



## Walking Hadrian's Wall

Roman civilisation at the edge of an Empire

**12–18 May 2025 (ML 684)**

7 days • £2,830

Lecturer: Dr Matthew Symonds

The archaeology and history of the largest Roman construction in northern Europe.

As the most spectacular stretches are accessible only on foot, this is by necessity a walking tour.

Passes through some of the most wild and magnificent scenery in England.

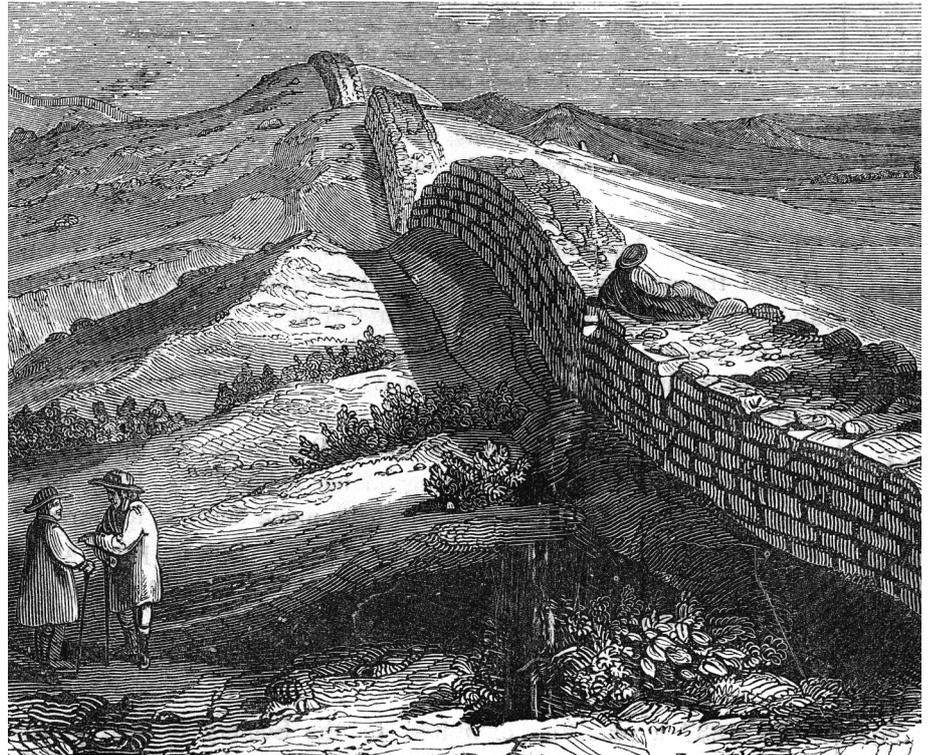
Coach excursions enable the inclusion of all the major Roman sites and relevant museums.

Traversing England from the Tyne estuary to the Solway Firth, the Wall was conceived and ordered by Emperor Hadrian in AD 122 to mark and control the northernmost limit of the Roman Empire. The ambition was extraordinary, its fulfilment – far from the pool of skills and prosperity in the Mediterranean heartlands of the Empire – astonishing: a 15-foot-high wall 73 miles long through harsh, undulating terrain, with 80 milecastles, 161 intermediate turrets and flanking earthwork ditches and ramparts.

15 or 16 forts, many straddling the Wall, housed a garrison of 12–15,000 soldiers from radically different climes elsewhere in the Empire, including Syria, Libya, Dalmatia, Spain and Belgium. A populous penumbra of supply bases and civilian settlements grew up nearby. As a feat of organisation, engineering and will-power, Hadrian's Wall ranks among the most extraordinary of all Roman achievements.

A study of the Wall leads to an examination of practically every aspect of Roman civilisation, from senatorial politics in Rome to the mundanities of life for ordinary Romans – and Britons – who lived in its shadow. But the Wall itself remains the fascinating focus, and the subject of endless academic debate.

For the modern-day visitor the Wall has the further, inestimable attraction of passing some of the most magnificent and unspoilt countryside in England. Happily, archaeological interest is greatest where the landscape is at its best, and it is on this central section that the tour concentrates. The principal excavated sites can be visited with no more exertion than on an average sightseeing outing, but to see the best surviving stretches of the Wall there is no substitute for leaving wheels behind and walking along its course.



*Hadrian's Wall near Housesteads, wood engraving c. 1888*

### Itinerary

**Day 1: Housesteads.** The coach leaves Newcastle Central Station at 2.15pm (or from the hotel, Matfen Hall, at 1.30pm) and takes you straight out to Housesteads. With standing remains of up to 10 feet, this is the best preserved of the Wall's forts and evocatively reveals the usual panoply of perimeter walls and gateways, headquarters building, commander's palatial residence, granaries, hospital, latrines. Remote and rugged, there are superb views.

**Day 2: walk Steel Rigg to Cawfields; Corbridge.** A thrilling but challenging walk (2.6 miles, c. 3 hours). Terrain is perhaps the most consistently rugged and undulating, sometimes quite steeply. It follows long, well-preserved stretches of the Wall through moorland above the cliffs of the Whinsill Crag, the Wall's highest point. Corbridge began as a fort in the chain built in c. AD 85 but left to the south by Hadrian's Wall it became a large civilian town.

**Day 3: walk Housesteads to Steel Rigg; Chesters.** Another challenging walk that, for much of the route, rides the crest of the faultline of dolerite crags, dipping and climbing (3.2 miles, c. 3 hours). There are some steep ascents and descents on rocky terrain. The rewards include excellently preserved milecastles, staggering views: moorland, lakes, conifer forests to the north, richly variegated greens, plentiful livestock, distant vistas to the south. Chesters is the most salubrious of the forts, with a lavish bath house, built for 500 Asturian cavalrymen, in an enchanting river valley setting.

**Day 4: Vindolanda; Brocolitia, Chesters.** The fort and town of Vindolanda is the site of ongoing excavations. These are revealing everyday artefacts including, famously, the 'postcard' writing tablets which uniquely document details of everyday life. Drive to a couple of archaeological remains, the Mithraic temple at Brocolitia and the bridge abutments across the river from Chesters.

Walking Hadrian's Wall  
continued

**Day 5: walk Gilsland to Birdoswald.** An easy walk through low-lying and pretty farmland with streams and wild flowers (2 miles, c. 2 hours). Included is the only mile with both milecastles and turrets visible, and good lengths of Wall.

**Day 6: walk Walltown to Cawfields; Carlisle, Bowness-on-Solway.** The final walk is graded moderate and is spectacularly varied, from rocky hilltops to lowland pasture (c. 3 miles, c. 2½ hours). Drive to Carlisle to see the Wall collections in the Tullie House Museum, and continue to the evocative estuarial landscape of the Solway Firth. The Wall ended at the remote village of Bowness-on-Solway.

**Day 7: South Shields, Wallsend.** At South Shields, Arbeia is a fine reconstruction of a fort gateway, as well as reconstructions of a soldier's barrack block and an opulent house belonging to the Commanding Officer. At aptly named Wallsend, and now engulfed in the Tyneside conurbation, Segedunum was the most easterly of the forts, the layout clearly seen from a viewing platform. The coach takes you to Newcastle railway station by 2.00pm before continuing to Matfen Hall.

## Lecturer

**Dr Matthew Symonds.** Matthew is editor of *Current World Archaeology* magazine and one of the leading scholars on Roman frontiers in Britain. He has co-edited three volumes on Roman frontiers and is the author of *Hadrian's Wall: creating division*. He is a visiting fellow at Newcastle University and lectures for the Institute of Continuing Education, Cambridge University. He has excavated in Bulgaria, Sicily, Italy, and Britain, but is most at home on Hadrian's Wall.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £2,830  
**Single occupancy:** £3,340. *English Heritage members (with cards) will be refunded c. £30.*

**Included:** Hotel accommodation; breakfasts, three pub lunches and five dinners with wine, water, coffee; travel by private coach; all admissions; all tips; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

**Accommodation. Matfen Hall Hotel** ([matfenhall.com](http://matfenhall.com)): 19th-century Jacobean-style mansion, Matfen Hall is a fine, five-star, country house hotel offering excellent service.

**How strenuous?** This is a walking tour, graded moderate to hard. There are 4 walks over 5 days, 2 are challenging, 1 is easy and 1 is moderate. Terrain is rough and there are periodic rises and falls. The challenging walks can be technically difficult, with narrow ascents and descents on steep, rocky paths which would be quite treacherous in wet conditions. It is essential for participants to be in good physical condition and to be used to country walking with uphill and downhill content. Strong knees are essential, as are a pair of well-worn hiking boots with good ankle support.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.

## Walking tours

**This is a walking tour.** Our walking tours require a different scale of fitness and agility to our other tours. You should be used to country walking and have a good level of fitness and balance. There are ascents and descents, climbs over stiles and terrain which can be uneven, loose, slippery or muddy. Appropriate footwear and clothing are essential. Only in weather conditions which are so extreme as to be dangerous would a walk be cancelled.

Please attend to the walk descriptions for details of the distances covered, lengths of walks and type of terrain.

We also grade both individual walks and tours as a whole using the following system:

**Easy.** A short and mostly flat walk lasting 1–2 hours, on well maintained footpaths or roads, perhaps with short periods of gentle ascent or descent. An 'easy' tour will consist of mostly easy walks, perhaps with a couple of moderate ones. There might not be a walk every day.

**Moderate.** A walk of 2–3 hours' duration, with significant elevation gain, or stretches of rocky, gravelly or slippery paths. A 'moderate' tour will consist mostly of moderate walks, perhaps with a couple of easy or challenging ones, too. There is likely to be a walk every day.

**Challenging.** A walk that is longer than 3 hours, has steeper, longer or more frequent episodes of ascent and descent, or is tricky under foot. Tours graded as 'challenging' will consist mostly or entirely of this level of walk, perhaps with some moderate or easier walks too.