

MONS GRAUPIUS AD 83

Rome's battle at the edge of the world



DUNCAN B CAMPBELL

ILLUSTRATED BY SEÁN Ó'BRÓGÁIN

CAMPAIGN • 224

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Series editor Marcus Cowper

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DEDICATION

To Janet and Ruairi, who cheerfully agreed to spend a perfectly good summer's day exploring the foothills of Bannachie with me, and kept me supplied with wine during the writing of this book.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is again a pleasure to acknowledge the kindness and generosity of friends and colleagues who provided illustrations (or attempted to locate them) for this little book: Tony Birley, for the Vindolanda tablets; Jim Bowers, for his stirring photo montage; Julie Bronson, for never giving up the quest to find the coin of 118 BC; Stephen Bull, for the Lancaster cavalry tombstone; Ross Cowan, for finding some excellent coins; Donald Fraser, for the reconstructed Roman field oven; Fraser Hunter, for items in the care of the National Museums of Scotland; László Kocsis, for the Carnuntum diploma; Jona Lendering, for assorted photos (as always); Alan Leslie, for his photos of Roman military ditches; Mike McCarthy, for the Carlisle photographs; David Mason, for the Chester inscriptions; Joyce Reynolds, for valiantly attempting to track down Julius Karus' lost tombstone; Alison Rutherford, for trying so hard to locate the photo of the 'Agricola' writing tablet; Manfred Schmidt, for *CLL*'s drawing of the Tacitus inscription; Tony Spence, for his excellent reconstructions of Iron Age chariots; Adrian Wink, for supplying some splendid images of his fellow re-enactors; and David Wooliscroft for some wonderful aerial photographs.

Stan Wolfson kindly permitted me to read his unpublished manuscript, *The Battle of Mons Graupius: Some problems of text, tactics and topography* (1999), from which I have benefited greatly. Of course, readers should not assume that he agrees with everything that I have written, although I am happy to acknowledge that I have usually accepted his emendations to Tacitus' text (especially at 35.3, 36.3, 38.2 and 38.5).

A NOTE ON THE SOURCES

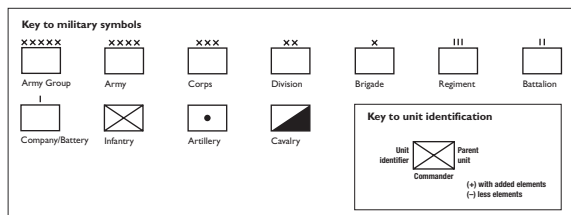
All ancient sources are referenced using the abbreviations listed on page 94. All translations are my own, although I have frequently benefited from the suggestions in Ogilvie and Richmond's commentary, and readers may notice that some passages from the *Agricola* bear a remarkable resemblance to the excellent version of A. R. Birley, which I was often unable to better.

ARTIST'S NOTE

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The Roman Empire in the Flavian period, c. AD 80



ORIGINS OF THE CAMPAIGN

By AD 83, Roman armies had been campaigning in Britain for 40 years. Throughout southern England, the process of romanization was gathering momentum, as the indigenous tribes welcomed the development of towns and took on some of the trappings of Roman civilization. But, although two generations of Roman soldiers had now fought and died in the province, whole tracts of Wales and northern England still required close military policing. At Rome, the reigning Flavian dynasty wished their legacy to include the final conquest of Britain and its absorption into the Roman Empire. The defeat of the Caledonian tribes at Mons Graupius in AD 83 brought that dream closer to fulfilment. But, in the words of the Roman historian Tacitus, 'Britain was completely conquered and immediately neglected' (Tac., *Hist.* 1.2: *perdomita Britannia et statim omissa*). The focus shifted to the great river frontiers of mainland Europe, where the threat to Rome seemed more pressing. Never again would a Roman army stand on the furthest edge of the world.



View of Bennachie from the north-east, across the site of the Roman marching camp at Durno. The suggestion of the late Professor Kenneth St Joseph, that this is the site of the battle of Mons Graupius, has become generally accepted. (Author's collection)

THE CLAUDIAN INVASION: PEOPLES SUBDUED AND KINGS CAPTURED



Coin of Claudius. Roman coins detail the official set of titles of the reigning emperor, in this case *Ti(berius) Claudius Caesar Aug(ustus) P(ontifex) M(aximus) Tr(ibunicia) P(otestate) Imp(erator) P(ater) P(atriciae)*. (Author's collection)

The Romans invaded Britain in AD 43, on the orders of the emperor Claudius. The island was home to dozens of individual Celtic tribes, some of whom had long-established trading links with Continental Europe. The Greek geographer Strabo, writing around AD 20, recorded that British exporters were already paying large sums in customs dues: 'they submit to heavy duties on the exports to Gaul, and on the imports from there, which include ivory bracelets and necklaces, amber and glassware, and similar petty goods' (*Geog.* 4.5.3). It seems that the southern Britons, at any rate, operated an economy of some sophistication, and many British aristocrats were already profiting from their links with Europe.

One result of Julius Caesar's expeditions to Britain in 55 and 54 BC had been to bring these southern tribes into the orbit of Rome.

Although Strabo claimed that little had been accomplished on the island, he admitted that Caesar had brought back hostages and slaves, which suggests that some form of client relationship had been established with some of the tribes at least. The *Achievements of the Divine Augustus* (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, *RGDA*), the lengthy catalogue of the first emperor's deeds, publicized on his death in AD 14, lists Britons amongst the kings who took refuge at Rome (*RGDA* 32), and Strabo claims to have seen British chieftains paying homage on the Capitol. It was not uncommon for the beleaguered princes of other nations to seek shelter at Rome; another Briton did so during the reign of Gaius Caligula (Suet., *Calig.* 44), and the historian Cassius Dio suggests that it was the presence of another at Claudius' court that presented the emperor with an excuse to invade the island (Dio 60.19).

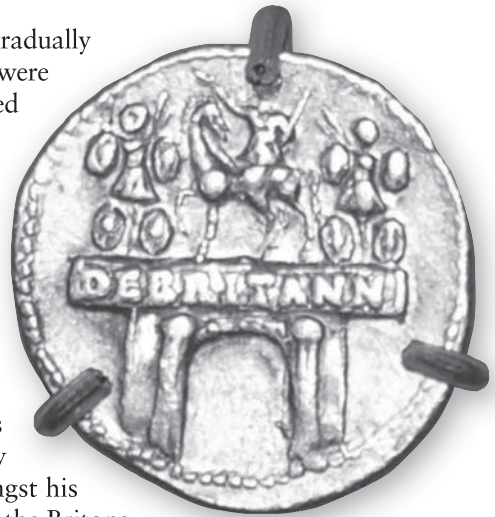
So it is not at all surprising that, when Roman troops arrived on British soil in AD 43, several chieftains were willing to pledge their allegiance. According to the inscription on Claudius' triumphal arch, 'the Senate and people of Rome (set up this arch) because [the emperor Claudius] received the submission of 11 kings of the Britons, conquered without any loss, and because he first brought barbarian peoples beyond the ocean under the control of the Roman people' (*ILS* 216; cf. Suet., *Div. Claud.* 17, for his triumph).

One of these friendly kings must have been Cogidubnus (or Togidubnus), who seems to have ruled the area around Chichester; formally hailed as a friend of Rome, on one inscription he is even named 'great king of Britain' (*RIB* 91: *rex magnus Britanniae*). Other so-called client kingdoms were established to relieve the pressure of military garrisoning by devolving responsibility onto the local chieftains. For example, in East Anglia, King Prasutagus of the Iceni was happy to ally himself with the Romans; and in AD 51, Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes in northern England, handed over the fugitive rebel Caratacus to cement her friendship with Rome. But these were temporary measures. The 1st century AD was a period of confident expansion for Rome. Developments documented elsewhere in the Roman Empire show that treaty arrangements were usually allowed to persist only during the lifetime of the friendly ruler. Thereafter, such kingdoms were usually brought under direct Roman control as imperial provinces.

Throughout the remainder of Claudius' reign, Roman rule was gradually imposed across southern England. 'Peoples were subdued and kings were captured', writes Tacitus (*Agr.* 13.3) in the biographical work entitled *De vita Iulii Agricolae* (*The Life of Julius Agricola*, usually called simply the *Agricola*, for convenience). This work, our main narrative for these events, was written around 50 years later, but Tacitus must have had impeccable sources; as a senator, indeed as one of the consuls for AD 97, he was well placed to consult original documents and to interview first-hand witnesses. Foremost among these was his father-in-law, Gnaeus Julius Agricola himself, who must have been extraordinarily knowledgeable about Britain, having served there at each stage of his military career.

Although geographically remote, the unfolding events in this far corner of the empire surely caught the imagination of ordinary Romans. On the death of Claudius in AD 54, Seneca listed amongst his greatest achievements (albeit satirically) his conquest, not only of the Britons who live beyond the shores of the known sea, but of the Ocean itself (*Sen., Apoc.* 12). Equally, in later years, it became well known that one of the participating legions, *II Augusta*, had been commanded by the emperor Vespasian, then known only as a middle-ranking senator of obscure ancestry. But in AD 69, when the Roman world was dividing along partisan lines, the army of Britannia was inclined to support Vespasian, 'because, having been given command of the Second Legion there by Claudius, he waged war with distinction' (*Tac., Hist.* 3.44).

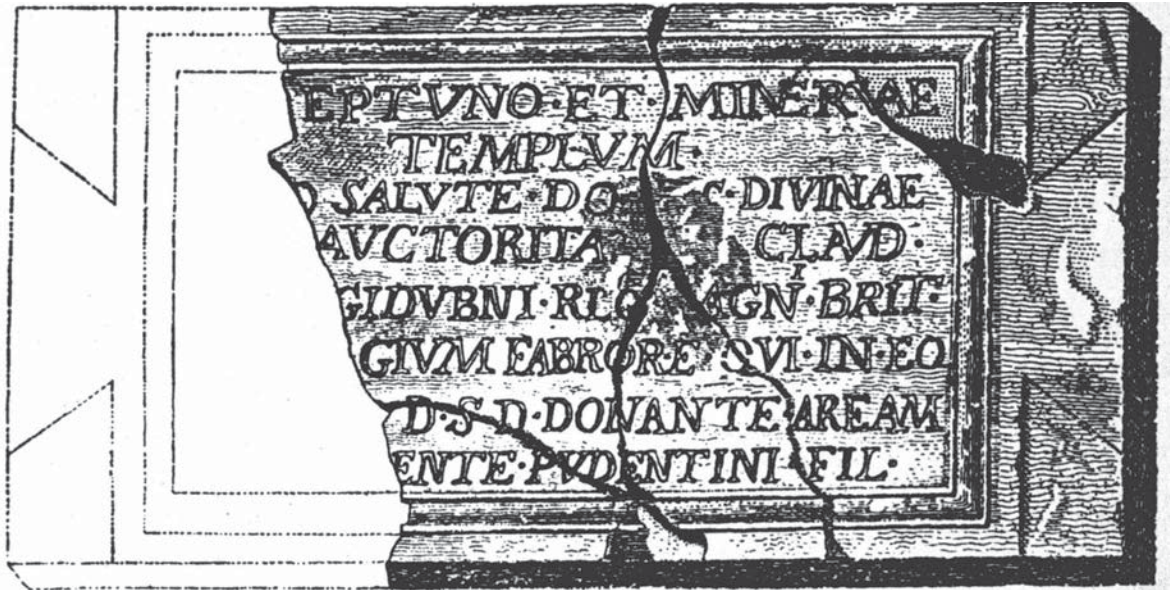
Because of this future emperor's involvement, historians of the day were moved to seek out and preserve details that might otherwise have been lost, such as the fact that Vespasian 'engaged the enemy 30 times. He reduced to submission two very powerful peoples and more than 20 towns, including the Isle of Wight near Britain' (*Suet., Div. Vesp.* 4). Although this summary makes the activities of *II Augusta* reasonably clear, unfortunately no record survives of the movements of the other legions, and of the dozens of auxiliary units that must have accompanied them. However, it is likely that, while Vespasian proceeded west from the Roman landfall in Kent or Sussex and the friendly kingdoms established there, his colleagues pushed north-west and north. 'Gradually', in the words of Tacitus, 'the nearest part of Britain was shaped into a province' (*Agr.* 14.1).



Coin of Claudius. This reverse image celebrates the conquest of Britain by depicting the emperor on horseback, flanked by trophies of captured weapons, on top of a triumphal arch with the legend *De Britann(is)*, implying a victory 'over the Britons'. (Author's collection)

NERO'S GOVERNORS: CONQUERING NATIONS, STRENGTHENING GARRISONS

By the time Nero came to the throne in AD 54, the Roman province of Britannia extended up to the Severn estuary in the west and the Trent in the east (*Tac., Ann.* 12.31: *Trisantonam et Sabrinam fluvios*). Roman arms had overrun the territories of more than half a dozen tribes: the Cantiaci of Kent, the Atrebates of Sussex, the Durotriges and Dumnonii of the south-west, the Dobunni of Gloucestershire, the Catuvellauni, whose lands stretched from Oxford to Cambridge, the Trinovantes of Essex, the Corieltavi (long thought to have been called the Coritani) of the East Midlands, and perhaps the Cornovii of the West Midlands, too. A succession of Roman governors came and went, commanding the large army of occupation for the standard three- or four-year period: 'nations were conquered', writes Tacitus, 'and garrisons were strengthened' (*Tac., Agr.* 14.3).



Engraving of an inscription from Chichester (RIB 91), mentioning a 'great king of Britain' (*rex magnus Britanniae*) on line 5. Unfortunately, his name has been damaged, so that he could either be [Co]gidubnus (as usually preferred) or [To]gidubnus (as seems more likely to scholars of Celtic languages). The inscription commemorates the raising of a temple to Neptune and Minerva (*templum Neptuno et Minervae*) by a guild of craftsmen (*[colle]gium fabror(um)*). (Author's collection)

However, in AD 60, when King Prasutagus of the Iceni died, the rebellion raised by his widow, Boudicca, set the process of romanization back. All this time, the tribes of modern-day Wales, the Silures in the south and the Ordovices in the north, remained defiant. But the Brigantes, who were 'said to be the most numerous people in the entire province' (Tac., *Agr.* 17.1), were quiescent, and no real contact had been made with the tribes further north, in their Caledonian fastnesses.

In AD 68, the reign of Nero ended in chaos, with rebellion in Gaul and civil war spreading across the empire. First, Galba, the aged governor of Tarraconensis in Spain, took the throne, but fell foul of his erstwhile associate, Otho. Then he, in turn, was challenged and defeated by Vitellius, one of the commanders on the Rhine. Finally, the veteran general Vespasian, then orchestrating Rome's Jewish War, was proclaimed emperor by the legions in the east. With his two sons, he established the Flavian dynasty and ushered in a generation of stability.

Meanwhile, the province of Britannia had been in the hands of ineffectual governors for some time. The elderly Marcus Trebellius Maximus, in charge from AD 63 until 69, had been consul in AD 56, but had served in no military capacity since holding a legionary command in AD 36. Yet here he was, commanding the four legions and mixed auxiliary garrison of a consular province. Tacitus condemned his term of office for its lethargy. In fact, it was on this account that the commander of XX *Valeria Victrix*, Marcus Roscius Coelius, stirred up trouble: 'there was a mutiny, for the soldiers were used to campaigning and became unruly from lack of activity' (Tac., *Agr.* 16.3). Some years later, writing his *Histories*, Tacitus claimed that 'Trebellius accused Coelius of sedition and upsetting military discipline, and Coelius blamed Trebellius for embezzling and weakening the legions' (*Hist.* 1.60). In any event, the governor was forced to flee for safety, leaving the province in the hands of Coelius and his two colleagues (there being only three legions in the province at this time).¹ He joined the pretender, Vitellius, in Gaul, early in AD 69 (Tac., *Hist.* 2.65).

1. See Fortress 43: *Roman Legionary Fortresses 27 BC–AD 378* (Osprey Publishing Ltd: Oxford, 2006) by the same author, p. 18

Tribes of Roman Britain

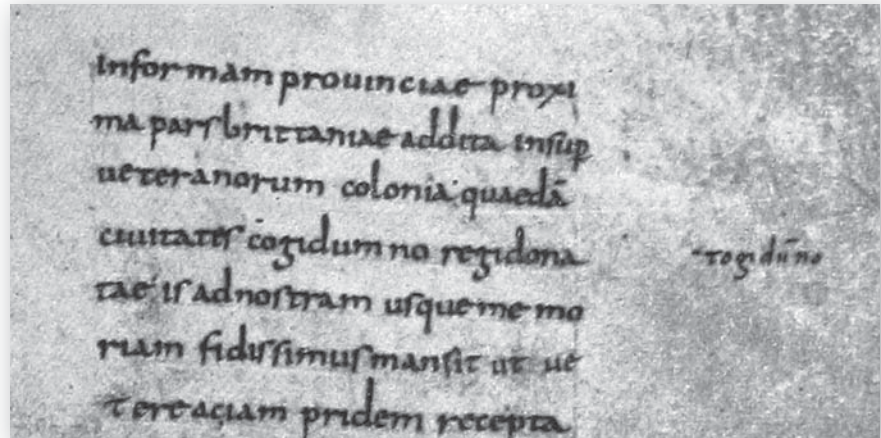


RIGHT

Extract from the *Codex Aesinas*, folio 56 recto (right-hand column), where Tacitus writes that 'certain communities were given to king Cogidumnus' (*quaedam civitates cogidumno regi donatae*). However, the 9th-century copyist was not sure of the name, for he has written *Togidumno* in the margin, perhaps preserving an earlier reading. (The forms *-dubnus* and *-dumnus* were interchangeable.) (Author's collection)

BELOW

Coin of Vespasian, showing the emperor's characteristic nutcracker profile. The coin legend lists his official set of titles in AD 74, *Imp(erator) Caesar Vesp(asianus) Aug(ustus) Co(n)s(ul) V* (i.e. for the fifth time). Vespasian took his fifth consulship in that year; he and his elder son, Titus, continued to fill the 'ordinary' consulship annually until AD 78. (Author's collection)



ROME AND THE BRIGANTES

Vitellius sent Marcus Vettius Bolanus to replace Trebellius as governor. If not exactly a military expert, at least Bolanus was no mediocrity; he had served with distinction as a legionary commander under the famous Corbulo during Nero's Parthian crisis, before proceeding to a consulship in AD 66. On his arrival in Britain, he preferred not to press his authority on the recalcitrant legions. Admittedly, the province must have been in some disarray. In around AD 65, Nero had already withdrawn an entire legion, *XIII Gemina* (Tac., *Hist.* 2.11), which had subsequently wound up, with Otho, on the losing side at Bedriacum. And in the meantime, Vitellius had drawn off another 8,000 men, effectively halving the three remaining legions, in order to bolster his Continental army against the Flavian forces (Tac., *Hist.* 2.57).

Returning to Britain with Bolanus, *XIII Gemina* was in a foul mood after its defeat by the Vitellian forces (Tac., *Hist.* 2.66); its support was soon canvassed by the Flavians (Tac., *Hist.* 2.86), so its sympathies most probably lay with Vespasian by now. As one of Vitellius' men, Bolanus will not have relished having the legion back in Britain.

Nor can the other legionary commanders have been happy with their new governor. Probably appointed by Nero, they had perhaps developed Othonian tendencies; but they now found themselves reporting to a Vitellian governor and many of their men were off fighting for Vitellius in northern Italy (*Hist.* 2.100). Soon, however, Vespasian's old legion, *II Augusta*, embraced the Flavian cause (Tac., *Hist.* 3.44). And in case the subsequent death of Vitellius had not convinced the others to follow suit, in AD 70 the new emperor sent one of his supporters, the young Gnaeus Julius Agricola, to relieve the unruly Roscius Coelius as commander of *XX Valeria Victrix* (Tac., *Agr.* 7.3). Simultaneously, *XIII Gemina* was again withdrawn for service on the Continent, never to return (Tac., *Hist.* 4.68).

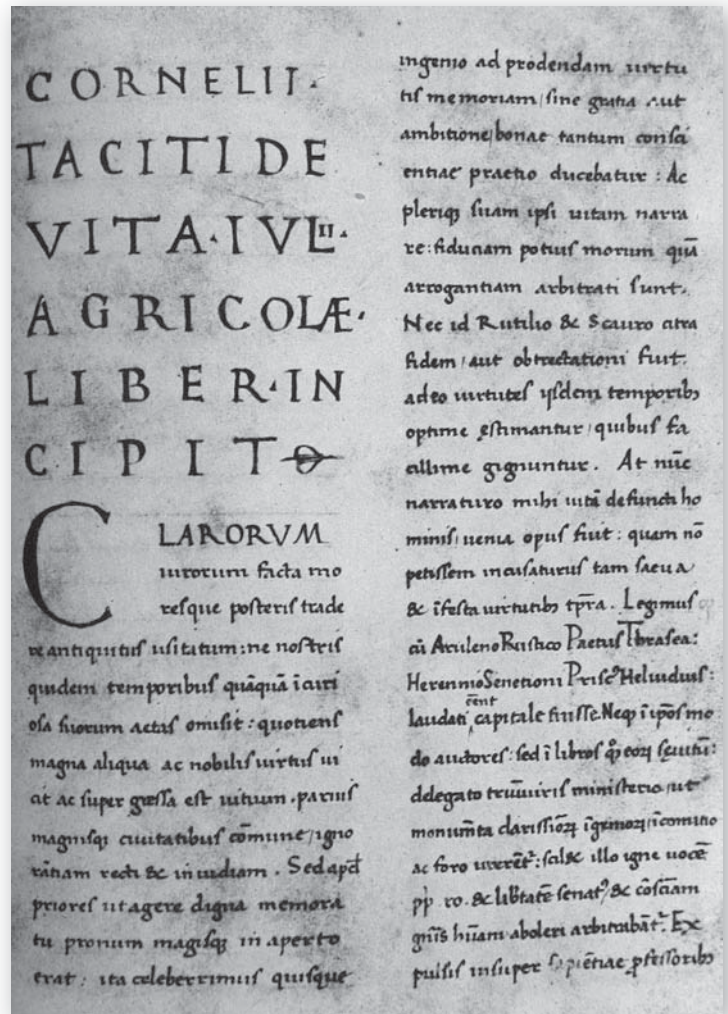


Besides the shifting politics amongst the army commanders, there was an ongoing military crisis, for the client kingdom of the Brigantes was beset by its own civil war. It appears that Queen Cartimandua had divorced her consort, the warlord Venutius, and had taken up with his armour-bearer, Vellocatus. 'At first', writes Tacitus, 'the conflict was between themselves, and Cartimandua cunningly seized the brother and kinsmen of Venutius' (*Ann.* 12.40). She no doubt hoped that, by taking hostages, she could bring calm to the situation. But, as AD 69 wore on, and mutiny caused chaos amongst the queen's Roman protectors, Venutius declared open war on his estranged wife. In the pithy words of Tacitus, 'the kingdom was left to Venutius, the war to us' (*Hist.* 3.45).

It seems that the new governor Vettius Bolanus could rely only on his auxiliary troops, but he managed to rescue the queen. No doubt there was hard fighting across the Brigantian lands of Yorkshire, Lancashire and the north. Many years later, when the poet Statius came to honour Bolanus' son Crispinus in verse, he recalled the exploits of the young man's father in Britain. 'Here was your father accustomed to dispense

justice, from this turf mound he addressed the cavalry; he planted watchtowers and forts far and wide – do you see them? – and surrounded these ramparts with a ditch. To the warlike gods he dedicated these gifts and these weapons – can you make out the placards? At the call to arms, he himself strapped on this cuirass, and this one he tore from a British king' (*Stat., Silv.* 5.2.144–49).

Archaeology has yet to identify Statius' watchtowers and forts with any degree of certainty, but it is likely that Bolanus' troops were obliged to extract Cartimandua from trouble. Her seat of power most probably lay at Stanwick (near Scotch Corner in Yorkshire), a site larger than any other in Brigantian lands by several orders of magnitude; imported fine wares and Roman-style building materials point to an owner of some authority, and whom better than Cartimandua? According to Tacitus, 'a powerful and exceptionally well-armed body of young warriors snatched her kingdom' (*Ann.* 12.40). Undoubtedly the supporters of Venutius, but modern claims that they were based around Carlisle in an area later known as the 'community of the Carvetii' (*RIB* 933: *civitas Carvetiorum*; cf. *AE* 2005, 922, for 3rd-century date) are purely speculative. At any rate, once Bolanus had rescued the queen, he was wise to refrain from any major campaigning if he lacked confidence in his garrison commanders.



Original manuscript page from the *Codex Aesinas*, folio 52 recto, the opening page of Tacitus' *Agricola*. The heading reads 'the book of Cornelius Tacitus concerning the life of Julius Agricola begins (here)' (*Cornelii Taciti de vita Iulii Agricolae liber incipit*). The task of decipherment is not helped by the small handwriting (the so-called 'Carolingian minuscule' script), along with frequent word breaks and peculiar abbreviations. (Author's collection)

TOP

Gate timbers exposed during excavations at Carlisle from 1998 to 2001. By use of the sophisticated tree-ring dating technique of dendrochronology, the timbers were found to have been felled late in AD 72. (© Carlisle Archaeological Unit. Photo: M. McCarthy)

BOTTOM

Roman timber floorboards belonging to the earliest fort at Carlisle, founded during the governorship of Petillius Cerialis (AD 70–73). In the foreground, a well was subsequently cut through the earlier levels. (© Carlisle Archaeological Unit. Photo: M. McCarthy)



VESPASIAN'S NEW ORDER: GREAT GENERALS AND ILLUSTRIOUS ARMIES

In AD 71, Vespasian inaugurated a new expansionist policy in Britain, sanctioning campaigns in the territory of northern England and Wales. Now, in the words of Tacitus, came 'great generals, illustrious armies' (*Agr.* 17.1). The first appointee as governor was Vespasian's kinsman (quite likely his son-in-law) Quintus Petillius Cerialis, who travelled directly from the Rhineland, where he had been suppressing a revolt. Previously, he had commanded *VIII Hispana* during the Boudiccan crisis of AD 60; Agricola had been a legionary tribune at the same time, so the two men were again united. Along with Cerialis came a new legion, *II Adiutrix*, to replace *XIII Gemina* and thus bring the garrison back up to four legions. And if his brief was conquest, he probably brought auxiliary units as well; there are several that make their first appearance in Britain at around this time.

Tacitus says that 'Petillius Cerialis immediately brought terror by attacking the community of the Brigantes' (*Agr.* 17.1). We have no idea how the

campaigning of these years was organized, but the Roman legions must have ranged widely across northern England, crushing Venutius' revolt. A trio of marching camps (Rey Cross, Crackenthorpe and Plumpton Head) are thought to mark the passage of his army across the Stainmore Pass, the route later followed by the A66 highway from York to Carlisle. At 8–9.5ha (20–23 acres), they could be taken to represent the temporary accommodation of a legionary battle group supported by cavalry, perhaps totalling some 7,500 men. Although the camps cannot be closely dated, their morphology suggests that they belong to the earliest Roman activities in the area. Their squarish shape has been taken to indicate an early date, for later camps appear to be rather more elongated in their quest to attain a 'tertiary' layout, with sides following 3:2 proportions. More tellingly, they were planted on virgin soil; one of the camps, Rey Cross, is demonstrably earlier than the Roman road, which diverges from a straight line almost imperceptibly in order to enter one gateway and leave by another.

The legionary fortress at York, known to the Romans as Eburacum, is also usually attributed to Cerialis and his old legion, *VIII Hispana*. Certainly, they left some epigraphic evidence of their presence there. The fortress they vacated at Lincoln (Roman Lindum) is thought to have been occupied by the newly arrived *II Adiutrix*. Meanwhile, the other two legions, *II Augusta* and *XX Valeria Victrix*, maintained watch over the west and south-west of the province. Tacitus says that, 'at first, Cerialis shared only hard work and danger, but soon glory as well' (*Agr.* 8.2), by which he implies Agricola's close involvement, so *XX Valeria Victrix* must have contributed an element at least to the campaigning army.

If the Stainmore camps can be assigned to Cerialis only on the basis of probability, the founding of a permanent fort at Carlisle can be attributed to him with absolute certainty. The dendrochronological dating of the gate timbers confirmed that Cerialis' army had felled the trees late in AD 72, finally vindicating the views of those whose suspicions had been raised by early pottery from the site. Another fairly large fort, extending over 3ha (7 acres) like Carlisle, was discovered at Blennerhasset, 30km (19 miles) to the south-west; subsequent fieldwalking recovered early Flavian material, quite in keeping with a Cerialian foundation.

Writing about Britain in around AD 77, the great encyclopaedist Pliny the Elder had mentioned 'the Roman forces, in almost 30 years, having extended our knowledge no farther than the neighbourhood of the Caledonian forest' (*Nat. Hist.* 4.102). This was certainly true in AD 77; but, strictly speaking, his words should relate to AD 72, almost 30 years after Claudius' invasion, when Cerialis' army stood at the point that later marked the Scottish border, and looked north into *terra incognita*.

By late AD 73 (or early 74), Cerialis had served out the standard governor's *triennium*. His departure drew a line under Brigantian affairs, and allowed the new governor, Sextus Julius Frontinus, to devote his attention to Wales. Garrisons were planted to hold down the volatile Silures in the south and Ordovices in the north, and *II Augusta* moved up from Exeter to a new fortress at Caerleon (transferring the name Isca from one to the other). At around the same time, it seems that either *XX Valeria Victrix* from Wroxeter, or *II Adiutrix* from Lincoln, began construction of a new fortress at Chester (Roman Deva), from where it could command both northern Wales and north-west England. By the time Frontinus left the province early in AD 77, the Roman legions were redistributed to dominate the north, and the new governor could plan for the conquest of present-day Scotland. His name was Agricola.

CHRONOLOGY

(All dates are AD)

| | |
|-------|--|
| 40 | Birth of Cn. Julius Agricola (13 June) |
| 41–54 | Reign of Emperor Claudius |
| 43 | Roman invasion of Britain |
| 43–47 | A. Plautius governor of Britannia |
| 47–52 | P. Ostorius Scapula governor of Britannia |
| 52–57 | A. Didius Gallus governor of Britannia |
| 54–68 | Reign of Emperor Nero |
| 57–58 | Q. Veranius governor of Britannia |
| 58–61 | C. Suetonius Paullinus governor of Britannia |
| 60 | Boudiccan revolt |
| 61–63 | P. Petronius Turpilianus governor of Britannia |
| 63–69 | M. Trebellius Maximus governor of Britannia |
| 69 | Civil war: ‘Year of the Four Emperors’ |
| 69–71 | M. Vettius Bolanus governor of Britannia |
| 70–79 | Reign of Emperor Vespasian |
| 71–73 | Q. Petillius Cerialis governor of Britannia |
| | Roman Army campaigns against the Brigantes in northern England |
| 74–77 | Sex. Julius Frontinus governor of Britannia |

Roman army campaigns against the Silures in south Wales and
Ordovices in north Wales

- 77–84 Cn. Julius Agricola governor of Britannia
- Roman Army campaigns against the Caledonian tribes of Scotland
- 79–81 Reign of Emperor Titus
- 81–96 Reign of Emperor Domitian
- 83 Domitian campaigns against the Chatti; hailed as Germanicus
(‘Conqueror of Germany’)
- 83 Battle of Mons Graupius (September)
- 84–87? Unknown governor of Britannia
- Construction of legionary fortress at Inchtuthil begun; subsequently
dismantled and abandoned
- 85 Hard fighting on Danube front
- Roman Army defeated in Moesia; governor (Oppius Sabinus) killed
- 86 Roman Army defeated in Dacia; Praetorian Prefect (Cornelius
Fuscus) killed
- 87 *II Adiutrix* withdrawn from Britannia for service on Danube
- 93 Death of Agricola (23 August)
- 97–98 Reign of Emperor Nerva
- 98–117 Reign of Emperor Trajan
- 98 Tacitus completes Agricola’s biography (*De vita Iulii Agricolae*)

OPPOSING FORCES

THE ROMAN ARMY: PILLAGERS OF THE WORLD

Since the days of Augustus, the Roman Army had been based around a core of 28 legions, distributed around the empire in readiness for further conquest. Each legion comprised 5,000 or so Roman citizens, equipped for battle as heavy infantry. The primary division of the legion was the *cohors* ('cohort'), which was further subdivided into six *centuriae* ('centuries'), each commanded by a centurion. But combat was not the legion's only role. Each unit was an army in miniature, with its own specialist technicians, craftsmen, medics and administrators; individual soldiers could be detailed to perform all manner of administrative or constructional tasks on behalf of the imperial government. During Agricola's governorship, there were still four legions in Britain: *II Augusta*, *II Adiutrix*, *VIII Hispana* and *XX Valeria Victrix*.

In addition to these, and in order to achieve a balanced military establishment, the emperors continued to recruit smaller bodies of troops from the more warlike of Rome's allied and tributary nations. These men, largely Gauls, Germans and Spaniards, did not fulfil the citizenship requirement for service in the legions, so they were drafted into their own units, the so-called *auxilia* (which literally means 'assistance'). Veterans received citizenship, usually on completion of 25 years' service, and many were willing to pay for a bronze document (the so-called diploma, so named because it consisted of two bronze sheets, bound together and sealed) that legally proved the fact. Although they could be criticized as 'pillagers of the world' (Tac., *Agr.* 30.4), to outsiders they presented the unfamiliar and alarming image of a drilled and disciplined standing army.

Some of these auxiliary units were purely infantry, divided into centuries, like the legions, but organized as individual autonomous cohorts. Their status

Writing tablet from Carlisle. As at Vindolanda, the waterlogged conditions at Carlisle were found to have preserved organic remains amongst the rubbish dumped at the end of each occupation phase, including some ink tablets. It is a specialized task to decipher the Roman handwriting, often visible only under infrared light. This tablet, found amongst 1st-century material, is the start of a letter addressed to an unknown trooper 'of the *ala Sebosiana*, singularis of Agricola' (*[a]lae sebosianae sing(ularis) | Agricolae*). (Author's collection)



is generally considered to have been inferior to that of the legionaries. For example, it is thought that an auxiliary infantryman drew only $\frac{5}{8}$ th of the legionary's pay, and it is often stated that his equipment was not of the same high standard. Also, the *auxilia* often bore the brunt of garrisoning duties in order to release the legionaries for construction work, but each played a distinctive part in battle.

As the legions were predominantly infantry, specialized auxiliary units provided the cavalry component of any Roman army. Many of these were squadrons entirely of cavalry; known as *alae* (literally 'wings'), they were divided into 16 troops (*turmae*), each with its own decurion. More numerous than the *alae* were the *cohortes equitatae* ('equitate cohorts'), which were made up of both infantry and cavalry, roughly in the proportion of four to one. This mixture gave the equitate cohort more operational flexibility than a purely infantry unit. The cavalryman, whether he served in an *ala* or a *cohors equitata*, was generally more privileged than his infantry counterpart. A writing tablet from Vindonissa (Switzerland) seems to suggest that, on the eve of the Claudian invasion, a cohortal trooper (*eques cohortis*) received a salary of 900 sesterces (225 *denarii*) in three instalments (AE 2003, 1238). This was the pay of a legionary; the auxiliary cavalryman (*eques alaris*), by contrast, got $\frac{7}{8}$ th (1,050 sesterces, or 262½ *denarii*), while the auxiliary infantryman got much less.

It is likely that Agricola's cavalry forces included *ala I Hispanorum Asturum*, *ala I Thracum*, *ala I Tungrorum*, *ala Classiana*, *ala Petriana*, *ala Tampiana*, *ala Vettonum* and *ala Sebosiana*. Of these eight, only the last is directly attested at this time, through the find of a writing tablet at Carlisle (AE 1998, 852). But the tombstone of Flavinus (RIB 1172), *signifer* ('standard-bearer') of *ala Petriana*, should probably be dated to this time. And the other regiments appear on diplomas issued by the emperor Trajan to British veterans in AD 98 (CIL 16, 43), AD 103 (CIL 16, 48), and AD 105 (CIL 16, 51). The trend during the AD 80s and 90s was for troop withdrawals rather than new arrivals, so there is a good chance that the units discharging men around AD 100 had been in Britain under Agricola. However, the three diplomas do not give complete coverage of the provincial army. For example, a certain *ala Augusta* buried two of its troopers at Lancaster (RIB 606, now lost; and *Britannia* 37, 2006, 468ff.), probably during the Flavian period; if men were discharged from its ranks under Trajan, they must have appeared on a different diploma, hitherto undiscovered. Equally, *ala II Asturum*, which disappears from view between its early deployment in Pannonia and its appearance in Britain under Hadrian, may well have arrived with Cerialis in AD 71.

Some of these cavalry units had been rewarded for meritorious conduct. The men of *ala Vettonum*, which was originally recruited amongst the Vettones of central Spain, had received a block grant of Roman citizenship, most likely for bravery during the early years of the invasion. (The trooper commemorated at Bath, Lucius Vitellius Tancinus, seems to have taken his new Roman name from L. Vitellius, the Emperor Claudius' colleague in the censorship of AD 48; RIB 159.) The men of *ala Petriana* had received a similar award, but prior to their arrival in Britain. They are likely to have been one of the regiments that accompanied Petillius Cerialis in AD 71; *ala Sebosiana* was another.



Tombstone of Pintaius, standard-bearer (*signifer*) of *cohors V Asturum* (CIL 13, 8090). (Copy of an original in Bonn, Germany, on display in the Museo de la Real Colegiata de San Isidoro, León.) Pintaius' heir, who set up the tombstone, proudly states that his friend was an Asturian from Transmontanus (Trás-os-Montes in north-east Portugal), thus he was probably an original member of the cohort. (Author's collection)



LEFT

Tombstone of Flavinus, probably from the Roman fort at Corbridge, but now located in Hexham Abbey. The inscription explains that, besides being a 'trooper of the *ala Petriana*' (*eq(ues) alae Petr(ianae)*), Flavinus was the 'standard-bearer of Candidus's troop' (*signifer tur(mae) Candidi*). He is depicted in a triumphal pose, riding down a naked Briton. (Author's collection)



RIGHT

Tombstone of Reburus, a Roman auxiliary cavalryman. The inscription is fragmentary, but is thought to mention the *ala Frontoniana*. Copy of the original at Bonn, on display at Xanten. (Author's collection)

Ala Classiana also received citizenship; probably raised in Gaul, it later calls itself *ala Gallorum et Thracum Classiana*, no doubt emphasizing its Gallic origins after an influx of Thracian recruits. These three units were entitled to add the letters *c.R.* after their name, indicating that each was an *ala civium Romanorum* ('squadron of Roman citizens'). At some stage, *ala Classiana* also acquired the honorific titles *invicta bis torquata* ('invincible, twice decorated'; *CIL* 11, 6033), but the occasions for these two grants of military decorations are unknown.

Infantry was always more numerous than cavalry. The three early Trajanic diplomas should again give a reasonable idea of Agricola's army, provided some care is exercised. For, although most of the named units could well have been long established in the province, one of the cohorts mentioned on the so-called Malpas diploma of AD 103 (*cohors I Alpinorum*) is known to have transferred *into* the province a few years earlier. The same may be true of a second unit (*cohors II Thracum equitata*), if its name has been correctly restored on the German diploma of AD 98. (There is a very slim chance of duplicate unit names, for those regiments raised in quantity from fertile recruiting grounds like Thrace and the Iberian peninsula; it is quite likely, for example, that a second *cohors II Asturum equitata* existed simultaneously in Lower Germany, but this is not the case with *cohors II Thracum*.)

An additional problem is posed, for those who would try to calculate the size of Agricola's army, by the possibility that some cohorts were at double

strength, an innovation that was gathering momentum during the Flavian period. And finally, as with the *alae*, several units have probably evaded notice. In particular, although *cohors IIII Delmatarum* appears on one of our diplomas, we know nothing about the early history of *cohortes I* and *II Delmatarum*, which subsequently appear in Britain and may have been based here all along. (By contrast, *cohors III Delmatarum* is known to have been based in Germany.)

We can make an educated guess that Agricola's army included the following 20 cohorts: *cohors II Asturum (equitata)*, *cohors I Baetasiorum*, *cohors III Bracaraugustanorum*, *cohors I Celtiberorum*, *cohors I Cugernorum*, *cohors IIII Delmatarum*, *cohors I Frisiavonum*, *cohors I Hispanorum (equitata)*, *cohors I Lingonum (equitata)*, *cohors II Lingonum (equitata)*, *cohors III Lingonum*, *cohors I Morinorum*, *cohors I Nerviorum*, *cohors II Nerviorum*, *cohors II Pannoniorum*, *cohors I Tungrorum*, *cohors II Tungrorum (equitata)*, *cohors I Vangionum (equitata)*, *cohors I fida Vardullorum (equitata)* and *cohors II Vasconum*.

Again, as with the *alae*, we usually lack firm evidence for the presence of these units in Britain at this time. However, it seems certain that *cohors I Hispanorum* buried one of their number, a man named Ammonius, at the fort of Ardoch (RIB 2213) at around this time. And there is a circumstantial case (albeit a very good one) for the involvement of *cohors II Asturum* in the battle at Mons Graupius (as we shall see below). Furthermore, Tacitus specifically notes the presence of two Tungrian cohorts in Agricola's army, which are surely the two *cohortes Tungrorum* from the Trajanic diplomas; indeed, one of these has left evidence of its later occupancy at Vindolanda. Tacitus also mentions four Batavian cohorts (Tac., Agr. 36), so we may add *cohortes I* and *II Batavorum*, which are first attested in Pannonia in AD 98, but which must have been in Britain over a decade earlier, alongside *cohortes III* and *VIII Batavorum*, which both left written records at Vindolanda.



Inner face of a diploma (CIL 16, 48 = ILS 2001) discovered near Malpas (Cheshire, England). Issued in AD 103 by Trajan (whose nomenclature has been lost in the damaged portion), it lists four of the *alae* and 11 of the *cohortes* that released veterans in that year from the army of Britain. The province is named towards the bottom of the sheet, where the regiments are said to be serving 'in Britain under Lucius Neratius Marcellus' (*in Britannia sub L(ucio) Neratio Marcello*). The text continues on the neighbouring leaf, which would have been securely bound to this one, and officially sealed. (© Jona Lendering)

(Oddly, there is no trace of Batavian cohorts bearing the intervening numbers.) One other cohort is mentioned by Tacitus, the *cohors Usiporum* which mutinied during its period of initial training (see below, p. 50); but, as the late Professor Sir Ian Richmond long ago wisely observed, this cohort can hardly be counted in the strength of Agricola's army.

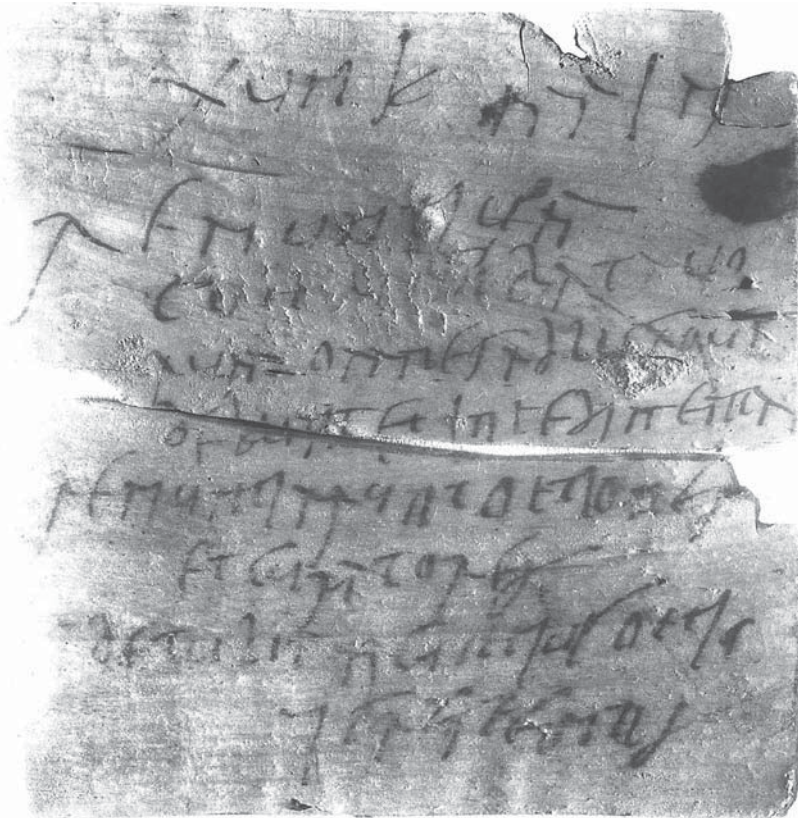
As with the *alae*, some of these cohorts will have arrived with Cerialis in AD 71. In particular, the epithet *fida* ('loyal') uniquely applied to *cohors I Vardullorum* could have been earned on the Rhine during the events of AD 69. Other units may even have been newly raised in the aftermath of these troubles. Some likely contenders are *cohors I Baetasiorum*, *cohors I Cugernorum*, *cohors I Frisiavonum* and *cohors I Vangionum*, all raised amongst peoples who hailed from the Rhineland; perhaps also the *cohors I Morinorum* and the series of *cohortes Lingonum*, too. Wherever there had been trouble, it was only sensible to remove the men of fighting age from their homes, and channel any tribal aggression into the service of Rome.

The late Professor Richmond, in his posthumously published commentary to the *Agricola*, jointly authored with the late Professor Robert Ogilvie, was perhaps responsible for drawing attention to the British auxiliaries whom Tacitus mentions in the preamble to the battle of Mons Graupius (*Agr.* 29.2; 32.1, 3). In particular, Tacitus' claim that they had been 'tried and tested in a long period of peace' (*Agr.* 29.2: *longa pace exploratos*) showed that these were men from the south of England, which had long since been settled. Richmond thought it quite likely that these were entire units, newly recruited to bolster Agricola's army, and he duly compiled a list of likely regiments. Of course, Tacitus simply means that Britons were being recruited into the regiments already stationed in Britain, but Richmond's list is not without interest.

Amongst the regiments of Britons that he suggested were in existence during the reign of Domitian, *ala Brittonum (veterana)* seems out of place; it is not known before the 2nd century AD, when it was stationed in Lower Pannonia, so the balance of probability suggests that it was a Trajanic creation. Richmond's other cavalry unit, *ala I Flavia Augusta Britannica* is disallowed for a different reason: the title *Britannica*, unlike *Brittonum* ('of Britons'), indicates simply that the unit had previously served in Britain, perhaps during the initial invasion, before transferring to the Danube.

Of the several cohorts that Richmond listed, *cohors I Brittonum* is most promising, as it appears on a diploma of AD 85 (*CIL* 16, 31), so the time-served veterans of that year had been recruited in around AD 60. However, the diploma belongs to the army of Pannonia, and there is no sign that this cohort ever served in Britain. Similarly, the time-

Tombstone of Gaius Julius Karus (*AE* 1951, 88, now lost). The lettering is difficult to read, but would originally have been brightly picked out in paint. The inscription states 'For Gaius Julius Karus, son of Gaius, of the Voltinian voting tribe, from the province of Narbonensis, military tribune of the III Cyrenaica legion, prefect of the Sixth Asturum *equitata* cohort, decorated in the British war with a mural crown, a rampart crown, a gold crown, an honorific spear. The centurions and men of the III Cyrenaica legion and the XXII legion, sent into the province of Cyrene on account of the draft, (set this up)' (C(aio) Iulio C(ai) f(ilio) Vo(l)l(tinia)] | Karo ex provincia Narbo | nensi trib(uno) mil(itum) leg(ionis) III Cyl(r)enaicae]] | praef(ecto) coh(ortis) VI Astyrum eq[ui]t(atae)] | 5 donato bello Brittanico co[r]ona | murali corona vallari co[r]ona | aurea hasta pura | [c]entyriones et | milites leg(ionis) III Cyl(r)enaicae et leg(ionis) | 10 [X]II missi in provinciam | [C]yrenensem dilectus caussa). (Author's collection, from *Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia* 4, 1961)



Writing tablet no. 574 from Vindolanda (AE 2003, 1036), of the type known as a *renuntium* ('summary report'). At the top is the date (*xvii k(alendas) maias* = 15 April, the year is not given), followed by the title of the document (*renuntium | coh(ortis) viii batavo | rum*), mentioning *cohors VIII Batavorum*, and the strictly formulaic text, which in all known examples simply states that 'all are at the places where they ought to be and (= with?) their equipment'. The final four lines state that 'the *optiones* and *curatores* reported', followed by the signature of the responsible individual, in this case 'Arquittius, *optio* of Crescens' century'. The *curator* was the cavalry equivalent of the *optio*; as an equitate cohort, *cohors VIII Batavorum* had both. (© Vindolanda Trust, by kind permission of Prof. A. R. Birley)

served veterans of *cohors II Brittonum*, who were released in Lower Moesia in AD 99 (CIL 16, 45), and of *cohors III Brittonum*, who were released in Upper Moesia in AD 100 (CIL 16, 46), must have been recruited in around AD 75; but again, there is no hint of service in Britain.

Scholars who have assumed that Agricola had 80 or 90 auxiliary regiments have surely overestimated the provincial army. During the reign of Hadrian, when Britain had one of the larger (if not, indeed, the largest) garrisons of the empire, there were still only a dozen *alae* and 30-odd cohorts, so it is unlikely that Agricola's army will have exceeded this. On the contrary, although we cannot be absolutely confident, it seems likely that, in the nine or ten *alae* and 24 cohorts listed above, we have identified the bulk of Agricola's army. Only further epigraphic discoveries will help to refine our list.

Roman officers and men

The long-service, battle-hardened legionary centurions were the real repository of experience in the Roman Army. Mostly promoted from the ranks after 15 or 20 years (although many were directly commissioned civilians of equestrian status), centurions could look forward to lifelong employment, culminating for a few in the coveted position of *praefectus castrorum* ('prefect of the camp'). After two or three years in this post, if the prefect was not tempted to retire from the emperor's service, he could hope for a highly paid procuratorial position.

Senior to the *praefectus castrorum*, but much younger and far less experienced, was the *tribunus laticlavus* ('broad-stripe tribune', drawing a distinction with the narrow stripe of the equestrian officer). Most aspiring

senators spent one or two years in this post, having been directly appointed and assigned to a legion by the provincial governor. As in many areas of Roman life, patronage played an important role, and young men often secured a tribunate from a close relative, or were recommended by acquaintances.

In AD 58, at the age of 18, Agricola was granted a tribunate in Britain by the old warhorse Suetonius Paullinus. Tacitus tells us that Agricola refused to treat his military service as an excuse for larking about, as many young men seem to have done, and resisted using his rank to obtain leave of absence. On the contrary, ‘he got to know the province, made himself known to the army, learned from those with experience, and followed the best examples’ (Tac., *Agr.* 5.2). Ostensibly second in command of the legion, the tribune was more likely to be simply observing the practicalities of military life. Pliny the younger says that ‘young men got their taste of service in camp in order to grow accustomed to command by obeying, and to lead by following’ (Plin., *Epist.* 8.14.5). Unusually, in AD 82–83, we find the tribune of *VIII Hispana*, Lucius Roscius Aelianus, conducting a detachment of his legion from Britain to the Rhine in *expeditione Germanica* (‘on the German expedition’: *ILS* 1025). As we shall see, this was the Emperor Domitian’s campaign against the Chatti. We might have expected the more experienced *praefectus castrorum* to be entrusted with the responsibility of leading troops into a war zone (cf. Tac., *Ann.* 13.39).

Each legion was commanded by a *legatus legionis* (‘legionary legate’), a senator usually aged in his 30s, whose previous military posting had been as a tribune, ten years before. In the meantime, he had been obliged to fill a variety of civil posts, underlining the fact that the senator was, first and foremost, a Roman magistrate, and only incidentally a military leader. As we have already seen, Agricola began his service as legate of *XX Valeria Victrix* in AD 70; he returned to Rome in AD 73, to continue his senatorial career.

The sons of equestrian families, by contrast, commanded the auxiliary units. These were wealthy municipal aristocrats who had elected to serve in the *tres militiae* (‘three military grades’), either as young men at the start of their public career, or in middle age, having held a succession of magistracies in their local area. Traditionally, they began with the command of an infantry cohort, which carried the rank of *praefectus cohortis* (‘cohort prefect’). The second stage of their military career was as a legionary tribune, with the rank of *tribunus angusticlavius* (‘narrow-stripe tribune’, drawing a contrast with the broad senatorial stripe). Besides the senatorial tribune, each legion also had five equestrian tribunes, whose duties largely revolved around representing the common men in judicial matters. Alternatively, the new ‘double-strength’ cohorts required a tribune as their commander, no doubt acknowledging the greater responsibility associated with their larger size. Many men elected to serve only as tribune before returning to civilian life, but for those who were determined to complete their military career the third



Tombstone of Insus, discovered in Lancaster in 2005. Almost 2m (7ft) in height, the sculpture depicts the cavalryman riding down a Briton, whom he has first decapitated. He describes himself as a ‘Treveran citizen’ (*cives Trever*) who served as the ‘curator of Victor’s troop’ ([*t(ur)mae*] *Victoris curator*), the cavalry equivalent of a centurion’s *optio*. (© Lancaster City Museum/Lancashire Museums)

stage was the command of a cavalry unit as *praefectus alaris* ('squadron prefect'). Promotion from one grade to the next depended as much on patronage as on the talents of the individual, for these posts were in the gift of the provincial governor.

Only two of Agricola's officers at Mons Graupius are known by name. The first is Aulus Julius Atticus, a young *praefectus cohortis* just beginning his career. (Tacitus simply calls him Aulus Atticus, but the family name Julius seems likely.) Like Agricola himself, he probably came from Narbonensis, where other Julii Attici are known.

The second is Gaius Julius Karus, who also came from Narbonensis. He was later buried in Cyrene, where as *tribunus angusticlavius* he was conducting a recruiting drive for the two legions of Egypt, *III Cyrenaica* and *XXII Deiotariana*. During his previous posting, as *praefectus of cohors II Asturum equitata*, he was decorated *bello Britannico* ('in the British war'; AE 1951, 88). His receipt of a *corona muralis* ('mural crown', usually given for storming an enemy town), a *corona vallaris* ('rampart crown', usually given for storming an enemy camp), a *corona aurea* ('gold crown', given for gallantry), and a *hasta pura* ('honorific spear', restricted to the officer class) seems lavish at a time when it was usual to reward deserving officers with one crown and one spear. To merit such rewards, he must surely have played a key part in Agricola's strategy.

THE CALEDONIAN FORCES: THE NOBLEST IN ALL BRITAIN

In contrast to the Roman Army, we know virtually nothing about their Caledonian adversaries. It is unfortunate, but inevitable, that much of our information about them derives from Roman sources, which are unlikely to be entirely impartial or even wholly accurate. To remedy this deficiency, scholars often extrapolate from later Pictish practices, or from the exploits of warbands in medieval Irish and Welsh literature, but the validity of this approach is questionable.

A generation ago, it was common to characterize the Iron Age peoples of Scotland as 'Celtic cowboys, footloose and unpredictable'. However, it has now been realized that, at the time of the Roman invasion, they had a long history of subsistence farming, harvesting barley and wheat, and herding cattle, goats, sheep and pigs. Extensive field systems, associated with roundhouse settlements, have come to light, dividing up great swathes of arable land in Angus, Fife and the Lothians. At the same time, pollen analysis suggests that this period saw widespread woodland clearance for cereal production. Linear alignments of pits perhaps represent the postholes of fence lines, segregating croplands from grazing pastures, while elsewhere, massive earthworks snaking across the countryside have been labelled as 'ranch boundaries'. And substantial stone-built underground cellars called souterrains (literally 'under the earth' chambers) provided the cool, dry conditions necessary for storing foodstuffs, certainly grain, perhaps even meat, milk and cheese.

In common with their Celtic cousins across western Europe, the north Britons were sophisticated craftsmen, builders and artisans, despite their lack of written records. Yet Mediterranean writers like Diodorus Siculus, a contemporary of Julius Caesar, were struck by 'their humble dwellings, being built for the most part out of reeds and logs' (Diod. Sic. 5.21.5). Certainly,

TOP

Aerial view of the souterrain at Shanzie, near Alyth (Perth). The curving stone-built structure, around 35m (115ft) in length, is typical of these underground storehouses. (© David Woolliscroft)

BOTTOM

Iron Age roundhouse, reconstructed at the Archaeolink Prehistory Park, near Aberdeen. Many of the Caledonian peoples who heeded Calgacus' call will have come from homesteads like this one. The mountain of Bennachie can be seen in the background. (Author's collection)



the peoples of lowland Scotland lived in settlements of roundhouses, sometimes fairly large with distinctive conical thatched roofs and earthen walls faced with wattle and daub. And in river- or loch-side locations, similar houses, called crannogs, were built in the water close to the shore, supported on timber platforms and connected to dry land by timber jetties. But their timber construction was in no way primitive, and in fact required advanced carpentry skills. Further north, the trend was towards building in stone.

Celtic society was tribal. Although Tacitus writes only of 'the peoples who inhabit Caledonia' (*Caledoniam incolentes populi*: *Agr.* 25.3), Ptolemy the geographer lists over a dozen tribes in Scotland: the Novantae of Galloway, the Selgovae of Dumfriesshire, the Dumnonii of Ayrshire and Stirlingshire, and the Votadini of the Lothians; then, beyond the Forth–Clyde isthmus, the Epidii of Kintyre, the Venicones of Tayside, the Taexali of Aberdeenshire and the Vacomagi of Strathmore; and finally, beyond the Great Glen, a welter of names (Creones, Carnonacae, Caereni, Decantae, Lugi, Smertae, Cornavii) centred on the Caledones (Ptol., *Geog.* 2.3.5–9). Incidentally, it is virtually

certain that the tribe was known as the Caledones (not, as Ptolemy mistakenly records, the Kaledonioi), for the native Vepogenus, whose name occurs on an early 3rd-century inscription from Colchester (*RIB* 191), called himself a ‘Caledo’, not a Caledonius.

Ptolemy was writing around AD 150, but it seems that, for the geography of north Britain, he relied on information gathered by Agricola’s army, decades earlier. For one thing, neither Hadrian’s Wall nor the Antonine Wall appears in his listings, although both existed at the time of writing. But it is curious that, although Ptolemy had acquired the names of so many tribes, Tacitus avoids mentioning a single one. He repeatedly refers to the region called Caledonia, but only rather vaguely to ‘the inhabitants of Caledonia’ (*Caledoniam habitantes*: *Agr.* 11.2), whereas he happily names the individual tribes south of the Tyne–Solway line.

Archaeology has identified a cultural boundary in the vicinity of the Fife Peninsula, based on the distribution of various artefacts and settlement patterns. Such a boundary, perhaps marked by the Earn or the Tay, would separate the lowland grouping of the Novantae, Selgovae, Dumnonii and Votadini from the more northerly peoples, who inhabited Caledonia proper. It is interesting to note that, as we shall see, Agricola thought that he could have established a boundary in Central Scotland between the Clyde and Forth estuaries, effectively separating the lowlands from Caledonia.

The archaeology of the Southern Uplands shows a degree of centralization, with prominent hillforts at Burnswark (near Dumfries), Traprain Law (near Haddington, East Lothian) and Eildon Hill North (near Melrose in the Scottish Borders). Although small and seemingly insignificant by south British standards (Burnswark is only 7ha [17 acres] in area, Traprain Law is 13ha [32 acres] and Eildon Hill 16ha [40 acres]), each clearly represents the tribal focus for, respectively, the Novantae, the Votadini and the Selgovae. The Dumnonii of the Central Lowlands seem to have followed a different tradition, with an emphasis on the crannogs of the Clyde and the Tay.



Dakbank crannog, reconstructed on Loch Tay near Kenmore. The design of this Iron Age dwelling, situated in the water and entered by a narrow walkway, was naturally defensive, as well as being well placed for fishing. The inhabitants probably reared stock on the loch side, to judge from finds of animal bones and cattle teeth. (Author’s collection)



Denarius (silver coin) of D. Junius Brutus Albinus, one of Caesar's assassins, minted in 48 BC. The reverse image shows Celtic motifs of the crossed war-trumpets with an oval shield at the top and a chariot wheel at the bottom. (Author's collection)

By contrast, the many ring-shaped forts of the north, the so-called duns, indicate a greater degree of social fragmentation. Mostly enclosing less than 2ha (5 acres), these duns perhaps represent the defended homesteads of individual Caledonian family groups, although their formidable stone-built ramparts, often reaching 6m (20ft) in thickness and perhaps 2m (7ft) in height, represent a significant expenditure of time and effort. The precise dating of these can be problematic; in the absence of accurate archaeological dating techniques, it is usually only the presence of Roman items, whether looted or traded, that gives us some idea of chronology, and such finds are relatively sparse.

It is only natural, of course, that a landscape of mountains, bogs and woodland, sometimes cleared for agriculture, sometimes left as a wilderness, created pockets of habitation, with individual family units seeking the security of their own small fortified dwelling. Perhaps there was the danger of marauders from neighbouring communities, for the rearing of livestock probably encouraged rustling. Equally, a predominantly farming folk would have been conscious of the threat from wild bears and wolves.

Caledonian warriors

Greek and Roman writers characterized Celtic and Germanic peoples as being blue-eyed and blond- or red-haired with large physiques. For Tacitus, 'the red-golden hair of the inhabitants of Caledonia, and their massive frames, declare their Germanic origin' (*Agr.* 11.2). Tacitus, of course, went on to compose a discourse all about the tribes of Germany. 'Their physical appearance,' he wrote, 'is always the same: fierce blue eyes, red hair, and large bodies' (*Germ.* 4). It is interesting to compare the opinion of Strabo, who had painted a similar picture of the Germans as 'being little different from the Celtic race, with an excess of savagery, stature, and blondness, but otherwise similar' (*Geog.* 7.1.2). And in his description of Britain, he wrote that 'the men are taller than the Celts [i.e. the Gauls] and less golden-haired, but their bodies are rangier' (Strabo, *Geog.* 4.5.2). They were also thought to be rather boastful, as Tacitus implies when he has the Caledonian chieftain call his people 'the noblest in all of Britain' (*Agr.* 30.2).

Some scholars are inclined to reject these statements as 'topoi', the kind of stock descriptions that a writer could insert in his work to pad it out and add colour. But, of course, the mere fact that the blue-eyed, red-haired north Briton became a commonplace of ancient literature does not necessarily discount its accuracy. Equally, the ancient notion of environmental determinism, that a rugged country produced a rugged people, is not entirely fanciful.

Again, it is unfortunate that Tacitus is our only source for Caledonian warfare, but classical authors portrayed the Celts in general as formidable warriors. In battle, they made a terrifying noise, shouting 'in the barbarian fashion, with roaring, chanting and discordant cries' (Tac., *Agr.* 33.1), and blowing distinctive horns. The only ancient description of these horns comes from Diodorus Siculus, who wrote that 'they have peculiar and barbaric war-trumpets; for, when they are blown, they produce a harsh sound that suits the tumult of war' (Diod. Sic. 5.30.3). But archaeology can supply an actual example of such a trumpet, for an animal-headed horn known as a *carnyx* was discovered long ago at Deskford (near Elgin in Moray). It had been carefully dismantled and buried in a ritual act. Its multi-part sophisticated



design, expertly crafted from copper alloy (perhaps ultimately of Roman origin), has been replicated in modern times to produce a functional musical instrument whose voice perfectly matches Diodorus' description.

If Tacitus is our only source for Caledonian warfare, other classical authors painted a more general picture of the Celts in battle.

In their battles, the Celts use chariots drawn by two horses, which carry the charioteer and the warrior; when they encounter cavalry in the fighting they hurl their javelins at their opposite number and then climb down to join battle with their swords. Some of them despise death to such a degree that they step into danger unprotected and wearing only a loincloth. They bring with them free-born attendants chosen from the poor, using them in battle as charioteers and as shield-bearers. Those drawn up for battle are accustomed to step out from the line and challenge the most valiant of their opponents to single combat, brandishing their weapons and terrifying their adversaries. And when any man accepts the challenge to battle, they sing of the bravery of their forefathers and of their own excellence, and insult and disparage their opponent, by these words generally sapping their bold spirit. Having taken the heads of those who fall in battle, they fasten them to their horses' necks; they carry the arms stripped from the enemy to their attendants, covered with blood, chanting a paean and singing a victory hymn, and they nail these prizes onto their houses, just like those who catch a wild animal in the hunt.

Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. hist.* 5.29.1–4

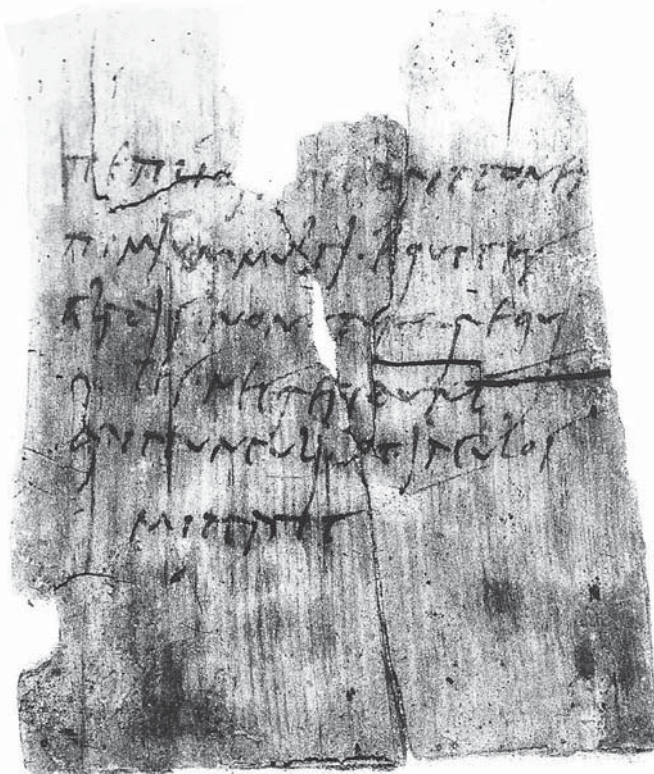
The Celtic individualism described by Diodorus led to a very different type of fighting from the organized battle line of the Romans. In emphasizing fighting on foot, Diodorus has an ally in Tacitus, who held the opinion that the Germans and Caledonians were principally foot soldiers, and that 'their strength lies in their infantry' (Tac., *Agr.* 12.1; cf. *Germ.* 6.2). But one of the writing tablets recovered from the Roman fort of Vindolanda and dated broadly to the period around AD 100 sheds an interesting light on the matter. The tablet in question appears to be the final sheet of a memorandum, setting out information about the native Britons, perhaps on the occasion of a change of command at the fort. The first line is damaged, but the remainder states, in terse military style: 'there are very many cavalry; the cavalry do not use swords, nor do the wretched Britons (*Brittunculi*) mount in order to throw javelins' (AE 1987, 746 = *Tab. Vindol.* 164).

LEFT

Carnyx head from Deskford (near Elgin, Moray). Described as 'a pig's head with movable under-jaw' when it was discovered in the 1860s, it has been recognized as the distinctive boar's head bell of the Celtic war-trumpet known as a carnyx. Modern excavations at the find-spot concluded that the item had been carefully dismantled and buried as a votive deposit, perhaps around the time of Mons Graupius. (© National Museums of Scotland, by kind permission of Dr Fraser Hunter)

RIGHT

Silver cauldron from Gundestrup (Denmark), discovered in a peat bog where it had been carefully dismantled and buried as a votive deposit. Measuring 0.42m (17in.) in height and 0.69m (27in.) in diameter, the cauldron was perhaps used in ritual purification ceremonies. A warband accompanied by carnyx-players can be seen on the interior. (© National Museum of Denmark)



TOP

Writing tablet no. 164 from Vindolanda (AE 1987, 746), thought to be a memorandum describing the nature of the native Britons. The famously patronizing reference to 'little Brits' (*Brittunculi*) occurs on the second bottom line. (© Vindolanda Trust, by kind permission of Prof. A. R. Birley)

BOTTOM

Bronze sword scabbard from Mortonhall (Edinburgh). Craftsmen used two different copper alloys to create the sophisticated decoration on this highly ornate piece, which is thought to date from around the time of the battle of Mons Graupius. Measuring 0.58m (2ft) in length, the matching weapon would perhaps not qualify as one of Tacitus' 'enormous swords'. (© National Museums of Scotland, by kind permission of Dr Fraser Hunter)

Broadly the same picture is painted by the geographer Pomponius Mela, writing during the reign of Claudius, who claimed that the Britons 'fight not only on horseback or on foot but also from two-horse chariots' (*Chor.* 3.6 = 52). As we shall see, the Caledonians certainly fielded horsemen at Mons Graupius in AD 83, but they were no match for the carefully drilled cavalry of the Romans, who quickly routed them.

Our Vindolanda tablet begins mid-sentence, but the damaged line appears to read *nudi sunt Brittones* ('the Britons are naked'). This should not be taken literally, because in a military context *nudus* simply meant 'lacking protection'. Caesar uses a similar description of Gauls whose shields had been rendered cumbersome and unusable because they were pierced by Roman javelins; they discarded the shields, preferring to fight 'with their bodies unprotected'

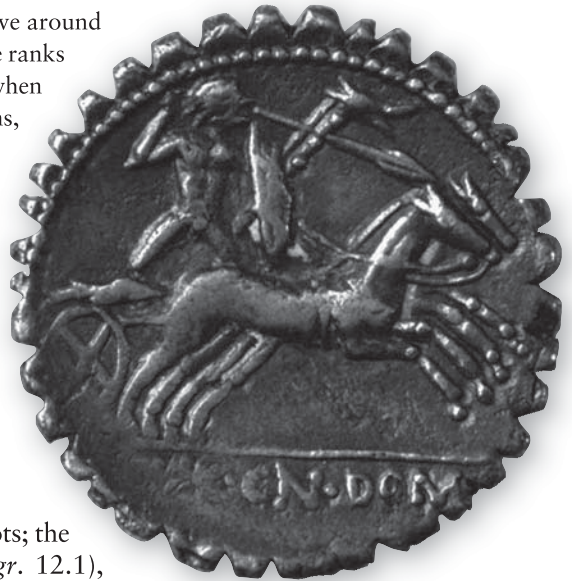
(*BGall.* 1.25: *nudo corpore*). (The Greek version of the same word is used by Diodorus for the unprotected charioteers, quoted above, who wear only a *perizôsis*.)

It is quite likely that the majority of the Caledonian warriors had no armour. Tacitus speaks only of their 'massive swords and short shields' (*Agr.* 36.1). So it is interesting to note the custom, mentioned by several classical authors, whereby 'all the Britons actually stain themselves with woad, which effects a blue colour, and for this reason they appear more horrifying in battle' (Caes., *BGall.* 5.14). There may have been a ritualistic element to this tattooing. Indeed, we may even speculate that the tattoos were seen as magical protection, for woad, like urine, has anti-bacterial properties that must have been useful in dealing with wounds.

The Caledonian tribes also upheld the traditions of chariot warfare, 'just like the old Greek heroes in the Trojan War' (Diod. Sic. 5.21.5). Classical authors were astounded that the Britons still employed such an archaic style of fighting; so much so, that they made a point of mentioning it. 'As regards battles', writes Strabo, 'the Britons mostly make use of chariots, just like the Celts' (*Geog.* 4.5.2). Even Cicero warns one of his correspondents, Gaius Trebatius Testa, to be careful 'that you are not deceived by the charioteers in Britain' (Cic., *Epist. ad fam.* 7.6). And Caesar, too, was so fascinated by the British chariots, that he wrote a lengthy excursus:



This is their method of fighting from chariots. First, they drive around in all directions and throw missiles and cause confusion in the ranks through fear of their horses and the din of their wheels; and when they have worked their way in between the cavalry squadrons, they jump down from the chariots and fight on foot. Meanwhile, the charioteers gradually withdraw from the fighting and position their chariots so that, if they are hard pressed by a host of enemies, they have an escape route to their own side. Thus they provide the mobility of cavalry and the stability of infantry in battle; and by daily practice and training they accomplish so much that, even on the steepest slopes, they can easily continue at full gallop, control and turn swiftly, and run along the beam, stand on the yoke, and from there quickly get back in the chariot. Caesar, *BGall.* 4.33



Tacitus' brief note, that 'certain tribes also fight with chariots; the nobles are the charioteers, their clients the fighters' (*Agr.* 12.1), preserves an interesting detail that is at variance with the descriptions of Diodorus and Caesar (quoted above). It seems that the Caledonian nobility drove the chariots, while their social inferiors acted as warriors. Unfortunately, whether by accident or design, Tacitus (or, at any rate, the text of the *Agricola* that has come down to us) does not describe the precise activities of the chariots at Mons Graupius, besides the fact that they proved disappointing.

TOP

Denarius (silver coin) minted in 118 BC to celebrate the defeat of the Gallic tribes in 121 BC. The coin shows the Celtic motif of the two-horse chariot and, in the background, the carnyx or war-trumpet. (© McMaster University Collection, Hamilton, Ontario. Photo: Katrina Jennifer Bedford. Ref. 1946.001.0008C)



BOTTOM

Chariot burial at Newbridge (Edinburgh) during excavation in 2001. The grave preserves the shape of the vehicle, with the wheels nearest the camera and the yoke pole at the far end; iron terrets and two bridle bits were found. Unusually, the vehicle was not dismantled before burial. Although no body was found, comparable finds from Yorkshire were linked with high-status individuals. Radiocarbon dates obtained from the chariot wheels indicated that the chariot was around 2,400 years old. (© National Museums of Scotland, by kind permission of Dr Fraser Hunter)

TOP

Reconstruction of the Wetwang chariot, excavated in 2001 and found to date from around 300 BC. Unlike the Newbridge burial, the Wetwang chariot had been dismantled and the pieces arranged around the crouched body of its female owner. (© Tony Spence)

BOTTOM

Reconstructions of Iron Age chariots, based on the finds from Wetwang (Yorkshire) in 2001. Each one demonstrates a different method of suspending the floor from the double-arched sides, in order to absorb the shocks that are inevitably generated by driving on solid wheels. These models are of the *essedum* type, and lack the scythed axles of the *covinnus*. (© Tony Spence)



The status of the driver is not the only difference exhibited by the Caledonian chariot. For Caesar uses the word *essedum* to indicate the type of chariot that he encountered amongst the south Britons, and the same word is used by other classical authors, like Cicero, for example (in the letter mentioned above). But, in his report of the battle at Mons Graupius, Tacitus uses the word *covinnus*. This unfamiliar word is explained by Pomponius Mela, who notes that the Britons employed 'chariots armed in the Gallic fashion; they call them *covinni*, on which they use scythed axles' (*Chor.* 3.6 = 52). The singular design of the Caledonian chariots must have caused a sensation at Rome, for even the poet Silius Italicus, in his pro-Flavian epic, managed to include a reference to

it, along with that other British peculiarity, woad tattooing: ‘no differently does the blue-painted native of Thule, when he fights, drive around the dense battle lines in his scythed chariot (*covinnus*)’ (Sil. Ital., *Pun.* 17.418–9). (By the time Silius was writing, his audience were familiar with Thule, the ancient name of the Shetland Islands.) Silius’ contemporary, the poet Martial, even claimed (humorously, no doubt) to have received a *covinnus* as a gift from his friend Aelianus (Mart., *Epig.* 12.24).

Other classical authors periodically mention scythed chariots, dating back to Alexander the Great’s encounters with the Achaemenid Persians. Frontinus, the one-time governor of Britain who wrote a book of military stratagems, believed that Caesar had encountered such vehicles in Gaul (Frontin., *Strat.* 2.3.18), a fact that receives an echo in the poet Lucan’s reference to the *covinni* of the Belgae (Luc., *BCiv.* 1.426). Most interesting is the advice of the late Roman writer Vegetius on ‘How scythed chariots and elephants may be opposed in battle’ (*De re mil.* 3.24). Recalling how these vehicles had been used in the past by Antiochus III of Syria and Mithridates VI of Pontus, he writes that ‘at first, they caused great terror, but after a while they attracted scorn; for it is difficult for a scythed chariot always to find level ground, and it is hindered by the slightest impediment, and is incapacitated if even a single horse is weakened or wounded’. Vegetius contrasts the initial psychological effect with the difficulties inherent in the design and the subsequent failure to perform. Almost the same sequence of events occurred at Mons Graupius, as we shall see.

OPPOSING COMMANDERS AND PLANS



Modern statue of Agricola, erected in his home town of Fréjus (ancient Forum Julii). He is depicted with one hand raised in salute, while the other holds his *mandata*, the instructions given to every provincial governor by the emperor. No ancient likeness of Agricola is known. (Author's collection)

AGRICOLA AND THE ROMANS

When Agricola arrived in Britain, accompanied by his family and probably (as was usual for a provincial governor) by an advisory staff of companions (*amici*), it was already midsummer AD 77. The Roman campaigning season ran from 22 March to 22 September, so the army had been sitting idly for some months. Agricola's predecessor in the governorship, Frontinus, had left the province earlier in the year, probably as soon as the sea lanes opened. Consequently, 'the soldiers turned to relaxation', writes Tacitus, 'as though campaigning had been cancelled' (*Agr.* 18.1).

Agricola will have made his way initially to the provincial capital at London, to meet his official staff (*officium*) and bodyguard (the *pedites* and *equites singulares*) and to liaise with the procurator, an equestrian officer in charge of finances. He surely carried orders (*mandata*) from the emperor Vespasian, whom we can imagine repeating Claudius' instruction to Aulus Plautius to 'conquer the rest' (Dio 60.21). He certainly remained in contact with Rome by sending at least two end-of-season reports and probably more.

Contact with Vespasian was critical. After all, the empire was a military dictatorship, in which the emperor relied on his governors to administer his various provinces for him. Minor areas with only auxiliary garrisons, or with none at all, could be entrusted to men of the equestrian aristocracy, who filled the posts as procurators or prefects, usually after completing the *tres militiae*. But provinces with important military forces were governed by senators. Many, like Britain, contained multiple legions, so they required a senator of some seniority to outrank the legionary legates under his command. Thus, only men who had held the consulship, the supreme magistracy at Rome, were eligible to govern these provinces, where they took the title of *legatus Augusti pro praetore* ('emperor's legate with the powers of a praetor', the usual formula to designate a provincial governor).

Agricola's consulship fell just before his appointment to govern Britain. The consular listings for the AD 70s and 80s, as we know them, have many gaps, and one of them relates to Agricola's term of office. Every year was divided, in theory, into six two-month periods, each to be occupied by two consuls; the year was officially named after the *consules ordinarii*, the 'ordinary' consular pair who held office in January–February. Consequently, and understandably, members of the ruling Flavian dynasty normally reserved the first few months in each year for themselves, sometimes up to April or

P·CORNELIO·P·F· TACITO·CA COS
 XV·VIRO·SACRIS·FACI·VNDIS·VIRO·STLITIBVS·IVDICANDIS·TRIB
 MIL·LEG· QVAESTORI·AVG·TRIBVNO·PLEBIS·PRAETORI



even June. So-called ‘suffect’ consuls filled any subsequent slots, in a sequence that observed the unwritten rules of etiquette that were so important in Roman society. It seems quite likely that Agricola was one of these suffect consuls in AD 76, a year for which our consular listings exhibit several vacant slots.

‘As consul’, writes Tacitus, ‘he betrothed his daughter, a girl of outstanding promise, to me in my youth, and after his consulship he gave her in marriage, and was immediately given command of Britain’ (*Agr.* 9. 6). We know, from the poet Ovid, that it was unpropitious for marriages to take place before 13 June (Ovid, *Fast.* 6.223), and it was perhaps his daughter’s wedding in the summer of AD 77 that delayed Agricola’s journey to Britain. Of course, travel in the ancient world was slow: in 54 BC, a letter from Caesar in Britain took a month to reach Cicero in Rome (Cic., *Epist. ad Att.* 4.18.5). We may also speculate that the entourage of *amici* that accompanied Agricola on his journey north through Gaul included his new son-in-law, serving as military tribune with one of the British legions. Because tribunates were in the gift of the provincial governor, it was fairly common for young men to begin their military career serving with a close relative.

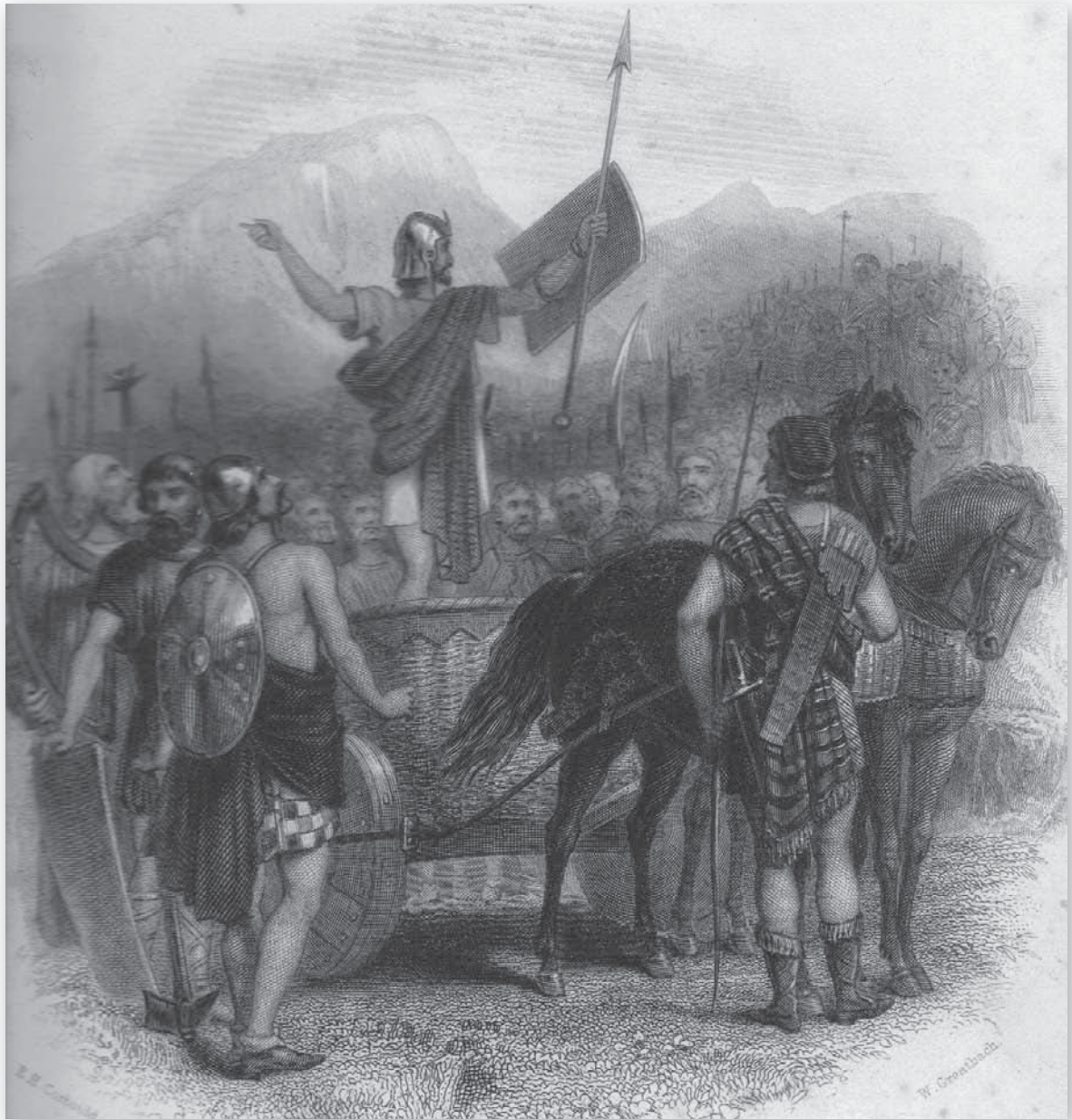
Reconstruction of the first three lines of a fragmentary inscription from Rome (*CIL* 6, 41106), which is thought to be the historian Tacitus’ funerary dedication. Such monuments normally listed the stages of the deceased man’s career, often beginning with the highest office of consul, which Tacitus held in AD 97. Like other senators, Tacitus will have served as quaestor, tribune, praetor, legionary legate and provincial governor, but the details are unknown. (© Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Drawing and interpretation by Géza Alföldy)

CALGACUS AND THE CALEDONIANS

By contrast with Agricola, we know virtually nothing about his Caledonian adversary. It seems that, to oppose the Roman advance, as it enveloped the lowland peoples, the Caledonian tribes had formed a confederacy, which enabled them to field a force of 30,000 individuals. Their leader was Calgacus, a man who was ‘outstanding among the many leaders in courage and lineage’ (Tac., *Agr.* 29.4). The name is thought to mean ‘swordsmen’ (like the Irish *calgach*), and some have suggested that this was a title rather than a personal name. Indeed, some have even doubted that the man ever existed, claiming that he was a literary creation of Tacitus; but of course, the Caledonians must have had a leader.

We have seen that, for Ptolemy, the Caledonians were only one of several peoples inhabiting the north of Scotland. So it is possible that the disparate tribes had been brought together under a single war leader, just as the Gallic tribes threatened by Caesar had rallied to the banner of Vercingetorix in 52 BC. Certainly, in later years, the peoples of the north would come together into the two great groupings of the Maeatae and the Caledones (Cassius Dio 76.12), repeating a phenomenon that can be observed on other Roman frontiers.

It suited Tacitus’ oratorical style to portray Calgacus haranguing his assembled warriors before the battle, so he duly provided a stirring 70-line speech for the chieftain (Tac., *Agr.* 30–32). Other classical writers followed the same tradition of inventing speeches. Although, as Agricola’s biographer,



Imaginary scene, engraved in the 19th century, depicting Calgacus' address to the Caledonians before the battle of Mons Graupius. Many of the details in this kind of antiquarian exercise are typically anachronistic, such as the tartan plaid and the clàrsach. Others, like the wicker chariot, are simply invented. (Author's collection, from *The Pictorial History of Scotland from the Roman Invasion*, 1859)

Tacitus was obliged to deliver factual information about his subject, as a writer in the tradition of Cicero and Sallust, he was equally obliged to produce a work of literature. It is noteworthy that his friend, the younger Pliny, consciously emulated elements from the *Agricola* in his own *Panegyricus* to the Emperor Trajan. So we may well imagine generations of long-suffering Roman grammarians drilling their young charges with repeated recitations of Calgacus' speech.

The speech is clearly not a reliable statement of Caledonian strategy. However, it is interesting as a statement of what a contemporary Roman *thought* that an outsider's observations might be, even though they are wrapped up in the stereotype of the boasting barbarian. It may, indeed, have been Tacitus' own opinion of the Roman Army's behaviour, when he placed

into Calgacus' mouth the following indictment: 'plundering, butchering, raping in the false name of empire (*imperium*), where they have created desolation they call it peace' (*Agr.* 30.4).

'Today', Tacitus imagines Calgacus saying, 'will mark the beginning of freedom for the whole of Britain' (*Agr.* 30.1). The preceding 40 years of Roman occupation had seen other battles fought, but now, at last, the Romans had reached the edge of the world. 'We are the last people on earth and the last to be free', as the historian A. R. Birley renders one of Tacitus' wonderfully concise epigrams (*Agr.* 30.3: *nos terrarum ac libertatis extremos*). He draws a distinction between peoples who, having been conquered, later rise in revolt once they have had time to regret their submission to Rome. 'We will be fighting, vigorous and untamed, for freedom not for regret' (*Agr.* 31.4). Whatever Calgacus actually said on the eve of battle, we can be sure that the Caledonian plan was to defend their homes in the face of Roman imperialism.

THE CAMPAIGN

Although Tacitus is our main source of information, he is not the only ancient author to mention Agricola's campaigns. They briefly feature in the *Roman History* of Cassius Dio, an enormous multi-volume work researched during the reign of Septimius Severus (AD 193–211) and written up during the following decade. Sadly, the section covering the history of the Flavian emperors has not survived, but a Byzantine summary, the *Epitome Dionis Nicaeensis* compiled by the 11th-century monk Johannes Xiphilinus, preserves the highlights.

Oddly, the section mentioning Agricola appears under the year AD 79, just before the description of the famous eruption of Vesuvius in August that year and the great fire of Rome in the following year. It was common during Dio's lifetime for governors to be sent to Britain in response to war and rebellion, so this perhaps coloured his account when he wrote that, 'as war had again broken out in Britain, Gnaeus Julius Agricola overran all the enemy's territory there' (Cass. Dio 66.20.1). In fact, it looks as though he has summarized the entire seven-year governorship in one sentence. And when he continues, 'he was in fact the first of the Romans, that we know of, to discover that Britain is surrounded with water' (ibid.), he refers to an event that seems only to have occurred in Agricola's final year, when his fleet circumnavigated Britain.

Members of the Roman Military Research Society, who re-enact as Batavian auxiliaries, photographed at The Lunt Roman fort, Coventry, in 2008.
(© Adrian Wink)



Roman Britain, AD 77–78



AGRICOLA'S FIRST SEASON (AD 77): SHARING THE DANGER

In the summer of AD 77, not everyone in the province was idly waiting for the new governor to arrive. The tribe of the Ordovices in north Wales had taken advantage of Roman lethargy to launch an attack on a cavalry regiment billeted nearby. The previous governor, Frontinus, had concentrated his efforts against the Welsh tribes, redeploying two legions in the process. But, when Tacitus specifically states that 'he subjugated the strong and warlike people of the Silures' (*Agr.* 17.2), his silence regarding their northern cousins is deafening.

Now, Agricola was faced with a serious problem. According to Tacitus, who (as we have seen) may well have been accompanying his father-in-law, 'not long before his arrival, the community of the Ordovices had almost completely destroyed an *ala* operating in their territory' (*Agr.* 18.1). Such impudence could not go unpunished. Nevertheless, there were those who pointed to the lateness of the season, for it was well into September by now, and they worried that conditions were no longer favourable for military action. Rather, they advocated keeping a watch on the suspects over the winter. But Agricola had other ideas.

Not only did he spring into action, despite the poor weather, but, when the Ordovices withdrew into the hills, he pursued them, 'himself at the head of the column' (*Agr.* 18.2) to share the danger. When Tacitus reports that 'almost the whole tribe was slaughtered' (*Agr.* 18.3), he perhaps saw it with his own eyes. But Agricola was not yet ready to return to winter quarters. He wished finally to stamp out any embers of rebellion that still smouldered on Anglesey, the holy island of the Druids. Tacitus elsewhere explains that it was 'a haven for refugees' (*Ann.* 14.29) and, although its heyday had been the Boudiccan revolt, Agricola had perhaps pursued the remnants of the Ordovices there.

This was not the first time that the Romans had approached Anglesey. Agricola himself may even have been there before, as a young tribune when Suetonius Paullinus attacked the island in AD 60. On that occasion, Paullinus 'built boats with flat bottoms to cope with the precarious shallows; thus the infantry crossed, while the cavalry followed by the shoals or, in deeper waters, by swimming between the horses' (*Tac., Ann.* 14.29). But this time, Agricola could not spare the time for boat-building, and threw his troops across, unencumbered by their packs and equipment.

The spearhead, comprising 'auxiliaries, specially selected from those who knew the shoals and were accustomed by tradition to swim with weapons while controlling their horses' (*Agr.* 18.4), were surely Batavians. Tacitus explains elsewhere that these particular troops hailed from an island in the Rhine delta, which explained their 'peculiar knack of swimming, even crossing the Rhine with weapons and horses, without breaking ranks' (*Hist.* 4.12). In fact, when he claims, earlier in the same passage, that they had 'increased their reputation in Britain', he may be thinking of the four *cohortes Batavorum* (above, p. 19) and their service under Agricola.

The surrender of Anglesey signalled the end of campaigning, and the troops were dispersed to their winter quarters. But, if this short and sudden episode shows us Agricola's vigorous temperament, the aftermath demonstrates another side of his character, for he 'did not exploit his success in vanity, but explained the campaign and the victory as keeping a conquered people down'. To underline the fact, 'he did not even report the affair in laurel-wreathed letters (*laureatae*)' (*Tac., Agr.* 18.6).



One of the lead pipes from the legionary fortress at Chester, stamped with Agricola's name. Three examples of the same inscription are known: *IMP VESP VIII T IMP VII COS CN IVLIO AGRICOLA LEG AVG PR PR* (RIB 2434). (© David Mason)

For the significance of this particular detail, we must turn to the encyclopaedia of Pliny the Elder, where he explains that ‘for the Romans especially, the laurel is a messenger of rejoicing and victory; it accompanies dispatches and decorates soldiers’ spears and javelins and the *fascēs* of generals’ (*Nat. Hist.* 15.133). (The *fascēs* were the symbolic bundle of rods signifying high office.) A pair of inscriptions from Ostia near Rome even record that, on 18 February AD 116, the emperor Trajan sent *laureatae* to the Senate ‘on account of his having been hailed conqueror of Parthia (*Parthicus*)’ (*AE* 1934, 97; 1939, 52). Clearly, Agricola was expected to report back to the emperor on the season’s activities, but modesty prevented him from claiming too much credit.

AGRICOLA’S SECOND SEASON (AD 78): ESTUARIES AND FORESTS

The winter months were spent settling into the new posting. The first order of business for any new provincial governor was to organize his *officium*. A man of Agricola’s seniority had a sizeable clerical staff to handle the day-to-day administration of the province. Something of the Roman Army’s bureaucracy can be glimpsed in the mountain of writing tablets recovered from the Roman fort at Vindolanda. We can safely assume that the documentation generated by the governor’s *officium* would have dwarfed the output from a single fort.

He also had his own domestic staff, as Tacitus reminds us: ‘beginning with himself and his staff, he first checked his own household (*domus*), which for a good many people is hardly less difficult than governing a province’ (*Agr.* 19.2). Tacitus was not exaggerating. The *domus* encompassed not only the immediate family, but also the slaves and freedmen, who could be numerous in a senatorial household; some of them were answerable to his wife, Domitia Decidiana, and will have organized her entertainment while her husband was on campaign.

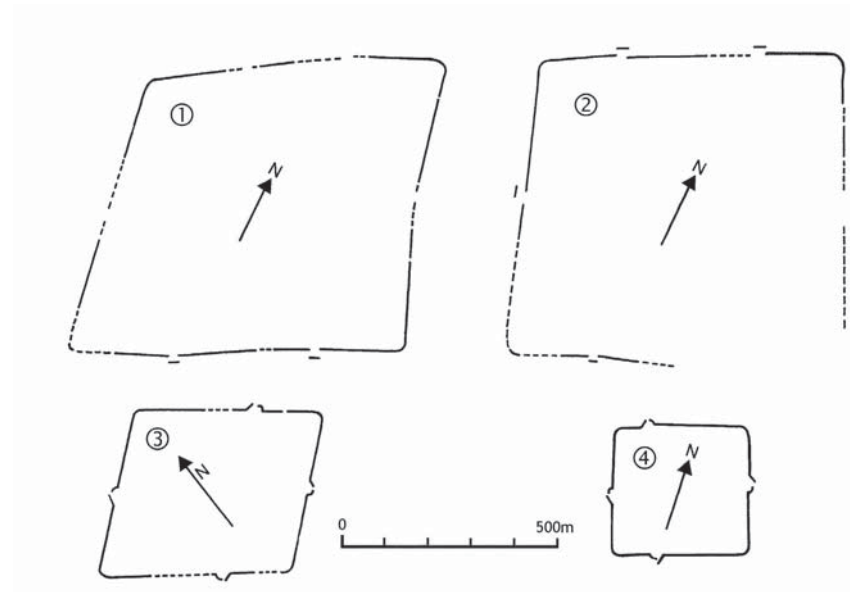
When the campaigning season came around again, Agricola’s first priority was to ensure that the Brigantes of northern England were suitably pacified, before any further advance could be contemplated. Tacitus writes:

When summer came, having assembled the army, he was present everywhere on the march, praising discipline and preventing stragglers; choosing camp sites himself and personally reconnoitring estuaries and forests; and all the while giving the enemy no rest by launching sudden plundering sorties. And when he had sufficiently terrorized them, he showed them the attractions of peace, by using restraint instead. Consequently, many communities (*multae civitates*) that hitherto had conducted themselves as equals now renounced violence and handed over hostages.

Tac., *Agr.* 20.2–3

Some have condemned this passage as a list of clichés, designed to disguise Agricola's lack of progress. Or more of the topoi that writers used to pad out their work, this time aimed at portraying the ideal general. But there is nothing inherently improbable in any of them. In fact, it is quite likely that, having traversed northern England in force, the Romans now made treaty arrangements with the peoples who inhabited the Southern Uplands of Scotland. The 'many communities' that Tacitus mentions, living in a landscape of estuaries and forests, surely lay amongst the Selgovae and Votadini, who probably entered into the same kind of client relationship that had earlier bonded Cartimandua and the Brigantes to Rome.

Tacitus also claims that these communities 'were surrounded by garrisons and forts with such care and attention that never before had a new part of Britain come over so quietly' (*Agr.* 20.3). We have seen that Petillius Cerialis



TOP

Comparative plans of some Roman marching camps.

1. Abernethy; 2. Dunning;
3. Stracathro; 4. Dalginross.

(© Author, after Maxwell)

BOTTOM

A length of rampart and ditch belonging to the north-west side of the Roman marching camp at Dunning, where they have been preserved in Kincladie Wood. (© Alan Leslie)



IMPCAES VESPASIANO AVGP MTR PPPCOS VIII ET TITO CAES
 ARI IMP PONT TRP COS VII ET CAESARI AVGVSTI FILIODOMITI
 ANO BASILICAM ET BALNEVM THERMARVM LEG II ADIVTRIX PF
 SVB GN IVLIO AGRICOLA LEG AVG PR PR PROV BRITANN FECIT

established a permanent fort at Carlisle. But archaeology seldom produces such an accurate foundation date, and other forts throughout the north of England can be assigned only very broadly to the Flavian period on the basis of their pottery and coins.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the Carlisle garrison lay unsupported so far north for very long, and Agricola's second season perhaps involved the organization of a logistically sustainable network of forts running back to the legionary fortresses at Chester and York. Certainly, both of the main routes north, on either side of the Cheviots, are dotted with half a dozen forts located at roughly 50km (30-mile) intervals to secure rearward communications, and it is likely that many of these were occupied at this time. Far from a season of relatively little progress, disguised by a list of topoi, it seems that Agricola was steadily laying the foundations for an invasion of Caledonia.

Imaginative reconstruction of an inscribed fragment found at Chester (*RIB* 463). Dedicatory inscriptions were very formulaic, and the list of titles of each emperor is well known from the general corpus of Roman inscriptions. Using clues from a similar dedication found at Verulamium, which actually names Agricola, this inscription has been restored to reflect the situation in AD 79, when Vespasian was consul for the ninth time and Titus for the seventh. (© David Mason)

AGRICOLA'S THIRD SEASON (AD 79): NEW PEOPLES AS FAR AS THE TAY

Modern writers often criticize Tacitus for his lack of geographical precision. But his readers in Rome were not interested in British geography, and the inclusion of strange place names would have made them none the wiser. Equally, Tacitus was not writing an itinerary. His readers expected not only to be informed, but also to be entertained, and if he occasionally dropped a few exotic names, that helped to sustain interest.

The account of Agricola's third season includes one of those exotic names, for he is depicted 'ravaging the peoples all the way to the *Taus* (the name of an estuary)' (Tac., *Agr.* 22.1). It is virtually certain that Tacitus here refers to the river Tay. Ptolemy, writing in Greek, records an estuary named Tava in the corresponding position (Ptol., *Geog.* 2.3.4: *Taoua eischysis*) and its similarity with the modern name is obvious (though ancient names often bear no relation to their modern counterparts). It would not be too far-fetched to speculate that Tacitus knew this particular place name because he had been there, standing at his father-in-law's side on the banks of the Tay. If he had accompanied Agricola to Britain, this could well have been his last season as legionary tribune before returning to a quaestorship in Rome, which was the next stage in the standard senatorial career.

The 'new peoples' (Tac., *Agr.* 22.1: *novae gentes*) encountered during this season were surely the Dumnonii, whose lands seem to have stretched across the Forth–Clyde isthmus into Stirlingshire and Perthshire. Campaigning in appalling weather, the Roman army sufficiently overawed them, and they perhaps handed over hostages, as their southern neighbours had done.

As we shall see (p. 51), campaigning armies based themselves, not in forts, but in marching camps, which were usually much larger and less formidably defended. Two camps in particular, recorded from the air in the 1970s, have been tentatively linked with Agricola's march to the Tay. The first, near the village of Abernethy (Perthshire) on the south bank of the River Earn, encloses 47ha (116 acres) within its squarish perimeter. Although nothing survives



Silver denarius of Titus, minted in AD 79. Previously, as Vespasian's colleague in power, he had shared each of his imperial acclamations (after his father's sixth). In AD 79, after Vespasian's death, he took his first acclamation independent of his father. This coin shows Titus as *IMP XV* along with his other titlature appropriate to that year. (Author's collection)

above ground, excavations across the south defences happened upon a sherd of Flavian pottery, which is suggestive of Agricolan occupation. Of the second camp, 15km (9 miles) west at Dunning (Perthshire), a 130m (425ft) length of rampart and ditch had long been known, running through the Kincladie Wood, where it had avoided destruction by the surrounding agriculture. It was found to belong to a similarly sized camp to the one at Abernethy, which was again broadly squarish in shape and probably exhibited the same doubled gateways on the north and south sides. (The find of a sherd of 2nd-century pottery from the west *titulus* ditch holds out the possibility of the camp's re-use during the Antonine occupation.) 'There was even time for the construction of forts. Experts commented that no other general selected suitable sites more wisely. No fort (*castellum*) established by Agricola was ever taken by enemy assault or abandoned either by capitulation or by flight. They could make constant sorties, for they were insured against long drawn-out sieges by supplies to last for a year. Thus winter was not feared there, for the garrisons (*praesidia*) were self-sufficient' (Tac., *Agr.* 22.2–3).

During this campaigning season, Agricola will have received word that his benefactor, the Emperor Vespasian, had died. The old man succumbed to illness on 23 June, in his 70th year, struggling to his feet and muttering that 'an emperor ought to die standing up' (Suet., *Div. Vesp.* 24.1). By midsummer, the news will have gone out to the provincial governors that Vespasian's elder son, the 39-year-old Titus, had succeeded to the throne. New *mandata* were perhaps issued. Certainly, we know enough about the new emperor to show that he did not simply slavishly follow Vespasian's policies. Equally, it is noticeable that the governors whom he found in place in key consular provinces, those like Britain, Pannonia and Syria, were retained there throughout his short reign. Nevertheless, it may be that he had other ideas for Britain, because Agricola's forward momentum certainly seems to have stalled.

At roughly the same time, Agricola received a legal assistant in the person of Gaius Salvius Liberalis, who held the new post of *legatus iuridicus* ('judicial legate'). Liberalis is known to have been an outstanding jurist who had been personally commended by the Emperor Vespasian (Suet., *Div. Vesp.* 13). Curiously, Tacitus does not mention him, and it is tempting to suggest that this was deliberate. At around the time when he was writing the *Agricola*, or just after, Tacitus and his friend Pliny successfully prosecuted a case in which Liberalis was the defence lawyer. So the two men perhaps did not see eye to eye.

Liberalis' career inscription (*ILS* 1011) reveals that, after serving as *legatus legionis* of *V Macedonica* in Moesia, he went on to hold the post of *legatus Augustorum iuridicus Britanniae*; the terminology implies service under successive emperors, so it seems that he was assigned by Vespasian and retained by Titus. He is known to have been absent from Rome from AD 78 until 81, so his legionary command can only have been for one year before he proceeded to Britain, on Vespasian's orders. If the old emperor had intended to free Agricola from the civic requirements of a developing province and allow him to concentrate on military tasks, the new emperor perhaps had different ideas.

Cassius Dio's brief account of Agricola's governorship, preserved by Xiphilinus, ends with the words, 'this took place in Britain, and as a result Titus was hailed as *imperator* for the fifteenth time' (Cass. Dio 66.20.3). As we noted above (p. 36), there is clearly some confusion in Xiphilinus' version (which may or may not reflect Dio's original). Nevertheless, Titus is known to have taken his 15th imperatorial acclamation late in AD 79. Did he perhaps assume that Britain was as good as conquered? Certainly, he and his father had not been averse to announcing *Iudaea capta* ('Judaea captured') in AD 71 with a great triumph (Cass. Dio 66.7.2), although the Jewish War was not over until the fall of Masada in AD 74.

AGRICOLA'S FOURTH SEASON (AD 80): SETTING A BOUNDARY

According to Tacitus, 'the fourth summer was spent securing what had been overrun' (*Agr.* 23.1). Whether or not Titus had actually called a halt, it was only sensible to ensure that lowland Scotland was firmly held. The lesson of the Boudiccan revolt was perhaps not lost on Agricola.

Equally, if Titus' plan was ultimately to complete the conquest, it would have been sensible to move the individual army units up within range of Caledonia. They were doing no good sitting in forts amongst the defeated Brigantes. Indeed, it seems that the task had already begun, with the previous season's fort building, and it surely continued into this new season, as Tacitus implies:

If the courage (*virtus*) of the army and the glory (*gloria*) of the Roman name had permitted it, a boundary (*terminus*) could have been set within Britain itself. For the Clyde (*Clota*) and Forth (*Bodotria*), carried far inland by the tides of opposite seas, are separated by a narrow neck of land. This was, moreover, strengthened by garrisons (*praesidia*) and the whole sweep of country on the nearer side was secured, pushing the enemy back, as if into a different island.

Tac., *Agr.* 23

Agricola's army had, by now, encompassed a huge area. Scholars have been quick to assume that the chieftain of the Votadini was treated as a friend of Rome, like the 11 kings who had earlier pledged allegiance to Claudius, or more recently Cartimandua of the Brigantes. But, unlike Claudius, the Flavians had shown themselves to be lukewarm about the concept of client kingship. In the east, Vespasian had incorporated the kingdom of Commagene into the province of Syria when he found that he distrusted the king (Jos., *Bell. Jud.* 7.219). And, although both the Votadini and the Selgovae appear to have handed over hostages in Agricola's second season, both must have had troops billeted upon them, whom they were obliged to feed.

Roman Scotland, AD 79–81



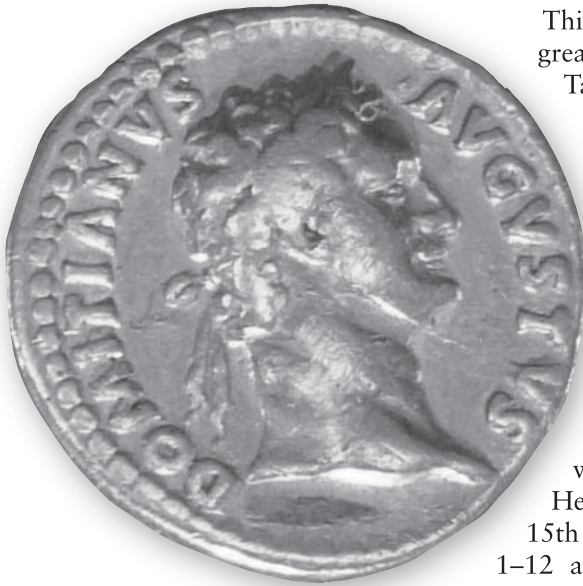
Amongst the ‘towns’ assigned by Ptolemy to the Votadini is ‘Kouria’ (*Geog.* 2.3.7), by which he probably means Corbridge, known to the Romans as Coria. Here, a 10ha (25-acre) supply base was established at Beaufront Red House, some way to the west of the later fort and town. Likewise, one of the ‘towns’ amongst the Selgovae is ‘Trimontion’ (*Geog.* 2.3.6), corresponding to the 4ha (10-acre) fort at Newstead, which the Romans named Trimontium after the triple-peaked Eildon Hills; the fort lay at the centre of a sprawling marshalling ground for armies on the march. The main Roman road north, later known as Dere Street and nowadays followed by the A68, ran through both of these sites.

Other forts were well spaced along this route, and along the parallel route from Carlisle, now followed by the M74, in order to impose the minimum burden on the local economy, for Tacitus mentions that Agricola put an end to the abusive system whereby ‘communities had to deliver supplies not to the nearest forts but to remote and inaccessible places’ (*Agr.* 19.4). Along the western route, the sites of Birrens, Milton (Tassieholm), Crawford and Castledykes are normally linked with Agricola, while in the east, High Rochester, Cappuck and Easter Happlew completed the network. It was to these winter bases that the army retired after the summer’s campaigning.

The ‘garrisons’ that strengthened Agricola’s natural frontier between the Clyde and the Forth have always proved elusive, simply because nobody is very sure of the line that he envisaged for his *terminus*. It is probably too simplistic to suppose that the builders of the Antonine Wall, arriving at the same spot some 60 years later, planted their forts on top of Agricola’s. For one thing, two of the likely candidates, Barochan (Renfrewshire) and Mollins (North Lanarkshire), forts of respectively 1.3ha (3 acres) and 0.4ha (1 acre), lie to the south of the line taken by the Antonine frontier, while a third, the so-called ‘South Camp’ at Camelon (near Falkirk), lies to the north. All three produced evidence of occupation within the Flavian period, and all three can justifiably be described as lying between the Clyde and the Forth. But it is not clear whether Agricola himself would have classified Elginhaugh (Midlothian), for example, as part of his *terminus*. The 1.3ha-fort there, lying to the south of the Forth estuary at the head of Dere Street, is thought to have been constructed in AD 79, which would place it in Agricola’s third season. That season’s fort-building activities may have accounted for other northern forts, as well.

AGRICOLA’S FIFTH SEASON (AD 81): CROSSING INTO TRACKLESS WASTES

Continuing the process of consolidation, Agricola must quickly have realized that, by advancing along Dere Street and distributing his army across the lands of the Votadini and Selgovae, he had entirely bypassed Galloway. This was the territory of the Novantae, amongst whom Ptolemy locates the place name ‘Rerigonion’ (*Geog.* 2.3.5), which is thought, on linguistic grounds, to be the present-day Loch Ryan, near Stranraer. If the Emperor Titus wanted all of lowland Scotland secured, then a foray into Galloway was required. ‘In the fifth year of the campaigns, first crossing into trackless wastes, he subdued peoples up to that time unknown in several successful battles. He drew up his forces in that part of Britain that faces Ireland, more in hope than in fear’ (Tac., *Agr.* 24.1).



Gold aureus of Domitian, minted in AD 88. (Author's collection)

This passage of Tacitus, more than any other, has caused great perplexity, and for a very simple reason. For, although Tacitus' style can often be intractable and his meaning obscure, there is an added complication caused by the physical state of the *Agricola*. In short, there are a few points in the text where the reading is uncertain. To explain this, a short digression on the manuscript tradition is required.

Most of the works that have come down to us from antiquity are preserved in handwritten manuscripts, which were jealously guarded in the monastic scriptoria of medieval Europe. In the case of the *Agricola*, we are reliant on the so-called *Codex Aesinas* (known to scholars as 'E'). This document was created in the 9th century AD by the monks of Hersfeld monastery in Germany, and was repaired in the 15th century by the creation of new pages to cover chapters 1–12 and 41–46, which must have been damaged in the meantime. Prior to the 20th century, scholars knew the *Agricola* only from two inferior 15th-century copies preserved in the Vatican, so the discovery of the original *Codex Aesinas* in 1902 was cause for celebration. But the handwriting is often difficult to decipher; so much so, that the 9th-century copyist even made some of his own suggestions in the margin.

The '*quinto expeditionum annonave prima transgressus*' of the *Codex Aesinas* (folio 59 recto) has often been suggested as a corrupt passage, where repeated miscopying has obscured the original meaning. At first sight, it means 'In the fifth year of the campaigns, crossing in the first ship...', but scholars balked at the word order, pointing out that 'in the first ship' should be *prima nave*, not *nave prima*. And, in any case, where was Agricola going by ship? Down through the years, a variety of alternative readings has been proposed, none of which was entirely satisfactory. None, that is, until the recent suggestion of the archaeologist Gordon Maxwell, who suggested that Tacitus originally wrote *in avia primum transgressus*, 'first crossing into trackless wastes'. This would aptly describe an initial reconnaissance of the Galloway Peninsula.

The same passage is also well known for its mention of Ireland, and the fact that 'Agricola had received one of the minor kings (*reguli*) of this people who had been expelled in a family quarrel' (Tac., *Agr.* 24.3). We have seen that the emperors Augustus, Gaius and Claudius had received similar princes from Britain and elsewhere, and cultivated them in case their knowledge and contacts could be exploited. So it is entirely plausible that, on the Roman army's appearance in the lands of the Novantae, a disaffected Irish prince took the opportunity to present himself to the Roman governor.

Agricola's army must have returned to winter quarters by the time the news arrived of Titus' death on 13 September. Agricola himself was perhaps based at Carlisle. One of the writing tablets discovered there was addressed to an unnamed 'trooper of the *ala Sebosiana*, *singularis* of Agricola' (AE 1998, 852 = *Tab. Luguval.* 44). The members of the governor's horse guard (*equites singulares*) were drawn from the auxiliary *alae* under his command, so the rest of the *ala Sebosiana* may have been wintering elsewhere; though probably not at Corbridge, where an early tombstone (RIB 1172), now in Hexham Abbey, signals the presence of the *ala Petriana*.



Aerial view of the Roman fort at Ardoch, near Braco (Perth). This fine upstanding monument is one of the best-preserved forts in the Roman Empire. The visible remains date from the Antonine period, when the original Flavian fort was remodelled and extra ditches added. (© David Woolliscroft)

The new emperor's instructions were clearly to finish the job, for the one thing that Domitian lacked was military glory. Unlike his father and elder brother, he had never set foot in a military camp. His elevation to the throne, a month before his 30th birthday, allowed him to take his first imperial acclamation. He had a long way to go, before he would match the 17 taken by his brother, but subsequent events along the Rhine and Danube would give him ample scope. More immediately, his desire for glory was incompatible with the *terminus* imposed by Titus in Britain. It seems that it was not 'the glory of the Roman name' (Tac., *Agr.* 23) that baulked at an incomplete conquest, but Domitian (whose hated name Tacitus mostly avoids mentioning).

AGRICOLA'S SIXTH SEASON (AD 82): A WAR BY LAND AND SEA

'During the summer in which he began his sixth year of office', writes Tacitus, 'he enveloped the communities located beyond the Forth (*Bodotria*)'. Of course, in his third season (AD 79), Agricola had penetrated as far as the Tay (*Taus*), and had perhaps received hostages from the Dumnonii. So it was probably the Dumnonian communities of Stirlingshire and Perthshire that were now 'enveloped' or surrounded by forts in preparation for the final push into Caledonia. If this is the case, the series of forts along the road running north from Camelon, at Doune, Ardoch, Strageath and Bertha on the banks of the Tay, should date from this year. Situated at the limits of Dumnonian lands, these forts were well placed to draw supplies from the rich hinterland of Fife. 'Because an uprising was feared amongst all the peoples living beyond [the Dumnonii] and communications might be threatened by an enemy army, he reconnoitred the harbours with the fleet (*classis*), which had been deployed by Agricola for the first time as part of his forces, and was making a splendid impression in support, since the war was being pushed forwards simultaneously by land and by sea' (Tac., *Agr.* 25.1).

West defences of the Roman fort at Ardoch, looking north and showing the excellent state of preservation of the remains. (© Alan Leslie)



Tacitus goes on to describe how ‘infantry, cavalry and seamen often mingled in the same camp, sharing supplies and banter’ (*Agr.* 25.1). The early history of the *classis Britannica* (‘British fleet’) remains shadowy, but this was perhaps its first real taste of action. Agricola must have realized its value in maintaining contact with his northernmost garrison, at Bertha on the river Tay, even if the land route was impassable. Having sailed this far, it is unthinkable that the fleet would not have taken the opportunity to continue their exploration northwards, past Montrose, Stonehaven and Aberdeen.

Tacitus later imagines Calgacus lamenting that ‘There is no land beyond us, and even the sea is no safe refuge when we are threatened by the Roman fleet’ (*Agr.* 30.1). He was quite right, that the land of Caledonia stretched to the end of the island. ‘There is no people beyond us, nothing but tides and rocks’ (*Agr.* 33.1), as the Roman fleet was to discover so spectacularly in the following season.

It is quite understandable that ‘the Britons, as was learned from prisoners, were dumbstruck by the sight of the fleet, for it was as if, now that the secret places beside their own sea had been opened up, the last refuge for the vanquished was closed’ (*Agr.* 25.2). The small 3.2ha (8-acre) temporary camp at Dun, on the north coast of the Montrose basin, may have figured in these operations. The fragment of Flavian pottery found in the ditch would support the general dating, while the surrounding complex of circular houses, some 10–15m (33–50ft) in diameter, suggests contemporary Caledonian habitation. It seems that the Roman warships had struck a psychological blow here, by delivering troops to a hitherto inaccessible location, one of the ‘secret places beside the sea’.

Finally, the peoples of Caledonia realized that there was no safe haven to rely upon, no secure refuge, so they finally went to war. ‘The peoples who inhabit Caledonia’, writes Tacitus, ‘resorted to warbands and weapons, with great preparations, exaggerated by rumour, as is usual when the facts are unknown’ (*Agr.* 25.3). Their opening gambit was to attack the northernmost forts, which prompted faint hearts on Agricola’s staff to recommend an evacuation back to the Forth Estuary.

But, at this point, Agricola’s scouts reported an imminent attack by several warbands. Tacitus explains that, ‘so that he would not be outflanked by superior numbers who were familiar with the country, he himself divided his army into three groups and advanced’ (*Agr.* 25.4). Such a tripartite division

is a curious strategy, perhaps even risky in the face of uncertain enemy numbers; in the event, Agricola's forces almost came to grief.

When the enemy found this out, in a sudden change of plan, they advanced together by night against the Ninth Legion, since it was especially weakened. Slaughtering the sentries, they burst in amongst the sleeping and the alarmed. There was already fighting inside the camp when Agricola, who had been informed of the enemy's movement by his scouts and was following in their tracks, ordered the swiftest of his cavalry and infantry to attack the rear of the combatants, and presently to raise the battle cry from the whole army.
Tac., *Agr.* 26.1

Caught between two armies, the Caledonian warband fought their way back out of the camp, despite the crush in the gateway, and fled into the night. The Romans, for their part, were anxious to come to grips with their adversaries. 'They clamoured to drive on into Caledonia', writes Tacitus, 'and, in an incessant round of battles, finally to reach the furthest limit of Britain' (*Agr.* 27.1). They perhaps sensed the hand of history on their shoulders, with the fabled edge of the world almost within reach.

DOMITIAN'S CHATTAN WAR: A CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

While Agricola's army were keenly anticipating warfare in Caledonia, other events were afoot elsewhere in the empire. One of these in particular was destined to exert a critical influence on the conquest of Britain, although Tacitus only hints at the facts.

In composing the *Agricola*, Tacitus was not writing a straightforward history, but rather a celebration of his father-in-law's life. It is fortunate that he chose to illustrate that life with glimpses of current events, although his brevity of expression, often for rhetorical effect, can be frustrating. One example of this is the remark that the *VIII Hispana* was 'especially weakened' (Tac., *Agr.* 26.1: *maxima invalida*), which has been taken to mean that, of all the legions, this one was particularly under-strength. But Tacitus gives no explanation.

The curious Debelec diploma (*ILS* 1995), issued to time-served auxiliary veterans of the Rhine army on 20 September AD 82, shows that the governor of Upper Germany, Quintus Corellius Rufus, was discharging men from three Moesian regiments alongside the regiments from his own province. The implication is surely that they were on temporary transfer at the time. The reason must have been Domitian's war against the Chatti, belittled by Cassius Dio (or his epitomator, Xiphilinus) as 'plundering some of the tribes across the Rhine' (Cass. Dio 67.3.5). At any rate, it seems that troops were being assembled during AD 82 for the following year's campaign in Germany, even from far-off provinces.

Britain was not exempt from this, despite Agricola's ongoing campaigns. For the tombstone of a certain Lucius Roscius Aelianus shows that he had been 'military tribune of the *VIII Hispana* and of its detached troops in the German expedition' (*tribunus militum legionis IX Hispanae vexillariorum eiusdem in expeditione Germanica*: *ILS* 1025). It is tempting to suggest that this was the reason for *VIII Hispana*'s numerical weakness during the Caledonians' night attack in AD 82.

BELOW LEFT

Aerial view of the Roman marching camp at Raedykes (near Stonehaven), looking south. The camp occupies the fields and moorland on the right of the photo. Its east rampart can be picked out where it runs along the west side of the wall extending from Broomhill Cottage. A large clump of trees marks the camp's north corner. (© David Woolliscroft)

BELOW RIGHT

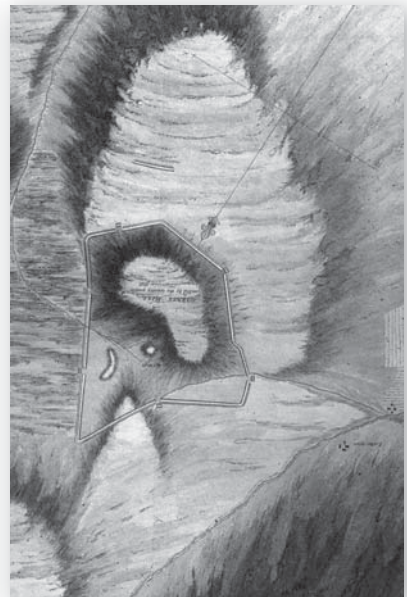
Plan of Raedykes Roman camp (inverted to show south at the top) from General William Roy's *Military Antiquities of the Romans in North Britain*, completed in 1773 and posthumously published in 1793. The camp is not mentioned in the text, which prompted the eminent Scottish archaeologist Sir George MacDonald to suggest that Roy may have drawn the plan himself in the 1780s, as a late addition to the book. (Author's collection)

Nor is it certain why Agricola divided his army into three groups. It would have been logical to place a legion at the core of each group, so it has been suggested that only three of the four British legions were on campaign. If this is the case, the fourth legion might have been dispersed to complete the task of fort building, for it is true that legionary craftsmen usually bore the brunt of any construction work. Unfortunately, Tacitus once again gives us a tantalizing glimpse, without providing the details that we would like.

THE MUTINY OF THE RECRUITS: A BOLD AND REMARKABLE CRIME

Tacitus relates another curious event during this season, which can have served only as an unwelcome distraction for Agricola. It seems that a regiment raised from the Usipi of Germany decided to mutiny, killing a centurion and the instructors who had been seconded for their basic training. 'They embarked on three small warships (*liburnicae*) dragging the helmsmen along by force', writes Tacitus (*Agr.* 28.1), and follows up with some lurid details of their clumsy voyage, before concluding with the remark that 'in this way, they sailed around Britain' (*Agr.* 28.3).

The tale of this 'bold and remarkable crime' (Tac., *Agr.* 28.1) became so famous that Cassius Dio incorporated it into his *Roman History*, from where it was excerpted by Xiphilinus, in the mistaken belief that it was only on account of their voyage that Britain was found to be an island. However, as we shall see, Agricola himself arranged for a seaborne reconnaissance to complete his governorship. Dio's version also illustrates how minor details can become corrupted by transmission, for he records that 'they killed their centurions and a tribune' (66.20.2). However, it was unnecessary for Dio to invent a tribune as their commanding officer, for it is quite likely that a unit in training could be entrusted to a legionary centurion. Such officers are frequently found in positions of authority, where they describe themselves as *curam agens* ('acting in charge'), or as the *praepositus* (literally 'one placed in command') of a unit, while retaining their rank as centurion.



The tale also illustrates an interesting feature of conscription into the Roman Army. For, as well as drawing upon provinces with a large pool of available manpower, like Spain, Gaul and Thrace, auxiliary units were deliberately recruited from Rome's more warlike neighbours. The Usipi (also called the Usipetes elsewhere) should have been an ideal choice. Their lands lay in Germany along the river Lahn, which flows into the Rhine near Koblenz. During the events of AD 69, when German warbands crossed over to join the Batavian revolt and attacked the fortress at Mainz, the Usipi were drawn along by their larger, more unruly eastern neighbours, the Chatti (Tac., *Hist.* 4.37). Afterwards, the fighting men of other tribes in the general area, the Baetasii, Cugerni and Frisiavones, for example, were formed into individual cohorts and transferred far from their homelands. We would have expected the Usipi to be treated likewise. The only surprise is that their conscription was delayed so long – by almost a generation, in fact.

MARCHING CAMPS: LIKE TOWNS PRODUCED IN A MOMENT

It is clear that, by March AD 82, as Agricola embarked on his sixth season, a few forts had been established as far north as the Tay estuary, to provide some of the troops with winter quarters. Agricola himself was perhaps based at Carlisle, if not further back in the fortress at York, but the bulk of his army occupied the forts of the Central Lowlands and Southern Uplands. These forts were intended to provide tolerable winter accommodation in timber buildings, and their turf and timber ramparts could be guaranteed to stand safe and sound all year round, maintained by only the smallest of caretaker garrisons, who were, themselves, secure behind sturdy timber gates. However, the onset of the campaigning season meant that troops were on the march for months on end; and as they moved around in search of their enemy, they required only makeshift accommodation.

Decades of aerial reconnaissance, photographing the unspoilt farmlands of Perthshire, Angus, Aberdeenshire and Moray, have revealed the telltale rectilinear traces of Roman marching camps by the dozen. Unlike the permanent forts, these were temporary enclosures, intended to marshal the troops under canvas or, strictly speaking, 'under leather' (*sub pellibus*: Caes., *BCiv.* 3.13), the true fabric of Roman tents. Even the officers lived in tents, but larger and more elaborate as befitted their elevated rank and status, with the commander occupying the largest, situated in the centre. The marching camp was no doubt primarily designed to preserve a degree of organization within a campaigning army, by providing familiar surroundings in an often-unfamiliar landscape, but it has been observed that its closely guarded boundaries also made clandestine desertion difficult.

Usually, the defences consisted only of a shallow perimeter ditch, from which the spoil was thrown up to form an earthen rampart; a palisade may have been planted on top. Gaps were left for the gateways, normally one in each side, although longer lengths of rampart might have two. These were covered, not by timber gates, but by an extra length of rampart and ditch, which either curved outwards in a semicircular extension of the camp rampart, or sat, detached, some way in front of the gap. The soldiers referred to the first of these as a *clavicula*, or 'little key', probably from its resemblance to the rather clumsy curved keys of the ancient world. In addition, the thought of securing a camp entrance with a 'little key' no doubt appealed to



The type of field oven discovered in Kintore marching camp, reconstructed at the Archaeolink Prehistory Park, near Inverurie. First, a pit is dug into the ground shaped as a figure-of-eight, of which one side is stone-lined for cooking; the soldier crouches in the other side, while tending the oven. This can be seen in the second view, showing a legionary re-enactor using the oven. (© Archaeolink Trust, by kind permission of Donald Fraser)

soldiers' humour. The second type of gate defence was known as a *titulus*, perhaps implying that it resembled a placard (the usual meaning of the word) lying on the ground; but, again, the name also satisfied soldiers' slang by naming the feature as a 'little Titus'.

An observer of the Roman army in action some years earlier, during Rome's Jewish War (AD 66–74), claimed that 'it is as if a town is produced in a moment' (Jos., *Bell. Jud.* 3.83). This observer, the historian Josephus, described how the ground was levelled, the perimeter marked out, the interior divided into tent lines, and the rampart thrown up, 'quicker than thought, thanks to the great number and skill of the workers' (Jos., *Bell. Jud.* 3.84). In the course of his brief description, he adds that 'they also create four gates, one facing each direction on the perimeter, convenient for draught animals to enter and wide enough for sorties in emergencies' (Jos., *Bell. Jud.* 3.81).

While broadly conforming to Josephus' description, no two marching camps in Scotland are exactly alike, and degrees of variation exist. For example, the 38ha (94-acre) camp at Raedykes in Aberdeenshire (which is clearly the Roman Army's handiwork despite the desire of 18th-century antiquarians to see it as Calgacus' stronghold) is broadly rectangular, but skewed in such a way that the north rampart has a pronounced re-entrant, centred on the north gate, and the west side gradually wanders eastwards, so that the south side is considerably shorter than the north. And, rather than the four gates of Josephus' account, Raedykes has six, with two on each of the long sides; but each one would be quite convenient for wagons, at around 15m (50ft) wide and protected by a *titulus* situated some 11m (36ft) outside. Indeed, a complete wheel was recovered from the camp during 19th-century investigations, but has since decayed from lack of conservation.

Roman Scotland, AD 82–83



The regular placement of the gateways, with each pair directly facing one another, served to define two main thoroughfares through the camp (or three, where there are six gates), so that each camp had a main longitudinal pathway (known to the Roman surveyors as the *via praetoria*) and one or two lateral pathways (the main one of which, running past the commander's tent, was known as the *via principalis*). These roadways formed the basis of a notional grid for the pitching of the soldiers' tent lines. 'Having entrenched themselves, they encamp in companies, in a quiet and orderly manner. They manage all their other affairs with discipline and security, obtaining wood and provisions, as needed, and water for each company. For nobody has supper or breakfast simply when they wish, but all together, and trumpets announce the times for sleeping, guard duty, and awakening, for nothing is done without such a signal' (Jos., *Bell. Jud.* 3.85–86).

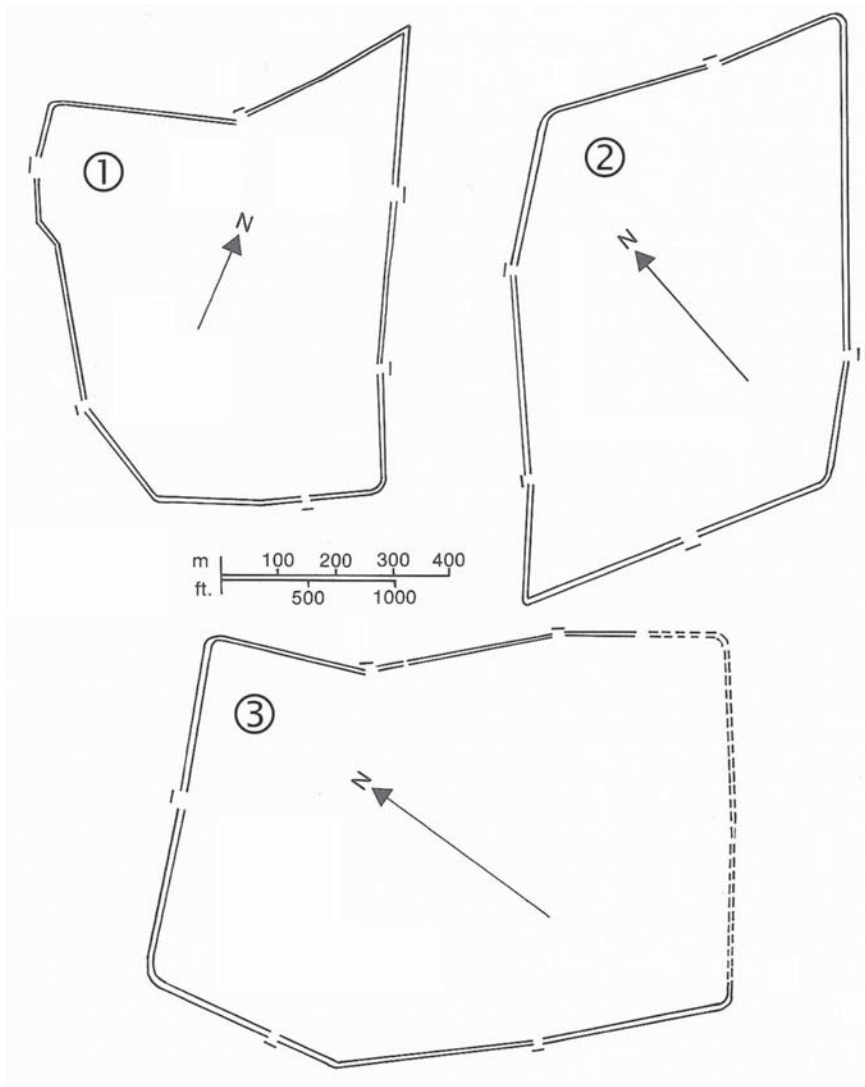
Traditionally, archaeologists have concentrated their limited budgets on examining the defences and the gateways of marching camps, as the most obvious features visible on aerial photographs. The interior space was usually ignored, on the grounds that, most probably, it would be archaeologically sterile, since it had contained only tents. The occasional observation of lines of rubbish pits, notably inside the camps at Glenlochar, Dalginross and Stracathro, was dismissed as an aberration, without exploring the possibility that temporary accommodation could mean days or weeks, rather than the assumed overnight stop.

However, in 2000, when part of the camp at Kintore (near Inverurie, Aberdeenshire) was threatened with destruction by road building, much more solid evidence came to light. Besides general-purpose pits, thought to have been used as latrines, archaeologists unearthed over 120 stone-lined field ovens. It is not yet clear how the ovens were arranged in relation to the soldiers' tent lines, but their existence indicates that marching camps were rather more sophisticated than many have believed up until now.

AGRICOLA'S LINE OF MARCH: PASSING FORESTS, CROSSING ESTUARIES

Marching camps of various sizes have been identified as far north as Bellie (near Elgin, Moray) on the flood plain of the river Spey. Over the years, archaeologists have tried to make sense of them by assigning individual camps to different historical periods. This task has become synonymous with the name of the late Professor Kenneth St Joseph, one of the pioneers of aerial reconnaissance, who, between 1950 and his retirement in 1980, proposed various groupings of camps.

Although these were chiefly based on an analysis of surface area, with a nod to morphology, one of St Joseph's groupings is based on neither of these, but rather on the design of the gate defences. For the so-called 'Stracathro' gateway, combining both an internal and an external *clavicula* with an added oblique spur designed to further narrow the entrance on the outside, occurs in only around a dozen camps, all of them located in Scotland. Although examples at Beattock, Dalswinton and Castledykes are broadly similar in size, and their geographical distribution is contained within the south-west, yet the diversity of the rest of these Stracathro-type camps argues against a single coherent grouping. Nevertheless, its relationship to known Flavian forts at the type-site of Stracathro, and also at Dalginross, where it was actually observed as an upstanding monument by William Roy, demonstrate the likely dating of this type of camp to the period around Agricola's governorship.



Comparative plans of some Roman marching camps.
1. Raedykes; 2. Ythan Wells;
3. Durno. (© Author, after Maxwell)

Of the other groupings proposed by St Joseph, the most robust is the series of so-called '110-acre camps' at Raedykes, Normandykes, Kintore, Ythan Wells and Muiryfold. The line thus runs in a roughly north-westerly direction, from the Mounth, where the Grampian mountains come down almost to the sea, and skirts the Highland massif to arrive in the vicinity of the town of Keith. The five large camps, arranged at roughly 20km (12-mile) intervals, average 44.5ha (110 acres); although Raedykes is a poor fit at only 38ha (94 acres), the eccentricities of its layout perhaps account for its reduced size. No real dating evidence has yet come to light, but the big camp at Ythan Wells appears to overlie a 'Stracathro-type' camp there.

St Joseph noted that the extra long 25km (16-mile) interval between Kintore and Ythan Wells could be bisected, by taking a slight westward detour to Durno. Here, a 58ha (143-acre) camp, laid out as a slightly twisted rectangle, was first noticed in 1975. Like other camps in the '110-acre' series, and incidentally complying with standard Roman practice (e.g. Hyg., *De mun. castr.* 57), it lies near a watercourse, in this case the little river Urie, which flows past the long west rampart, about 200m (650ft) away. And like

others in the series, it has six *titulus*-guarded gates. It was immediately noted that this largest camp north of the Forth–Clyde isthmus clearly ought to betoken special circumstances, further emphasized by its proximity to the distinctive mountain of Bennachie, and it has become almost universally accepted as the Roman mustering point for the battle of Mons Graupius.

THE BATTLE

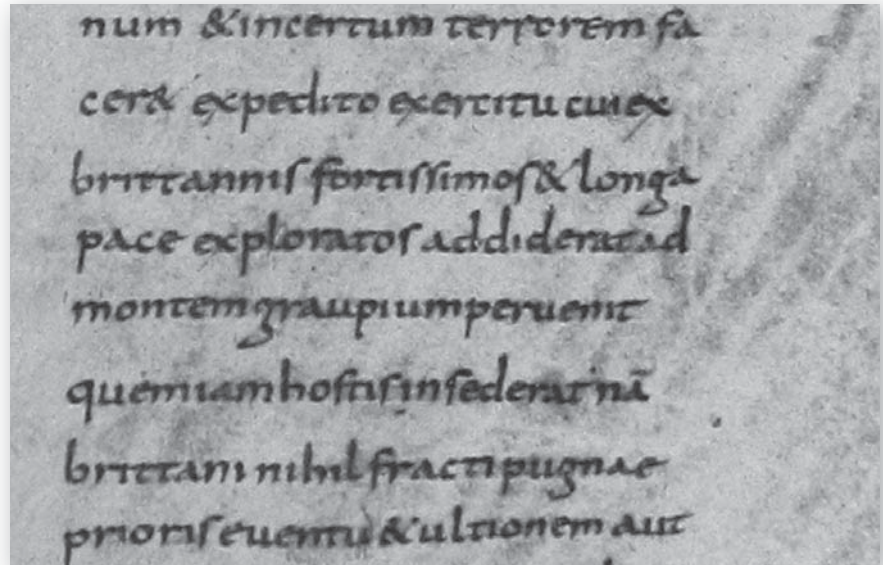
Tacitus preserves no hint of the events in Britain through the winter of AD 82, but we can be sure that construction and maintenance continued apace. The garrisons strung out along the Strathmore road at Ardoch, Strageath and Bertha will have been especially keen to keep their defences in good condition. Work may even have been continuing on the legionary fortress at Deva. That water pipes were being laid in AD 79, ‘during the ninth consulship of the Emperor Vespasian and the seventh of Titus, while Gnaeus Julius Agricola was the emperor’s *propraetorian* legate’, is demonstrated by the official stamp that appears on the lead pipes themselves (*AE* 1975, 554; *ILS* 8704a; *RIB* 2434). It is quite likely that work was continuing intermittently there, while the troops were not on campaign.

In the meantime, Agricola’s wife, Domitia Decidiana, had given birth to another son earlier in the year. Their first son had died shortly after the birth of their daughter, Tacitus’ wife, in AD 63–64, and the couple now lost this second son, early in the new year. Infant mortality in the ancient world was notoriously high. Perhaps for this reason, the Emperor Augustus had



View across the battlefield, looking south-west along the curving north face of Bennachie, like the tiers of an amphitheatre. The mountain’s distinctive profile can be recognized from miles around. (Author’s collection)

Extract from the *Codex Aesinas*, folio 60 recto (right hand column), where Tacitus first mentions Mons Graupius: 'he came to Mons Graupius, which the enemy already occupied' (*ad montem graupium pervenit quem iam hostis insederat*). (Author's collection)



legislated to grant certain privileges to those with children. His *ius liberorum* ('law concerning children') laid down, amongst other things, that the age limit for each stage of the senatorial career would be reduced by one year for each child. So Agricola had reached the praetorship in AD 68, two years earlier than the stipulated 30th birthday, because his wife had borne two children. Of course, it was important for a senator to have a son to carry on the family name, as well as a daughter to forge alliances with other families, so the premature death of another boy will have been particularly distressing.

Meanwhile, the Caledonians must finally have realized that battle was inevitable, for they began to assemble a host from their divided communities. 'They had at last learned', writes Tacitus, 'that a common danger must be repulsed by a common effort' (*Agr.* 29.3). So, sending out embassies far and wide, alliances were invoked or renewed, and the tribes of Caledonia gathered in strength. No doubt, warbands assembled from the various peoples listed by Ptolemy in his *Geography*. Some of these, the Venicones of Angus, the Taexali of Aberdeenshire, and even the Vacomagi of Moray, will have seen the Roman forces at first hand. Agricola may, in his sixth season, have marched as far north as Fochabers, where archaeology has revealed the likely site of a marching camp at Bellie. His fleet had almost certainly reconnoitred as far as the Moray Firth. But other peoples from more far-flung parts of Caledonia, the Cornavii of Caithness, for example, or the Creones of Lochaber, may have needed coaxing, cajoling even threatening, before they would mobilize for war.

In the end, Tacitus claims that more than 30,000 warriors, young and old, heeded the call, although the magnitude of the number has been doubted. The warriors were 'illustrious in battle and each wearing his decorations' (*Agr.* 29.4); if these are not the painted designs and tattoos favoured by the Celtic peoples, they may be the massive bronze armlets, collars and torcs which archaeologists periodically find on sites of the Scottish Iron Age. Writing over 200 years earlier, the Greek historian Polybius had been impressed by the Celtic warriors, 'richly adorned with golden torcs and armlets' (*Plb.* 2.29.8); on that occasion, it was the Gallic tribes at the battle of Telamon in 225 BC. The Caledonians at Mons Graupius must have presented a similar sight.

It is clear from Tacitus' account that the Caledonians selected the battlefield. Their choice of site was no doubt dictated by three considerations. First, in assembling a host from all over Caledonia, a reasonably central point was required, one which the more far-flung communities would still have a chance of reaching on time. Second, the hosting place had to be topographically distinctive, so that strangers could find it without difficulty. And third, as a proportion of the Caledonian fighting strength consisted of chariots, the battlefield required a reasonably flat plain. Mons Graupius must have satisfied all three of these factors, and, as we shall see, the site of Bennachie is an admirable fit.

THE LONG MARCH

On the morning of the battle, Tacitus represents his father-in-law sympathizing with the troops, saying 'Many a time on the march, when marshes or mountains and rivers were tiring you out, I have heard the bravest of you exclaim, "When will we get at the enemy? When shall we have a battle?"' (Tac., *Agr.* 33.4). Even if skirmishing might have occurred during this final season, the army will have been keen to exact revenge for the Caledonians' night attack on the *VIII Hispana*. They wanted a full-scale battle to underline the conquest of Caledonia.

We have seen that the general line of Agricola's march was largely dictated by the topography, for the route north, from Camelon on the Forth–Clyde isthmus to the river Tay at Perth, is constrained by the presence of the Highland front, and is still followed to this day by the A9 highway. But, while the modern highway heads off through the Grampian Mountains towards Inverness, the evidence of Roman marching camps confirms what logic would suggest, that Agricola's army took the more coastal route, where they could maintain contact with the fleet. The camp at Raedykes is particularly relevant, lying only 5km (3 miles) inland from Stonehaven Bay. 'He sent the fleet ahead to spread great panic and uncertainty by plundering at various points; and with the army, marching without baggage and reinforced by the bravest of the Britons, picked out in a long period of peace, he came to Mons Graupius, which the enemy already occupied' (Tac., *Agr.* 29.2).

Arriving finally at the fateful battlefield, Agricola comments on the long months of campaigning. 'While we were advancing', Tacitus represents him saying, 'it is noble and splendid to have accomplished such a long march, bypassing forests and crossing estuaries' (*Agr.* 33.5). But if the battle should go badly, he warns his men, there would be a long and perilous trek back. Apart from the obvious danger of leaving an undefeated foe in the rear, the lateness of the season would complicate matters, because Tacitus tells us, in the aftermath of the battle, that 'the summer was already over' (*Agr.* 38.2).

Agricola's army was 'marching without a baggage train' (*expeditus*). If he wished to maintain maximum flexibility and speed, he had perhaps ordered the wagons to follow on, under separate guard. Usually, Roman armies on the march followed more or less the same form. A brief description was recorded by the Greek writer Onasander, in a work entitled *The General (Strategikos)*, dedicated to Quintus Veranius, one-time legate of Britain, perhaps on the occasion of his taking up the governorship in AD 57. He recommended that an army should advance 'prepared at the same time for marching and for battle' (*Strat.* 6.1). This is perhaps his version of *expeditus*.







AGRICOLA'S ARMY IS DRAWN UP IN THE FACE OF THE CALEDONIAN HOST, WHICH HAS TAKEN UP POSITION ON MONS GRAUPIUS (pp. 60–61)

Late in the campaigning season of AD 83, Agricola's army finally confronted the massed Caledonian forces. The historian Tacitus claims that more than 30,000 warriors, young and old, gathered on the slopes of Mons Graupius for the climactic battle with the Roman invaders. Whereas the Caledonians probably assembled in their individual warbands, Roman discipline obliged Agricola's men to draw up in rank and file: 8,000 auxiliary infantry formed the core of his formation **(1)**, supported by 3,000 cavalry, spread out on the flanks **(2)**.

The Caledonian host, mostly infantry warriors, were drawn up on the lower slopes of the mountain **(3)** with small groups of horsemen, while their chariot-borne chieftains careered back and forth across the plain. Their purpose was evidently to intimidate the Romans and shake their resolve, while indulging in an ostentatious display of skill and force. Now, the front ranks of the Romans caught perhaps their first sight of the Caledonian chariots (*covinni*) with their scythed wheels, as they rattled and rumbled past **(4)**.

The customary silence of the Roman ranks must have contrasted eerily with this din, amplified by the Caledonian horde, where individuals were shouting their war cries or blasting out tunes on the distinctive *carnyx* war-trumpets

At this stage, Agricola ordered his men to adopt a wider formation by opening out the ranks. Tacitus believed that the reason for this manoeuvre was the need to match the wide frontage of the Caledonians. However, the deployment of an open order formation may have been Agricola's intention from the start, along with his choice of auxiliaries in preference to the classic dense shield-wall of the legions. The flexibility of the auxiliaries as individual fighters must have seemed ideal in combating the threat posed by the Caledonian chariots, and Agricola may have envisaged a scenario not unlike Alexander the Great's battle of Gaugamela, where similar scythed chariots had been drawn into the front ranks, surrounded and overpowered there.

Onasander is quite clear that the good general should send cavalry scouts ahead of the main force to reconnoitre. But, beyond that, he simply notes that ‘a marching formation that is compact and rectangular and not too long is easily manageable and safe’ (*Strat.* 6.5). He further recommends placing the medical equipment and the baggage in the centre, but presumably Agricola’s army lacked these. We know that, when he arrived at Mons Graupius, he deployed 8,000 auxiliary infantry and 5,000 cavalry; the size of his legionary force remains unknown, but we may legitimately infer that it broadly matched the auxiliary infantry.



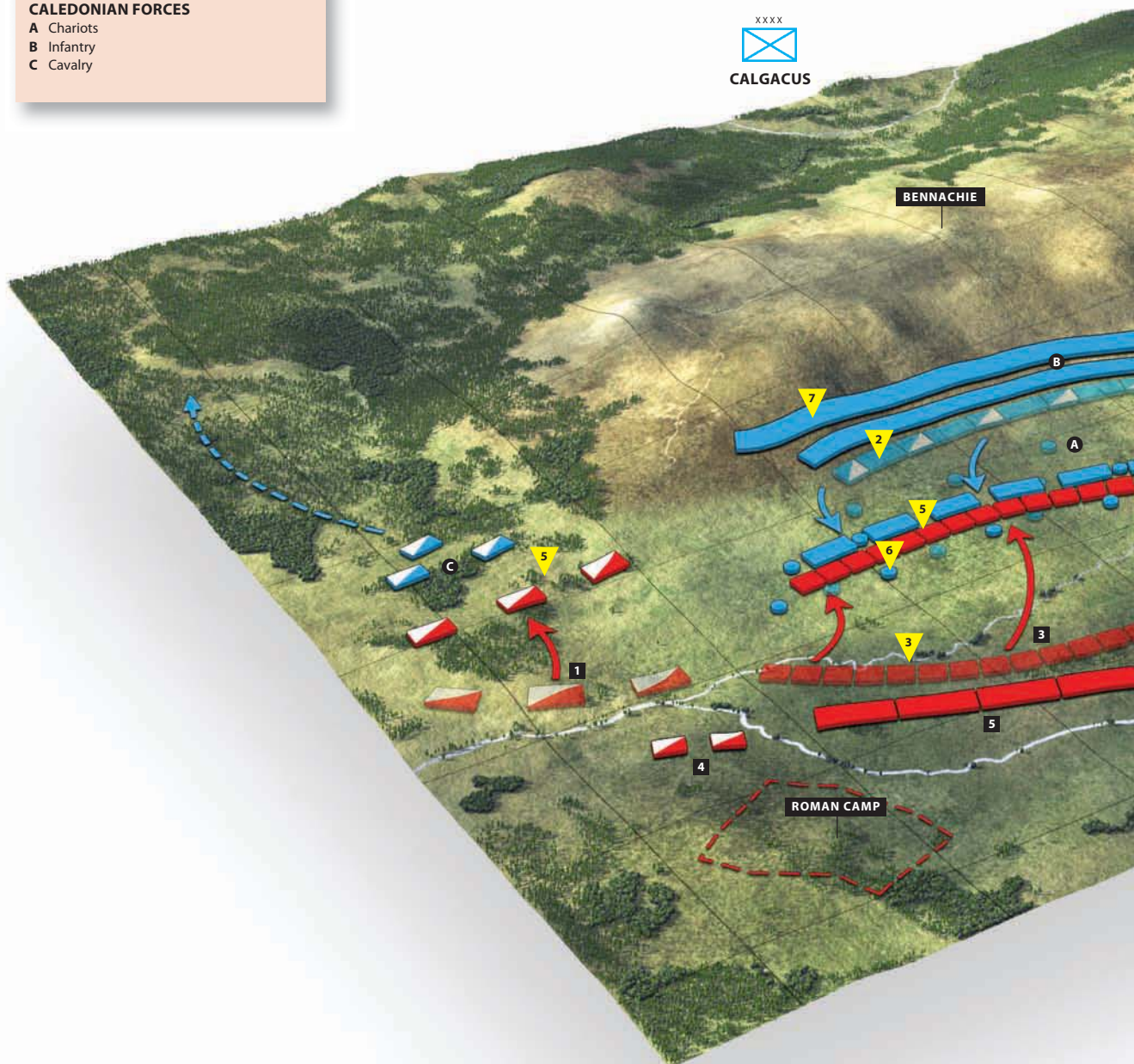
Roman re-enactor equipped as an auxiliary infantryman, wearing a replica of the segmental arm guard (*manica*) discovered at Carlisle in 2001. He wields the short sword (*gladius*) usually (wrongly) associated only with legionaries, and wears a fur cap, which may have been a Batavian tradition. (© Adrian Wink)

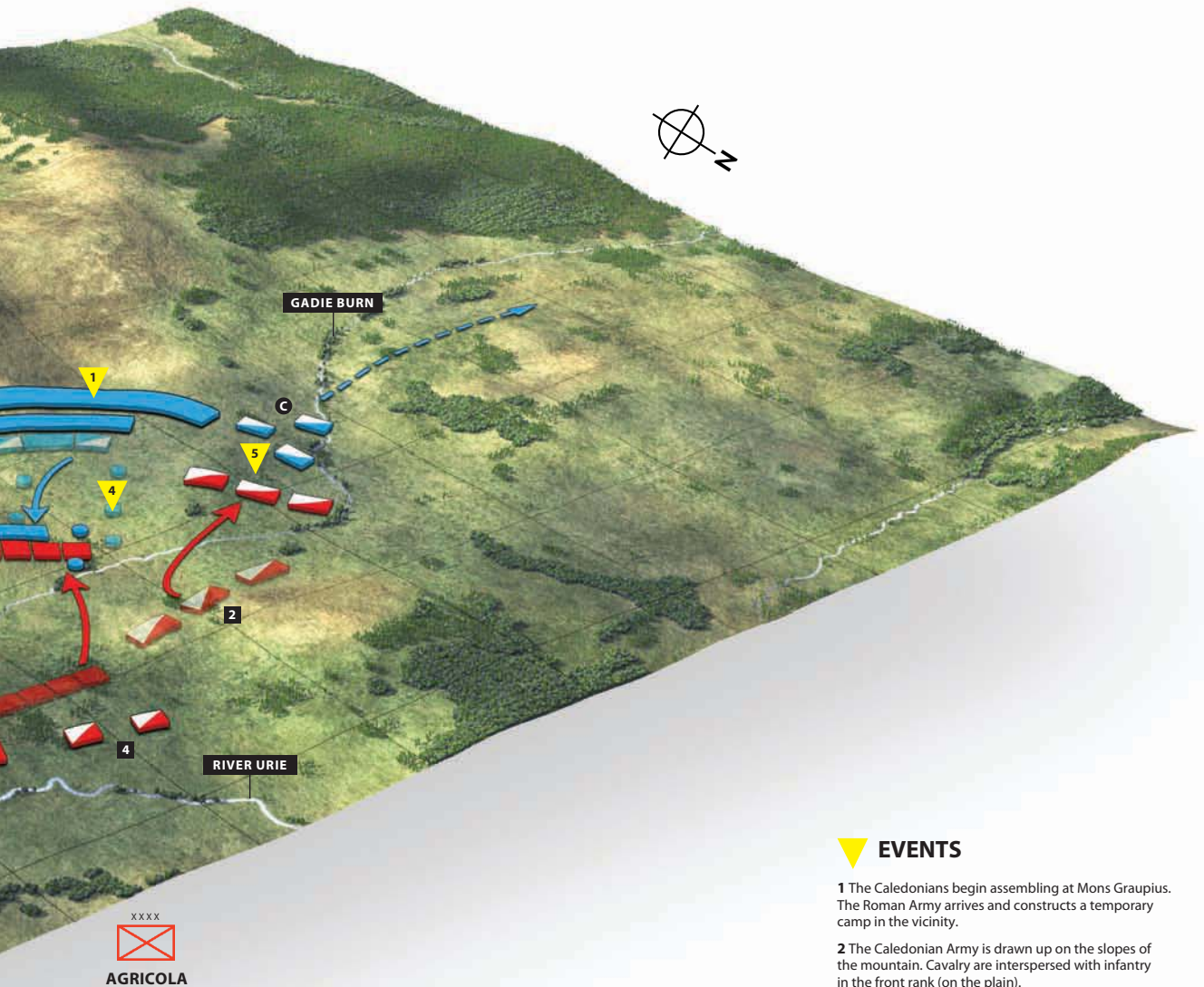
ROMAN FORCES

- 1 Auxiliary cavalry (left flank)
- 2 Auxiliary cavalry (right flank)
- 3 Auxiliary infantry cohorts
- 4 Auxiliary cavalry reserve
- 5 Legionary vexillations

CALEDONIAN FORCES

- A Chariots
- B Infantry
- C Cavalry





EVENTS

- 1 The Caledonians begin assembling at Mons Graupius. The Roman Army arrives and constructs a temporary camp in the vicinity.
- 2 The Caledonian Army is drawn up on the slopes of the mountain. Cavalry are interspersed with infantry in the front rank (on the plain).
- 3 The Roman Army draws up for battle. The battle line is composed of auxiliary infantry and cavalry. The legionary vexillations form a reserve with four units of cavalry. Agricola takes up position with the reserve.
- 4 The Caledonian chariots drive back and forth across the plain to intimidate the Romans.
- 5 The Roman auxiliary infantry envelops the Caledonian chariots and advances to engage the Caledonian front ranks. Meanwhile, the Caledonian cavalry flees, pursued by Roman auxiliary cavalry.
- 6 Caledonian chariots are embroiled in the infantry battle; their wreckage obstructs the infantry.
- 7 The Caledonian rear ranks remain on the hillside.

MONS GRAUPIUS, SEPTEMBER AD 83: THE OPENING STAGES.

The forces are drawn up, the Caledonian cavalry is routed by the Roman cavalry, and the Roman infantry neutralises the Caledonian chariots while advancing to meet the Caledonian infantry.

An interesting parallel might be drawn with another army on the march, this time 50 years later in the eastern province of Cappadocia, where the governor, Arrian, was making plans to counter a threatened invasion of his province. His army, described in a text known as the *Expedition against the Alans* (*Ectaxis kat'Alanon*), involved cavalry scouts, in compliance with Onasander's recommendation. The column proper was spearheaded by a force of cavalry, comprising two regular squadrons (*alae*) and a composite force drawn from five equitate cohorts (*cohortes equitata*), probably totalling some 1,600 men. A body of around 2,000 auxiliary infantry followed them, made up from four cohorts, the last of which was a *cohors sagittariorum* ('cohort of archers'). Then, at this point on the march came the general himself, with his *equites singulares* ('mounted bodyguard') leading the cavalry component drawn from each legion under his command; in Arrian's case, this meant two legions, XV *Apollinaris* and vexillations of XII *Fulminata*, whom he specifies marching four abreast. After the legions came another grouping of auxiliary infantry, this time apparently mixed with the contributions of allied states and perhaps numbering another 2,000 men. Bringing up the rear of the column were two further cavalry squadrons, adding 1,000 to the cavalry total; one accompanied the baggage train, while the horsemen of the other rode in single file along the sides of the marching column.

Arrian's army was a smaller force than Agricola's, but it illustrates the kind of formation that the governor of Britain might have adopted in his march to Mons Graupius. Although smaller, it is still reckoned to have taken up almost 6km (4 miles). Agricola's army may have stretched for double that distance, so that his rearguard had barely left the gates of Kintore when his surveyors were already laying out the new camp at Durno, beneath the quadruple peaks of Bennachie.

THE GRAUPIAN MOUNTAIN

It was long ago conjectured that the name 'Graupius', which has no meaning in the Latin language used by Agricola and Tacitus, must have been a corruption of a Celtic word, 'Craupius'. This, it was argued, had the same derivation as the Welsh word *crwb*, meaning a hump, since Welsh also has roots in the ancient Celtic tongues. However, it now seems that the Welsh word is neither ancient nor Celtic, but probably derives from the Old French word *courbe*, meaning 'bent'. Consequently, any linguistic similarity with current place names (for example, Duncrub, a hill in Strathearn) seems purely coincidental.

The search for parallels with modern place names is, in any case, a fickle process. We have seen that the estuary named *Tava* by Tacitus has been identified with the river Tay, chiefly because the two words are similar. For the same reason, Tacitus' *Trisanton* is thought to be the river Trent, and his *Sabrina* the Severn. However, other ancient geographical names differ radically from their modern counterparts. Thus, although the river Clyde is recognizable in the name *Clota*, *Bodotria* is less obviously the river Forth. And, completing Tacitus' list of geographical features, *Thule* is almost certainly Mainland, the largest of the Shetland Islands, although the names are in no way similar.

More recently, it has been suggested that the name 'Craupius' might originally have been 'Cripus'. *Crip*, an ancient Welsh word for 'comb', is often applied to mountain ridges, such as the rock faces on Snowdon. It is

quite possible that Agricola (or Tacitus himself) may have heard a Celtic place name meaning ‘hill of the ridge’; and, if they Latinized it as *Mons Cripus*, it is easy to see how the name was later miscopied by the generations of medieval scribes who wrote the work out by hand. Worse corruptions have appeared in Latin manuscripts.

The name Mons Cripus, if it means ‘hill of the ridge’, is particularly well suited to Bennachie, with its 6.5km (4-mile) ridge running from east to west. Furthermore, the ridge is divided into the four summits of Hermit Seat, Watch Craig, Oxen Craig and Mither Tap, so that its profile is strikingly reminiscent of a cock’s comb. If we can no longer explain Mons Graupius as a ‘humped’ hill, it seems very likely that it was a ‘ridged’ hill, which resembled the crest of a bird, just as does Bennachie. And it is noteworthy that its distinctive silhouette is visible for miles around. St Joseph noted it as far south as the Mounth, near the camp of Raedykes, and as far north as Keith, near the camp of Muiryfold. As a Caledonian mustering point, it seems ideal.

THE GENERAL’S SPEECH

The speech by a general to his troops was a feature of ancient warfare. Alexander the Great harangued his troops before Issus and Gaugamela (Curt., *Hist. Alex.* 3.10; 4.14); Hannibal and Scipio Africanus both addressed their troops before Zama (Plb. 15.10–11), and Caesar similarly before Pharsalus (Caes., *BCiv.* 3.90).

The (enemy) battle line was already being drawn up when Agricola addressed his soldiers like this, thinking that, although they were cheerful and hardly able to be restrained within their defences, they needed to be encouraged still further. ‘It is now the seventh year, fellow soldiers (*commilitones*), that, under the auspices of the Roman Empire, through bravery and loyal service, you have been conquering Britain.... We have surpassed the limits reached by earlier legates and previous armies, and the furthest point of Britain is no longer a matter of report or rumour, for we hold it with camps and with arms. Britain has been discovered and subjugated.

Tac., *Agr.* 33.1–3

In his jointly authored commentary to the Agricola, which has become the standard text, Professor Ogilvie cautiously noted that ‘Agricola may well have made a speech before the battle but we cannot tell whether Tacitus preserves anything of it’.

We can certainly be sure that Agricola made a speech, for it would have been remarkable if he had *not* addressed his troops at this most critical juncture of his entire governorship. The Greek writer Onasander advised that the general should be ‘a competent speaker; for... if the general is drawing his men up for battle, the encouragement of his words makes them despise the danger, and long for the glory’ (Onas., *Strat.* 1.13). The general’s exhortation, he continues, is more encouraging than the very trumpet blast that signals the start of battle.

If we can be certain that Agricola addressed his troops, we are less sure of his precise words. Ogilvie points to the artificially rhetorical structure of the speech that Tacitus preserves. But, as an important public address, wouldn’t Agricola have spent time planning it? Of course, in the end, Ogilvie is quite







AGRICOLA'S BATAVIAN INFANTRY ADVANCES AGAINST THE CALEDONIANS (pp. 68–69)

The battle was joined with the traditional exchange of missile weapons. The flying spears of Agricola's auxiliaries would have thinned out the front ranks of the Caledonians, while many on the Roman side probably fell victim to the British spears. Tacitus makes it quite clear that the Caledonian horse had left the field, probably routed by the better-disciplined Roman cavalry, and the chariots, which had previously enjoyed the freedom of the plain, were now obstructed by the infantry advancing on both sides.

Once the auxiliaries had cast their spears, the real business of Roman combat was accomplished with the short, pointed infantry sword (*gladius*). Tacitus describes how the cohorts of Batavians and Tungrians (1), in particular, were highly trained in close-quarters fighting. Even the shield was used aggressively to batter the enemy, combined with the swift sword thrust, as the auxiliaries advanced, trampling the dead and the dying. Only the wreckage of the Caledonian chariots (2), and the runaway horses, terrified by the close press of bodies, posed a serious obstacle to the inexorable Roman advance.

By contrast, the Caledonian warriors were at a distinct disadvantage. Quite apart from their more individual fighting style, which encouraged un-coordinated attacks, Tacitus notes that they were equipped with short shields and long swords, which were badly suited to combating the auxiliaries' superior protection (3).

Agricola remained with his command group near the Roman camp. Durno, enclosing some 58ha (143 acres) within its ramparts, is the largest camp north of the Forth–Clyde isthmus. The reason for this is unclear, but if it was built on the eve of battle, it perhaps included elements which were not normally found in the average marching camp, providing services that would be required only after hard fighting. While Agricola's army was engaged in combat, the soldiers' servants and camp followers were firing up the ovens to provide a hot meal for the returning heroes.



LEFT

Roman re-enactor equipped as an auxiliary infantryman. The copper alloy scale cuirass was more lightweight than a mail shirt and probably provided a similar level of protection. Officers may have favoured it for its more flamboyant appearance. (© Adrian Wink)

RIGHT

Roman re-enactor equipped as an auxiliary infantryman. With his head-to-knee protection and three-ply wooden shield, this type of soldier in no way constituted 'light infantry'. Our view of the Roman auxiliaries is usually coloured by the depictions on Trajan's Column at Rome, where they are shown wearing a different set of equipment from the legionaries. (© Adrian Wink)

right to be sceptical. Tacitus may well have heard his father-in-law's reminiscence of the speech, but the version that he immortalized must largely have been his own composition. As Plutarch astutely observed when faced with the fulsome battle speeches of previous historians, 'it can be said of the rhetorical wanderings of Ephorus, Theopompus and Anaximenes, which they recite to the end, having armed and drawn up their army: "no one talks such nonsense when there is steel close at hand"' (Plut., *Moral.* 803B).

There is the added implausibility of being able to address 20,000 or so men at once, for it seems impossible for one man to be heard by the entire army. Before the battle of Issus, Alexander the Great allegedly rode along the front of his army, from one end to the other, addressing individuals by name, reminding various units of their past glories, and giving general encouragement to all (Arrian, *Anab.* 2.10; Curt., *Hist. Alex.* 3.10). Agricola could certainly have done the same. In fact, Tacitus' words perhaps imply that he harangued the men as they issued from the camp, for they were 'hardly able to be restrained inside their defences'.

DEPLOYING FOR BATTLE

As soon as Agricola finished speaking, 'the end of the speech was followed by a tremendous outburst of enthusiasm, and they immediately rushed to take up their arms' (Tac., *Agr.* 35.1). We can perhaps envisage lines of men

ROMAN FORCES

- 1 Auxiliary infantry cohorts
- 2 Auxiliary cavalry reserve
- 3 Legionary vexillations

CALEDONIAN FORCES

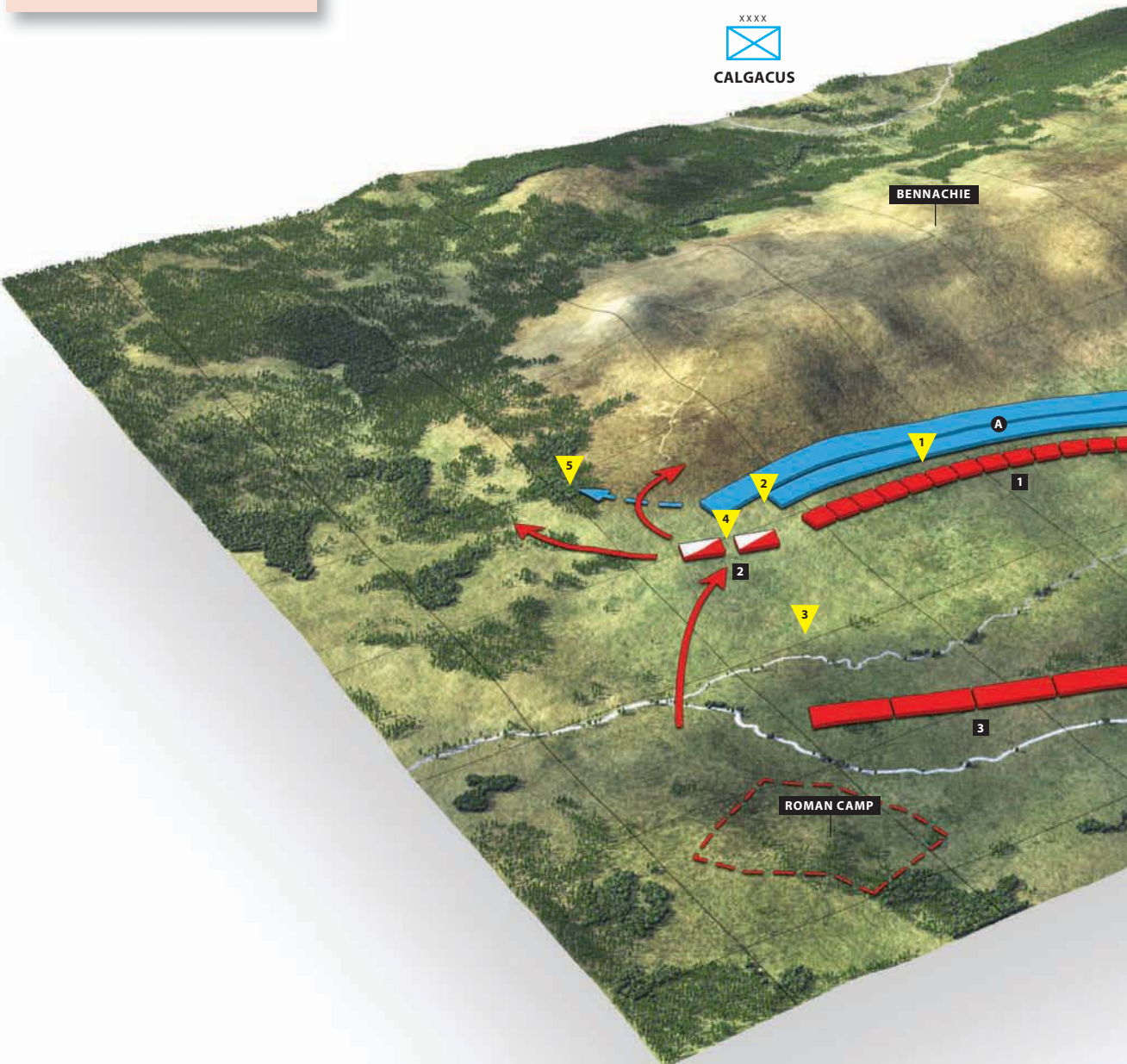
- A Infantry

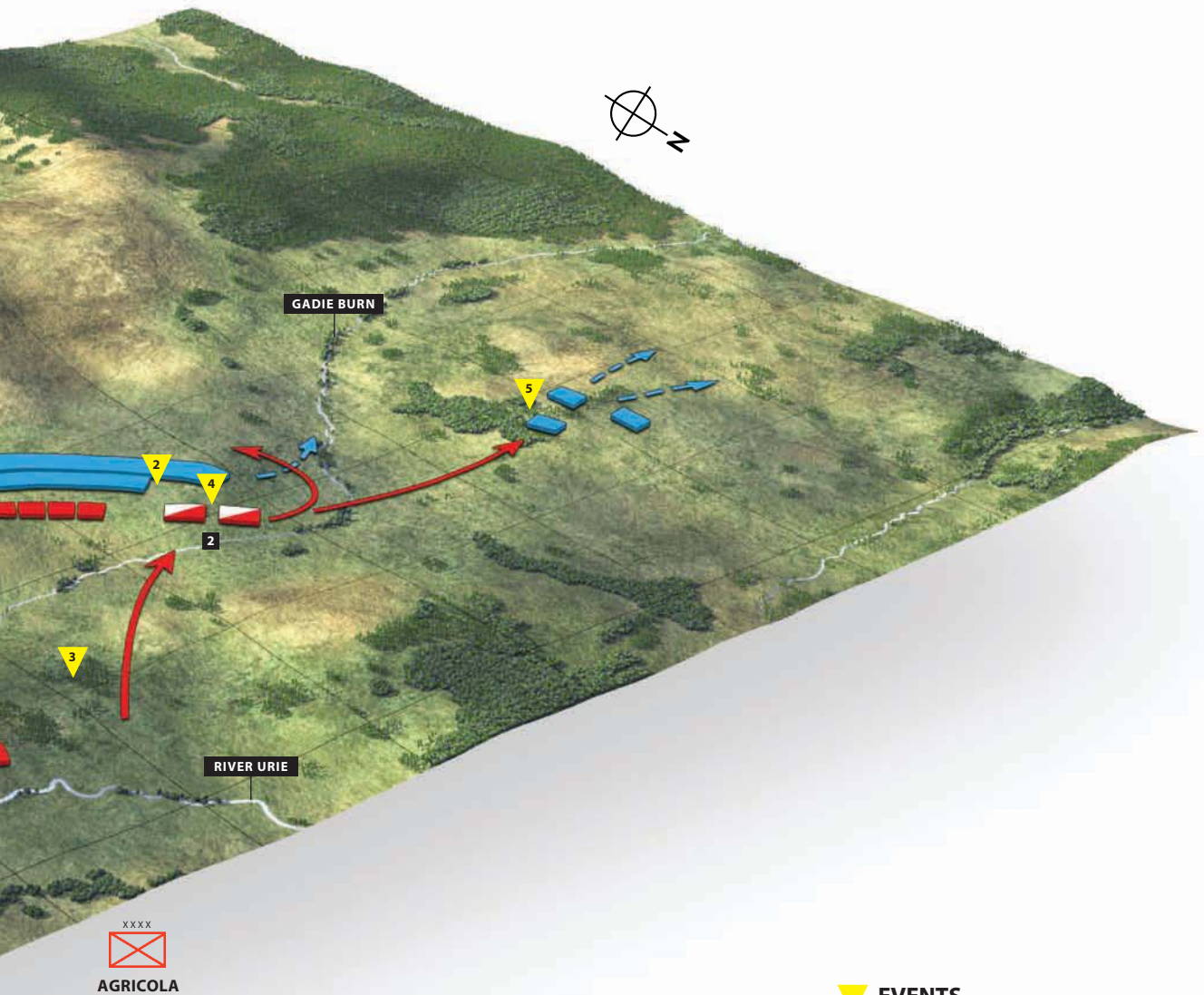
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CALGACUS

BENNACHIE

ROMAN CAMP





EVENTS

- 1 The Roman auxiliary infantry continues to cut down the Caledonian ranks and steadily advances uphill.
- 2 The rear ranks of the Caledonian infantry descend to the plain and attempt to outflank the Roman line.
- 3 Agricola sends the Roman auxiliary cavalry reserve to intercept the Caledonian outflanking manoeuvre.
- 4 The Roman auxiliary cavalry reserve scatters the Caledonians, and panic sets in.
- 5 Having been enveloped, the Caledonian force disintegrates and the warbands flee individually. They are hunted down by the Roman cavalry reserve.

MONS GRAUPIUS, SEPTEMBER AD 83: THE CALEDONIAN ROUT.

The Roman infantry steadily crush the front ranks of the Caledonians. In response, their rear ranks attempt an outflanking manoeuvre, but it is foiled and their position collapses.

issuing from the west and south gateways of the Durno camp, and steadily making their way across the river Urie to take up their pre-arranged battle stations. 'While they were fired up and eager to charge, he deployed them like this, so that the auxiliary infantry, which numbered 8,000, made a firm centre to the battle line, while 3,000 cavalry were spread out on the flanks. The legions were stationed in front of the rampart, for it would be a great honour to win a battle without shedding Roman blood, but they were a reserve, if the auxiliaries were driven back' (Tac., *Agr.* 35.2).

The comment about conserving Roman blood was doubtless Tacitus' own interpretation of Agricola's strategy. Nothing in the military history of the times suggests that any Roman general would have thought in this way. The auxiliaries, just like the legionaries, were a valued part of a professional army; both had their particular strengths, and both had their weaknesses. Tacitus was perhaps naively seeking to add to his father-in-law's achievement, but instead he opened a debate that has continued ever since.

Scholars of previous generations were fooled into characterizing the *auxilia* as 'relatively cheap and expendable', the ancient equivalent of 'cannon fodder'. But, apart from Tacitus' comment here, there is no reason to believe that the auxiliary regiments were so undervalued. Previous commentators have been mystified as to why Agricola chose to compose his entire battle line solely from these units. After all, the great battles of the late Republic had been decided by the legions.

The first point, and one that is often missed, is that Agricola clearly could rely upon his auxiliary regiments to acquit themselves well. Indeed, Tacitus later points to their training and long military service (*Agr.* 36.1, quoted below). But, as we noted earlier, each branch of the Roman military service had its own particular strengths. So the second point to make is surely that, somehow, the auxiliaries were more suited to the task at hand.

This, too, has caused great perplexity amongst scholars, who were initially operating under the misapprehension that the *auxilia* were 'light infantry', in contrast to the 'heavy infantry' of the legions. Years of specialized study of the arms and armour of the Roman Army have demonstrated that many auxiliaries were equipped with armour that was equally as 'heavy' as the legionaries'. Certainly, the legions appear to have maintained their own peculiarly distinctive panoply, comprising, by and large, the so-called *lorica segmentata* cuirass, the rectangular, curved shield (*scutum*), and the uniquely designed javelin (*pilum*). But the auxiliary infantry, as depicted, for example, on Trajan's Column, wear the so-called *lorica hamata* mail shirt, which re-enactors agree can weigh half as much again as the segmented cuirass; and they are similarly helmeted and shod, and well-protected behind a flat, oval shield. The auxiliaries at Mons Graupius were not chosen on the grounds of weight.

Tacitus later makes it clear that a large proportion of the battle line, probably 3,000 of the 8,000 infantry, were Batavians, originally recruited from the marshy lands of the Rhine delta, and their Tungrian neighbours. If these regiments had begun recruiting amongst the Britons, they surely maintained the native traditions that made them such staunch warriors. These were the men who had spearheaded Agricola's attack on Anglesey in AD 77 (p. 38, above) by employing their river-crossing abilities. Now, the little river Urie at Durno bears no resemblance to the Menai Straits, so it cannot have been this particular skill that Agricola required. But this is a point to which we shall return.

THE OPENING STAGE

The Caledonians, too, were preparing for battle in a formation that took full advantage of Bennachie's topography, no doubt accompanied by the din of the war horns. 'The Britons' line was posted on high ground, both for show and to strike terror, in such a way that their front ranks were standing on the plain while the rest were rising up along the hill, as if in a curving formation. The charioteers filled the middle of the plain, making a din as they rode around' (Tac., *Agr.* 35.3).

As St Joseph observed, 'the northern face of Bennachie forms a great amphitheatre facing the camp at Durno', with a curving front of 3.5km (2 miles). The Caledonians swarmed over the hillside 'as if in a curving formation' (*acies convexa*), looking down on the plain below, where the scythed chariots rumbled and rattled backwards and forwards, in an attempt to intimidate the Roman lines. There were clearly many dozens of chariots, in order to fill the plain. Each one manoeuvring independently, as its chieftain driver sought to show off his skills, their main tactic was perhaps to run along the front ranks, where one scythed wheel could wreak some damage.

Classicist Stan Wolfson has even noticed a parallel in the poetry of Silius Italicus, who must have witnessed a reading of Tacitus' *Agricola* in Rome, just at the time when he was completing his great epic *Punica*. One of his couplets (quoted above, p. 31) was surely a nod to the battle of Mons Graupius. 'At this point, writes Tacitus, *Agricola* was anxious that the superior numbers of the enemy might attack his front and flanks at the same time. So he opened out his ranks, although the line would be rather extended and many were urging him to bring up the legions. But, with eager optimism and resolve in the face of difficulties, he sent away his horse and took up his position on foot in front of the standards (*vexilla*)' (Tac., *Agr.* 35.4).

Tacitus makes no explicit mention of how the Caledonian chariots were dealt with, but the fact that *Agricola* now ordered the ranks to be opened up may hint at his tactics. The use of scythed chariots, of course, recalls Alexander the Great's battle of Gaugamela (331 BC), in which Darius deployed 200 of these machines. The historian Arrian relates how 'the Macedonians had orders, wherever the chariots attacked, to break formation and let them through' (Arr., *Anab.* 3.14; cf. Curt., *Hist. Alex.* 4.15.14–17); once surrounded in this way, they could easily be neutralized.

Far from extending his frontage as a response to the large Caledonian army, it may have been in order to tackle the *covinni*. This, in turn, may have dictated *Agricola*'s choice of auxiliaries for his battle line. The legions were traditionally drawn up in close order, presenting a wall of shields through which the short sword stabs could be delivered. Auxiliaries, on the other hand, were more naturally open-order troops, who could respond flexibly to the special problems posed by scythed chariots.

THE BATTLE IS JOINED

While *Agricola* took his stand, no doubt with his infantry guard (*pedites singulares*), at the front of the legionary line, his auxiliaries joined battle. In placing himself well to the rear, he was simply following the precepts of Onasander, who wrote a chapter on 'how the general himself should not enter battle' (Onas., *Strat.* 33). 'At its opening, the battle was joined at long range.

Roman cavalry re-enactor, from the Colchester Roman Society. He is shown slashing with the long sword (*spatha*) which was surely designed to give the horseman additional reach. His Connemara pony (aptly named *Trajan*), with its sturdy frame and characteristic agility, is thought to closely resemble the horses used by the Roman cavalry. (© Nigel Apperley)



With skill and persistence, using their massive swords and short shields, the Britons either parried the missiles of our men or warded them off, while hurling a great barrage of spears themselves' (Tac., *Agr.* 36.1).

While the Romans gradually brought the chariots under control, the battle itself had begun with the traditional shower of missiles. If these were not the auxiliaries' usual sturdy thrusting spears (*hastae*), they were perhaps some of the lighter projectile weapons that archaeologists often turn up on Roman military sites. Javelins of this kind could have been effective at ranges of up to 30m (100ft).

Then Agricola exhorted the four Batavian and two Tungrian cohorts to fight hand to hand at sword's point. They had trained for this during their long military service, whereas it was awkward for the enemy with their small shields and enormous swords, for the swords of the Britons, having no points, were not designed for grappling and close-quarters fighting. So the Batavians rained blows indiscriminately, struck with their shield-bosses, and stabbed in the face. When they had cut down those posted on the plain, they started to push their battle-line up the hillside. The other cohorts, in eager competition, pressed forward to attack, and cut down the nearest of the enemy. In the haste of victory, a good many were left half-dead or untouched.

Tac., *Agr.* 36.1–2

Agricola had clearly pinned his hopes on the Batavian and Tungrian soldiers. Whether they had thrown their spears or not, each man now drew his short sword, the classic *gladius*, and stormed into the massed ranks of the Caledonians. Even his plywood shield with its brass edging and iron boss became a weapon, smashing into the face of his opponent. This surge in activity gave encouragement to the other cohorts in the line, and gradually they pressed forwards, clambering over the bodies of the fallen, whether dead or not. It was perhaps during this phase of battle that Aulus Atticus, one of



Roman cavalry re-enactor, from the Colchester Roman Society. He carries the cavalryman's standard equipment of shield and thrusting spear. His cunningly designed saddle allows him to maintain his seat without the use of stirrups. (© Nigel Apperley)

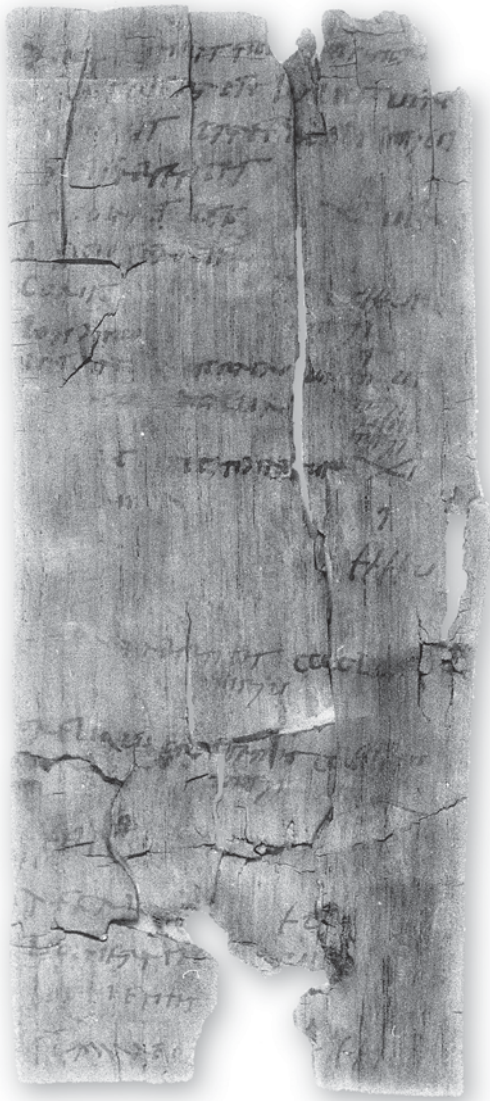
the young prefects, was killed, no doubt relaying orders to his men. Tacitus says only that 'his youthful eagerness and spirited horse had carried him into the enemy's midst' (*Agr.* 37.6).

Meanwhile, the troops of cavalry fled and the charioteers (*covinnarii*) became embroiled in the infantry battle. But, though they had at first created panic, they began to falter in the crowded ranks of the enemy and the uneven ground. Such fighting was most disadvantageous to our men, maintaining their exhausted battle line for such a long time while being jostled by the horses' flanks. And often, runaway chariots or terrified horses without their driver, as if guided by fear, dashed against them from the side or head on.

Tac., *Agr.* 36.3²

It is not clear where the Caledonian cavalry had been deployed, but they were presumably on the level ground at the foot of the hill, perhaps even amongst their infantry comrades. They were now routed. Perhaps their lack of a guiding hand made them disorganized. But the reason for their flight is not far to seek, for Agricola had posted 3,000 cavalry on his own flanks. It was presumably these horsemen who outclassed their Caledonian adversaries and led to the rout. That, after all, was the proper business of cavalry.

2. Readers familiar with previous translations of the *Agricola* will notice substantial differences in this passage. I am grateful to the perspicacity of Stan Wolfson for creating intelligible Latin from a manuscript that is badly corrupted at this point.



Writing tablet no. 154 from Vindolanda (AE 1991, 1162), a strength report of *cohors I Tungrorum*. The writing is faded and difficult to interpret with the untrained eye, but line 5 records the fact that 46 men had been seconded to the governor's bodyguard (*singulares leg(ati) xlv*). Towards the bottom, the following totals have been deciphered: 'sick, 15; wounded, 6; suffering from eye disease, 10' (*aegri xv | volnerati vi | lippientes x*). (© Vindolanda Trust, by kind permission of Prof. A. R. Birley)

Meanwhile, the Caledonian chariots, the scythed *covinni*, had badly underperformed. *Covinni* in particular must have required fairly level terrain, to prevent the scythes from fouling in the ground. Unfortunately, the plain beneath Bennachie is by no means level. Equally, in order to employ their main feature to best advantage, the scythed wheels must keep turning. But it is clear that, by this stage in the battle, the Caledonian chariots were largely immobilized, having been swamped by the infantry *mêlée*. And as the Roman line trudged inexorably forwards, they were buffeted by stray chariot horses and impeded by the wreckage of the machines themselves.

AN OUTFLANKING ATTEMPT

All this time, the Romans had successfully restricted the fighting to the lower slopes of the mountain, drawing the waves of Caledonians down to them, and avoiding the boulder-strewn upper slopes. It was now time for the men stationed on these slopes, with a grandstand view of the battle, to join in. And again, Tacitus' account has a peculiar resonance with the situation at Bennachie, for these forces are said to have been 'stationed on the hilltops', of which Bennachie has, not one, but four.

The Britons who had as yet taken no part in the battle because they were stationed on the hilltops, and who being unoccupied were regarding our small numbers with contempt, now began gradually to descend and to work their way round to the rear of the winning side. But Agricola, who had feared this very move, sent four regiments of cavalry, which had been reserved for the emergencies of war, to counter their arrival. And the more ferociously they charged, the more vigorously he repulsed them and dispersed them in flight. Tac., *Agr.* 37.1

It was for just this kind of eventuality that Agricola had held back a cavalry reserve. These four squadrons were now released for the task of preventing the outflanking manoeuvre. By this time, the flower of the Caledonian forces had probably perished on the battlefield, so that only the lesser folk remained, perhaps poorly armed, almost certainly unarmoured. The nobles and their chariots had been destroyed, the cavalry had long since fled, and the auxiliary battle line continued their butchery, although they must by now have been exhausted.

The new arrivals on the battlefield were no match for galloping horsemen, particularly well-armed and armoured Roman horsemen. From the picture painted by Tacitus, it seems as if the Romans made sport with them, for no sooner had they hunted down and captured some, than they were executed when other victims came into view; and so the process was repeated.

Thus the stratagem of the Britons was turned against them. The cavalry regiments wheeled around from the front of the battle on the general's command and charged the rear ranks of the enemy. Then indeed a vast and grim spectacle filled the open plains: pursuing, cutting down, capturing, and slaughtering as new victims appeared. Each of the enemy acted on his own, as bands of armed men fled before inferior numbers and unarmed individuals wantonly charged and exposed themselves to certain death. Everywhere, there were weapons, bodies, mangled limbs, and blood-soaked earth.

Tac., *Agr.* 37.2–3

MOPPING UP

Once the Britons began to flee, a sure sign that the battle was over, Agricola called for his horse, in order to take an active part in the mopping-up operations. The fate of his Caledonian counterpart, Calgacus, remains unknown. Perhaps as one of the charioteer nobles, he had fallen early in the battle, allowing events to play out in their own way.

And sometimes even amongst the vanquished there was fury and courage. For when they reached the woods, banding together and knowing the ground, they began to encircle the first incautious pursuers. So that this would not continue, Agricola, rushing everywhere, ordered strong, unencumbered (*expedita*) cohorts to act as a ring of huntsmen; where the forest was dense, some of the cavalry were to dismount, and where it was more open, the remainder were to sweep through, otherwise there might have been casualties from overconfidence.

Tac., *Agr.* 37.4

Members of the Roman Military Research Society, re-enacting as Batavian auxiliaries, are shown rounding up Caledonian warriors using the technique that Tacitus describes as 'in the style of a ring of huntsmen' (*indaginis modo*). Like modern-day grouse beaters, they flushed out any resistance, driving them towards the dismounted cavalry.

(© Jim Bowers)









THE ROMAN CAVALRY MOP UP THE REMNANTS OF THE ROUTED CALEDONIANS (pp. 80–81)

The final phase of the battle was a cavalry action, as Agricola released the four squadrons that he had been holding in reserve. Out on the battlefield, the Caledonian cavalry (such as it was) and their chariotry had been defeated. But there was a danger that, with so many foot soldiers on the Caledonian side, successive waves of fresh adversaries would soon overwhelm the Roman auxiliary infantry, who had borne the brunt of the fighting and must, by now, have been nearing exhaustion.

However, the next wave of Caledonians adopted a different tactic. Tacitus believed that they were still contemptuous of the 8,000-strong Roman force, although they had surely been watching as the auxiliaries butchered and trampled over rank upon rank of their compatriots. So, in an evident attempt to turn the tables, fresh Caledonian warbands descended the mountain on the flanks of the battle; they planned to take the Roman line in the rear.

Agricola's cavalry scotched the Caledonian plan by breaking up their warbands and scattering the warriors across the plain. Unable to form up for battle, they fell easy prey to the Roman horsemen (1), whose superior speed and vantage point gave them an enormous advantage over fleeing infantry.

Here, to judge from Tacitus' description, the cavalry made sport with their enemies, pursuing some until they were captured, but quickly dispatching them before riding off in pursuit of others. Even crossing the little Gadie Burn (2), which flows along the valley below Bennachie, could give no protection, and jettisoning any heavy items, such as the *carnyx* (3) seen here, in a desperate attempt to gain speed, was futile in the face of galloping horsemen. Tacitus uses the imagery of the hunt, as a cordon of soldiers was deployed to flush the fleeing Caledonians from the woods where they sought sanctuary. Finally, Tacitus paints a gruesome picture of the field scattered with weapons, bodies and limbs.

Only darkness brought an end to the operations. Untold hundreds had fled without even joining battle. Tacitus claims that 10,000 Britons lay dead, as against only 360 Romans. The disparity seems astonishing. Certainly, it was usual to inflate the numbers of the enemy dead, in order to increase the importance of the victory. But long gone were the days when a Roman general had to slay 5,000 in order to qualify for a triumph; only the emperor now enjoyed such institutionalized adulation. Nevertheless, it does seem that, in ancient warfare, the losers generally suffered disproportionately large casualties, chiefly because of the Roman cavalry's ghastly efficiency in hunting down the fugitives. We may trust that the figure of 360 was reported back to Rome, and could be verified from the exhaustively documented strength returns that each regiment seems to have compiled on a regular basis.

'It was a cheerful night for the victors', writes Tacitus, 'with rejoicing and plunder' (*Agr.* 38.1). Battlefields always provided loot for the winners, but the process of picking over the corpses probably extended over several days. Wherever Roman battlefields have been investigated, they turn up only mundane items in any quantity. Flashy decorations and serviceable weapons will quickly have found new owners. 'The next day revealed the full scale of victory', Tacitus continues. 'Everywhere the silence of desolation, the lonely hills, homesteads smouldering in the distance, nobody spied by the scouts' (*Agr.* 38.2). The conquest was over.

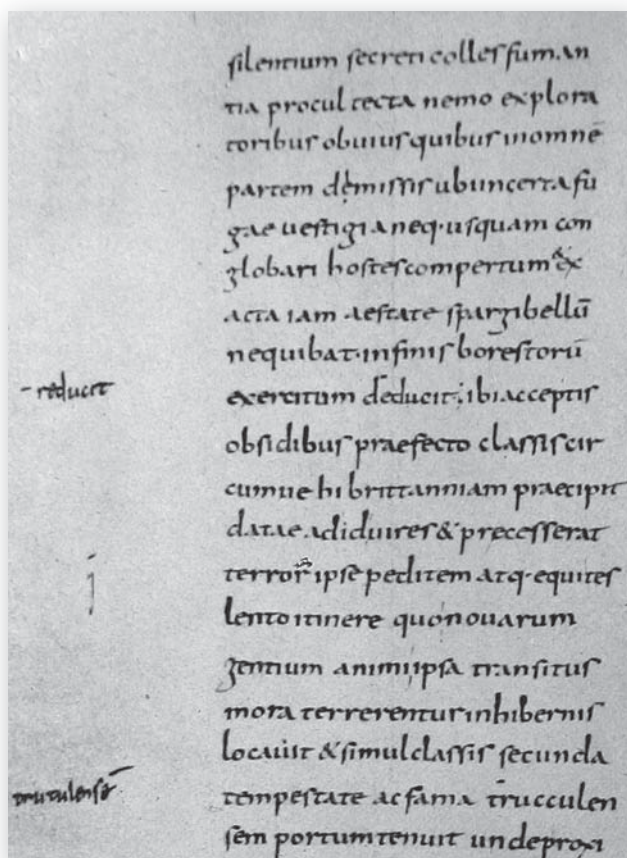
We may well imagine that the camp at Durno was occupied for days or even weeks while the battlefield was cleared and the countryside swept. Its unusual size, surely too large even for Agricola's army, was perhaps to accommodate the special services which would be required only after a battle: a medical area for the care of the wounded; a blacksmithing area for the repair of broken and blunted equipment; a corral for the prisoners, if any survived after the cavalry had had their sport. Traditionally, there was a trophy to be erected, indicating ownership of the battlefield, and decent burial was arranged for the fallen Romans. For them, Tacitus supplies a fitting epitaph, for indeed 'it would not be inglorious to die at the very place where the world and nature end' (*Tac., Agr.* 33.6).

AFTERMATH

The summer was now over. In Roman terms, that meant late September. But, as the army prepared to return to their winter quarters, we encounter another passage of Tacitus that has caused great perplexity over the years; indeed, it has inspired scholars, not only to invent ingenious routes for Agricola's returning army, but also to create a completely new tribe for him to encounter. But here again, as with Tacitus' report of the fifth season (above, p. 46), the Latin text of the *Codex Aesinas* appears to be have been corrupted by earlier miscopying. The mistake has persuaded generations of scholars of the claim that 'Agricola led the army down into the territory of the Boresti', an otherwise unknown tribe.

The relevant phrase in the *Codex Aesinas* (folio 63 verso: '*in finis borestorum exercitum deducit*') has only recently been corrected, despite the fact that it makes no sense. Why would Tacitus suddenly mention a new tribe, when up to this point he was content to refer only to 'the inhabitants of Caledonia'? Why did Ptolemy not register the Boresti amongst the many other peoples that he places north of the Forth–Clyde isthmus? Was he not seized by the fascination of the last tribe encountered by the Romans, a people who must have lived on the very edge of the world? Scholars have long complained about the dearth of geographical pointers in the *Agricola*, yet they were willing to add this mystery tribe, whom Ptolemy had unaccountably overlooked.

But some years ago, with an eagle eye for the telltale hints of textual corruption, classicist Stan Wolfson brilliantly emended the Latin to read '*in finis boreos totum exercitum deducit*', consigning the Boresti, in one fell swoop, to oblivion. The new reading makes perfect sense, as Agricola 'led his entire army down into the northern extremities' (*Agr.* 38.2). 'There he took hostages', continues Tacitus, recalling the usual procedure when the Romans had sufficiently overawed a neighbouring people,



‘and instructed the prefect of the fleet to sail round Britain’ (*Agr.* 38.3). We can well imagine him, making his way down to the Moray Firth and beyond, ‘marching unhurriedly so that the courage of the newly conquered peoples was drained by his leisurely progress’ (*Agr.* 38.3), and finally settling his men in their forts for the winter. The Carlisle writing tablets show that there were men of XX *Valeria Victrix* at Carlisle in November AD 83 (*AE* 1992, 1139), perhaps having returned from Mons Graupius.

CIRCUMNAVIGATION

We have seen that the poet Statius, writing around a decade after the battle of Mons Graupius, wrote a poem flattering Crispinus, the son of Vettius Bolanus (above, p. 11). In it, he claims that the young man’s father, ‘carrying out his orders, reached Thule that bars the western waves, where Hyperion is ever weary’ (*Silv.* 5.2.53–56). The basis of this claim is difficult to discern, as it is highly unlikely that Bolanus ever had the opportunity to explore the northern waters. But Statius is fond of maritime images, and clearly, the idea of this northernmost island, *ultima Thule* (which is surely to be located amongst the Shetland Isles), was current at Rome at the very time that Tacitus was composing the *Agricola*.

If Statius, as an epic poet, may be forgiven for his hyperbole, it may well have spurred Tacitus to set down in writing his own version of events. For it seems that the voyage of the *classis Britannica* (‘British fleet’) to Shetland properly belonged, not to Bolanus, but to Agricola. ‘It was then, for the first time’, Tacitus emphasizes, ‘that a Roman fleet, circumnavigating this coast of the remotest sea, established that Britain was an island’ (*Agr.* 10.4). Having subjugated the Orkneys, Agricola’s fleet sailed on. ‘And Thule was closely examined because they had been commanded to go this far, but winter was approaching’ (*Tac., Agr.* 10.4). At any rate, the historian Cassius Dio knew that Britain had been proven to be an island during the governorship, not of Bolanus, but of Agricola (*Cass. Dio* 39.50.4).

The voyage was apparently shared by a certain Demetrius, a grammarian (*grammaticus*) from Tarsus, who observed that there were many uninhabited islands and one which supported a religious community (*Plut., Moral.* 410A, 419E). He set up a pair of silvered bronze plates at York, one of them dedicated, appropriately, ‘To Ocean and Tethys’ (*RIB* 663). It has been observed that Alexander the Great worshipped the same deities on the Indus in 325 BC (*Diod. Sic.* 17.104), at the eastern edge of the world. How appropriate that they should likewise be invoked at its northern edge.

Having dispensed with the imaginary Boresti, we must now excise one last geographical fiction from the story of Mons Graupius, for scholars have long laboured under the misapprehension that Agricola’s fleet wintered in the ‘Trucculensian harbour’ (*portus Trucculensis*), an otherwise unknown location. Scholars have searched far and wide for a suitable harbour, without success. But again, as we have now seen twice before, the text of the *Codex Aesinas* is at fault.

Our received text reads ‘*trucculensem portum tenuit*’ (*Codex Aesinas*, folio 63 verso), but again, as in the case of Cogidubnus (illustration on p. 10), the 9th-century copyist has made a marginal note. It seems that he had found an alternative, even preferable, reading for the first word: ‘*trutulensem*’. Stan Wolfson has ingeniously improved the Latin even further, suggesting

OPPOSITE

Extract from the *Codex Aesinas*, folio 63 verso (left-hand column). On lines 8–9 can be seen the spurious reference to the Boresti (*in finis bores totum* can be read, leading to the explanation suggested in the main text). Further down (lines 18–19) can be seen the equally spurious reference to the Trucculensian harbour, but here the scribe has suggested his own correction in the margin, writing *trutulensem* (and leading to the explanation in the main text). (Author’s collection)

that it ought to read '*trux Thulensem portum tenuit*', thus incorporating a reference to Thule. (The adjective *trux* must here refer to the Roman fleet's 'ruthless' reputation.)

So, instead of Agricola's fleet reaching an unheard-of port, which would have meant nothing to Tacitus' audience at Rome, 'the fleet, with its ruthlessness enhanced by rumour and favourable weather, reached Shetland harbour' (*Agr.* 38.5). Now, at last, Roman arms had truly reached the furthest edge of the world.

EVENTS AT ROME

Some time in the summer of AD 83, certainly by September, Domitian added the name *Germanicus* ('conqueror of Germany') to his collection of titles, advertising his conquest of the Chatti. This was probably also the occasion of his fourth imperial acclamation, although by a quirk of fate *IMP IV* is not recorded on any known inscriptions. (Sooner or later, a diploma will turn up confirming Domitian's precise list of titles in the summer of AD 83.)

Tacitus took a very dim view of Domitian's Chatti war and his subsequent triumph. In later years, he wrote that 'the Germans were more triumphed over than conquered' (*Germ.* 37), an opinion apparently shared by Cassius Dio, who wrote that 'he made a campaign into Germany and returned without having so much as seen any hostilities anywhere' (Dio 67.4.1), and Tacitus' friend Pliny made a similar allusion in his Panegyric addressed to the Emperor Trajan, by contrasting the new emperor's well-deserved triumph with previous 'images of a sham victory' (Plin., *Pan.* 16).

News of Agricola's victory at Mons Graupius must have travelled to Rome during the winter of AD 83, no doubt by laurelled dispatch (*laureata*). Meanwhile, determined to outdo his father and illustrious brother, Domitian took a fifth, sixth and seventh imperial acclamation during AD 84, one of which must surely relate to Mons Graupius. In the following years, the acclamations came thick and fast, so that Domitian entered AD 87 as *IMP XIV*, and by the time of his death on 18 September AD 96, he was *IMP XXII*.

Although only the emperor could celebrate a triumph, Agricola was awarded 'triumphal decorations' (*ornamenta triumphalia*) and the honour of a public statue (Tac., *Agr.* 40.1). For many men, this would have been their crowning achievement. But Tacitus expected his father-in-law to secure further employment, perhaps as governor of Syria, a consular province like Britain. In fact, it was highly unusual for men to hold more than one such command. One of the very few who did so, Titus Atilius Rufus, had just died in office governing Syria, so this may have been preying on Tacitus' mind. He hoped also for the proconsulship of Africa or Asia, the two plum senatorial provinces, governed for one year at a time. But competition for these was fierce, and many were well into their 50s before securing election to one or the other.

Agricola was dead by the age of 53, perhaps through illness. His British conquests were never consolidated, as troops were increasingly siphoned off to the troubled Danube frontier. At around this time, a trooper of the *ala Tampiana*, for example, died at Carnuntum, the great military base on the Danube; he was serving in a *vexillatio Britannica* ('British detachment') that was no doubt involved in Domitian's Sarmatian war. All of *II Adiutrix* had been withdrawn, too. Britain was now a low priority. By AD 90 at the latest, Caledonia had been left to the Caledonians.

THE HISTORICAL TRUTH

When he published his commentary to the *Agricola* in 1967, Ogilvie was in no doubt that ‘the details of the battle are authentic. It is in no sense an imaginary battle modelled on a famous earlier engagement such as Pharsalus’, as one sceptic had claimed. However, academic study is often cyclical: old theories fall out of favour, and new ones become popular, before being discarded in turn. Lately, it has become fashionable to doubt the veracity of Tacitus’ account. Indeed, Martin Henig, a specialist in ancient art, has gone so far as to doubt whether the battle of Mons Graupius ever occurred. He claims that ‘the notion of a pitched battle in mountainous terrain seems inherently implausible’ (*British Archaeology* 37, 1998). But, of course, Tacitus tells us that the battle took place ‘on the flat ground’ (*Agr.* 35.3) at the foot of the mountain; there is nothing implausible about that.

Then, having claimed that ‘no such battle ever took place’, he absurdly accuses Agricola of embroidering the details of the fighting, on the grounds that ‘a battle in such a place has few witnesses’. But, of course, he is wrong. On the Roman side, unfortunately the only side in a position to pass judgement on Tacitus’ description, there were thousands of witnesses. Furthermore, we have seen that the emperor was usually kept well informed of events on the frontiers, even in distant Britain. And, although Agricola would have filed an official report at the close of the campaign, he was not the emperor’s only representative in the province. In AD 61, for example, when Nero’s general Suetonius Paullinus was crushing the Boudiccan revolt with fire and steel, the equestrian procurator, Julius Classicianus, saw fit to send an unfavourable report to Nero (*Tac., Ann.* 14.38). Agricola had his own equestrian procurator with the power to make or break his career.

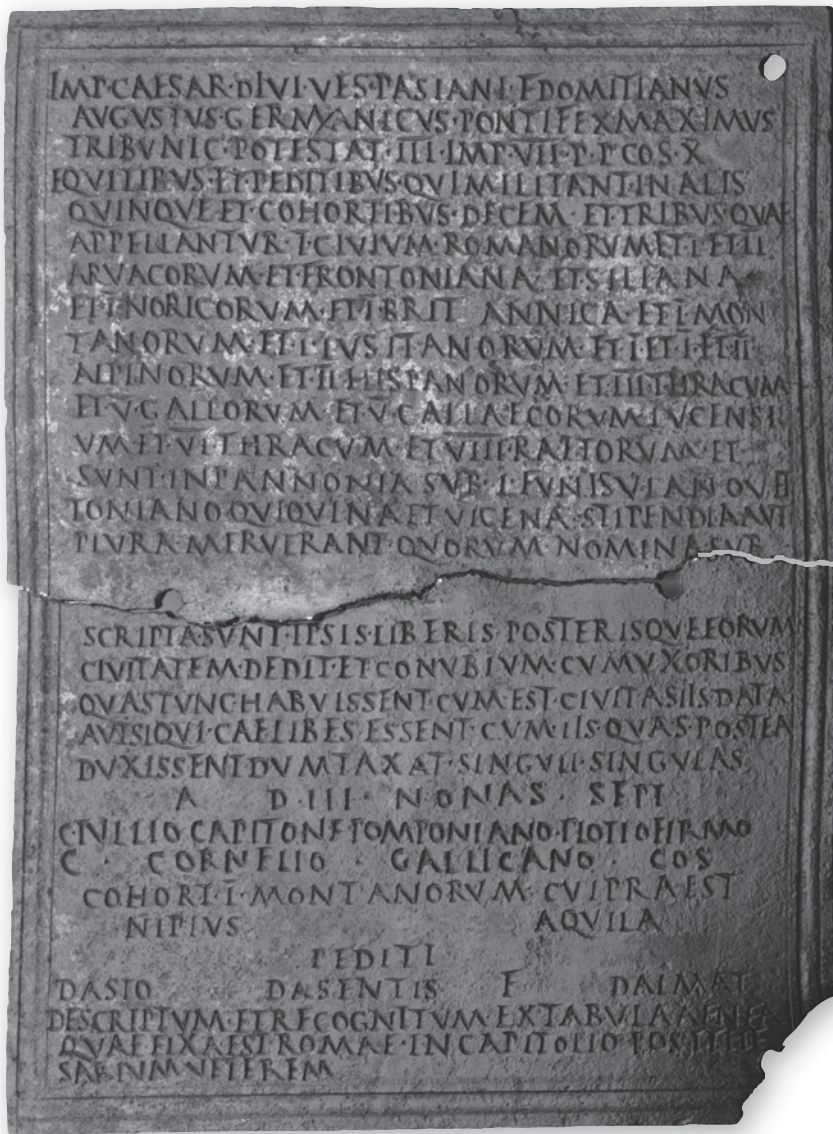
In the field of foreign affairs, it seems there were always plenty of witnesses. Fifteen years after the battle of Mons Graupius, when Tacitus aired his version of events, many of Agricola’s senatorial officers would have been important men in Rome. For example, Roscius Aelianus, who served as a tribune in Agricola’s army, was destined to hold the consulship in AD 100; the other tribunes, whose names we do not know, will have seen their careers progress in a similar way. By the same token, Agricola’s legionary legates will have progressed to other official positions. Gaius Caristanius Fronto, who commanded *VIII Hispana* in the early years of Agricola’s governorship, went on to hold the consulship in AD 90 (*ILS* 9485); he and his colleagues in command of the other legions could certainly testify to Agricola’s character, and their successors, whose names remain unknown to us, would have witnessed the battle of Mons Graupius.

Are we to suppose that such men colluded in Tacitus’ falsification of history? The idea seems preposterous. Henig rests his case on the lack of material evidence, but few other ancient battles are known archaeologically, and it is a fundamental maxim that absence of evidence does not constitute evidence of absence. Simply because archaeologists have not yet found evidence on the ground, the mass grave of the Caledonian dead, the scatter of discarded and broken equipment, this does not mean that such evidence is not waiting to be found one day.

Henig subsequently recanted his denial of Mons Graupius, conceding that there was ‘a skirmish in the hills’ (*British Archaeology* 41, 1999). But there are others who contend that Tacitus wrote fiction. This is far too simplistic a verdict on the *Agricola*. It is true that Tacitus’ purpose was to eulogize his father-in-law,

Roman Scotland, c. AD 86





Outer face of a diploma (CIL 16, 30 = ILS 1997) found at Carnuntum. It was issued to a veteran of the Pannonian army on 3 September AD 84 (the formula *a(n)te d(i)em*) *III Nonas Sept(embres)* C(aio) Tullio Capitone Pomponiano Firmo C(aio) Cornelio Gallicano co(n)s(ulibus) gives the date), and is the first official document to name the Emperor Domitian as *Germanicus* ('Conqueror of Germany'). (© Hungarian National Museum, Budapest. Photo: A. Dabasi)

not to record bare facts. Professor J. G. C. Anderson, an Oxford classicist and Tacitus scholar of the 1920s, was well aware that 'everything, or nearly everything, serves in one way or another to set in relief the hero's character and achievements'. But, as another Tacitean scholar, M. P. Charlesworth, long ago observed, 'his accuracy, though severely probed by modern criticism, can rarely be impugned'.

It is foolish, for example, to brand the primary historian of the early empire a liar, simply on the say-so of the Christian apologist Tertullian. Writing a century after Tacitus, Tertullian condemned his predecessor's vague knowledge of the early Christian church, calling him 'that blurter of falsehoods' (*Apol.* 16.1) for claiming that the Jews worshipped an ass's head (Tac., *Hist.* 5.3). Quite apart from the fact that Tacitus' ignorance of a minority eastern religion in a province that he never visited has absolutely no relevance to his knowledge of contemporary affairs in Britain, he was simply following the received wisdom of the day, in repeating a story also found in Plutarch and others.

And, as Ogilvie himself realized, the fact that Tacitus' style has echoes of earlier authors does not mean that his content is lifted from their work. It is one thing to identify literary borrowings from earlier writers (as, for example, when he describes the older Caledonian warriors, whose 'old age was still fresh and green', a quotation from the poet Vergil). Or to suggest that he has exaggerated Agricola's achievements (as, for example, when he claims that 'no fort established by Agricola was ever taken by enemy assault'). But it is quite another thing to accuse him of wholesale mendacity.

We have seen that Tacitus might even have had first-hand experience of the army in Britain during the years AD 77–79. If so, it is at least possible that the historian accompanied his father-in-law as far as the river Tay, and heard with his own ears the veterans who 'commented that no other general selected suitable sites more wisely' (Tac., *Agr.* 22.2). If, as seems likely, his absence from Rome in the years running up to AD 93 was on account of his service as a legionary legate, we may further speculate that his legion lay on the Rhine. It is interesting to note that the governor of Upper Germany during these years was Lucius Javolenus Priscus, who had served as *iuridicus* in Britain around AD 84, some years after Salvius Liberalis. If we have correctly located Tacitus in the early AD 90s, he would have been ideally placed to gather more detailed information on Britain.

THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Despite these arguments, there may still be some who believe that the battle of Mons Graupius existed only in the mind of Tacitus, or at least only in the mind of Agricola. Even so, it would still be a valuable exercise to study Tacitus' description, as it would have needed to convince his Roman readers and, as such, may be held up as an authentic reconstruction of Roman combat.

However, there are rather more who believe that there is a Roman battlefield waiting to be discovered somewhere in Scotland. Throughout this book, I have assumed that the battle took place on the slopes of Bennachie, near Inverurie in Aberdeenshire. In this, I have followed the interpretation of the late Professor Kenneth St Joseph, who believed that the site satisfied two out of three necessary conditions: firstly, that there should be a suitable gathering ground for the Caledonian host; secondly, that there should be a Roman camp whose size and position did not conflict with Tacitus' narrative; and thirdly, that there should be some evidence that a battle actually took place.



The entrance to the Archaeolink Prehistory Park, near Inverurie (Aberdeenshire). The mountain of Bennachie can be seen in the background. (Author's collection)

Critics may carp that St Joseph's third criterion has not been met, and no material evidence of the battle has ever been found. There are none of the hobnails or sling bullets that turn up in large quantities, for example, at Andagoste and Baecula (Spain); nor are there any of the bent and blunted weapons familiar, for example, from Alesia (France). But no material evidence of the battle has ever been sought, either. And it should be remembered that none of the other candidates (conveniently listed by Gordon Maxwell in *A Battle Lost*) can show this kind of evidence either. It is as true today as it was 30 years ago, when St Joseph himself wrote:

Readers will form their own judgement on the identification of this elusive hill. A camp of unique size, in significant juxtaposition to a highly distinctive mountain that it partly outflanks; ample space afforded for the massing of large native forces; ground suited to the tactics of the battle; such details of terrain as the concave hill-slopes and the mountain mass with its distinct peaks; interruption of the normal spacing of the large Roman camps by the position at Durno;... these considerations, taken individually, might be judged of little account, but the chances are overwhelmingly against there being in some other locality the significant association which is so evident at Durno-Bennachie.

J. K. St Joseph, *Britannia* 9, 1978, pp. 286–877

The ideal spot for readers to begin making their own judgement is at the Archaeolink Prehistory Park, near the village of Oyne, just off the A96 Inverurie–Huntly road. (Rail travellers can alight at Inch and take the connecting bus to Oyne. Full information can be accessed from the official web site: <http://www.archaeolink.co.uk>) Besides its location between Bennachie and Durno, this living history park has its own visitor attractions, including a reconstructed Iron Age roundhouse and a section of Roman rampart and ditch.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| AE | <i>L'Année épigraphique</i> (http://www.anneepigraphique.msh-paris.fr) |
| CIL | <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (http://cil.bbaw.de) |
| ILS | H. Dessau (ed.), <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> (Berlin, 1892–1916) |
| RGDA | <i>Res Gestae Divi Augusti</i> (Achievements of the Divine Augustus) |
| RIB | R. G. Collingwood & R. P. Wright (eds.), <i>The Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i> (Oxford, 1965) |
| <i>Tab. Luguval.</i> | <i>Tabulae Luguvalienses</i> (The Carlisle writing tablets), published in <i>Britannia</i> 29 (1998), 31–84 |
| <i>Tab. Vindol.</i> | <i>Tabulae Vindolandenses</i> (The Vindolanda writing tablets), published in: A. K. Bowman & J. D. Thomas, <i>The Vindolanda Writing Tablets</i> (London, 1994) |
| Arrian, <i>Anab.</i> | Arrian, <i>Anabasis Alexandri</i> (The campaigns of Alexander) |
| Caes., <i>BCiv.</i> | Caesar, <i>Bellum civile</i> (The Civil War) |
| Caes., <i>BGall.</i> | Caesar, <i>Bellum Gallicum</i> (The Gallic War) |
| Cic., <i>Epist. ad Att.</i> | Cicero, <i>Epistulae ad Atticum</i> (Letters to Atticus) |
| Cic., <i>Epist. ad fam.</i> | Cicero, <i>Epistulae ad familiares</i> (Letters to his friends) |
| Curt., <i>Hist. Alex.</i> | Quintus Curtius Rufus, <i>Historiae Alexandri</i> (The history of Alexander) |
| Cass. Dio | Cassius Dio (Roman History) |
| Diod. Sic., <i>Bibl. hist.</i> | Diodorus Siculus, <i>Bibliotheca historica</i> (Universal history) |
| Frontin., <i>Strat.</i> | Frontinus, <i>Strategemata</i> (Stratagems) |
| Hyg., <i>De mun. castr.</i> | Hyginus, <i>De munitionibus castrorum</i> (On fortifying a camp) |
| Jos., <i>Bell. Jud.</i> | Josephus, <i>Bellum Judaicum</i> (The Jewish War) |
| Luc., <i>BCiv.</i> | Lucan, <i>Bellum civile</i> (The Civil War, also known as <i>Pharsalia</i>) |
| Mart., <i>Epig.</i> | Martial, <i>Epigrammata</i> (Epigrams) |
| Mela | Pomponius Mela, <i>De situ orbis libri III</i> (Description of the world) |
| Onas., <i>Strat.</i> | Onasander, <i>Strategikos</i> (The General) |
| Ovid, <i>Fast.</i> | Ovid, <i>Fasti</i> (Festivals) |
| Plb. | Polybius (Histories) |
| Plin., <i>Nat. Hist.</i> | Pliny (the elder), <i>Naturalis historia</i> (Natural History) |
| Plin., <i>Pan.</i> | Pliny (the younger), <i>Panegyricus Traiani</i> (In praise of Trajan) |
| Plut., <i>Moral.</i> | Plutarch, <i>Moralia</i> (Morals) |
| Ptol., <i>Geog.</i> | Ptolemy, <i>Geographia</i> (The Geography) |
| Sen., <i>Apoc.</i> | Seneca (the younger), <i>Apocolocyntosis</i> (The pumpkinification of the emperor Claudius) |
| Sil. Ital., <i>Pun.</i> | Silius Italicus, <i>Punica</i> (The Punic War) |
| Stat., <i>Silv.</i> | Statius, <i>Silvae</i> (Woodlands) |
| Strabo, <i>Geog.</i> | Strabo, <i>Geographia</i> (The Geography) |
| Suet., <i>Calig.</i> | Suetonius, <i>Caligula</i> ('Caligula' from the Twelve Caesars) |
| Suet., <i>Div. Claud.</i> | Suetonius, <i>Divus Claudius</i> ('The deified Claudius' from the Twelve Caesars) |
| Suet., <i>Div. Vesp.</i> | Suetonius, <i>Divus Vespasianus</i> ('The deified Vespasian' from the Twelve Caesars) |
| Tac., <i>Ann.</i> | Tacitus, <i>Annales</i> (The Annals) |
| Tac., <i>Agr.</i> | Tacitus, <i>De vita Iulii Agricola</i> (The Agricola) |
| Tac., <i>Germ.</i> | Tacitus, <i>Germania</i> (On Germany) |
| Tac., <i>Hist.</i> | Tacitus, <i>Historiae</i> (The Histories) |
| Tert., <i>Apol.</i> | Tertullian, <i>Apologeticus</i> (Apology for the Christians) |
| Veg., <i>De re mil.</i> | Vegetius, <i>De re militari</i> (On military matters, also known as <i>Epitoma rei militaris</i>) |

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