



ENGLISH HERITAGE  
EDUCATION

KS2 & KS3

## ACTIVITY TRAIL

### Birdoswald Roman Fort

This trail has been designed to help students explore Birdoswald Roman Fort, which offers fascinating insight into life in a fort and the building of Hadrian's Wall.

Use this trail at Birdoswald to help students get the most out of their learning about Roman Britain and Hadrian's Wall.



#### INCLUDED:

- Teachers' Guide
- Teachers' Answer Sheet
- Student Activity Trail

Get in touch with our Education Bookings Team:

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📄 <https://bookings.english-heritage.org.uk/education>

Don't forget to download our **Hazard Information Sheets** to help with planning.

Share your visit with us on Twitter [@EHEducation](https://twitter.com/EHEducation)

Step into England's story

# TEACHERS' GUIDE

## Recommended for

KS3 (History, Geography)

## Learning objectives

### WHAT

Understand the fort's geographical and strategic position, its purpose, how it changed over time and what life was like there.

### HOW

By examining maps, plans and artefacts and exploring architectural features to stimulate enquiry.

### OUTCOME

Students will understand the fort's key structures, be able to explain the significance of its position and explain how some aspects changed over time.

## Time to complete

5–10 minutes per activity;  
8 activities

## PRE-VISIT

### PRIOR LEARNING

Before your visit, you could discuss the strategic importance of Hadrian's Wall in the Romans' consolidation of their empire in Britain. Use the Historical Information and Timeline with students to familiarise them with the key development periods in the fort's history.

### PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY

In the pre-visit activity 'What is Hadrian's Wall?', students will use a map and aerial photography to identify why the geographical location of Birdoswald Roman Fort led to a requirement for military protection.





### PREPARATION AND RESOURCES

Print the Activity Trail and complete the classroom activity with your class before visiting the site.

The booklet will print as four double-sided pages that can be folded into a booklet and stapled.

1. Select size A4, landscape orientation.
2. Select 'Print on both sides of the paper'.
3. Select 'Flip on short edge'.
4. Select the option to 'Print custom range' from pages 5 to 12.
5. This will print four double-sided pages of PDF that can be folded in half and arranged in page number order.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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# TEACHERS' ANSWER SHEET

## WHAT IS HADRIAN'S WALL?

**A) How many forts were built on Hadrian's Wall?**

16 were built on the Wall itself.

**B) At which fort did the Romans stop building the Turf Wall?**

Birdoswald Roman Fort (it ran past the fort up to the river Irthing).

**C) How many (modern) miles long was the entire Wall?**

73 miles (80 Roman miles).

**D) Why were forts built on the Wall?**

Hadrian's Wall was a frontier line that marked the northernmost edge of the Roman Empire in Britain. By establishing a secure border, patrolled by troops based at regular forts, the Romans could control who passed through the frontier. They could also watch for rebellious tribes and mount a response if the frontier was attacked.

## ACTIVITY 1: WEST GATE

**D) Find the square-cut sandstone on the face of the wall. This is high-quality stonework by master craftsmen. We think this stone was re-used from the base of a statue. Why do you think the Romans re-used stone?**

The scale of Hadrian's Wall – 73 miles long (modern miles) – required a huge amount of resources when it was first built. By the 3rd century, the Romans re-used stone to make alterations and repairs to save time and money.

## ACTIVITY 2: DRILL HALL

**B) Find the graffiti of a stallion on one of the stones in the remains.**

**C) The stallion graffiti is a symbol. What values do you think it might represent for a Roman soldier?**

The carving may be a symbol of strength (a key aspiration for a soldier of the Roman Empire). Also, virility: look closely - the stallion has a phallus.





## ACTIVITY 3: GRANARIES

- B) If grain got warm and damp it would rot. Discuss with a partner: How were the granaries designed to keep the grain cool and dry?

The granaries were built on low, stone walls above the ground level to help keep the building cool and dry (away from the damp earth). The ventilation channels beneath the floor and in the walls allowed air to circulate in the granary floor, preventing the air from becoming damp. Thick walls helped to keep the building cool.

## ACTIVITY 4: EAST GATE

- B) Find the stone pillar with a 'lip' of stone sticking out.



## ACTIVITY 5: MINOR EAST GATE

- A) Find stones with small slots (lewis holes) in them.



## ACTIVITY 6: SOUTH-EAST ANGLE TOWER

- B) Estimate the area saved by the curved corner design, compared with walls at right angles.

Area of the rectangle design: 70 m<sup>2</sup>.

The curved angle tower design saved: 11–12 m<sup>2</sup>.





ENGLISH HERITAGE  
BIRDOSWALD  
ROMAN FORT

# WELL DONE!

*Congratulations* on completing the trail!  
We hope you enjoyed your visit.

You can stick this Activity Trail into your book  
as a record of your learning.

*Step into England's story*



ENGLISH HERITAGE  
EDUCATION

KS2 & KS3

## ACTIVITY TRAIL

DISCOVER BIRDOSWALD  
ROMAN FORT



NAME: .....

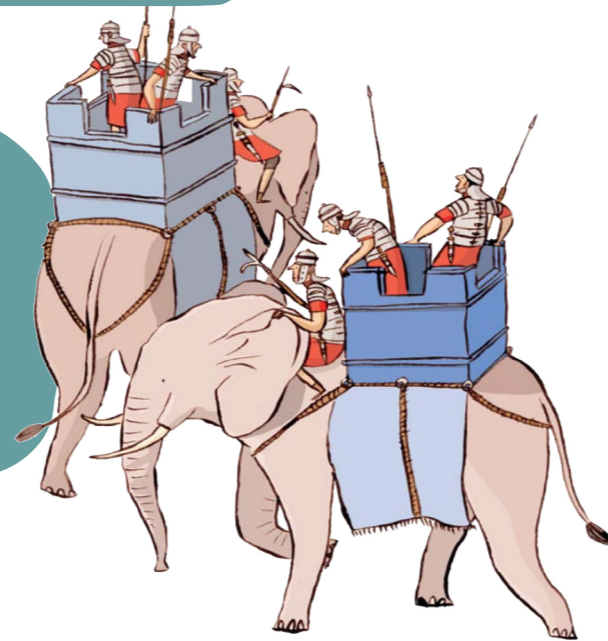
CLASS: .....

SCHOOL: .....



## WHAT IS HADRIAN'S WALL?

In AD 43, Emperor Claudius led a successful invasion of Britain, and the well-equipped and disciplined Roman Army quickly conquered the south of England, overpowering the Celtic tribes.



Emperor Hadrian.

By AD 84, the Roman Army had claimed northern Scotland. However, rebellious tribes continued to attack. When troops were called to fight elsewhere in the empire, the Roman frontier was pulled back to northern England.

In AD 122, Emperor Hadrian decided to build a secure wall to protect the Roman-occupied lands against the rebellious tribes.

The western half of the Wall was first built using turf (grass and earth) to save money and time. Before the Turf Wall was finished, the Romans decided to build the rest in stone straight away. Later the Turf Wall was rebuilt in stone.

### DID YOU KNOW?

It took around 5,000 soldiers to build Hadrian's Wall. Historians estimate it took between four and ten years to build.



Hadrian's Wall.

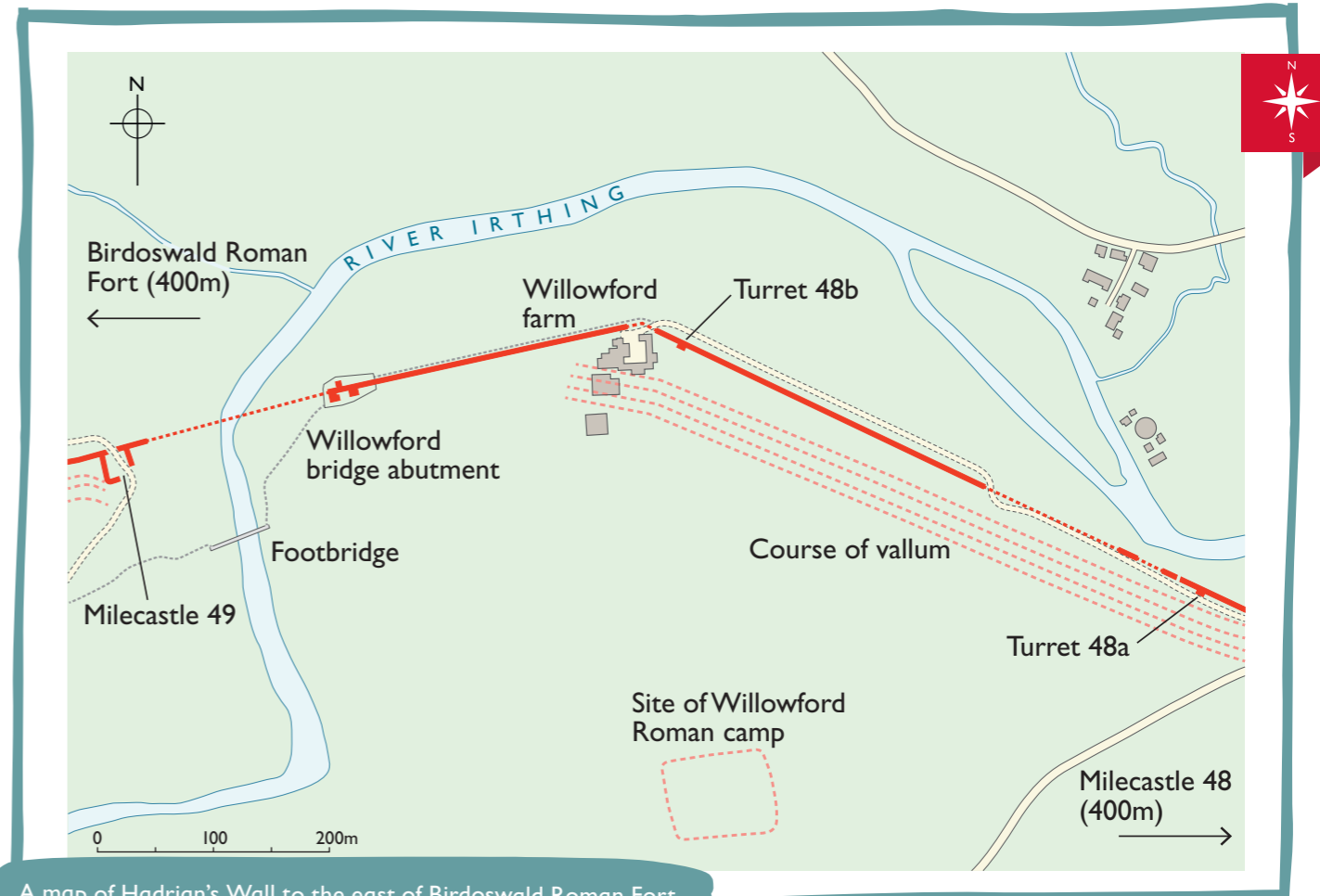
## OTHER LOCATIONS TO VISIT



Leaving the fort, walk along the path next to Hadrian's Wall to the east.

If your group leader would like to explore the area around Birdoswald Roman Fort, we recommend these nearby locations:

- Harrows Scar (Milecastle 49)
- Willowford bridge
- Centurion stone in the barn at Willowford farm

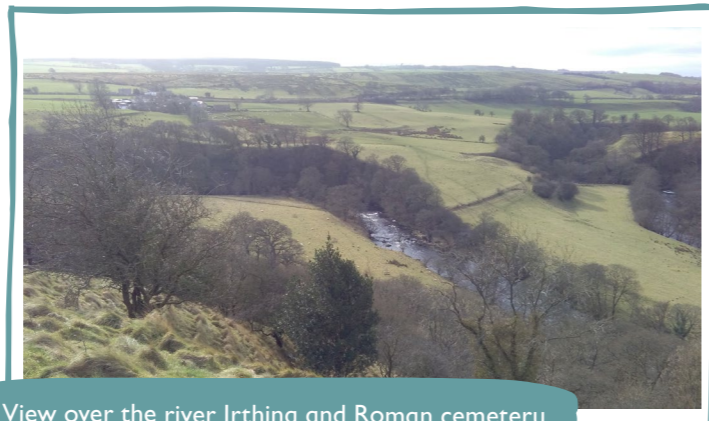


A map of Hadrian's Wall to the east of Birdoswald Roman Fort.



# ACTIVITY 7 – THE GORGE AND CEMETERY

Walk along the south wall towards the viewing platform that looks over the river Irthing. There are steep slopes in this area so walk carefully.



View over the river Irthing and Roman cemetery.

**A** **Look** across the gorge to the wooded cliff edge to the right. This is the site of the Roman cemetery.

DID YOU SPOT IT?

In 2009, the cemetery was excavated by archaeologists. They discovered cremation urns buried in the ground.



One of the cremation urns discovered at the cemetery outside Birdoswald Roman Fort.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Romans cremated their dead, and sometimes human remains were placed in urns (pots) along with objects that were connected with the person who had died.

**B** **Talk** to your partner. What objects in your life represent what is important to you?

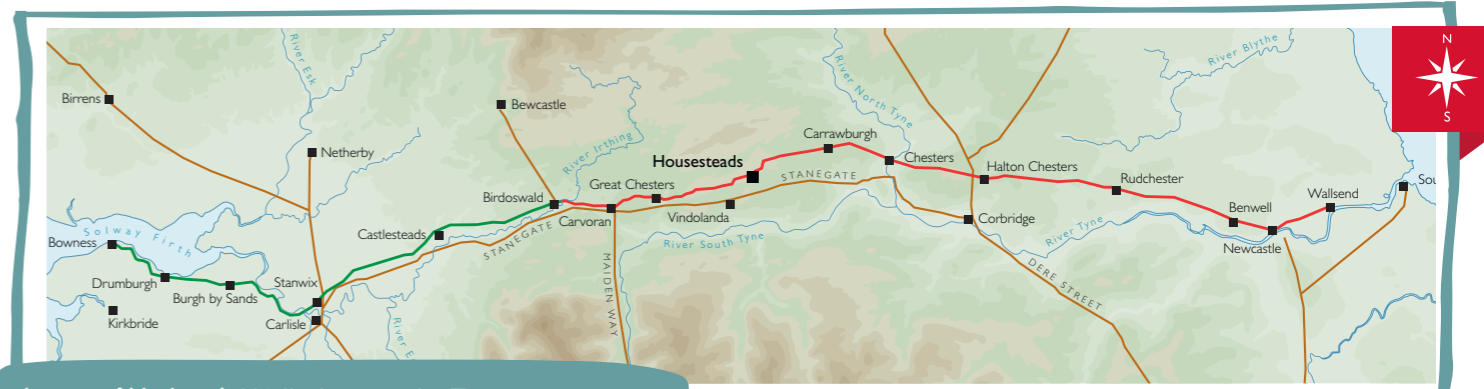
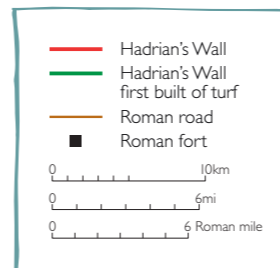
- 1 .....
- 2 .....

Discover amazing facts about Hadrian's Wall on our **website**. ([www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/hadrians-wall/history](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/hadrians-wall/history)).

Use the information and the sources on this page to answer the questions below.



An aerial photo of Hadrian's Wall showing the modern road running parallel between the Wall (right) and Vallum (left).

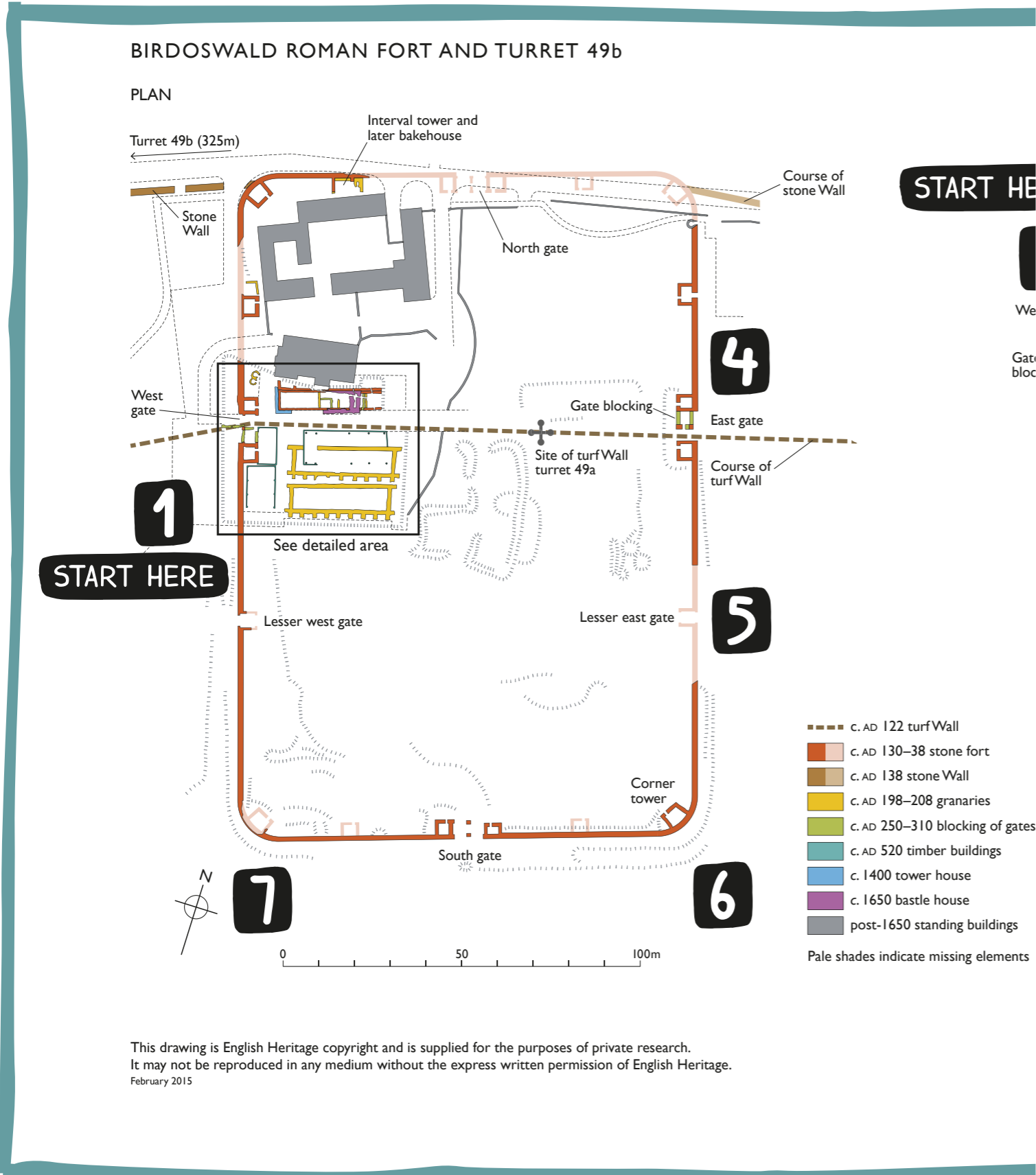


A map of Hadrian's Wall, showing the Turf Wall in green.

- A** How **many** forts were built on Hadrian's Wall? .....
- B** At **which** fort did the Romans stop building the Turf Wall? .....
- C** How **many** (modern) miles long was the entire Wall? .....
- D** **Why** were forts built on the Wall? .....



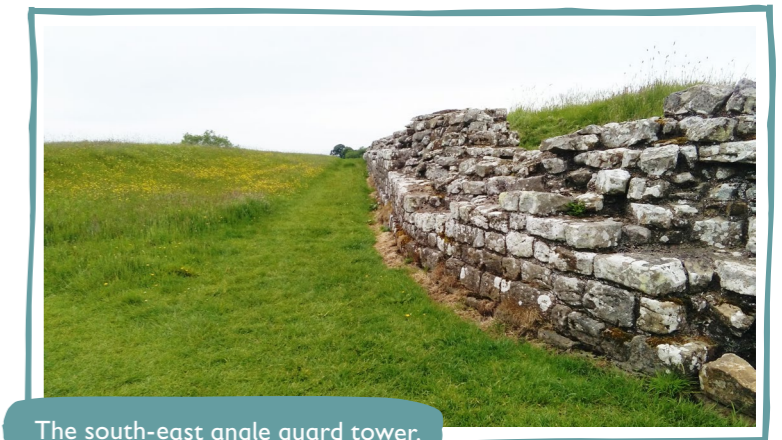
Complete each task as you go – the activities can be done in any order. The trail begins at the **west gate**.



Keep walking along the Wall until you reach the rounded south-east corner.

**A** Explore the foundations of the angle tower.

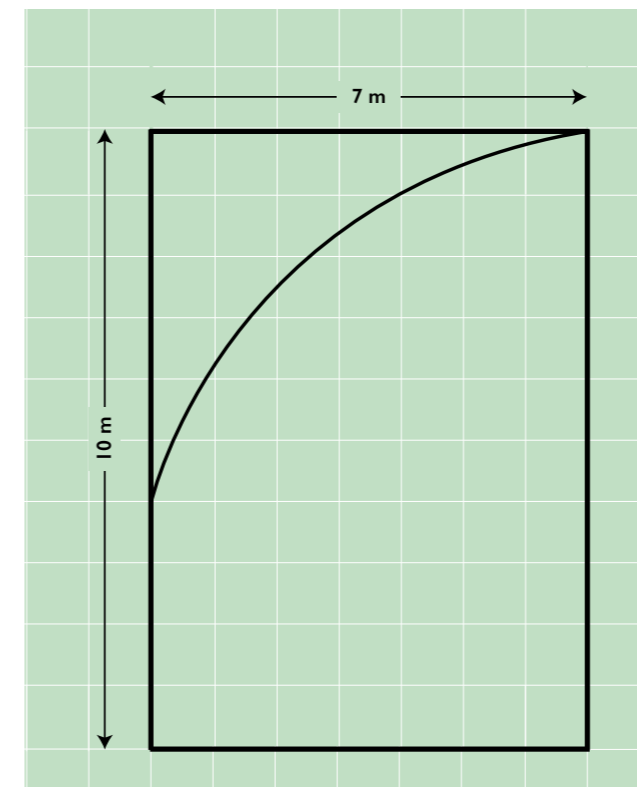
Rounded corners were easier to defend than right-angled corners. It also allowed the Romans to save on building materials.



The south-east angle guard tower.



Roman forts were all designed in a playing card shape with straight edges and rounded corners.



**B** Estimate the area saved by the curved corner design, compared with the rectangular design.

Area of the rectangle design:

..... m<sup>2</sup>.

The curved angle tower design saved:

..... m<sup>2</sup>.

# ACTIVITY 5 – MINOR EAST GATE

Walk south along the outer wall of the fort until you reach the minor east gate.

**A** Find stones with small slots (lewis holes) in them. Take photos or make a small sketch to use back at school.

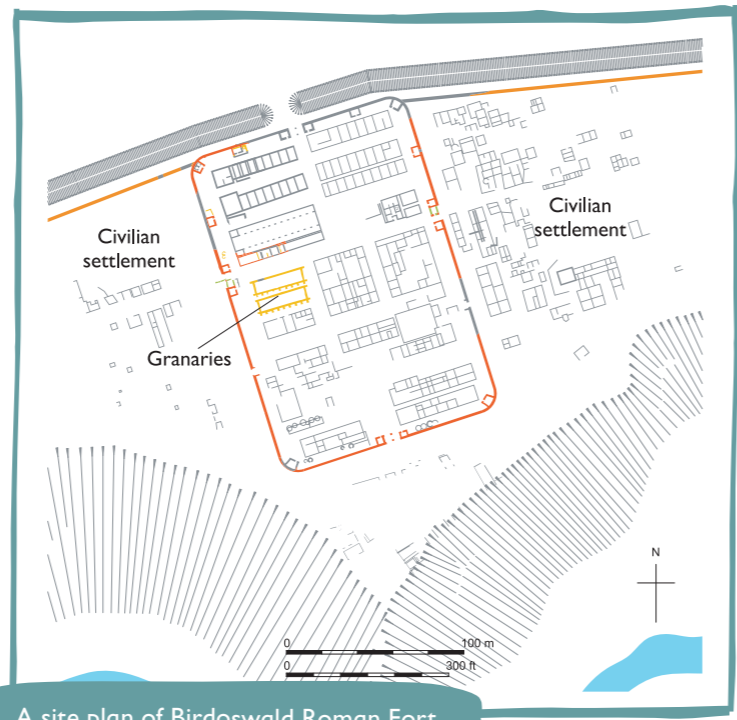


When Hadrian's Wall was rebuilt in stone, it was moved further north. The minor east gate was abandoned and fell into disrepair.

The Romans used a lewis lifting device to lift heavy stones for building. The holes on the stones show where the lewis attached to each stone brick to lift it. Try the lewis stone interactive display in the visitor centre to see how it works.



**B** Look at the landscape with your back to the minor east gate. In the fields beyond was the 'vicus' – the civilian settlement where craftsmen and the soldiers' families, servants and slaves lived.



A site plan of Birdoswald Roman Fort.

DETAILED AREA

1 West gate

2 Drill hall remains

3 Granaries

4 East gate

5 Minor east gate

6 South-east angle tower

7 Gorge and cemetery

ENGLISH HERITAGE



# WELCOME!

Your task is to collect evidence to discover what life was like at Birdoswald Roman Fort and why the fort was built here.

### You'll learn about:

- how and why Hadrian's Wall was built.
- who lived at the fort.
- what life was like here.

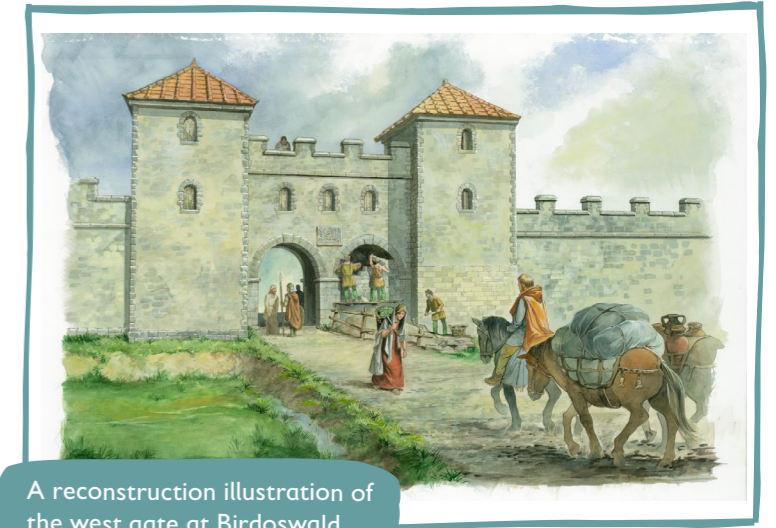
It should take you around one hour to complete this trail.



Birdoswald Roman Fort.



Look back to the illustration of the west gate where you started. The archways supported the weight of the gate buildings.



A reconstruction illustration of the west gate at Birdoswald.

**C** The stone on top of the pillar is the first in an arch. **Draw** in the rest of the arch stones.

**D** Stones in an arch share the load acting on them from above. Label on your drawing the direction of the forces (weight) acting on the stones in the arch.



## ACTIVITY 4 – EAST GATE

Walk down the main street, into the open field. This field, which used to be part of the fort, was covered in buildings. Walk straight ahead to the east gate.



The east gate. Each of the four gates of the fort was designed the same way, with two arches and a supporting pillar in the middle.

**A** **Explore** the two guard chambers on either side of the gate.

**B** **Find** the stone pillar with a ‘lip’ of stone sticking out.

DID YOU FIND IT?

This pillar held up one end of the arched gateway.

### DID YOU KNOW?

‘Porta principalis dextra’ is Latin for the ‘right main gate’.



## ACTIVITY 1 – WEST GATE

The west gate is one of four main gates into the fort.

**A** Each gate had two archways with heavy wooden doors.

**Look** for the stone that shows where the central column stood.

**B** **Find** the round holes in the ground where the door pivots were.

**C** **Explore** the fort’s outer wall remains to the east of the gate. The wall has a rubble core. This was stone set in clay and then capped with mortar.

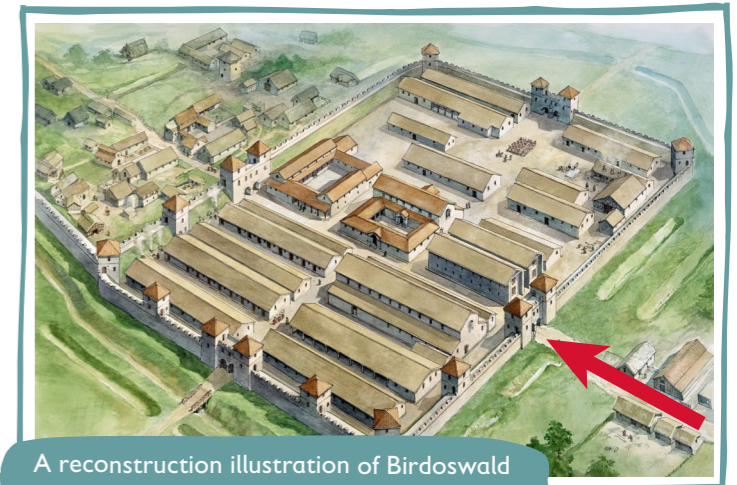
**D** **Find** the square-cut sandstone on the face of the wall. This is high-quality stonework by master craftsmen. We think this stone was re-used from the base of a statue. Why do you think Roman’s re-used stone?

.....

.....

.....

.....



A reconstruction illustration of Birdoswald Roman Fort in the early 3rd century.



The west gate.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Mortar is used to cement stones together. The Romans made mortar from lime, burning it with charcoal and the mixing it with sand gravel and water.





## ACTIVITY 2 – DRILL HALL

Stand at the gate and look down the main high street inside the fort. On the left is the Victorian farmhouse which was built on top of the Roman drill hall.



Drill halls were built so that infantry soldiers could practise their training in all weathers. Regular training was very important for the Roman Army.

**A** Explore the ground in front of the farmhouse tower to find the remains of the drill hall wall.

**B** Find the graffiti of a stallion carved on one of the stones in the remains.

**C** The stallion graffiti is a symbol. What values do you think it might represent for a Roman soldier?

.....

.....

### DID YOU KNOW?

'Basilica exercitatoria' is the Latin name for a drill hall.

'Basilica' means a large oblong hall with double colonnades, 'exercita' means 'I exercise, practise or train' and 'I serve in the Army, I am a soldier'.



## ACTIVITY 3 – GRANARIES

On the other side of the Roman high street, opposite the farmhouse, are large rectangular stone foundations where the two granaries stood.

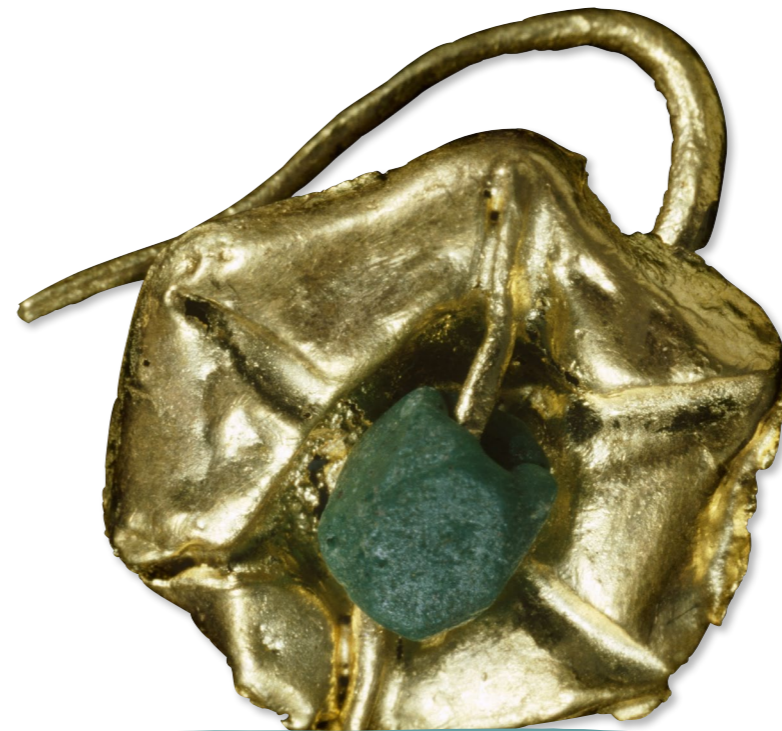
**A** Look carefully at the remains of the granaries. Find these design features:

- Ventilation slots
- Ventilation channels
- Raised floors
- Thick walls



These granaries were built in the early 3rd century. Granaries were used to store grain. Grain was used for making bread and porridge.

**B** If grain got warm and damp it would rot. Discuss with a partner: How were the granaries designed to keep the grain cool and dry?



This gold earring was discovered near the fireplace in the granary after the Romans left Birdoswald. The granary was used as a hall for meeting and eating together as a community.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Romans built little doors into the walls of the granaries to let dogs into the buildings to hunt rats.

