

“UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Europe – A Network for Cultural Dialogue and Cultural Tourism”

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In 1987, Hadrian's Wall (UK) was declared a World Heritage Site. In 2005 it was joined by the German *limes* and a new World Heritage Site created, the Frontiers of the Roman Empire. This is a phased, serial trans-national World Heritage Site. The long-term aim is to bring within it all appropriately preserved elements of the frontiers of the Roman empire in Europe, the Middle east and north Africa. This will create a truly unusual World Heritage Site in that it will encompass archaeological remains in many countries rather than just one or two countries as is the present situation with World Heritage Sites: it will, in short, be an multi-national World Heritage Site.

Progress has been made towards that aim. The Antonine Wall in Scotland, the most northerly and most advanced frontier of the empire, is now under consideration as a World Heritage Site, while Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, and Croatia have all stated their intention to nominate their section of the Roman frontier as part of the World Heritage Site. Roman forts in Syria and Jordan are already on the Tentative Lists for these countries, and it is therefore not difficult to envisage a trans-national World Heritage Site reaching out into Asia and into Africa.

The frontiers of the Roman empire stretched from the Atlantic coast of Scotland, along the Rhine and Danube rivers, with a salient out into Transylvania – modern Romania - using the Carpathian Mountains as the boundary, to the Black Sea; from Trabzon on the southern shore of the Black Sea to the Red Sea; and thence across north Africa, along the northern edge of the Sahara Desert, to the Atlantic coast of Morocco. These frontiers, over 5,000 km long, defined the Roman empire, one of the greatest states which the world has seen, and an idea and ideal which still inspires us today. Great books, exciting films and even the location of the signing of the founding treaty of the European Union all attest to this.

Along these frontiers today lie the visible remains of forts both great and small dating from the first to the fourth centuries AD. They include iconic sites such as Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall, the Saalburg in Germany, fourth century fort towers still standing to full height in Austria, and late Roman defensive works in Hungary and Romania, as well as artificial barriers in Britain and in Germany.

The frontiers of Rome are in many ways natural complements to the great cities and monuments of the more peaceful provinces of the empire which are already World Heritage Sites. These include Rome itself, Leptis Magna and Volubilis in Africa and Palmyra and Petra in Asia, engineering works such as the Pont du Gard and the Segovia aqueduct, temple complexes like those at Baalbeck, and the theatre and arch at Orange.

The frontiers which protected these places and of course the whole of the Roman empire link many modern countries around the Mediterranean Sea in a very particular way. Even today, one could march along the remnants of these frontiers, along Roman roads, from country to country around the edge of Rome's empire. Yet, the frontiers also relate to countries beyond the Roman empire. It was through these frontiers that Roman goods passed out to the people beyond the Roman world. These trade links stretched right across northern Europe, as far as Scandinavia and the countries round the Baltic Sea. Today, one of the best collections of Roman material is on display in the National Museum in Copenhagen.

Roman frontiers have left their mark on today's landscape in a variety of ways. The great line of the German *limes* can still be seen from the air as a marker across the landscape. Hadrian's Wall has served as an administrative, parish and estate boundary for centuries and also remains a very visible feature in the landscape. The plan of the legionary fortresses at Regensburg and Vienna still govern the layout of the historic cores of these great cities.

World Heritage Sites are chosen by the World Heritage Committee. As part of the nomination process considerable work has to be undertaken to define each proposed new Site, ensure that it is adequately protected, conserved and presented, and, in every sense of the term, properly managed. In order to help this process, one particular network has been created, a scientific committee made up of the archaeological co-ordinators appointed by each country for its section of the Roman frontier. Named the Bratislava Group after the location of our first meeting, it offers advice to the state parties, and has, for example, responded to a request by UNESCO to define the Roman frontier.

Each World Heritage Site must have a Management Plan. A multi-national World Heritage Site requires a special approach to the Management Plan. In acknowledgement of the differing traditions of the various countries proposing to join the World Heritage Site, the World Heritage Committee has approved the formulation of individual Management Plans for each section of the frontier rather than a single Plan embracing the whole World Heritage Site. Each Plan, of course, must relate to the management philosophy for World Heritage Sites laid down by UNESCO and ICOMOS.

Each Management Plan is required to contain a research strategy. Five years ago, a group of Roman military archaeologists decided to take the bold step of trying to create a research strategy for all the European frontiers of the Roman empire. A discussion was held at the European Archaeological Association's Annual Conference at Thessaloniki in 2002 and a programme devised. But to achieve that programme, it was realised that money was required. At the second attempt, we received a grant from the European Union Culture 2000 programme towards a project worth 1.35m euros. The 4 parts of this project are to improve the documentation of Roman frontiers, inform the public through the creation of a web site, prepare exhibitions and formulate guide lines for the protection, preservation, management, presentation and interpretation of Roman military sites. The project is about to enter its third and final year.

This Culture 2000 project, Frontiers of the Roman Empire, encompasses 9 partners in Europe, but it has embraced during the last 2 years many other countries who have been touched by the truly international scale of the project. It was a surprise to us 5 years ago that the first expression of interest was from Latvia, far removed from the Roman empire, but whose museums today proclaim the ancient link with Rome. The Culture 2000 project forms a second network.

As I have said to UNESCO on several occasions, in the task of trying to create a complex multi-national World Heritage Site, there is a great advantage in that so many of the core participants in the modern countries along the frontier know each other very well, not least through the regular meetings of the International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies, and we are strengthening our links through this Culture 2000 programme.

One of the great advantages of like-minded and motivated people working together on a common project is that they produce new ideas. The Culture 2000 project has spawned several new ideas which were not in our minds at the beginning. We have 3 such projects of which we are proud. The first is to create a short DVD about all Roman frontiers. This is being prepared by Boundary Productions, which has already produced DVDs of the frontiers in Britain and Germany (www.boundary.de). The difference, however, is that the new DVD will be distributed free of charge courtesy of Culture 2000. The other 2 projects are the twinning of schools and museums along the frontier, the former led by Austria and the latter by Bavaria. Both fit securely within the projects which UNESCO is seeking to promote in relation to World Heritage Sites.

Thus, in the medium term various legacies are being created: a web site and exhibitions about Roman frontiers, improved knowledge about the frontiers, the linking of museums and schools along the frontiers, and a DVD in at least 8 European languages. But more than that, we have created networks of archaeologists and cultural resource managers across a far wider area of Europe than the former Roman empire, and are demonstrating that scholars, archaeologists and cultural resource managers from countries with very different traditions within Europe can work together to create and enhance a truly multi-national World Heritage Site.

Further reading

David J. Breeze, Sonja Jilek and Andreas Thiel, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (Edinburgh – Esslingen – Wien 2005)

Deutsche Limeskommission: <http://www.deutsche-limeskommission.de>

Project “Enhancing the value of the UNESCO World Heritage Site ‘Upper German-Raetian Limes’ through landscape management”: <http://www.landespflege-freiburg.de/forschung/limes.en.html>

Historic Scotland: <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/antoninewall>