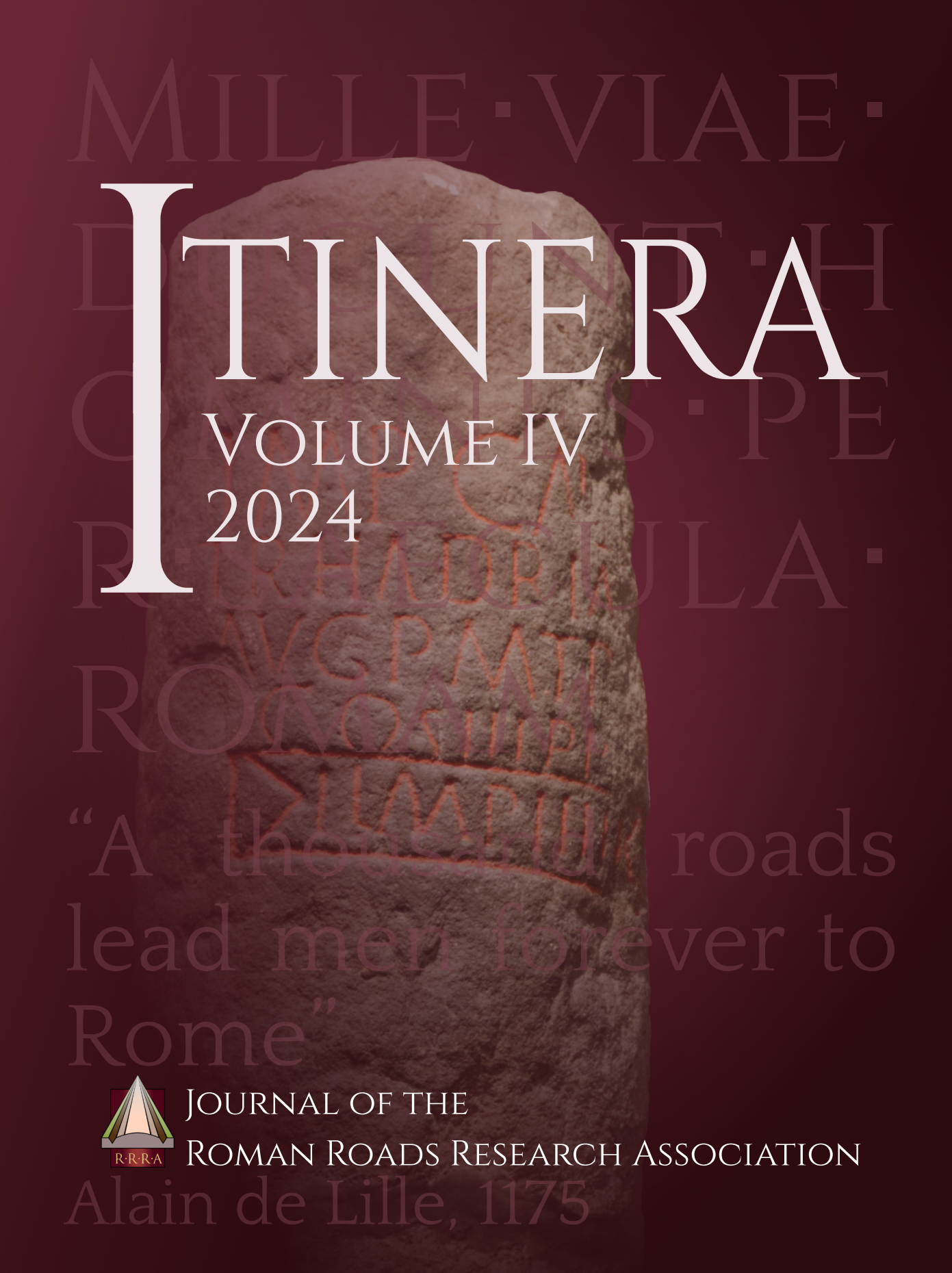


ITINERA

Volume IV
2024

"A thousand roads lead men forever to Rome"

Alain de Lille, 1175

Journal of the
Roman Roads Research Association

ITINERA

THE JOURNAL OF THE
ROMAN ROADS RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

VOLUME IV, 2024

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About the Association

by Mike Haken



The late Hugh Toller and I founded the Roman Roads Research Association to provide a focal point for what we thought was a fairly small group of individuals with an interest in the study of Roman roads and connectivity throughout the former Roman province of Britannia. I'm not sure that Hugh, who sadly died in 2016, could have imagined that at the end of April 2024 we would have an international membership totalling 556, a figure that continues to grow. We are a very broad church, ranging from those with just a general interest in the Roman period, through to professional archaeologists from both commercial and academic sectors, not forgetting those those like myself who have had a lifelong passion for the subject (some might say obsession!). The Association welcomes all new members, whatever their background.

The continuing growth in membership may well have been fuelled, at least in part, by some of the things we have achieved. For example, we have just concluded the fourth season of our online lecture series, which we launched in 2021 during the pandemic. As part of our key policy of ensuring that our work is always made as accessible as possible, our talks are open to everyone, are always free of charge, and regularly attract audiences of 200 people or more from across the world. Another excellent programme for our fifth season is being prepared by our Secretary, Dave Armstrong, and details will be released soon. You can catch up with previous seasons on our YouTube channel.

Since 2018, we have conducted over 200 Ha of geophysical survey with our own gradiometer cart, accurately identifying the course of many roads and examining Roman period sites along them. Our most recent survey, assisted by a group of local volunteers from Southwell (SCAG), was near East Stoke (*Ad Pontem*) in Nottinghamshire. This confirmed the location of the junction of RR59(x) from Ancaster with the Fosse Way, making the existence of RR59(x) now beyond dispute. We always welcome suggestions for other potential survey sites, no matter where in the country they might be.

Above all, however, our greatest achievement is *Itinera*, the only journal in the world dedicated to the study of Roman roads and transportation infrastructure. Published entirely in house by our large team of volunteers, we are proud that our standards are as high as most academic publishing houses. Indeed, As Rob Entwistle points out in the following Editorial, it is a measure of our growing credibility that *Britannia*, a journal of the Roman Society, guides authors of reports on Roman roads that would have previously been published in *Britannia* towards *Itinera* instead.

Looking forwards, the wealth of new research and discoveries that have been reported by *Itinera* have, if nothing else, highlighted the urgent need for an accurate map that reflects the true state of knowledge of the Roman road network in Britain, and the sites it served, since the national maps that do exist are either decades out of date or simply inaccurate and misleading. To rectify this situation we will soon be recruiting volunteers to assist with a nationwide project which aims to accurately redraw the map. In line with our Open Access policy, the results will all be made freely available.

Finally, I am sure that our enthusiastic membership will enable us to continue to expand and develop our activities, ensuring that the next decade is even more productive than our first decade has been.

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Editorial

Robert Entwistle



The late Hugh Toller, co-founder of the RRRA with Mike Haken, was sadly lost to Roman road research when the Association was only a year old. Earlier I had become aware of his work through his part in identifying the long-sought line of the Lune valley Roman road out of Lancaster, my native town. Identifying it through Lidar and on foot, he followed its route up and over Lancaster Ridge towards Caton and the southern flank of the Lune valley.

It is therefore a pleasure to see David Ratledge's contribution to this volume of *Itinera*, a memorial to Hugh's work in the Exeter region, developed in the light of further studies. It is appropriate that this same volume contains a significant paper by Mike Haken identifying *viae vicinales* in the north-east Midlands which perhaps should no longer be regarded as somehow 'lesser' or 'minor'.

Itinera has a record of examining different aspects of Roman road studies, not necessarily restricted to our corner of the Roman empire. The 2024 volume sees a new contribution from the Spanish archaeologist and presenter, Isaac Moreno Gallo: the first publication in English of his work analysing road construction methods and transport development. His trenchant views provide a counterbalance to other accounts, reminding us that the evidence of the trowel is always subject to interpretation.

A new departure for this volume is the incorporation of a 'Focus' section with multiple papers exploring a single theme. The subject is the Devil's Causeway – a road which branches off Dere Street just north of Hadrian's Wall to head (via Learchild fort) determinedly towards modern-day Berwick and the mouth of the Tweed – where no Roman site is known. This theme originated in a 2023 conference held in Berwick-upon-Tweed and coordinated by Dr Lindsay Allason-Jones and the Border Archaeology Society with support from the RRRA, exploring the riddle of the road. Expert presentations have been developed into these papers. We would be happy to repeat, in future volumes, similar suites of papers focused upon a single theme or aspect: suggestions for themes and contributors would be welcomed by the Editor.

As always, this volume treats different geographical parts of Britannia, ranging from the south-west (Exeter) to the north-east (Berwick). Paul Booth explores aspects of the Roman road network in the Oxford area, Mike Holmes considers issues around the River Glynde in East Sussex, and Nigel Rothwell examines the possibilities for a Thames crossing linking St Albans and Silchester.

In a full volume, however, we regret the lack of papers on Wales and Scotland, even though these countries are represented in our annual round-up across Britain. Potential contributors suggesting interesting papers on these areas of would find us warmly receptive. *Itinera* continues to welcome every submission from contributors established or new, and if necessary, will endeavour to advise authors where further work is needed for key improvements. A short proposal to the Editor of what is intended, before making a full submission, is often helpful.

Editorial

We take pride in a professional standard of production maintained entirely through the work of volunteers: our editorial board (Mike Haken, Dave Armstrong, Mike Bishop and Paul Booth, all of whom contribute endless hours to the production of each volume); our academic advisor (Pete Wilson); our index compiler (Chester Forster); and postmaster (Chris Webb). Without the dedicated work of the whole team Roman studies would be the poorer.

We are greatly heartened by the respected position that *Itinera* has achieved in the short period of its existence. The long-established journal, Britannia, acknowledges this in specifying that submissions on Roman roads for their annual update section should be limited to brief summaries of the main points of interest if accounts are also published in *Itinera*, with our journal cited for those fuller reports.

An important part of our role, alongside publicising research, is (through the RRRA) the regulation and classification of new discoveries, as Margary's original system of nomenclature strains to adapt to an expanding known road network. This volume therefore contains a list of newly attributed numbers and a proposal from Mike Haken on the classification of non-standard Roman roads.

This year we have taken the decision to slightly reduce the font size to bring *Itinera* more into line with other similar journals and to control printing costs. Even so, readers will find that 2024 marks a bumper issue: the largest volume we have yet produced.

We trust that RRRA members and all readers will enjoy and profit from this 2024 volume of *Itinera*.

Robert Entwistle

(Hon Editor, *Itinera)*

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A Focus on: The North End of the Devil's Causeway

by Lindsay Allason-Jones
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Questions as to the exact route of the Devil's Causeway at its northern end have been asked for many years. There are also several subsidiary questions to be answered: where is the most northerly confirmed sighting of the road? Does it cross the Tweed between Tweedmouth and Berwick-upon-Tweed and, if so, how? If the road heads purposefully to Tweedmouth, why was this its destination and is there a fort waiting to be discovered there?

In an attempt to answer these questions, the Border Archaeological Society invited members of the Roman Roads Research Association and the Northern Roman Frontiers Seminar to join them for a day conference in Berwick-upon-Tweed in October 2022. Sadly, this event had to be postponed due to 'works on the line' effectively making train journeys to Berwick from Newcastle and Edinburgh impossible on our chosen day. A second attempt was made in May 2023 and this time, despite a rail strike, a very successful conference was held, with lectures followed by a walk along the banks of the Tweed to allow people to familiarise themselves with the terrain.

Much that was new was discussed and it was suggested that the papers should be published so those who could not attend might discover what was discussed and those who did attend could digest the contents at their leisure. The members of the Border Archaeological Society are very grateful to the Roman Roads Research Association for allowing these contributions to be inserted into *Itinera IV*. Sadly, not all the speakers were able to prepare their papers for publication, but it is hoped that the following will provide much food for thought and move on the debate about the purpose of the Devil's Causeway.

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The Devil's Causeway: Current Understanding and Future Work

by Dave Armstrong
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Abstract

This summary is broken into three parts: what we know about the Devil's Causeway, what we do not know and what our Association is currently doing to close the gap.

What do we Know about the Devil's Causeway?

It has long been known that a Roman road ran from north of Hadrian's Wall, branching from Dere Street and running generally north-east to north towards the mouth of the Tweed at Tweedmouth. Horsley, amongst others, mapped it that way (Horsley 1732, map after p. 156) (Fig. 1). While his mapping appears to be more illustrative than specific, lacking the precision of modern GPS, intriguingly he shows the Devil's Causeway crossing over Dere Street and continuing on towards the fort of Chesters on Hadrian's Wall. Was he aware of some evidence or was he making assumptions and just joining the dots?

It is thought that the name of the road comes from the early medieval period, created by those who could not conceive that such a massive straight structure might be man-made and it must have been the work of the Devil. In some areas it is also recorded as being called Cobs or Cobbs Causeway.

The first scientific step in recording the course of the road was made through the 1850s and published in 1864, by Henry MacLauchlan. This was at the request of the Duke of Northumberland, a keen antiquarian himself, with a full survey of the course of the road accompanied by a commentary and additional notes (Fig. 2). This also covered a survey of Margary's RR88, from High Rochester to what we now know as the fort at Low Learchild, although MacLauchlan was unaware of the fort's presence and its significance adjacent to the junction.

The next significant work was undertaken by R.P. Wright, just prior to World War 2, when the nature, structure and dimensions of the road were determined at a large number of locations where it was most obvious in two of the segments in its central and southern areas (Wright 1938, 351-361; 1940, 65-74). Wright found the road was typically about 24 feet (7.3 m) wide at its south-western end and around 19 feet plus (5.8 m) in the central segment. It was solidly built with bottoming and a metalled

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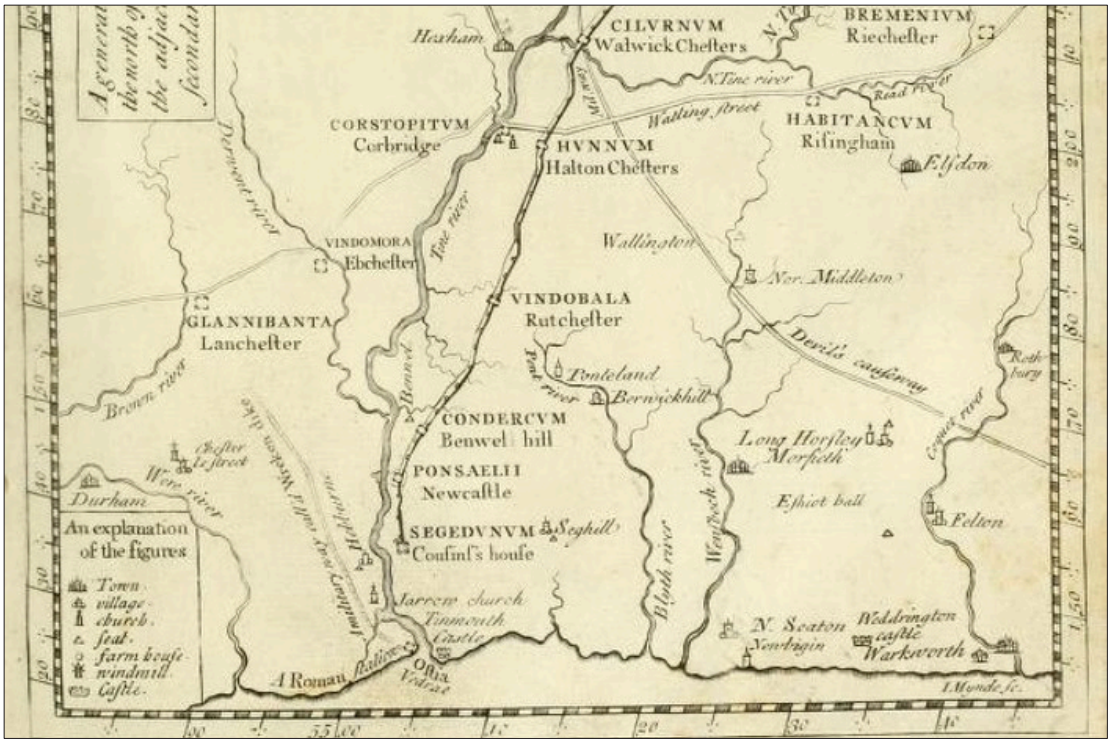
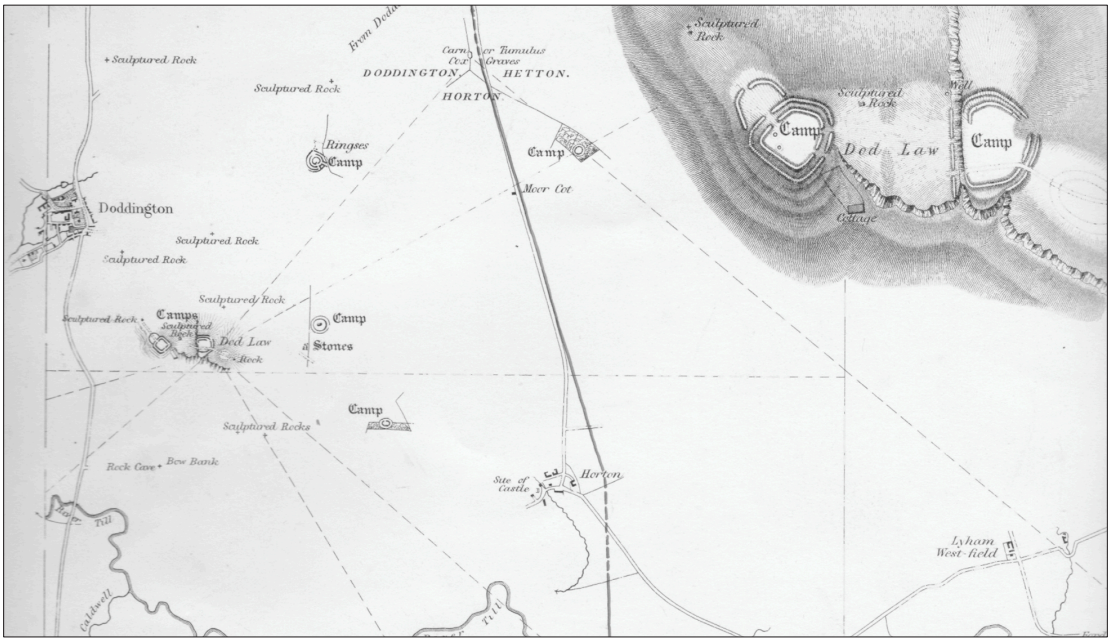


Fig. 1. (above). Horsley's map of 1732 showing the Devil's Causeway crossing Northumberland from top centre to bottom right of the image. Note that north is to the right.

Fig. 2. (below) An extract (from sheet 3) typical of MacLauchlan's mapping of the Devil's Causeway, this being near Horton, showing the extent of the detail he incorporated.



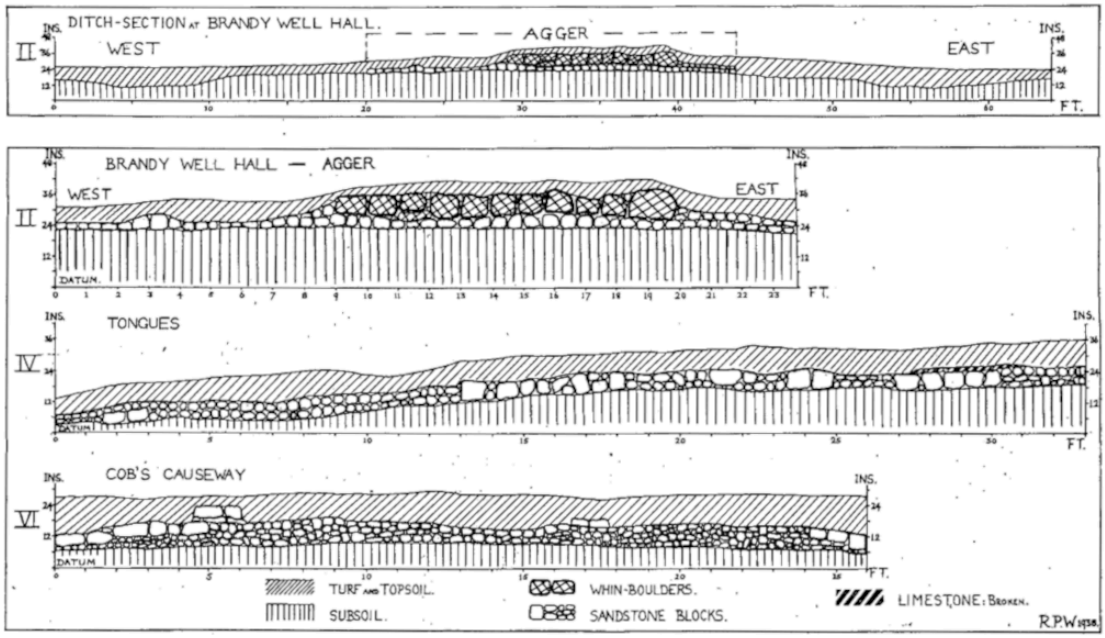


Fig.3. An extract of Wright's work on the Devil's Causeway. Image © SANT, reproduced from Archaeologia Aeliana, *Ser. 4, 15.*

surface. There were places where the road had a centre rib (Fig. 3). Margary summarised this work and allocated the road the number RR87 in his numbering series (1973, 478-80). He also allocated RR88 to the link road from High Rochester to Low Learchild.

Rowland described the road's course in an undervalued little book (Rowland 1984), with some further excavated sections being taken. While his recorded dimensions of a width of 24 feet (7.3 m) at a number of locations are consistent with Wright's measurements, his section drawings seem generic rather than specific and lack Wright's precision (Fig. 4).

More recently, John Poulter has analysed the surveying and layout of the route revealing some long-distance alignments for the north end and south-west segments (2014, 76-85; see also Poulter, this volume). After this, pre-development activities have located the road in a number of places where it was expected, and not located it in some other places. Through the Covid pandemic, the Association completed a lidar survey of the full route and found it presents itself very well for much of its course (Fig. 5).

All this indicates, in general, the precision of MacLauchlan's work. His survey is generally very close to Lidar/GPS accuracy, often only a few metres out across much of the route, although there are places (at Hartburn for example) where there is some doubt over his plotted course. There is no certainty on the start and end parts of the route around Beukley and Tweedmouth, with no excavated evidence or clear lidar indications.

In comparison with neighbouring Dere Street, there are very few known Roman installations along this road. The Association is investigating the route to determine if there are any as-yet undiscovered fort or fortlet sites. This is of significance, as a strong presence of the military would indicate the

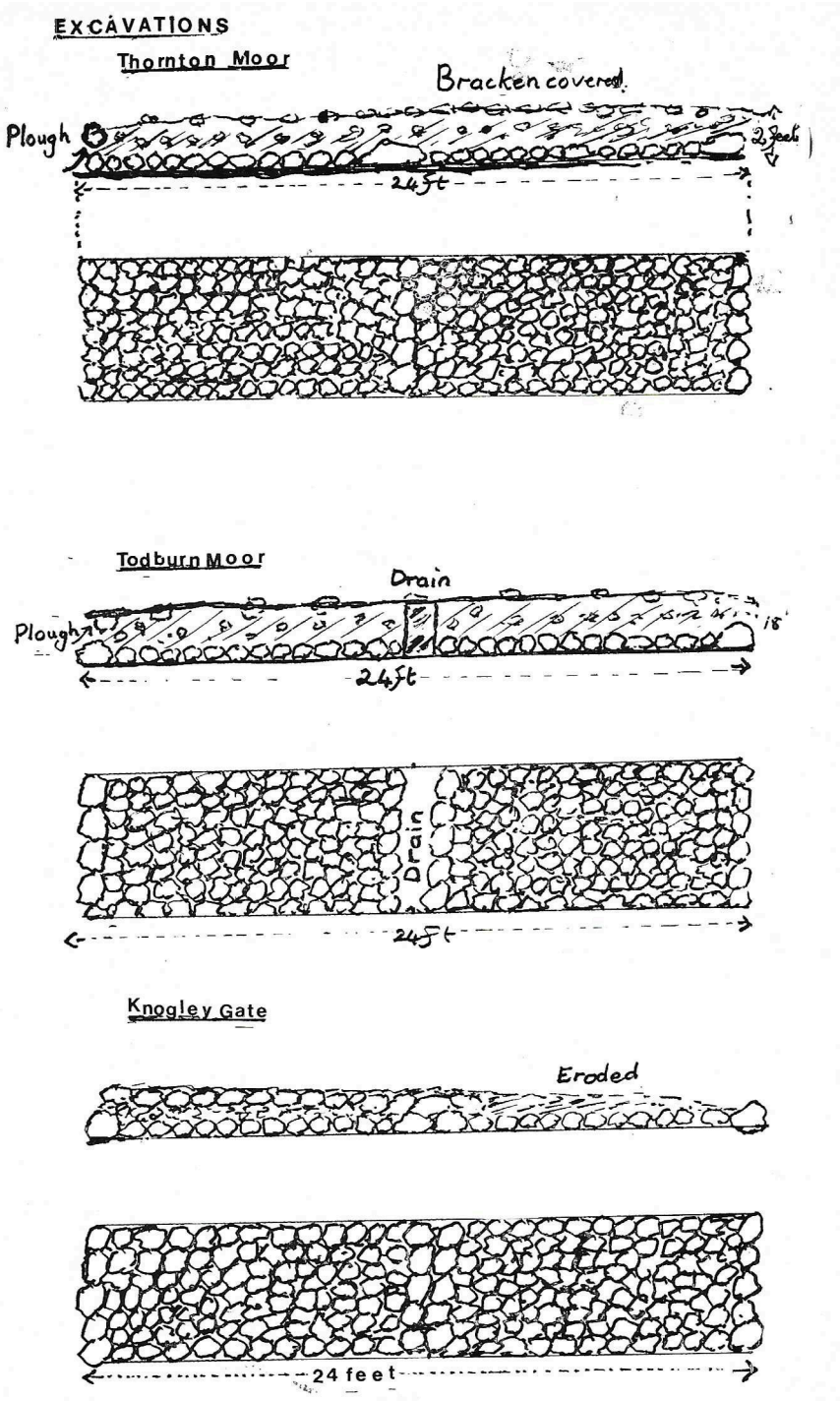


Fig. 4. Section drawings of the Devil's Causeway by Rowland.

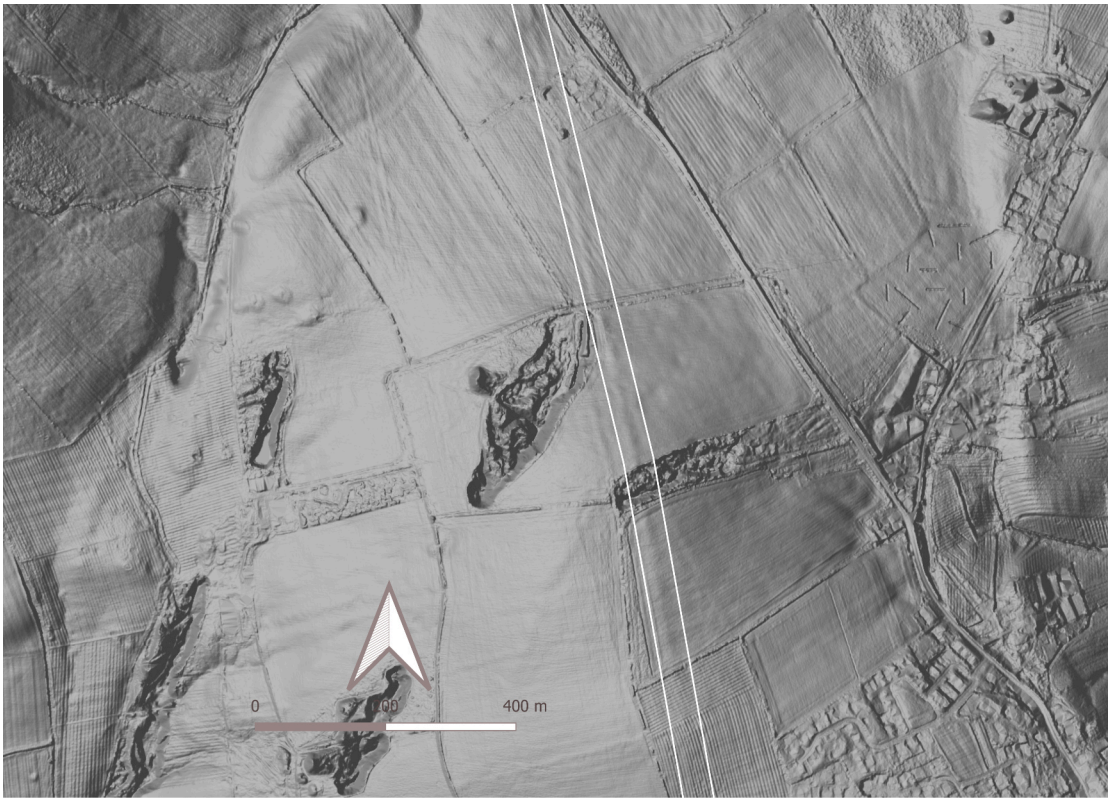


Fig. 5. Lidar image of the Devil's Causeway near Longframlington, visible in the bottom right corner of the image. The agger is very prominent between the parallel white lines. Image © DA, RRRA, 2022. Lidar data, © Crown Copyright 2019, Open Government Licence v3.0.

potential of a fortified route and possibly indicate the role of the road. Logically a lack of forts/fortlets would suggest no fortified route, perhaps indicating territory under the control of allied tribes. This also would impact on our understanding of Roman control of this area.

The one fort site that is known along the course of the Devil's Causeway is Low Learchild, which will be covered later in this paper with what was achieved there in 2022. A fortlet site is also known just off the Devil's Causeway at Longshaws (Fig. 6). This twin rampart site has an unusual layout and is some distance away from the known road (Welfare 2011). Other previously postulated military sites at Hartburn and at Tweedmouth have been shown not to be Roman military installations, but regularly shaped Romano-British sites (Jobey 1973, 11-54 and Archaeological Practice 2017, respectively). However, cropmarks have revealed possible temporary camp sites at West Marlish, Hartburn, Edlingham, and East Horton (Gates and Hewitt 2007, 11-30). Excavation in advance of quarrying at Wooperton, that has not yet been formally reported, has revealed some tantalising evidence of Roman occupation. Other speculation has proposed potential sites recorded in the HER at Chatton, Mitford Steads, Laverocklaw and Hall Hill, to name but a few (see end notes [1] for HER references). An extra site has been added from lidar at Todburn West just above the Coquet crossing (Fig. 7). Significantly these sites are close to river crossings, where the Romans preferred to locate their forts (Fig. 8).

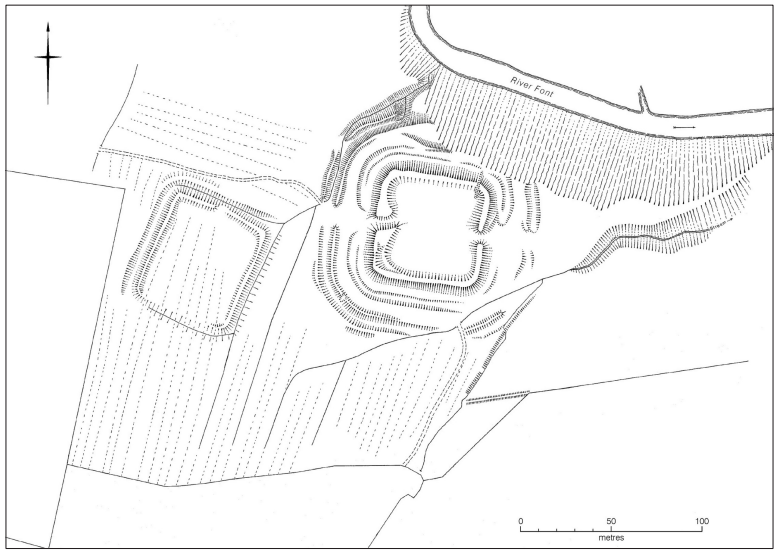


Fig.6. Earthwork representation of Longshaws Roman fortlet(s). Image © SANT, EH, reproduced from Archaeologia Aeliana, *Ser. 5, Vol. 40 where the caption states; The earthworks of the Roman Fortlet at Longshaws, with - immediately to the west - those of what is probably an associated detached annexe. (Inked archive drawing by Iain Salisbury; prepared for publication by Philip Sinton) © English Heritage.*

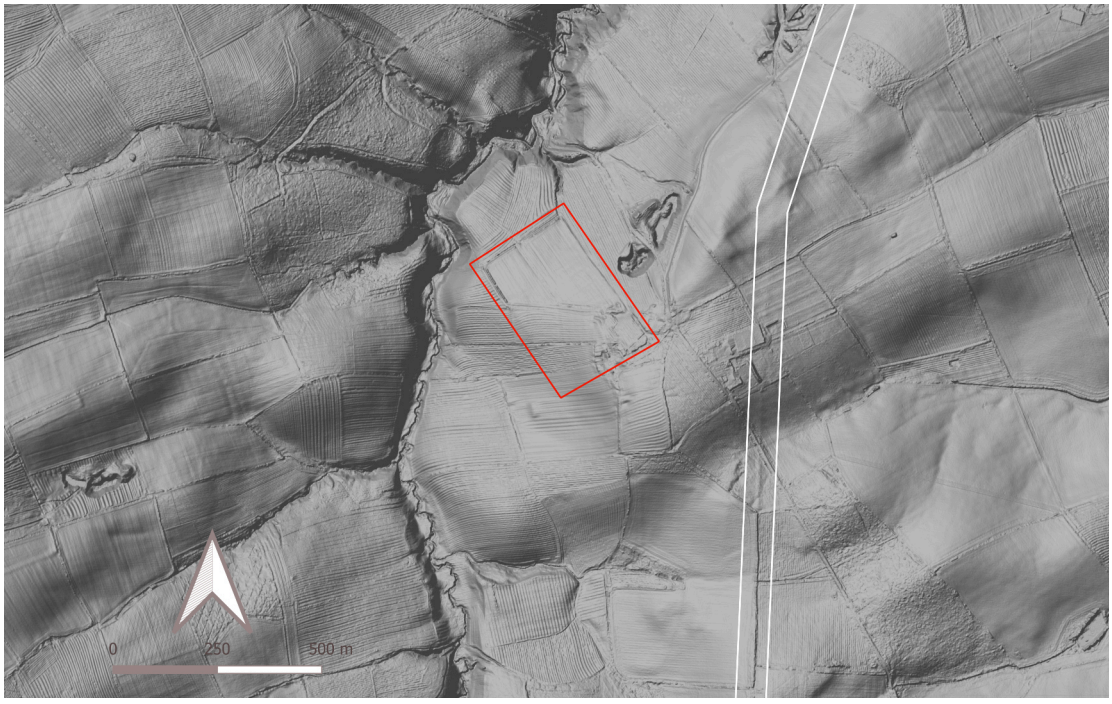


Fig.7. Todburn West, a suspected temporary camp site, outlined in red. Image © DA, RRRA, 2022. Lidar data, © Crown Copyright 2019, Open Government Licence v3.0.

In summary, the Roman origin of the Devil's Causeway (RR87) and its route, other than the north and south ends, is generally well established. The road, where it has been exposed, is a well-engineered structure, laid out on long alignments typical of other Roman roads. A Roman fort is known at Low Learchild adjacent to a road junction with RR88 from High Rochester. Another fortlet is just off the road at Longshaws. Further sites are postulated along the road's course but with little evidence as things stand; they may not be Roman.

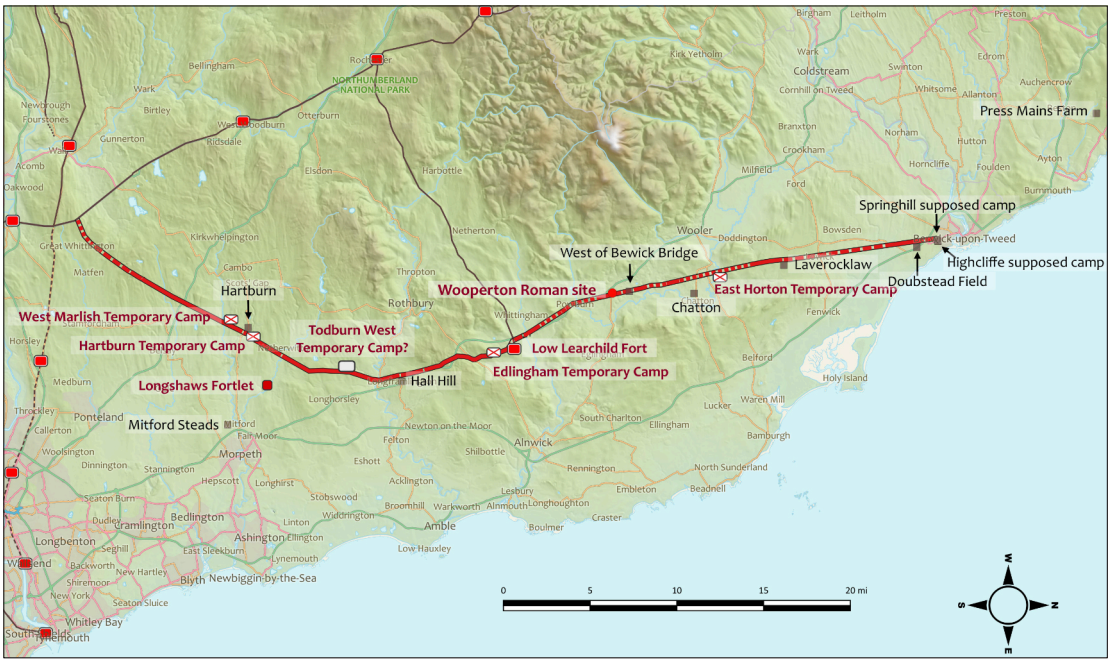


Fig. 8. All known and suspected Roman sites along the Devil's Causeway. Note that north is to the right. Image © Mike Haken, RRRA, 2022. Lidar data, © Crown Copyright 2019, Open Government Licence v3.0.

What don't we know?

As stated, the northern terminus of the road at the River Tweed is not anchored on a known Roman site. Similarly, the southern junction, thought to be with Dere Street north of Halton Chesters, is not underpinned by any evidence. There are a number of potential Roman sites that have not yet been explored and there has also been speculation as to whether there was a greater Roman road network in Northumberland than currently identified (Bishop 2014, 165-177 & Selkirk 2001, 264-9). Medieval armies moved on other routes that could suggest they may have had an earlier origin, perhaps Roman. Possible temporary camps in the Tweed valley identified by Gates and Hewitt (2007) suggest there may have been a route or road up the valley in the direction of Newstead. Also unclear is the dating of the known and postulated sites along the road which may indicate if their relative relationship is to the early 1st century advance north into Scotland, the control of a frontier during the subsequent withdrawal, or as an outpost system which formed part of the establishment of Hadrian's Wall (Hodgson 2017, 36).

What is the RRRA doing to close the gap?

The Association, inspired by Nick Hodgson's talk covering these issues at the 2019 Arbeia Conference, has initiated a project to gain a greater understanding of this road and its associated installations. All the previous data on the road has been gathered, a lidar survey completed confirming its course in most places and a start made in exploring the sites. Part of of this is to understand the road in the context of the wider Roman occupation. Thus, the route of RR88 from High Rochester to Low Learchild is being plotted and a review is determining if there was a network of other roads. A lidar survey to the north and west of Berwick-upon-Tweed has yet to identify any indications of Roman roads or other possible sites. Evidence for the postulated Roman fort at Press Mains Farm at Coldingham north of Berwick (Selkirk 2001, 25) (Fig. 9) and a Roman road nearby has been reviewed, but nothing compelling has been found.



Fig. 9. The postulated Roman fort site at Press Mains Farm, Berwickshire (Selkirk 2001, 25)

The first site worked on has been Low Learchild, including the junction of the Devil's Causeway with RR88 from High Rochester. After the discovery of the fort site by Dr St. Joseph in the 1940's (St. Joseph 1947) (Fig. 10), some trial trenching was made in 1945 by Sir Walter Aitchison, who unfortunately died before publishing his findings and his notes: all bar a brief message and sketch, are now lost. Recovered pottery, which has been located in the Great North Museum, Newcastle upon Tyne and reassessed, suggested 1st and 2nd century occupation. Sir Ian Richmond carried out further exploratory excavation in 1956 (Richmond 1957) that enabled him to estimate the minimal dimensions of the fort, which he believed was large, orientated north/south and had two phases, but sadly he also died before publishing a final report. Richmond's archived papers in Oxford do not contain any further information, although Charles Daniels did manage to locate one of Richmond's site plans while discussing the site with Nick Hodgson. More recently, three small parts of the site were surveyed in 1991, with what was early generation geophysics equipment, by an informal group of Newcastle University archaeology postgraduates (Anderson, Rushworth and Willis 1992, 34). This did no more than suggest the overall rampart dimensions exceeded those estimated by Richmond; any further information and their data is now believed lost.



Fig. 10. Aerial photograph, un-numbered, of the Low Learchild site looking south taken by St. Joseph assisted by the RAF. Reproduced from the papers of Sir Ian Richmond with thanks and © to the Sackler Collection of the Bodleian Library.

Assisted by the Holystone History and Archaeology Group, a gradiometer survey was undertaken in August 2022; this has clarified and built upon the sketchy information left by Aitchison and Richmond. Instead of a large north/south orientated fort of two phases that Richmond postulated, the survey suggests that the smaller double ditched fort was smaller than Richmond assessed, and was orientated east/west, but has what appears to be an annexe on the north side (Fig. 11). A single ditched larger enclosure surrounds this smaller fort. All the southern defences have been truncated by the railway but the slope of the site, particularly the west and south-west sides, does define the maximum extent in those directions.

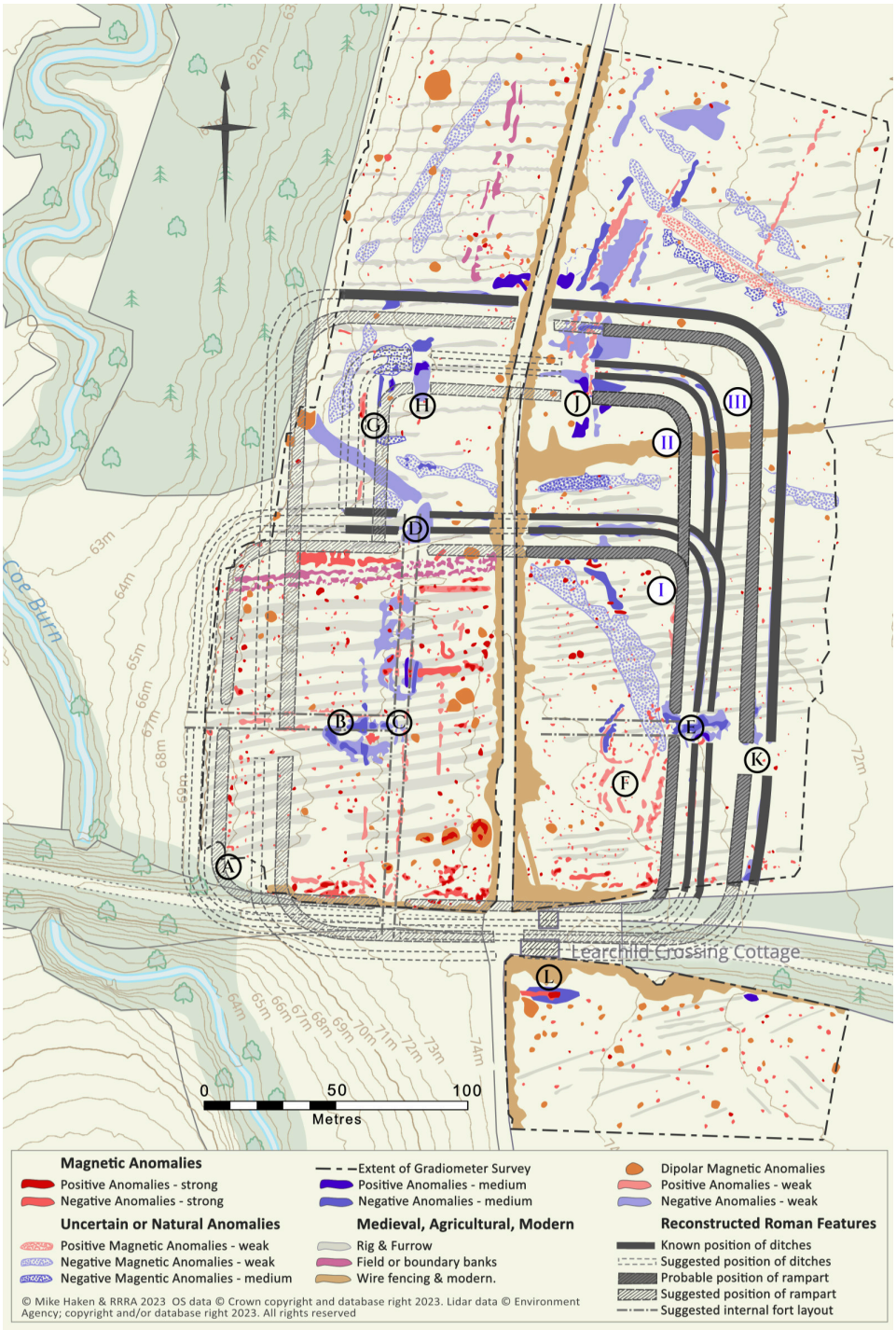


Fig. 11. Interpretation of the geophysics of the Low Learchild site (Haken and Armstrong 2023). For details, consult the full report as listed in the Bibliography.



Fig. 12. Lidar image of the junction of the Devil's Causeway and RR88. The courses of these roads as mapped by MacLauchlan and the OS are shown in red, but the suggested lines are indicated between the white dotted lines. The ditches and ramparts of the Low Learchild fort site are visible at the top right. © Mike Haken, RRRA, 2022. Lidar data, © Crown Copyright 2019, Open Government Licence v3.0.

As part of the survey, the course of the Devil's Causeway was sought near Low Learchild where the junction with RR88 was mapped by MacLauchlan but not definitively located. However, Wright's work at the Bridge of Aln, just to the north, suggested that MacLauchlan's alignment may have been slightly out (Wright 1940, 74). In addition, lidar suggests that RR88 as it approaches the junction is further to the north than mapped (Fig. 12). The conclusion is that the junction is some 135 m to the north of MacLauchlan's line, although the survey did have a very weak indication that may correspond with this. The full report of the Low Learchild work is available on-line from the Association site (Haken and Armstrong 2023).

Further surveying work has commenced and is in progress at the potential site at Todburn West. A bank standing approximately 1 m high, very suggestive of a rampart, with an external ditch still of some 1 m depth and 2 m width, makes up the northern side of the site and a substantial length of the west and east sides, with what appear to be curved corners set at 90 degrees. To explore this further, a gradiometer survey of the southern side, particularly the potential location of a south-west corner, was completed in 2023. Preliminary results suggest that the bank and ditch did continue further along the western side, but the weak indications petered out and did not indicate a clear curved corner where anticipated (Fig. 13). While the site is clearly archaeological in nature, further survey work is being planned to clarify this.



Fig.13. The Todburn West initial gradiometer survey as viewed from the south. © RRRA, 2023. Aerial Photograph background courtesy of GoogleEarth dated to July 2021, image © CNES / Airbus.

Concluding Remarks

From the excavated sections and lidar of the alignments, the Devil's Causeway has all the construction and laying-out characteristics of a Roman road. While its destination at a location at the mouth of the Tweed has not been confirmed, the alignment of the road through north Northumberland shows a very clear intent that the road was heading for or originating from that area. MacLauchlan's last confident observation was at Oxford, some 3 miles (4.8 km) south of the river mouth at the end of a direct alignment of over 11 miles (17.7 km) from Hetton Law. The last clear lidar evidence of the road is slightly further north at Scremerston (but see Blyth, this volume). Alternative routes have been suggested approaching the river to the west of Berwick-upon-Tweed, perhaps with crossings. However, there seems to be no evidence currently that these routes existed or that they were even Roman roads. The topography to the south of Berwick is generally not severe and there is no other obvious physical reason why a Roman surveyor would set this straight alignment on the Tweed – the focus on the river mouth is very clear. Going forward, the Association's intent, working in cooperation with local archaeological groups, is to continue investigating possible fort sites to clarify if the road was garrisoned or militarised in a similar manner to Dere Street.

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End Note

1 For details of these sites see the HER at; Aerial photograph NMR NU 0528/1-6 (TMG 16204/26-31) 14-AUG-1995 with RCHME/EH/HE Aerial Photographers comment, J. Walford 2003, S. Cutchley 2003. See Pastscape <https://www.pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=1379894>. Field Observations by OS, E. Geary 1954, D. Smith 1971. See <http://www.keystothepast.info/article/10339/Site-Details?PRN=N11274>. Field Observations by OS, A.S. Philips 1955, N.K. Blood 1964, D. Smith 1968. See <http://www.keystothepast.info/article/10339/Site-Details?PRN=N3688>. Field Observations by OS, E. Geary 1954. See <http://www.keystothepast.info/article/10339/Site-Details?PRN=N4287>.

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