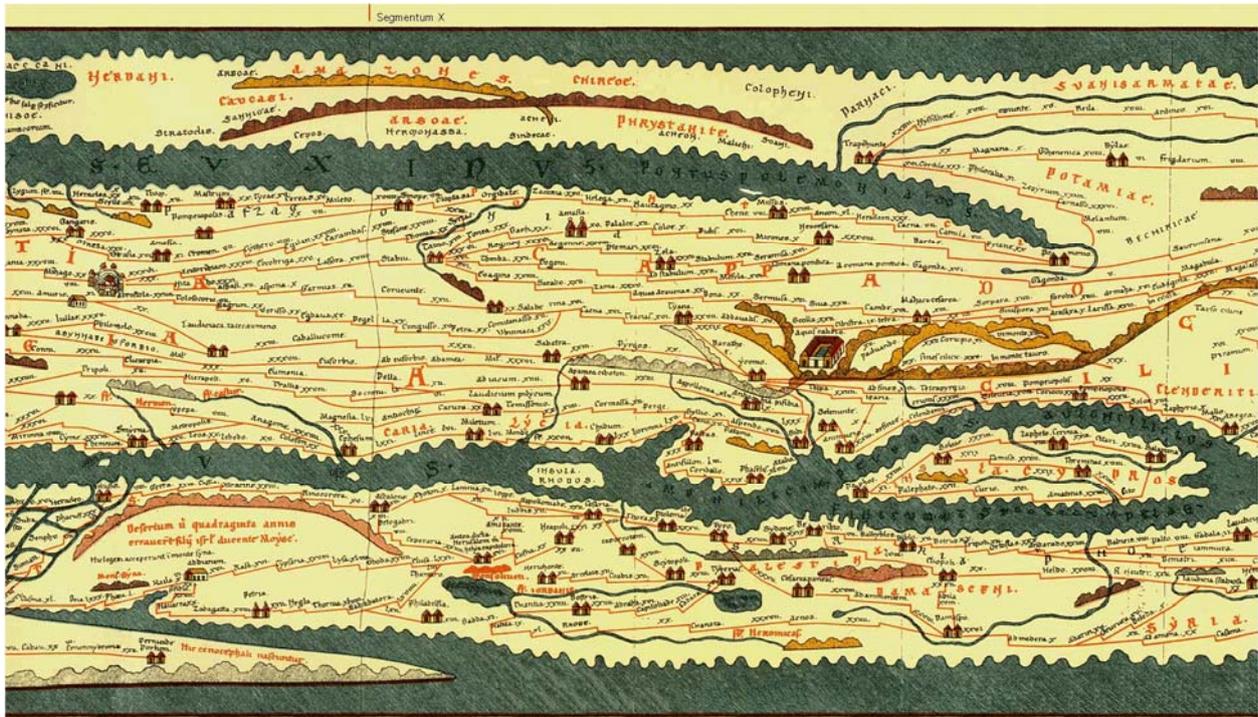
[Likewise from the *Wall [of Hadrian]* to the port of *Rutupiae*
four-hundred and eighty-one thousand paces *thus written*]

A Blato Bulgio		[= <i>Blatobvlgvm</i> = Birrens, Dumfries & Galloway]
Castra exploratorum	xii	[= <i>Castra Exploratorvm</i> = Netherby, Cumbria]
Luguvallo	xii	[= <i>Lvgvvalivm</i> = Carlisle, Cumbria]
Voreda	xiii	[= <i>Voreda</i> = Old Penrith, Cumbria]
Brovonacis	xiii	[= <i>Bravoniacvm</i> = Kirby Thore, Cumbria]
Verteris	xiii	[= <i>Verteris</i> = Brough Castle, Cumbria]
Lavatris	xiii	[= <i>Lavatris</i> = Bowes, Durham]
Cataractone	xvi	[= <i>Cataractonivm</i> = Catterick, North Yorkshire]
Isurium	xxiii	[= <i>Isvrivm</i> = Aldborough, North Yorkshire]
Eburacum	xvii	[= <i>Ebvracvm</i> = York, North Yorkshire]
Calcaria	viii	[= <i>Calcaria</i> = Tadcaster, North Yorkshire]
?Camboduno	xx	[?= <i>Cambodvnm</i> = Slack, South Yorkshire?]
Mamucio	xviii	[= <i>Mamvcivm</i> = Manchester, Greater Manchester]
Condate	xviii	[= <i>Condate</i> = Northwich, Cheshire]
Deva, leg. xx vict.	xx	[= <i>Deva</i> = Chester, Cheshire]

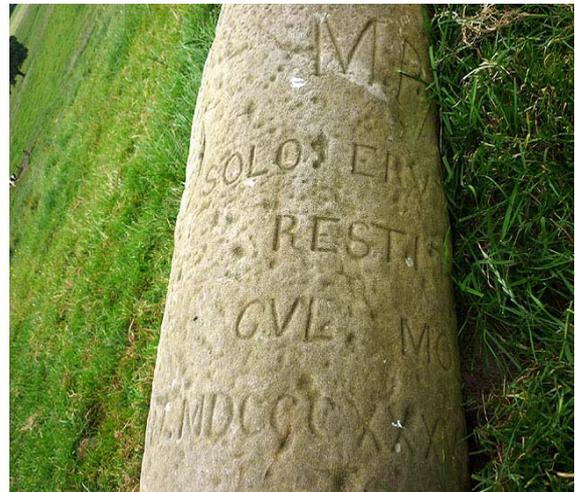
I would like to think that even in Roman times there was the equivalent of my Romanian truck driver, getting his Iters in a twist so to speak, finding himself at Cambodunum soaked to the skin (it is Slack!) when he thought he had arrived at Camulodunum (Colchester). If a mistake can be made someone will make it!

Another Roman road map survives, albeit in a medieval copy: the **Peutinger Table**

Unfortunately this shows only a small part of the south coast of England, the rest has been lost. As a map of Europe it leaves a lot to be desired, but then it was not designed to depict the landscape but to show with great clarity that all roads led to Rome.



There must have been a lot more practical help and guidance, now lost, for the traveller in Roman Britain, not so much for the native population, but for the many businessmen and merchants who came to this country to market their goods, - wine merchants from France and Spain or purveyors of high class glass ware from Cologne for example. Milestones existed along the roads and some of these survive, perhaps one at Slaithwaite. There were perhaps also professional guides or escorts for the stranger or visitor of a nervous disposition. As so often with the Romans, there is an awful lot we do know about their culture and way of life, but there are also large and very frustrating gaps in that knowledge, and what it was like to travel around Roman Britain is one of those gaps.



Footnote: **Cambodunum/Slack**

It is by no means certain that Slack Roman fort was named Cambodunum. Other names such as Camulodunum have also been suggested, although that name is known principally for the settlement at Colchester. According to the Antonine Itinerary Cambodunum was only 9 miles from Tadcaster,

so the distances do not tally. This may be due to a copying error, or the real Cambodunum has yet to be discovered elsewhere in West Yorkshire, perhaps in the Leeds area. There have been no clues in the excavations which have so far taken place at Slack, so maybe the answer still remains hidden in the fort ruins now lost to us under the car park at Outlane golf club. To add to the confusion there is also a Roman fort in Germany called Cambodunum.

There is plenty of discussion and argument on this subject online. Read and make your own mind up.

David Cockman for HDAS July 2017

