



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Frontiers of the Roman Empire
inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2005

Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site

Hadrian's Wall

Interpretation Framework

Overview and summary



Hadrian's Wall
Heritage Ltd



HADRIAN'S WALL
COUNTRY



Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site

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Genevieve Adkins and Nigel Mills



Hadrian's Wall
Heritage Ltd

Cover images

Sewingshields Crags © Northern Horizons

Event at Segedunum @Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums



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1 An Interpretation Framework for Hadrian's Wall

Event at Arbeia © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

For the past four years, Hadrian's Wall Heritage Limited (HWHL) has been committed to a unique vision to realise the full social, economic, learning and cultural heritage potential of Hadrian's Wall.

At the heart of this vision is the adoption of a Wall-wide approach to audience development through collaborative partnership effort and the creation of an Interpretation Framework for Hadrian's Wall.

This vision has been taken forward in the creation of two Interpretation Framework documents. Each focuses on a separate overarching interpretive theme identified for Hadrian's Wall:

- Primary theme: The north-west frontier of the Roman Empire
- Secondary theme: The natural and cultural landscape of Hadrian's Wall

The term 'framework' has been used very deliberately to describe a flexible approach which sets out guidelines to inform audience development and interpretation along Hadrian's Wall. Each document presents an overall thematic structure complemented by practical guidelines.

These guidelines are not prescriptive; instead, they are intended to help the many different organisations with an interest in Hadrian's Wall, from local authorities and national agencies to community groups and private landowners, develop approaches to interpreting the World Heritage Site (WHS) and its landscape in a coherent, complementary and differentiated way that will enhance and deepen the visitor experience of Hadrian's Wall for a wide range of audiences.

Although the two documents have the same purpose, the differences in their guidance and proposals reflect the contexts in which they have been created.

The Interpretation Framework for the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire reflects the situation that public presentation of the archaeology of Roman sites along Hadrian's Wall is rooted in conservation management planning, in academic research and in displaying the material culture associated with Hadrian's Wall. Given the number of key archaeological sites and museums that span the length of Hadrian's Wall, the initial focus for development is on major capital interventions at these sites.

The Interpretation Framework for the natural and cultural landscape of Hadrian's Wall focuses on engagement with place, landscape, nature and culture – aspects that are less tangible and more dispersed than the material culture of Hadrian's Wall, and which are often associated with grass roots, community-led initiatives. The focus is on small-scale, distributed projects and activities, although the need for a major centre to interpret the natural and cultural landscape of Hadrian's Wall is identified.

A key difference between the two documents is that availability of funding and the need to prioritise understanding of audiences and interpretation approaches in relation to the archaeology of Hadrian's Wall, enabled an in-depth programme of audience research to be undertaken for the primary theme - north-west frontier of the Roman Empire. This involved both qualitative and quantitative research including focus groups, telephone surveys and community consultation. Quotations from the focus group research are used to illustrate key points and recommendations in this Overview and summary document.

The Interpretation Framework has been developed by Hadrian's Wall Heritage Limited with the support of two steering groups¹. Preparation of both documents has involved extensive consultation with partners and stakeholders along Hadrian's Wall. The resulting Interpretation Framework is an advocacy and guidance document. The primary objective of the Interpretation Framework is to encourage adoption of the highest quality interpretation designed to meet audience needs across the WHS. High quality interpretation underpins the development of a world-class, differentiated, complementary and cohesive visitor offer along Hadrian's Wall. This in turn will improve connectivity between sites, encourage multi-site visiting, increase dwell time and improve ticket sales and income generation for all.

As a guidance document, formal endorsement by the various partners and stakeholders across the WHS is not anticipated. HWHL understand that some of the research results and subsequent recommendations in the Interpretation Framework may generate discussion. The findings and recommendations are, however, research-led and provide an invaluable resource for use by all partners in working together to transform visitor understanding and appreciation of the WHS over the short, medium and long term.

¹ Steering Groups: Primary Theme – north-west frontier of the Roman Empire: Professor Peter Stone – University of Newcastle, Bill Griffiths – Manager, north-east museums hub, Nigel Mills – HWHL, Linda Tutti HWHL. Secondary Theme – natural and cultural landscape of Hadrian's Wall: Elaine Rigg – NNPA Andrew Poad – National Trust, Brian Irving – Solway AONB, Bryan Scott – HWHL, Nigel Mills – HWHL.



2 The potential of the World Heritage Site

Hadrian's Wall at Crag Lough from Steel Rigg, Northumberland © Graeme Peacock

Hadrian's Wall was originally inscribed as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1987, as the most complex and best preserved of the frontiers of the Roman Empire. Today, Hadrian's Wall is arguably the most celebrated element of the transnational Frontiers of the Roman Empire WHS, inscribed in 2005 and currently comprising Hadrian's Wall, the German Limes and the Antonine Wall. The Hadrian's Wall element extends over 118 km and includes the Wall itself with directly associated features, the frontier defences extending down the Cumbrian coast and several outpost forts to the north. Its location has given rise to the identification of Hadrian's Wall as "the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire" – a term carried forward in the Primary theme of the Interpretation Framework.

The recognition of Hadrian's Wall as "the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire" offers unparalleled opportunities to:

- Broaden the themes and messages and appeal of the WHS so that its true composition, context, nature and significance can be better communicated and understood
- Explore the "bigger picture" by setting Hadrian's Wall in the context of Rome's occupation of Britain and the wider Roman Empire
- Use the many sites and the environment of Hadrian's Wall to communicate the various aspects of this story in unique, individual and complementary ways

- Engage and interest visitors in the cultural values of the north-west frontier story in contemporary society – going beyond an appreciation of archaeology to fostering understanding of the frontier, of Britain as a Roman colony, of modern frontiers, walls and barriers and of issues of citizenship, identity and multiculturalism
- Broaden the scope of the interpretation to take in the natural and cultural landscape of Hadrian's Wall and thus explore the role of landscape in its creation and legacy

The Interpretation Framework is directed at realising these opportunities, which will, in turn, deliver wider benefits:

- Enhance the visitor experience and visitor enjoyment for the widest possible audiences
- Increase visitor numbers and, more importantly, encourage visitors to stay longer and to visit more sites
- Improve awareness and understanding of the WHS, its significance and the need to conserve and protect it, thus supporting the objectives of the WHS Management Plan²
- Promote UNESCO's WHS values which seek to share the heritage and experience of people around the world to foster understanding, respect, tolerance, co-operation and peace. In the second decade of the 21st century with globalisation, migration, economic turbulence and war as ever-present concerns, these values offer an unparalleled opportunity for reflection and understanding

Outstanding Universal Value

A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place that is inscribed by UNESCO as having 'outstanding universal value' (OUV) and each site has its own statement explaining this OUV. The OUV for the Frontiers of the Roman Empire and Hadrian's Wall derives exclusively from the scope, scale, technological, and organisational achievement of the Romans represented by the Frontiers, reflecting the unifying impact of their Empire on the wider Mediterranean world.

Although the wider cultural and natural environment does not contribute to the World Heritage Site's OUV, it is an important part of the interpretation offer for visitors. The cultural and natural environment therefore forms a part of an overarching Interpretation Framework for the Hadrian's Wall WHS, and is recognised in the secondary Natural and Cultural Landscape Interpretation Framework document.

² The Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site - Hadrian's Wall Management Plan 2008 - 14

2 The potential of the World Heritage Site





3 The need for an Interpretation Framework

Visitors reading an interpretive panel at Cawfields © Northern Horizons

In April 2007, USA Today wrote: "...Hadrian's Wall is England's top ancient monument".

Yet for the past three decades visitor numbers to three of the main sites in the central section of Hadrian's Wall have fallen by an average of approximately 1.65 per cent each year³.

A full review of available audience research identified possible reasons for this decline, confirmed by a programme of public engagement undertaken during 2009-10.

- Potential visitors have limited knowledge of Hadrian's Wall and its significance. A common perception is that it is simply 'a wall' without any particular attractions. A visit to Hadrian's Wall was expected to be 'hard work' because the experience would depend on 'what you make of it yourself'. As a result of these expectations and perceptions, a trip to Hadrian's Wall was felt to be too risky to commit precious leisure time to

"Look at it compared to all the other places... It doesn't really match up to the others does it? There's nothing there!"

"I imagine I will get there and there will just be a bit of wall - after driving 100 miles. I don't know how you will go and see it. Where do you park?"

"Where does it run from? What did it look like? I am ashamed to say that I don't even know the basics about Hadrian's Wall"

"I think before you go you need to read up, because there's too much information, especially for children"

- For those who live locally, their knowledge of Hadrian's Wall is largely based on school trips, with the belief that little was likely to have changed since then, or be relevant to them

"The last time I went to Hadrian's Wall was with school. Many years ago - we didn't walk it though"

"It was all so long ago. Battles and armies and not the people. I don't think knowing about the Romans tells you much about life today"

- For previous visitors, Hadrian's Wall was thought to consist of a collection of Roman sites with little to unify them into a cohesive visitor experience. The lack of differentiation between sites, and the limited awareness of attractions along its length, means there was a perception that visiting one part of Hadrian's Wall was the same as visiting any other

"I just thought it was a wall and a bit boring, I didn't realise there were different places to go, I thought it was all the same"

"We tend to get a bit bored after about an hour and a half. There's just lines of bricks. It's OK for adults. You couldn't keep children occupied there for a full day"

Hadrian's Wall is arguably the most celebrated element of the transnational Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site inscribed in 2005, which currently comprises Hadrian's Wall, the German Limes and the Antonine Wall.

- The WHS runs from Ravenglass to the Solway Firth and across to the North Sea at South Shields
- Hadrian's Wall itself extends over 118 km from the lower Tyne to Bowness on Solway
- The site spans 10 local authority areas and over 70 parish councils and includes more than 150 individually scheduled ancient monuments. These include Hadrian's Wall itself with directly associated features, the frontier defences extending down the Cumbrian coast, and several outpost forts to the north

³ Economics Research Associates 2004 *The Hadrian's Wall Major Study Report*

3 The need for an Interpretation Framework

- Interpretation was generally regarded as not particularly good. This was the case for individual sites, of the linking of sites along Hadrian's Wall, and for the Wall itself. Difficulty accessing information about Hadrian's Wall was given as a key barrier to attracting new visitors, together with the perception that the large number of signs pointing in different directions to Hadrian's Wall meant that no single location would be sufficient to make a visit worthwhile

"It just worries me that I don't know what's there. I don't want to turn up and there be nothing there. I have visions of it being really rainy and bleak and nothing there"

"A website with all the information about the area as a whole would be great; with all the info about pubs and restaurants"

- Respondents generally felt that they should visit Hadrian's Wall for educational or health and fitness reasons, making it a duty visit rather than a pleasure. Usually, a key motivator for leisure visits is a recommendation from a friend or relative. Few respondents, however, stated that a recommendation had influenced their trip to Hadrian's Wall, indicating that it currently lacks a "wow" factor



Visitors at Walltown Crags Turret 45a © Graeme Peacock

These findings highlight a series of important issues that need to be addressed if Hadrian's Wall is to better realise its social, economic, cultural and educational potential.

What is interpretation and how can it help?

Interpretation is often associated with storytelling traditions. But it is more than storytelling. Interpretation is about fostering understanding – enabling people to move beyond the acquisition of information and knowledge to a position in which they wish to engage and to find out more.

Interpretation seeks to engage people in the meaning of things and in doing so relate that meaning to their own lives such that the place, object or people being interpreted are better understood and respected. It uses evidence, facts and our most up-to-date knowledge and understanding as the basis to explore the known and unknown, inspiring people's imaginations, evoking emotions, sparking ideas and prompting reflection that help inform people's beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours.

Interpretation can engender meaningful relationships between the subject or place being interpreted and the visitor. Such relationships can be associated with loyalty and active support – characteristics that are valuable to both managers and marketers. Research reveals that the more authentic and real a site or experience, and the more engaging and stimulating the themes explored and approaches used, the greater the attachment that can be forged. And this loyalty and support can translate directly into visits, membership and advocacy - behaviours that enable managers to achieve their aims.

Because interpretation can be targeted at particular audiences, it plays an influential role in audience development strategies, by fostering new audiences or further developing existing ones. It is for such powerful purposes that interpretation is increasingly used to deliver benefits to society, particularly in the heritage, environmental and cultural sectors.

Creating visitor experiences

Interpretation helps to create visitor experiences. It helps organisations plan how a site is presented and interpreted. It helps organisations manage visitors to sites. It helps organisations deliver visitor experiences through various interpretive approaches and media.

Interpretation plays a key role in the entire visitor experience and visitor communication cycle, alongside wider pre-visit information, site welcome and orientation, and end of visit information activities, all of which take key messages from the interpretation.

Given their importance to the whole visitor experience of Hadrian's Wall, this Interpretation Framework will cover such aspects where appropriate.

3 The need for an Interpretation Framework

The benefits of good interpretation

Good interpretation is a powerful tool. It can make the visitor experience engaging, fun and memorable. It can help promote Hadrian's Wall as a destination for tourists, bringing greater economic benefits to local businesses and communities. It can attract and engage more people in the historic environment. But it has the potential to do much more.

Good interpretation can forge links between individuals, communities and shared heritage, engendering pride in Hadrian's Wall as a place of both local and international significance. It can break down barriers that often exclude particular social, cultural and ethnic groups. It can be used to develop existing and new audiences by providing experiences that meet their needs and make them feel welcome, secure and valued and which, in turn, fosters the development of these audiences.

Good interpretation can encourage a sense of stewardship of sites themselves and contribute to the management of visitors to minimize their impact on the heritage. It can foster understanding and respect amongst visitors for a place, site and the people who work and live there. It can be a focus for education, from formal school trips to informal lifelong learning. It can enrich the cultural lives of visitors and local communities, revealing common qualities that connect human cultures. If the interpretation of a site or groups of sites works well, there are many potential benefits that can be realized.

Interpretation can be a force for change.

The Interpretation Framework aims to:

- Create an overarching framework for the interpretation of Hadrian's Wall and associated sites that pulls together existing plans and will inform future site presentation, events, public programmes, volunteering and so on
- Provide the intellectual logic for thinking about Hadrian's Wall as more than a monument but rather as "the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire"
- Support the development of an overall Hadrian's Wall visitor offer that has resonance with local people, visitors and stakeholders
- Enable the creation and marketing of clearly differentiated visitor experiences that contribute to the overall Hadrian's Wall visitor offer and appeals to a variety of audiences
- Broaden the appeal of Hadrian's Wall to the widest possible audiences by diversifying the offer. For example, the schools offer should be developed to appeal to wider subject areas rather than simply 'history' or 'the Romans' (so 'multiculturalism' and 'identity' themes could be linked to Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education within the National Curriculum, while tourism and heritage management themes would interest geography, economics and travel and tourism students)
- Provide support to sites at a macro level to create distinctive visitor experiences, in terms of both themes and presentation, that complement rather than duplicate existing provision, thus encouraging multi-site, cross-visiting
- Help maximise the contribution of Hadrian's Wall to the local economy



4 The audiences for Hadrian's Wall

A family visits Segedunum © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

The existing audiences

The existing audiences for Hadrian's Wall are declining. There are many reasons for this, including the affordability of overseas travel, increased competition within the UK and greater demands on leisure time. This situation means that Hadrian's Wall must be more competitive, presenting a compelling leisure destination in the north of England.

A study by Economics Research Associates (ERA)⁴ estimated that in 2003, 776,000 people visited Hadrian's Wall, of whom 458,000 visited the museums and main sites, 287,000 were general tourists who did not visit museums or sites and 31,000 were walkers who likewise did not visit the sites. The study found that:

- Forty nine per cent of visitors were from the North of England, 41 per cent from elsewhere in the UK and 10 per cent from overseas
- Visitors tended to be older than the population average, with 27 per cent aged 55+
- Just under a third of visitors were accompanied by children
- About two thirds of visitors were staying overnight away from home
- Just over 40 per cent of visitors were on their first visit to the area
- A quarter of visitors had made more than five previous visits to the area

The potential audiences

The pool of potential visitors for Hadrian's Wall is large. The ERA study found that 2.4 million people live within 40 miles or an hour's drive of Hadrian's Wall, 85 per cent of whom are in the northeast. A further 1.9 million live within 80 miles, constituting a secondary residential market. Furthermore, some 5 million tourists – 4.4 million domestic – stay within 40 miles of Hadrian's Wall each year. Yet despite being less than hour's drive away, the majority of these potential visitors choose to visit Cumbria or Newcastle instead.

It is this pool of missing visitors - locals and tourists - that needs to be persuaded to explore the outstanding heritage on their doorstep.

Consultation with stakeholders identified seven priority market segments. These include:

- UK ABC1s, predominantly over 45 years old with no dependent children and living within three hours of Hadrian's Wall
- North Americans and northern Europeans, with a similar demographic profile to the UK ABC1s
- Families with children
- Specialist audiences, with the same profile as UK ABC1s but with an active interest in heritage, walking or cycling
- New visitors who are in part attracted to Hadrian's Wall by its WHS status
- School and other educational visitors
- People visiting friends and relatives in local communities

⁴Economics Research Associates 2004 *The Hadrian's Wall Major Study Report*



Putting audience development at the heart of Hadrian's Wall

Central to the Interpretation Framework for Hadrian's Wall is a commitment to audience development and to improving the visitor experience as a means to achieve this. This recognises the need to broaden the appeal of Hadrian's Wall to the widest possible audiences for whom it may have meaning, resonance and value, including: local people, visitors (UK and overseas) and stakeholders. The Interpretation Framework puts audience needs and the visitor experience at the heart of decision making and recognises that a dynamic and responsive approach is required to engage all audiences and encourage repeat visitors.

To achieve these aims both Interpretation Framework documents are underpinned by the following audience development principles:

- A belief that our cultural and natural heritage should be accessible and inviting and that interpretation is key to achieving this
- An understanding of the barriers to participation for different audiences and an understanding of the factors that drive participation
- An understanding of the needs of different audiences and a commitment to meeting these needs
- An awareness that the stories of the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire, its natural and cultural landscape and the people connected to it can be motivating for audiences and can encourage participation if presented in appropriate ways
- The desire to make people feel welcome and build relationships with visitors
- Ongoing consultation and evaluation

"I think sometimes, if you have someone there talking about the place who knows all about it, if they have a personal interest and they're telling you lots of things you've never heard before, that just makes it really interesting"

"There's nothing worse than displays in glass cases"

"Keeping the children occupied is key. There needs to be things to do to stop them getting bored"

"I think it helps put things in context"



Event at Segedunum © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums



5 Interpretation Framework principles - making change happen

A small boy meets the standard bearer at Housesteads © Northern Horizons

To help make change happen along Hadrian's Wall, a series of interpretation principles have been developed to inform future interpretation and projects. These have been informed by consultation, good practice guidelines, interpretation research and the findings of the audience research.

1. Commit to interpretation that is dynamic and people oriented, relevant (though potentially challenging) to their views, understanding and interest in the world around them – providing interpretation that is exciting, challenging, engaging, fascinating, participative, enjoyable and fun.
2. Recognise opportunities to identify contemporary resonances as a key means to engage visitor interest, foster understanding and promote UNESCO's broader values in relation to the WHS. For example, modern frontiers can illustrate some of the tensions and realities of life along Hadrian's Wall – it can act as a metaphor through which to explore contemporary issues, contributing relevance, meaning and value to the visitor experience.
3. Appreciate that Hadrian's Wall is itself an object that illustrates the overarching theme of the Roman Empire's north-west frontier, but is not, on its own, the whole story.
4. Enable visitors to grasp the "bigger picture" and to understand that each site tells a different part of the story or presents the story in a different way appropriate to different audiences.
5. Differentiate each site along Hadrian's Wall so that each one is an attraction in its own right and makes a unique contribution to the overall visitor offer and experience.
6. Understand that in order to engage more effectively with existing and new audiences, interpretation needs to be underpinned by sound academic research and that objects and sites should focus on communicating themes within an overall narrative structure for the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire.

"I like things to be quite thought provoking and make me think"

"My children are more interested if there's a story behind it, people's experiences; it really captures their imagination, something to relate to. The story of someone's life would be great"

"To me the size of the empire is really interesting and the idea of different walls around the world now is brilliant"

"I think this is a really good idea to make you think of the wall as part of a bigger picture"

"The idea that things are still ongoing is really interesting; it goes against the idea that a wall is a wall. It's a process that's still going on"

"...it's really good to hear about people and how they lived"



H Murus map © Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums



6 Interpretation Framework themes – the themes of Hadrian's Wall and its natural and cultural landscape

Housesteads, Hadrian's Wall, Northumberland © Graeme Peacock

The primary overarching theme of the Interpretation Framework is the story of the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire from the first to the fifth century – a dynamic story as the frontier changes, evolves and adapts over 400 years.

The secondary overarching theme is the story of the natural and cultural landscape through which Hadrian's Wall passes.

Primary Theme: The north-west frontier of the Roman Empire

The central interpretive concept proposed for the Roman Frontier is:

Hadrian's Wall is at the centre of the dynamic story of the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire. This frontier evolved from the first to the fifth centuries AD in response to changing political, social, economic and demographic forces within the Roman Empire, and the changing status and role of Britain as an Imperial Province. The heavily militarised frontier zone has left a rich physical and cultural legacy through which we can explore its story and understand its resonance with the modern world.

This concept has been mapped into a series of themes which will be the focus of interpretation at sites along Hadrian's Wall. These draw on the interpretive potential of the sites gleaned from aspects including landscape character, archaeology, collections, historical records and so on.

1. **People of the Empire** – the Roman Empire was multicultural and as concerned with issues of citizenship, identity and belonging as we are today. Modern parallels can be drawn with the archaeological and historical record to inspire reflection and a new understanding of this aspect of Rome's legacy.
2. **Frontier Lives** – we can become personally involved in the daily lives, emotions and cares of individual Roman citizens through the compelling personal stories revealed in the writing tablets from Vindolanda and Carlisle and through the wealth of inscriptions found across Hadrian's Wall.

3. **Edge of Empire** – Hadrian's Wall became the centre of the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire, a key element in the frontier ring created by Emperor Hadrian. As such, it symbolises the military power of the Empire and the imposition of military occupation on Rome's territories.

4. **Britain – a Roman Province** – Britain was part of a vast empire with long-range social and commercial links. The area around Hadrian's Wall reflects this story and reveals many aspects of life in the provinces, including exploitation of mineral resources, commerce, citizenship, politics and relations between Romans and local people.

5. **The Roman Army** – the Roman Army was the key instrument in establishing and maintaining the Roman Empire. It operated as an effective and mighty military machine and its multicultural soldiers were also administrators, engineers, a police force and loyal citizens in retirement.

6. **Before and After** – before, during and after the Roman occupation of the north-west frontier, local people occupied the area. Through archaeological excavation we are learning more about these people, about Rome's legacy on people, culture and environment, and ties to our European neighbours. The frontiers of the Roman Empire form both tangible and intangible links between the many countries once within the Empire, and those outside the Empire.

7. **Power and Control** – empires are often synonymous with conflict, struggle and barriers, but also with stability, economic prosperity, trade and commerce. Once a great divide, the frontiers of the Roman Empire provide a unifying element in the modern world and offer opportunities to explore and understand contemporary struggles and barriers, and share universal values that resonate with the purposes of WHS status.

8. **The Frontier and its Environment** – the landscape, its geology and its flora and fauna helped shape the frontier and the nature of Hadrian's Wall. The Romans exploited, adapted to and left their mark on the environment of Hadrian's Wall.

6 Interpretation Framework Themes

9. Exploration, Discovery and Values – the archaeological and historical evidence that enables us to explore the story of the north-west frontier is revealed through antiquarians researchers, archaeologists, workmen and volunteers. This is a dynamic process with which we can actively engage and contribute our own interpretations. It is also a process through which we come to understand and value the legacy of the past.



Berlin Wall Eastside Gallery, Berlin, Germany © Image Source

Secondary Theme: The natural and cultural landscape of Hadrian's Wall

The central interpretive concept proposed for the natural and cultural landscape of Hadrian's Wall is:

Hadrian's Wall Country: extraordinary landscapes united by their Roman heritage. These diverse habitats – from coastal plains, rivers, rocky crags and remote bogs to farmland and urban centres – surround and overlook the line of this historic frontier.

As with the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire, this concept has been mapped into a series of themes which will be the focus of interpretation at sites along Hadrian's Wall. These draw on the interpretive potential of the landscapes gleaned from aspects including landscape character, archaeology, collections, historical record and so on.

- 1. Managing the Landscape** – Hadrian's Wall Country is significant for its variety of landscapes as well as its unique history. These are a mix of working landscapes and fragile environments, all of which must be carefully managed to balance the needs of wildlife and people.
- 2. The Influence of the Landscape** – The different parts of Hadrian's Wall Country have distinctive identities and cultural traditions. These unique characteristics have been shaped by the landscape, and by the ways in which people make use of and adapt the natural resources here, over thousands of years.
- 3. Reading the Landscape** – Hadrian's Wall Country has endured a turbulent history, evidence of which can be read in the landscape. Along this ancient frontier are remnants of great geological upheavals, the scars of centuries of weather and industry, and the remains of countless battles and modern military manoeuvres.
- 4. A Living Landscape** – Hadrian's Wall Country is a place for people. It is a dynamic landscape with a rich history that welcomes you to explore and enjoy a wealth of natural riches and cultural activity.

The themes identified in this section illustrate how the primary and secondary overarching themes of the Interpretation Framework can be delivered. It is important to highlight that these are not prescriptive. It is hoped that site and project teams will further develop and refine these as they explore how to improve the visitor experience of Hadrian's Wall.

6 Interpretation Framework Themes

Making connections

The project consultation process has identified two subsidiary themes which link the two Interpretation Framework documents and provide further scope to broaden the interpretive offer for visitors:

- UNESCO and World Heritage Sites
- Natural and cultural frontiers

UNESCO and World Heritage Sites

World Heritage Sites are places inscribed by UNESCO as having cultural and/or natural heritage which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. This is usually referred to as a place having 'outstanding universal value' to all humankind. UNESCO does not define precisely what it means by outstanding universal value but each World Heritage Site has its own statement of significance that places its value within the context of the Convention and a series of qualifying criteria. For the Frontiers of the Roman Empire and Hadrian's Wall the outstanding universal value is seen within the scope, scale and technological and organisational achievement represented by the frontiers, reflecting the unifying impact of the Roman Empire on the wider Mediterranean world.

In promoting the concept of World Heritage, UNESCO has a wider agenda and objective which is to promote peaceful co-existence and partnership between the nations of the world through respect, understanding, tolerance and co-operation. These broader values are most effectively expressed through the UNESCO 'World Heritage in Young Hands' learning programme.

It is important that the interpretation of World Heritage Sites and their use and presentation to the public as a resource for learning encompasses this wider UNESCO agenda. One way of doing this is to ensure that the 'World Heritage in Young Hands' programme is adopted as an integral part of the learning strategy for any World Heritage Site.

A second way of addressing UNESCO's wider objective is to identify aspects or elements of the outstanding universal value of a particular site that resonate with the modern world. Hadrian's Wall, and the Frontiers of the Roman Empire WHS as a whole, has enormous potential for promoting these wider UNESCO values since issues of identity, tolerance, respect and co-operation lie at the heart of understanding the functioning of both Roman and modern frontiers. This is reflected in the thematic structure of the primary Roman Frontier theme.

Natural and cultural frontiers

Many physical and human aspects of the landscape between what are now Scotland and England reflect a 'frontier' theme, from geological times to the present day. Included within this ancient frontier zone are not only the remains of the Roman frontier, but also remnants of major ecological upheavals as land masses collided millions of years ago; the traces and scars of climate change and the related ebb and flow of human settlement in marginal areas; the castles and fortified farmhouses that reflect the political process and history of the area from Roman times to the recent past; and the buildings and monuments that reflect the early Christian story when the area was an important religious frontier.

This 'frontier' theme provides further links between the Roman frontier and the modern world and between the Roman frontier and the landscape in which it is set. This linking theme is reflected in the Natural and Cultural Landscape document.



The Whin Sill - View East from Cockmount Hill towards Cawfields
© Graeme Peacock



7 Bringing the World Heritage Site to life

Excavations at Roman Vindolanda © The Vindolanda Trust

The two Interpretation Framework documents propose a series of projects along Hadrian's Wall. The following section summarises the main and most relevant projects at this time.

The north-west frontier of the Roman Empire

The Interpretation Framework for the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire has both informed and been informed by major developments currently being brought forward along Hadrian's Wall. The major developments proposed or in process of realisation are: the [Great North Museum](#), [Tullie House Museum](#), [Roman Vindolanda](#), the [Roman Army Museum](#), [Housesteads](#)⁵ and [Maryport](#). These are the focal points of the Interpretation Framework for the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire which concentrates on creating the differentiated but complementary offers essential to a cohesive Wall-wide visitor experience and to realising the social, cultural and economic vision for Hadrian's Wall.

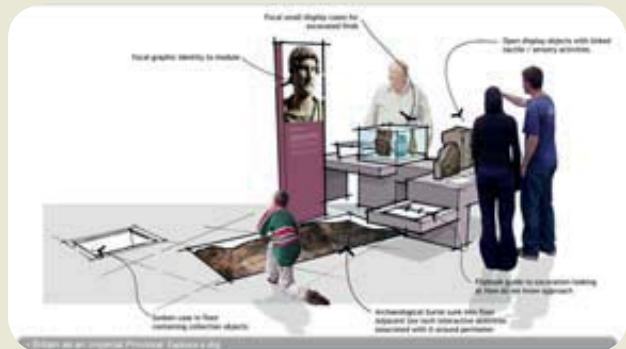
The Great North Museum and Tullie House Museum, with their large museum collections representing many different parts of the frontier zone, will act as east and west 'gateways' and orientation points to Hadrian's Wall and to Hadrian's Wall Country. Their purpose is to provide both a physical and conceptual overview of Hadrian's Wall and the story of the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire in contrast to site-based interpretation which will focus on more specific themes and stories.

The Great North Museum whose Hadrian's Wall Gallery is completed, focuses on Hadrian's Wall itself and features a scale model of its full length. This centrepiece is supported by collections rich displays which are brought to life through the voices of individuals identified from the world-class collection of stone inscriptions.



Roman Gallery, Great North Museum, Newcastle
© Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

The new Roman Frontier gallery at Tullie House Museum, currently under construction, focuses on communicating the wider story of the north-west frontier of Imperial Rome and the position of Britain as a military province within the Empire. The main focus of the gallery will be the people of the Empire and Imperial power and control, enabling exploration of ideas of colonialism, citizenship and identity as well as highlighting contemporary resonances in modern experiences of frontiers and identity.



Design visual Roman Frontier Gallery
© Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery

At Roman Vindolanda, just completed, visitors are able to engage and empathise with the real people, real events and daily military and domestic life on the frontier 2,000 years ago as revealed through the Vindolanda writing tablets and the ongoing process of archaeological investigation and research at the site.



Chesterholm Museum, Roman Vindolanda © The Vindolanda Trust

⁵ Site names used throughout the Interpretation Framework documents reflect those used in public communications and signage and not site descriptive terms e.g. Housesteads Roman Fort

7 Bringing the World Heritage Site to life

At the Roman Army Museum, also just completed, the interpretation brings the Roman Army to life, exploring themes of the army and the Empire, military tactics and training, and the diverse roles and functions of the army as an occupying force, as engineers, as architects, as administrators and as multicultural Roman citizens. It also, where possible, draws contemporary parallels with the modern military. Given the broad and popular appeal of the subject, the visitor experience is more family focused and maximises the opportunity for this facility to be a much needed wet weather attraction along Hadrian's Wall.



Roman Army Museum © The Vindolanda Trust

At Housesteads, English Heritage and the National Trust are planning a project that will enable visitors to explore and understand life within one of the best preserved and most easily visible fort complexes in the Roman Empire that includes the entire complex of fort, Wall, vallum, garrison settlement, temples, parade ground, cultivated land and roads. Visitors will be able to explore the fort, Hadrian's Wall and its dramatic landscape setting and through comparisons with other Roman frontiers and forts, will develop an appreciation of what it must have been like for an occupying force to live at the edge of the Roman Empire.



Housesteads © Graeme Peacock

At Roman Maryport, a project is being planned that will focus on communicating the relationship between a fort, its garrison and the wider Empire by exploring the journeys and career paths of its people and soldiers as revealed by the altars in the Senhouse collection. At the height of its power and influence Rome's Empire stretched across 32 countries, a feat that meant its citizens and soldiers had to make both physical and personal journeys by land and sea to remote outposts such as the north-west frontier. The new museum displays will be enlivened by an on-going programme of excavation that will enable visitors to engage with the on-going process of excavation and archaeological research.



Artists impression of proposed project at Roman Maryport © HWHL

These major developments will be supported by a rolling programme of small-scale improvements and developments at other sites and locations to complement and enrich the Hadrian's Wall visitor offer and to spread the benefits of association with the World Heritage Site more widely.

7 Bringing the World Heritage Site to life

The natural and cultural landscape

In contrast to the major projects proposed above, many of the proposals for the natural and cultural landscape theme are smaller in scale. However, an opportunity for a significant development in the central section of Hadrian's Wall has been identified. This would provide the opportunity to celebrate the landscapes of Hadrian's Wall Country and could be integrated with the proposed Northumberland National Park development at Once Brewed. There is also an opportunity to mark the western end of Hadrian's Wall at Bowness in a way that complements the development of Segedunum at Wallsend but focusing instead on the landscape of the Solway area and providing a link to the Cumbrian coast.

The projects below are examples of the range of ideas to interpret the natural and cultural landscape theme. They need to be discussed, prioritised and developed with partners across the WHS.

A landscape interpretation centre for Hadrian's Wall Country

The development of a site in the central section of Hadrian's Wall to interpret the landscape of the Roman frontier. This would fill a major gap in landscape interpretation and provide the opportunity to develop links north and south as well as east and west.

Top ten things to see and do leaflets

Highlights based on landscape themes and activities. Hadrian's Wall Country stretches over 100 miles and passes through numerous National Character Areas. There is so much to see and do that visitors struggle to read all the literature available to identify locations appropriate to their interests and needs. A series of easily updatable 'Top Ten' leaflets could be developed to meet the needs of specific audiences.

Hadrian's Wall landscape seasonal highlights programme

The development and promotion of a seasonal highlights programme, integrating the highlights of the Hadrian's Wall Country year with conservation and behavioural messages, for example, why to avoid certain places at nesting time, why to walk the National Trail in summer and so on. This has the additional benefit of spreading visitor load throughout the year and encouraging new and repeat visits.

Making hay while the sun shines partnership

This project aims to celebrate the special habitat of traditional hay meadows as part of the Managing the Landscape theme, and to promote the early summer spectacle of wildflowers in bloom. Three Interpretation Framework stakeholders (Northumberland National Park, Solway Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) have undertaken work to promote traditional hay meadows and increase wildflowers in their areas. Each has developed a plant spotting guide and worked with farmers to ensure the delivery of the project. A simple next step would be for these organisations to work together in order to exchange best practice, to encourage visits to different hay meadows across Hadrian's Wall Country, and compare the wildflowers protected by the scheme, and to reduce costs through joint marketing.

Traditional skills in action

This project aims to map traditional skills employed across Hadrian's Wall and encourage their promotion, interpretation and opportunities for participation. Building on Northumberland National Park's Hidden Histories project, a series of buildings across Hadrian's Wall could be chosen to illustrate the diverse range of local materials and skills used to protect and enhance their condition.

A disputed land

This project aims to interpret the area's troubled past. The Border Reiver links have significant potential for tourism through the international dispersal of Reiver family names. A co-ordinated approach to telling the Reiver story across Hadrian's Wall Country is needed, including a network of community-based interpretation trails and key sites.

Lumps and bumps events

This proposal for a series of events and activities focuses on helping local people and visitors understand the significance of the many lumps and bumps in the landscape of Hadrian's Wall Country. This could range from interpreting the earliest geological features and archaeological remains, to overgrown boundary walls, industrial heritage and evidence of climate change, erosion and changing farming practices. Individual ways in which this project could be delivered include: Top Ten Lumps and Bumps; guided walks and talks for general visitors and/or specialists that might feature industrial heritage, geology, archaeology, climate change, conservation and other key topics; family-friendly activity days; and, at key locations, the creation of new lumps as temporary features/arts installations that tell exciting stories about the past.

Hadrian's Wall Country people

This initiative aims to celebrate well-known and ordinary people from Hadrian's Wall Country who are an integral part of the history and community of the area. It could showcase people who are closely involved with the landscape, from Romans to Roman historians, Iron Age farmers to today's land managers, famous visitors, scientists, artists and mythical creatures. Material could be developed for venues across Hadrian's Wall Country, supported by temporary, rotating exhibitions at gateway venues, as well as on-line resources. It would be an effective way of developing community-based interpretation and could be linked to existing resources on key local people, for example, the John Martin trail at Haydon Bridge.

Hadrian's Wall Country landscape fact cards

This initiative aims to produce Fact Cards containing key information about the local landscapes that can be distributed free of charge to local people and businesses as part of the current Know Your Hadrian's Wall project. These would include key messages that people can share with confidence in general conversation with visitors.



8 Infrastructure – more than interpretation needs to change

Visitors stop at Piper Sike Turret @ Graeme Peacock

Research carried out during development of the Interpretation Framework has highlighted that it is not only interpretation that needs to change. A series of related activities and provision also needs to change if the benefits of improved interpretation are to be realised.

Imagery

The imagery used to position and promote Hadrian's Wall and its sites needs to better reflect the variety of visitor experiences that are available. New images should focus on communicating the differences between sites across Hadrian's Wall and avoid conveying a message that sites are similar. Key to this are images that depict not only the sites themselves, but also the exhibitions, facilities and staff within them. Also key are images that show people visiting, interacting with and enjoying sites, in all weathers. The focus of imagery on scenic landscapes, empty of people, has clearly had an impact on audience perceptions and motivations to visit and this should be addressed as a priority. New images should also reflect the natural diversity of Hadrian's Wall Country, from remote upland areas to coastal bays and industrial heartlands.

By adopting an artistic brief that focuses on conveying the breadth, diversity and ease of access to Hadrian's Wall, perceptions that it is 'hard work' and 'all the same' can be addressed.



Visitors at Arbeia © Northern Horizons

Website

There needs to be one central website portal for Hadrian's Wall Country that must be visitor facing, with content based on serving identified visitor needs and inspiring people to visit. Website development should start from consideration of the reasons why people will choose to visit the website in the first place, such as seeking inspiration for or planning a visit to Hadrian's Wall Country or accessing educational resources. The homepage should enable all of these audiences to continue their online journeys through appropriate links that are clearly signposted.

The website should be structured around the online journeys that people wish to make. Background information that might appeal to visitors, such as the archaeology or broader Roman context, can be provided as appropriate along the way. This should include links to websites for other sites on Hadrian's Wall where there are clear connections, both thematically and geographically, so the physical journey can be developed. The website should also be aware of its place in the broader digital landscape, integrating social media such as the image-sharing website Flickr and the social networking site Facebook.

This approach can emphasise the richness of Hadrian's Wall Country, the potential for different visitor offers and hence encourage longer and repeat visits as well as the possibility of the experience extending before and after the visit itself. It can also place sites in their broader context and encourage a deeper understanding of Hadrian's Wall, the WHS and connections to other monuments such as the Great Wall of China.

Printed Visitor Information and Guides

It is understandable that each organisation responsible for running attractions will wish to produce its own site guides for sale to visitors. However, it is essential that visitors also have access to a suite of literature that presents the whole of the WHS as an integrated visitor destination, and which highlights the different yet complementary attractions and experiences available. The Hadrian's Wall Country map, accommodation guide and bus guides do this job effectively. They need to be complemented by some basic Wall-wide interpretive guides that provide accessible introductions to the themes of the Interpretation Framework.

Signage

Research has highlighted that existing signage for Hadrian's Wall compounds audience perceptions that Hadrian's Wall is "all the same" and is "hard work". In particular, the signage along the A69 that signs "Hadrian's Wall" at multiple points was cited as problematic. A new signage scheme is needed that helps visitors orient and navigate their way along Hadrian's Wall and to its different sites. This should be aimed at helping visitors who are travelling by car, foot or bicycle.

Wherever possible, the use of physical signage should be weighed against the use of other methods to mark sites to mitigate visitor and visual impact in more sensitive locations.

8 Infrastructure

Cross-site referral and orientation

While it is important to emphasise the rich variety of experiences that Hadrian's Wall Country offers, it is equally important that all sites associated with Hadrian's Wall are perceived as part of a single destination and clearly relate to each other. This will help to reassure, orientate and empower audiences to explore Hadrian's Wall and its many sites. This, in turn, will foster increased awareness and understanding of Hadrian's Wall, the various Interpretation Framework themes that are explored in different ways at different locations, and engagement with the universal values of the WHS. This, in turn, will encourage return visits to sites and the area as audiences become familiar with the richness of the experience that Hadrian's Wall Country provides.

The most overt type of orientation is through the provision of leaflets. Hadrian's Wall Heritage introduced an orientation leaflet in 2007 and this is distributed free of charge through local accommodation providers, shops, tourist information centres and travel stations.

This leaflet is supported by a series of orientation and cross-site referral panels at key sites along Hadrian's Wall and which need to be updated in line with site developments, imagery, website and signage.

Hadrian's Wall Country – a holistic visitor experience

Communities and business across Hadrian's Wall are vital to communicating the variety of experiences available to visitors. To maximise their contribution to visitors' experience of Hadrian's Wall, opportunities should be provided to better engage them with the assets and opportunities of the World Heritage Site and to promote collaboration.

The Know Your Hadrian's Wall Country training programme and business network is an effective way of engaging businesses and communities across the WHS. The programme needs to be continued and developed and to embrace the new interpretative offer currently being developed.



Roman Vindolanda visitor reception building © Michael Pearson, Elevated Digital Surveys

Engaging with the Hadrian's Wall Country brand

To complement the existing branding material, a user-friendly Hadrian's Wall Country branding guide for local businesses and organisations should be produced with guidance on how to use and benefit from the HWC branding. The guide could include the Know Your Hadrian's Wall Country (KYHWC) crib card. Workshops should be offered to local communities, businesses and organisations through the KYHWC project to provide additional guidance on the opportunities, benefits and practicalities of working with the Hadrian's Wall Country concept and brand to best effect.

Facilities

The public engagement exercise clearly identified that good facilities and amenities were key characteristics of the most popular sites. Good and reasonably priced catering and clean and well maintained toilets were identified as underpinning a positive visitor experience. These facilities should therefore be improved as part of any development plans along Hadrian's Wall.

"All most people want is toilets and a cafe"

Marketing

Changes to the interpretation, information, orientation and directional signage for Hadrian's Wall will help create a holistic visitor experience and better realise its benefits to the local economy. However, the adoption of this co-ordinated approach has clear implications for the marketing of Hadrian's Wall.

It is important to recognise that neither "the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire" nor "the natural and cultural landscape of Hadrian's Wall" are intended as marketing propositions. They are concepts which reflect the WHS designation and open up opportunities for enhanced interpretation. Their use and the implications for marketing need to be considered more fully along with other proposals in this section. This is one of the actions identified in section 10 - Next steps.

Ticketing

Research indicated that value for money plays a key role in influencing a decision to visit. Although what exactly constitutes value for money varies according to each visitor or group, all focus group participants identified the multiple ticketing of sites and car parking charges as barriers to visiting when factored on top of distance/time and travel costs and incidental expenses such as drinks, food and souvenirs.

"I wonder about the cost of it ...do you have to pay to go to each different site individually, or can you get a special ticket that you can use in all the sites? Because otherwise it would end up being quite expensive"

"I think if you've got a year pass to somewhere, you're much more inclined to go and visit. Paying individually works out very expensive"

There is a clear need and demand for a multisite ticket for Hadrian's Wall.



9 Using the Interpretation Framework to deliver change on the ground

Illuminating Hadrian's Wall 2010 © Stuart Herbert

So far this summary has presented the argument for change and provided the principles and thematic framework through which the issues identified with Hadrian's Wall can be addressed. This section provides guidance on how these changes can be implemented on the ground.

This guidance is underpinned by the knowledge that organisations will need to undertake detailed interpretive planning for the sites and landscapes in their care. This interpretive planning process will be informed by organisational practices and procedures but should be iterative and comprise the following elements devised to reflect the particular circumstances and issues of Hadrian's Wall:

Identifying the assets – review of a site/collections/features/natural history/cultural history to identify opportunities for enhanced presentation and interpretation with a view to broadening audiences to Hadrian's Wall.

These assets should be mapped to the key themes of the Interpretation Framework to help demonstrate how the physical assets of Hadrian's Wall can sit within the intellectual logic of the Interpretation Framework, and how it can be delivered on the ground.

Identifying access opportunities – access to the sites along Hadrian's Wall is extremely variable and is therefore a primary consideration within any strategy that seeks to develop audiences through enhanced interpretation. Alongside the asset review, an access review should be undertaken, identifying opportunities for on- and off-site interpretation.

Identifying themes and stories – based on the asset review, themes and stories for communication should be identified and mapped onto the Interpretation Framework themes. This process should include development of a concept or central theme statement that draws together all key themes to provide a clear identity and message which can be communicated and promoted simply.



Lepidina birthday party invitation © The Vindolanda Trust

Identifying audiences – review of existing audience data to highlight visitor and non-visitor groups, both of whom should be the target for enhanced interpretation.

Identifying opportunities for differentiated interpretation – the focus group research undertaken for the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire theme highlighted that responses to themes are inextricably linked to how themes are delivered. Therefore, the final element of the interpretation planning process is to identify ways in which the identified themes and stories can be delivered that are different, yet complementary, to adjacent and more distant sites.

This requires an assessment of the widest possible interpretive methods and media. Special consideration should be given to approaches that enable the greatest levels of active participation and engagement and response to audience questions, as well as the conservation and management needs of sites.

9 Using the Interpretation Framework

Meeting audience needs

Effective interpretation of Hadrian's Wall depends on shifting the focus from the resource to the audience; on creating experiences that balance audience needs with resource considerations.

This has clear implications for the interpretive methods used. A focus on encouraging community learning in an urban area, for instance, will require a vibrant, interactive and constantly changing offer to meet the needs of repeat visitors. On the other hand, a site that is popular with coach-tour operators and older visitors would demand a different solution.

Knowing your target audience is critical to creating effective and successful interpretation.



A young girl plays with an interactive display at Arbeia
© Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

Making better use of the assets and resources available

Critical to delivering change on the ground is the better use of all the available resources. Current interpretation along Hadrian's Wall draws on four key assets – archaeology, collections, landscape and people.

The archaeological assets – the curtain wall and associated structures – are the principal focus of interpretation in the WHS at present. This reliance on archaeology is particularly true of the central sector, where the upland terrain has preserved more remains than in the heavily cultivated lowland areas. The approach understandably tends to be accompanied by an emphasis on conservation rather than the needs and interests of visitors. By contrast, there is much less visible archaeology in the urban areas of Carlisle and Tyneside, and so different approaches to interpretation are more common, including the use of reconstructions and outreach.

In future, there needs to be a greater balance in the use of archaeology with other resources and interpretive methods that can animate the visitor experience. This is critical in creating an offer that engages visitors and potential visitors and in providing variety.

Greater and more varied use can be made of collections to convey the story of the north-west frontier and in enhancing visitors' experience of Hadrian's Wall. As well as archaeology, collections also include archives and documents, pictures and photographs, sound recordings and so on. Used appropriately, these authentic and often familiar objects that provide personal insights into the people who built Hadrian's Wall and lived in its shadow can help audiences empathise and connect with the past.

The landscape provides not only a visible influence on and context for Hadrian's Wall but also has appeal in its own right, from lowland countryside and upland crags to the great Solway estuary and the urban sprawl of Carlisle and Tyneside. Interpreting the landscape surrounding the WHS's sites can help visitors look beyond a few individual monuments to explore more of the area.

Staff at sites along Hadrian's Wall and who live and work in the countryside around the WHS constitute perhaps the best resource for communicating with visitors. They provide a human face to the WHS, welcoming visitors and helping them make the connections to Hadrian's Wall and its sites. Their daily interaction with visitors means that these individuals probably know most about visitors to Hadrian's Wall – what they want and where they go – and can be an invaluable tool in the ongoing evaluation and development of the visitor experience.

Volunteers can add to the staff resource and provide essential support to the work of organisations and sites, from guiding and managing visitors to participating in archaeological investigations, landscape and wildlife conservation and research. Their active engagement with sites and landscapes presents a remarkable learning opportunity as well as the chance to learn new skills. Volunteering opportunities can strengthen community links through the recruitment of local people. Their enthusiasm and knowledge makes them effective goodwill ambassadors for the site and powerful communicators for visitors.

A key principle of this Interpretation Framework is the need to work in partnership. This includes joint initiatives and arrangements between different parties with a direct interest in the interpretation of Hadrian's Wall. It might also include other bodies, such as community groups, local authorities, educational establishments, national cultural and natural heritage organisations, museums, funding bodies and businesses.

By working together, a greater pool of expertise and resource can be brought to bear to provide better visitor experiences.



Hadrian's Wall Country Volunteer Heritage Guides © HWHL

9 Using the Interpretation Framework

Methods and media

There are many methods and media that can be used to deliver interpretive messages along Hadrian's Wall. While research tells us that some of the most effective experiences are those created by personal interpretation, this method is simply not always appropriate, practical or affordable. Therefore, other methods and media need to be used.

Whatever method is used, research has identified that maintenance and cleanliness are key factors that effect perception, value and visitation along Hadrian's Wall.

Personal interpretation

Personal interpretation, or live interpretation, encompasses a range of activities that involve someone talking to visitors. It includes guided tours, demonstrations, costumed interpretation, re-enactments, performances and storytelling. It can also encompass interpretive conversation delivered by front of house employees and volunteers.

People can deliver some of the most effective interpretation, making personal connections with visitors that help them empathise with past lives and experiences and make their own meanings. They can deliver authentic, dynamic experiences that can respond flexibly to the challenges and requirements of each visitor or group, and they can prompt repeat visits. On the downside, personal interpretation requires quality-controlled training to impart the required skills to ensure quality and consistency and can be a drain on stretched operational budgets. In spite of this, visitor research consistently highlights the value visitors place on personal interpretation.

Moreover, personal interpretation can provide clear community benefits. It offers employment to local people and it gives people the opportunity to volunteer. There is no better advocate for a local area than the people who live and work there and whose pride in the area can be communicated through their interaction with visitors. As cultural ambassadors, they can convey not only an understanding of the place but also a deep understanding of the value of the place, cultural capital that can be spread by their contact with others. Furthermore, if volunteers receive training there may be opportunities for employment or to develop the commercial potential of their new skills and knowledge and re-invest it in the local economy.

The thoughts of Volunteer Heritage Guides for Hadrian's Wall give a clear insight into the opportunity:

"I personally feel that I am going from strength to strength. I consider myself to be a fairly shy person but this wonderful experience is definitely bringing me out of my shell. Just the other day I was able to guide 40+ visitors around Vindolanda and talk them through the delights of a complicated site in a beautiful setting".
(Catherine Jarvis, Hadrian's Wall Country Volunteer Heritage Guide, central cluster sites)

The benefits that can be derived from personal interpretation mean that it provides an important method through which the issues associated with Hadrian's Wall can begin to be addressed.

Events and public programmes

Events and public programmes are regularly used to attract new audiences to sites and give repeat visitors new perspectives and experiences. They can also be used to spread visitor numbers throughout the year, particularly outside of the peak season, which is a particular issue in the central sector of Hadrian's Wall.



Living Frontier event at Housesteads © Northern Horizons

Public programmes can also be focused around particular types of activity in order to attract audiences who are not prompted to visit through existing presentation or interpretive approaches. For example, by putting on theatrical performances, by hosting storytelling events, by providing arts-based activities, the appeal of Hadrian's Wall can be broadened beyond the interests and needs of existing audiences.

English Heritage already runs a very successful events programme at its Hadrian's Wall sites. Historically, these were largely re-enactment spectacles. However, more recently there has been greater use of living history and experimental archaeology displays. Further development of this engaging programme would encourage family visits and develop new audiences.

In addition, a move towards more widespread public programming that would provide a more diverse range of activities, such as music, dance, theatre, storytelling and opportunities for audiences to participate and get involved whatever their age, is required. This would complement and add value to the existing re-enactment programme.

With such a variety of sites and landscapes across the WHS, there is enormous potential to work in partnership to use events and public programmes as a key strategy for audience development.

9 Using the Interpretation Framework

Outreach

Closely associated with public programming, is outreach. Outreach can engage communities and school audiences in Hadrian's Wall. It can bring heritage to audiences that might not otherwise encounter it, or who perceive it as irrelevant. It not only enables policy objectives to be met but can also encourage future visits and nurture community ownership, pride, engagement and support in the site. The public engagement exercise highlighted a lack of community interest and ownership in Hadrian's Wall that was expressed through the difficulty in recruiting participants to on-site visits and focus groups. Outreach activities are an important way through which to explore this issue further and break down barriers between local people and the WHS. Volunteer programmes are another effective means of breaking down these barriers and creating links between people and place.



School outreach on the Romans and multiculturalism
© Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery

Exhibitions and displays

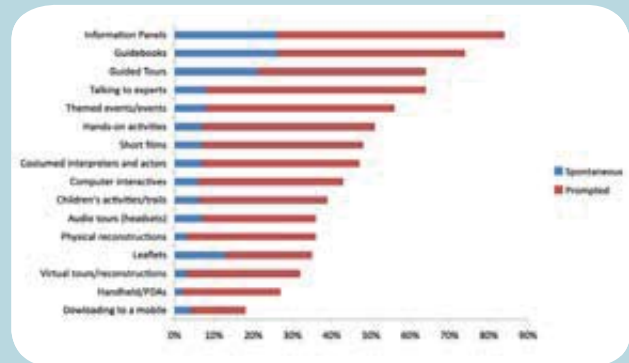
The display of archaeology, artefacts and collections should be determined by visitor needs, interests and perspectives. It should therefore be strongly influenced by the identified target audiences. At the same time, these audiences should help to determine the themes and stories presented, to interpret evidence and to engage with uncertainty. They should also be offering fun experiences that can support learning where appropriate. Having fun is particularly important for children and hence families as visits undertaken in early years of childhood can help foster family capital that is drawn on in later years. With imagination, play can be effectively mixed with interpretation.

It is also important that displays and exhibitions are regularly refreshed. More needs to be made of the opportunities for partnership working to create temporary touring exhibitions. These can be used to illustrate and explore Interpretation Framework themes. Recent experience of the Hadrian's Head and Eagles Have Landed touring exhibitions demonstrates these are effective in attracting additional and new visitors.

Interpretive methods to support site presentation

While much of the investment in interpretation along Hadrian's Wall to date has been concentrated on just 12 major sites, the great swathe of sites and landscapes in between have much potential for visitors.

Audience research for the north-west frontier of the Roman Empire theme investigated audience responses to a series of interpretive methods for Hadrian's Wall.



These results are interesting in that responses reflect the media principally used to interpret historic and archaeological sites and belies the popularity of reconstructions at sites such as Vindolanda, Arbeia and Segedunum. Therefore, it appears that familiarity with various media may have had an influence on responses, and that responses therefore cannot be taken as definitive guidance on introducing new media to interpret Hadrian's Wall. More focused research may help inform the design and introduction of such media.

However, the research makes clear that audience's value interpretation panels, although existing panels need updating and should be more accessible. The research also makes clear that opportunities to enliven the visitor experience through personal interpretation should be maximized. The recent introduction of the Hadrian's Wall Volunteer Heritage Guides is an important step in this direction, as is suggested by visitor feedback:

"He was an excellent guide, giving factual detail in a friendly and interesting way"

"What a wonderfully enthusiastic guide whose knowledge didn't feel like a history lecture"

Furthermore, in light of the research that concluded that visitors find it difficult to comprehend Hadrian's Wall and its various sites, the introduction of a guidebook that covers the entire Wall is urgently required. This should contain information on all publically accessible sites and represent the 'Official Souvenir Guide' of a visit to Hadrian's Wall, being accessible at all sites and associated facilities to better enable visitors to plan and learn from a visit to Hadrian's Wall. This needs to be supported by complementary information on the natural and cultural landscape offers.



10 Next steps

A young girl participates in a living history event at Walltown Crags © Graeme Peacock

The Interpretation Framework sets out a Wall-wide vision for interpretation and supporting visitor information and signage along Hadrian's Wall. This vision focuses on developing existing and new audiences for Hadrian's Wall through the adoption of a series of audience development and interpretation principles, a thematic approach to interpretation and the co-ordination of interpretation with wider communications provision.

A number of actions are needed to realise this vision. Some of these actions are already in progress through the major new exhibitions that have recently opened or are about to open along Hadrian's Wall, and which will transform the visitor experience. Other actions are planned or in development and will be co-ordinated through a project-based action planning approach engaging with partner interests along Hadrian's Wall.

This action planning approach is being adopted to enable ongoing project planning and development to take place in a collaborative manner, engaging all interests along Hadrian's Wall and avoids the need for further overarching strategy and plan documents. Given the history of planning along Hadrian's Wall and a perceived lack of change, a project-based action planning approach is more likely to deliver the vision and will also ensure efficient use of resources – both financial and time – whilst also maximising the involvement of local communities and businesses. The approach to implementation in the Interpretation Framework is one of engagement and inclusivity.

Working collaboratively with the key stakeholders along the WHS, Hadrian's Wall Heritage Ltd will have a key role in co-ordinating and initiating many of the actions needed to realise the vision set out in the Interpretation Framework documents. HWHL will support interpretation developments initiated by the many partner organisations along the WHS corridor and will endorse funding applications where they demonstrate adoption of the principles and approaches advocated in the Interpretation Framework – increasing the chance of success. The research undertaken with potential audiences for the WHS has indicated strongly the approaches and themes most likely to engage visitors and encourage greater understanding of the WHS. It is important that all new interpretation takes advantage of this knowledge.



Key actions:

1. Launch and public dissemination of the Interpretation Framework.
2. Improved communications and networking between stakeholders in the areas of audience engagement and interpretation.

The existing Site Managers' meetings and the Education Forum provide potential vehicles through which improved communications and networking can be realised. The Education Forum has recently initiated an annual practitioners' workshop for education staff across the WHS. This model could be applied to the establishment of an equivalent mechanism associated with the Site Managers' meeting but including wider site staff, heritage and interpretation professionals and volunteers involved strategic and frontline engagement with visitors. Whatever method is ultimately chosen, links to the Education Forum would be beneficial as there is significant overlap between interpretation for visitors and interpretation for education audiences.

This mechanism would help facilitate actions 3 and 4 below.

3. Development of a Wall-wide understanding and agreement on interpretation principles and good practice based on evidence and research.

Interpretation practices within organisations operating across Hadrian's Wall vary significantly. In order to work better together, they need to develop a shared understanding of good practice relevant to each organisation. Effective mechanisms for this could include facilitated workshops involving partners from different organisations in reviewing and considering best practice in interpretation; adoption of a common understanding and shared language for interpretation by all interests operating along Hadrian's Wall; adoption of a common interpretive planning approach; a programme of interpretation training days and workshops including interpretive planning, interpretive methods and media and so on.

4. Development of joint interpretation initiatives.

One of the easiest and most cost effective ways in which communications, networking and interpretation delivery could be improved along Hadrian's Wall is through the development of joint interpretation projects. This would enable underlying development issues to be addressed at the same time as delivering organisational plans and projects. The Hadrian's Head and Eagles Have Landed touring exhibitions are examples of joint interpretation projects that have explored new interpretive and audience engagement approaches and led to significantly increased visitor numbers at participating sites. The Wall-wide Volunteer Heritage Guides project is another example of a Wall-wide partnership-based project that is delivering significant benefit to the WHS, to visitors, to local people and to participating organisations. Further joint developments with national museums such as the British Museum and international colleagues offer the potential to embed greater understanding of the Frontiers of the Roman Empire WHS locally, nationally and internationally. This approach will have a significant effect on audience development and visitor numbers over time.

5. Engagement with local resident and business communities.

Local resident and business communities are a key part of the visitor experience and can make significant contributions to the interpretive offer alongside the major sites and museums. Projects such as Know Your Hadrian's Wall Country and volunteer heritage guides are examples of projects that engage local communities with improved interpretation. The Interpretation Framework provides the basis for a programme of community-based interpretation projects exploring local landscapes and their connections with the WHS. Local people proud of their heritage and its international significance will add greatly to the growth in world-wide understanding of the WHS through their interaction with friends, family and visitors.

6. Establishment of a Wall-wide marketing and promotions group to work collaboratively on priority projects.

The audience research clearly demonstrates the need for improved co-ordination of marketing and promotion for domestic and international markets focused on the destination and the provision of clear, accessible and holistic information about the overall visitor offer. There is a need to build on existing world-wide knowledge of the destination to enrich and deepen understanding of the depth, breadth and richness of the offer as this develops through delivery of Interpretation Framework principles and approaches. Key areas for co-ordination and co-operation include:

- market segmentation (discussion of adoption of common approach and terminology; joint market research and data collection; sharing of research and data)
- single destination development (brand values, promotional identity)
- joint marketing and promotion activities and materials

7. On-going evaluation of action projects.

Evaluation should be an integral part of each project, enabling both projects and the Interpretation Framework to be reviewed and lessons learned. Any future evaluation should:

- Evaluate projects against project objectives and SMART targets
Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed
- Evaluate projects against the objectives of the Interpretation Framework which has informed and been informed by such projects
- Gather feedback from existing and new audiences as well as non-visitors.

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