

A Kink in the Cosmography?

One vital clue for deciphering Roman-era names is that the order of names in the Ravenna Cosmography is geographically logical. The unknown cosmographer appears to have taken names off maps and/or itineraries that were tolerably accurate, not up to modern cartographic standards, but good enough for Roman soldiers to plan their travels logically.

An apparent exception to this logic occurs near Hadrian's Wall, where RC's sequence of names runs thus:

... *Bereda* – *Lagubalium* – *Magnis* – *Gabaglanda* – *Vindolande* – *Lincoigla* ...

The general course is clear enough, looping up from the south onto the [Stanegate](#) road (which was built earlier than the actual Wall) and then going back south. *Lagubalium* must be Carlisle and *Vindolande* must be Chesterholm, so it seems obvious that *Magnis* was at Carvoran and *Gabaglanda* was at Castlesteads. The problem is that Carvoran lies east of Castlesteads, which would make RC backtrack and put a kink in its path across the ground.

Most people will simply say “So what? Cosmo made a mistake. Or his map was wrong. Or the names were written awkwardly on his map.” But this oddity prompted us to look hard at the evidence for names on and around Hadrian's Wall, as summarised in a table on the following page. How many of the name-to-place allocations accepted by R&S really stand up to critical examination? One discovery quickly followed (a better location for *Axelodunum*), but many questions remain.

For a start, what was *magna* ‘great’ about the two places that share the name *Magnis*, Carvoran and Kenchester? Did that name signify something such as ‘headquarters’ or ‘supply base’ in a particular period? Could another site on the Stanegate between Carlisle and Castlesteads be the northern *Magnis*? The fort at [Chapelburn](#) (=Nether Denton, NY59576460) would reduce the size of the kink, but not eliminate it. The [fort](#) at Brampton Old Church (NY510614) would be better, but not perfect. On balance, it seems best to stick with majority opinion that *Magnis* = Carvoran.

What about *Gabaglanda*? Is it really just a corruption of *Camboglanna*, or could the name really belong to the fort at [Haltwhistle Burn](#) (NY71446615)? Yes, definitely, because the likely meaning of [Gabaglanda](#) fits that site so beautifully, to vindicate RC's reliability.

This analysis makes the sequence *Magnis* – *Gabaglanda* – *Vindolanda* quite close together, implying that Roman manpower was quite tightly focussed on building the central section of Hadrian's Wall. This contrasts with the relative sparseness of forts to the west and highlights the puzzle that ND ignores Birdoswald fort. Assuming its name really was *Banna*, would it be outrageous to speculate that that meant something like ‘administrative centre’, an essentially civilian rather than military function?

Forts on the Wall

a table trying to reconcile all the names recorded in various sources

Now	ND	Rudge Cup Amiens Patena	Staffs Pan etc	RC	AI etc
Wallsend	<i>Segeduno</i>			<i>Serduno</i>	
Newcastle	<i>Ponte Aeli</i>				
Benwell	<i>Conderco</i>			<i>Condecor</i>	
Rudchester	<i>Vindobala</i>			<i>Vindovala</i>	
Haltonchesters	<i>Hunno</i>			<i>Onno</i>	
(Corbridge)			(<i>V. tablets</i>)	<i>Corie</i>	<i>Corstopitum</i>
Chesters	<i>Cilurno</i>			<i>Celunno</i>	
Carrowburgh	<i>Procolitia</i>			<i>Brocoliti</i>	
Housesteads	<i>Borcovicio</i>			<i>Velurcion</i>	
Chesterholm	<i>Vindolana</i>		(<i>V. tablets</i>)	<i>Vindolande</i>	
(Haltwhistle Burn)				<i>Gabaglanda</i>	
Great Chesters	<i>Aesica</i>	ESICA		<i>Esica</i>	
Carvoran	<i>Magnis</i>			<i>Magnis</i>	
Birdoswald		BANNA		<i>Banna</i>	BANNIESS
(Chapelburn)					
Castlesteads	<i>Amboglanna</i>	CAMBOGLANS	CAMMOGLANNA		
Stanwix	<i>Petrianis</i>	VXELODUM	VXELODUNUM	<i>Uxelludamo</i>	
(Carlisle)				<i>Lagubalium</i>	<i>Luguvalio</i>
Burgh-by-Sands	<i>Aballava</i>	ABALLAVA		<i>Avalava</i>	
Drumburgh	<i>Congavata</i>		COGGABATA		
Bowness	<i>Axelodunum</i>	MAIS	MAIS	<i>Maia & Maio</i>	

Names in parentheses in the Now column are off the Wall, on the Stanegate.