

# The Lakeland-Lancashire Puzzle

Where do Roman-era place names belong in Lancashire and neighbouring counties?

The Antonine Itinerary generally follows known Roman roads, reporting mileages that accurately match distances between definite Roman forts, or plausible places to spend the night or change horses. Most *itiner* are straightforward to interpret, but *iter* 10 is really difficult. Rivet and Smith (1979) did a good job of presenting the evidence then available, since their preferred Celtic name explanations need to be taken seriously in this part of Britain. It is not their fault that the Ordnance Survey chose names for Roman sites that are badly wrong! Can we do better? Here is *iter* 10:

[Clanoventa](#) was almost certainly the Roman fort at the north end of Lake Windermere, near Ambleside and the same as the *Notitia's* *Glannibanta*.

Then 18 Roman miles = 26.6 km, probably along the east of the Lake like the modern A591 and A592.

[Galava](#) is a big puzzle that prompted repeated bad guesses, before a hypothetical Roman fort under [Cartmel Priory](#) became the clear winner. It was very tempting to point to what looks very like the outline of a Roman fort in Google Maps and published Lidar images around SD34288361, near to Haverthwaite and across the river [Leven](#) from Low Wood. There is even a mill race and river island of the type that Selkirk suggested might have originated as Roman river works, plus an interesting place name Stang End. However, David Ratcliffe found no trace of a Roman site there.

Then 12 Roman miles = 17.8 km.

[Alone](#) too has been a puzzle, with past bad guesses pointing to Roman forts at Low Borrowbridge or hypothetically at Levens Bridge near Hincaster. The most likely explanation now appears to be that *Alone* (which presumably belongs with the other 9 places called after a river [Alauna](#)), was at Watercrock, near Kendal, where the Roman fort has a second name [Medibogdo](#).

Then 19 Roman miles = 28.1 km, a distance too long to let the next place be Burrow-in-Lonsdale.

[Galacum](#) was probably the same as Ptolemy's *Καλατον/Καλαγον*. This needs to be somewhere in the general vicinity of Lancaster, in order to make the mileages correct. More work needed.

Then 27 Roman miles = 40 km to

[Bremetonnaci](#) was almost certainly the important fort at Ribchester, after which the route becomes easy:  
then 20 Roman miles = 29.6 km to

[Coccio](#) was at Wigan, Lancashire, to fit the mileages  
then 19 Roman miles = 28.1 km to

[Mamcunio](#) was almost certainly at Manchester  
then 18 Roman miles = 26.6 km to

[Condate](#) was probably at Middlewich (not Northwich), Shropshire  
then 19 Roman miles = 28.1 km to

[Mediolano](#) was almost certainly at Whitchurch, Shropshire

Now what about the Ravenna Cosmography? Rivet & Smith falsely accused it of being grossly corrupted, but in fact Cosmo is the number-one source of ancient British names, apparently read from maps quite reliably and in a logical order, though not stating mileages and not necessarily following known roads. Cosmo's three manuscripts contain some handwriting that is hard to decipher and may have misdirected past copyists. Richmond and Crawford (1949) published excellent photographs, from which we sometimes need to overrule spellings that they chose. Here are scans of the vital parts of those photos:

.ayau  
tio. Alunna. Camulo dono.  
Caluuo. Galluuo.

. Mantio ahina.  
Camulo dono. Calunio. Gallu  
mo.

ayunio Alunna Camulo dono Calunio Galluuo

Notice how hard it is to distinguish *n* from *u*. By a small margin we prefer to read *uu* (= *uv* in modern spelling) in the adjacent *Caluuo* and *Galluuo*, but *Calunio* and *Gallunio* cannot be excluded. And there is frequent confusion between *C* and *G* in old documents (as with *Calleva*, where majority opinion currently suggests that the Itinerary's *Gallewa* was just a variant spelling). Here are our best guesses for this sequence of places, spelled and numbered as in the *Cosmography*, followed by their likely locations:

- 109 [Mantio](#) (preferable to *Mautio*) = almost certainly Manchester
- 110 [Alunna](#) (not *Alicuna*) = probably Castle Steads
- 111 [Camulodono](#) = probably Hawksclough hillfort near the Walton-le-Dale Roman site
- 112 [Caluuo](#) = plausibly Lancaster. An ending *-uuo* tends to suggest a river ( $\pm$ bank), while *-unio* might perhaps survive in the river Lune,
- 113 [Galluuo](#) = a duplication of *Caluuo*, or conceivable [Warton Crag](#) near Morecambe Bay
- 114 [Medibogdo](#) = almost certainly Watercrock, near Kendal
- 115 [Cantaventi](#) = probably [Ting Mound](#) by Castle Howe hill fort, not same as *Clanoventa*, as once thought
- 116 [Iuliocenon](#) = almost certainly Hardknott

Ptolemy's [Καλατον](#) would make best sense as the fort the Roman fort at Burrow-in-Lonsdale, surrounded by evidence of native gatherings.

Cosmo also mentions [Coantia](#) in its sequence of harbour estuaries, somewhere in this region. It naturally means something like 'together opposite'. Morecambe Bay is a modern invented name. The river Kent probably descends from a form like [Cunetio](#), probably meaning an engineered channel.

All the names beginning with *Gal-* or *Cal-* make one think of Wales, Gaul, Celtic, Galatian, etc, which have never been satisfactorily explained. In Irish traditional history the name *Galls* was applied to all races who attacked them from the sea, such as the Vikings in the AD 800s ([Skene](#), 1862). It shows up, for example, in Fingal's Cave and in Galway.

Lots still to think about!

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