

Hadrian's Wall Path: Walking along the end of the Roman Empire

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Hadrian's Wall formed the northern border of the Roman Empire. This wall ran from coast to coast through northern England and was intended to protect Roman Britain from hostile tribes. Today, the remains of this wall are one of the most important English historical sites and a popular hiking destination. Along this wall runs the Hadrian's Wall Path, which is considered one of the most beautiful walking routes in England.



The Sycamore Gap, perhaps the most scenic point along Hadrian's Wall

What explains the warm interest of the English in the Romans I do not know. It remains striking. Wherever you visit ruins from Roman times (750 BC to 475 AD) in Europe, there are almost always English people nearby, who can tell you what you see even better than the information boards. Is it the unique experience that their island was rarely occupied by foreign powers over the centuries (which is rather debatable)? Is it the considerable progress in all kinds of areas that the Romans left on the island after their departure (an advance that quickly disappeared shortly after their departure)? Or the great interest in The Past that the English seem to have in their genes? No idea.

But the fascinating combination of England, the English, the Romans and the still visible remnants of the Roman presence in Britannia can best be experienced by walking the Hadrian's Wall Path. We walked a few stages of it.



walking the wall

Hadrian's Wall Path

The Hadrian's Wall Path, a National Trail in England, is located in the beautiful Northumberland National Park in the north of England. The route runs from coast to coast. From Wallsend, Newcastle upon Tyne in the east to Bowness-on-Solway in Cumbria on the west coast. In 135 kilometers you walk along the remains of the Roman wall and the fortifications. Emperor Hadrian had it built from 122 AD to protect the Roman Province of Britannia from rebellious Picts, Celtic tribes from the north. Further north Caledonia (say Scotland) was never conquered. (But, as the English Wikipedia reports: their wall of peat, in particular, just further north, never made it onto the UNESCO World Heritage List...)

Accommodation

This time we opted for day walks from a central point. That became [the youth hostel of Once Brewed](#). Part of the National Landscape Discovery Centre the Sill. This Youth Hostel is located about halfway down Hadrian's Wall Path. With which you especially have the advantage that the wall and the fortifications are best preserved here. At the beginning and end of the Wall, the locals gratefully used the many stones that were up for grabs here for free after the departure of the Romans.

The landscape

The landscape of Northumberland National Park is rolling and mysterious, with walled meadows, rugged moors, lakes and countless rocky outcrops. And sheep, everywhere, the current inhabitants of the forts and the mile-castles. Silence and wilderness predominate. And at night it is really dark here. Stargazers will certainly get their money's worth here. I know people from "the big city" who thought it was "scary". Alienated from an untouched nature.

The walks and the buses

[The Hadrian's Wall Country bus](#) maintains an hourly service along the wall for much of the day, the 80 mile castles or forts, the two watchtowers and the 17 larger forts. This makes it possible to combine walking and transport into an excellent walking package.

Circular walks are also possible. Like the walk to Vindolanda and back via Sycamore Gap. Vindolanda was an additional fort (castrum) south of the Wall. Sycamore Gap is possibly the most idyllic spot on the entire Trail: a tree and a pit between two hilltops. World-famous! Also by a key scene in *the Kevin Reynolds' 1991 film Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*.



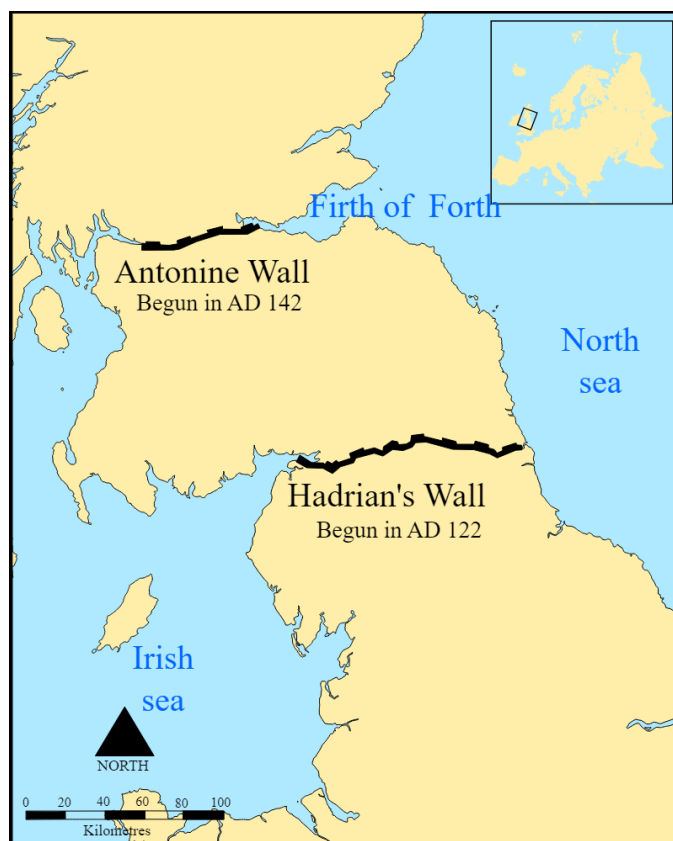
Or a walk to Housesteads Roman Fort (Vercovicium), via the Wall and back by bus. Then you have enough time to let everything you see sink in. Or to the Temple of Mithras at Carrawburgh. Or... or... Lovers of Roman culture can enjoy themselves here. If you are perhaps less interested in that past, you will still walk, guaranteed, through fantastic

landscapes. The combination of nature and archaeology, of moving in the open air and learning history makes this area.

Warning: do not start on the bus with an English fellow passenger over the forts and the wall. The travel time by bus does not tolerate enthusiastic and undoubtedly instructive lectures about Roman times and Hadrian's Wall in particular from your fellow passenger(s).

General route tips

- A good hiking map is recommended. The Hadrian's Wall Path is well marked, but to take a circular walk or walk to an extra castrum via an off-route, you do need a map.
- A good card is the OL 43 1:25,000 Haltwhistle & Hexham.
- The walking area has few opportunities for shopping. The youth hostel and a local café have to do it. Delicious!
- Don't underestimate the toughness of the route! It's constant climbing and descending. Hills, yes, but still.
- We advise to walk from east to west. This way you have the best chance of wind in the back.
- Another famous multi-day walking route crosses the Hadrian's Wall Path at Once Brewed: the [Pennine way](#).



From: Wikipedia