

Trans Alpes 2004

1.) Description:

A project of the University of Regensburg in the field of experimental archaeology: a group of students marched in Roman military equipment from Regensburg/Ratisbon in middle Bavaria (Germany) via the Brenner pass to Trient/Trent in Upper Italy.

2.) Origin:

The project was based on an idea by Josef Löffl (the centurion). His original plan was to set up a Roman reenactment group at Regensburg and then march from Regensburg to Rome. The destination was later changed to Trent, where LEG III ITAL had a supply base. The the distance Regensburg – Rome would have taken too much time.

3.) Historical background:

The garrison of Regensburg, LEG III ITAL, was formed under Marcus Aurelius around 166 AD to strengthen the hard-pressed Roman forces in the Balkans and in the upper Danubian area. After several years of fighting and construction work, the legion set up a permanent base at Regensburg / Reginum / Regina Castra. According to a large fragment of an inscription from the *porta principalis dextra*, the fortress was completed in 179 AD.



(the *porta praetoria* of Regensburg)

After the assassination of Pertinax in the spring of 193 AD, III ITAL immediately supported Septimius Severus and most likely joined his forces when Severus marched into Italy in order to topple his rival Didius Julianus and thus secure the capital of the empire for his cause.

The scenario chosen for the „Trans Alpes“ project was the following: a detachment (*vexillatio*) of III ITAL marches from Regensburg to the provincial capital Augsburg (just in case the Severan position has to be strengthened there), then crosses the Alps and secures the supply base at Trent while simultaneously guarding the Alpine passes (again, just in case). It might then press on and join the other Severan legions which are marching into Upper Italy from Pannonia.

4.) Aims of the project:

- a) test Roman military equipment of the late 2nd/early 3rd century AD
- b) get a close look at daily life in the Roman army and find out if modern people (students) can at least partially compete with Roman legionaries in strength, willpower and discipline
- c) increase public interest in Roman history and archaeology

5.) Results and achievements:

- a) Successful: some new insights were gained (this included probably the first long range test with closed boots instead of *caligae*), and a number of findings from other reenactment groups and projects were confirmed.

Preparations for an illustrated book with detailed descriptions are under way (planned to be published in 2005).

- b) Partially successful: several participants displayed an impressive amount of physical and/or mental strength, while others had to tackle a lot of problems. Most of them did what they could to get along with the pain, the strain and the stink, but all had to agree that they still had taken only a superficial look at the harsh life of a Roman legionary. Despite occasional days of rest (not in the last week), the group was very exhausted after four weeks on the road. Even minor actions or decisions demanded a lot of effort. Compared to Roman army standards, discipline could have been better, but it was satisfactory for a group of students/*tirones* (most of them without a military background) who took part in such a project for the first time. Only one participant left the group prematurely and only because another business forced him to do so. The others all stayed on board although they would have been able to get out whenever they wanted to.

Although the huge stress led to a few disputes (all solved within a few hours), it did never erupt into a fight. Given the cramped conditions at night and the exhausting marches, the absence of any violence was by no means self-evident and shows that the group members managed to keep themselves under control.

Nevertheless, the centurion and the standard bearer here and then would have loved to have the right to keep up order with 'Roman methods'.

- c) Massively successful: only very rarely did the group bivouac without a huge group of interested visitors. Especially the children were fascinated by the 'Romans' and were happy to be able to test the mill or put on a *lorica segmentata* or a helmet (although we once had to interfere when two of them grabbed a pair of *spathae* and tried to play „Highlander“ or „Gladiator“). Every local newspaper wrote an article, and more than four German, one Austrian, and one Italian TV station brought at least a short report. In the second week the group was inspected by Dr. Goppel, the Bavarian minister of research and science:



The trip from Parthenkirchen to Mittenwald included a special surprise: Marcus Junkelmann himself escorted the legion for one day.



(Junkelmann and the three “Germanic scouts”)



(Junkelmann and one of the legionaries)

6.) Number of participants:

12 (of which one had to leave prematurely in order to fulfill other obligations)

7 legionaries: Josef Löffl (centurion), Florian Himmler (standard bearer or ordinary legionary), Paul Schrott, Gerhard Schrauß, Dominik Bauer, Matthias Vogel (had to leave prematurely), Bernd Ohlow (occasionally Germanic scout)

5 archers: Johannes Felix, Martin Kaiser, Christian Schultes (occasionally legionary), Markus Altmann, Andreas Klinger (both occasionally Germanic scouts)

A 13th participant, Sebastian Namyslo, had suffered from a torn ligament about one and a half months before the march started. He was then given the task of driving the supply jeep and doing some of the organisation. Although his ankle had not recovered completely, he tried to march with the rest of the group several times, e.g. over the Brenner pass (he then had to return to driving the car because his ankle was the size of a tennis ball).

7.) Funding and sponsoring:

This project was financed without public funding. Instead, almost all expenditures were covered by the participants themselves (in some cases with some financial support of their families). The lion's share was brought up in cooperation with a similar project of the university: the reconstruction of a late Roman riverine warship (the „Lusoria-project“, which was also completed in 2004). Most of the legionaries and archers took part in building the Mainz type A vessel and then donated their (moderate) salaries for the ‘war chest’ of their legion. Because of the huge amount of equipment (or components and tools) that had to be purchased, and because in the last stages of the preparation the costs got beyond control, it is impossible to present exact figures. A rough estimate comes to more than 20 000 €, which is an impressive sum for a group of students.

A huge Bavarian brewery („Weltenburger/Bischofshof“) agreed to cover the fuel costs and the toll for the baggage train (all in all more than 1000 €). In return, the legion carried a standard of the brewery from Regensburg to Trent:



Additional support came from „HP Geländewagentechnik“ at Kötzing in the Bavarian Forest. This firm supplied the legion with a Suzuki jeep for a period of four weeks. The jeep turned out to be very helpful and was used primarily used for scouting ahead and for supplying the marchers with water.



8.) Route:

Danube upstream to Rein am Lech - along the Lech into the pre-Alpine hills – through the German Alps to Völs near Innsbruck (Austria) – over the Brenner Pass into the Italian Alps – through South Tyrol over Brixen and Bozen to Trent.

9.) Places visited:

Regensburg – Bad Abbach – Eining (Weltenburg) – Manching – Neuburg – Rain – Meitingen – Friedberg – Hörbach – Schondorf – Weilheim – Murnau – Parthenkirchen – Mittenwald – Völs – Matrei – Gossensass – Mittenwald – Brixen – Waidbruck – Bozen – Neumarkt – Lavis – Trient.

10.) Duration:

4 weeks including a day of rest after every 2-3 days of marching (no days of rest during the last week). The group started on August 15th and arrived on September 11th.

11.) Complete distance:

Unclear. According to a first calculation it amounted to about 480 km, but according to a more thorough one more than 530 km. Both calculations were based on major roads, but since the group often used footpaths and had to zig-zag (as was especially the case in the Alps), the entire distance was certainly higher and may have come close to 600 km.

12.) Average marching distance:

Between 25 to 30 km (sometimes less and sometimes more); once almost 40 km (Mittenwald/Germany to Voels/Austria). This was clearly the upper limit and a day of rest was utterly necessary after that.

13.) Individual distances:

It was originally intended to let everybody march the complete way from Regensburg to Trent. However, this was not possible. Most of the participants had to be exempted from marching from time to time because of inflamed blisters, an impending achillobursitis or overwhelming aches in general (most could resume marching after one or two days). In the end, only the two archers/scouts Marcus Altmann and Andreas Klinger had walked the entire distance.

As already mentioned above, adding together marching distances is not easy. Nonetheless, a sum of more than 400 km for most of the participants is likely. This is still not bad for a group of present-day people.

14.) Average speed:

Speed was mediocre during the first days: many participants had clearly overburdened themselves / technical and physical problems showed up / despite some training a number of people were still rather unused to long range marching / a too tight time schedule prevented long breaks around noon and the heat caused severe dehydration.

A noticeable increase was achieved on the 5th day (after a day of rest): stamina was clearly rising. Furthermore, the doctor of the group (a tough retiree aged 65) put on a coat of chain mail, insisted on leading the heavy infantry and the archers (the scouts had already left), and within the first 3 hours of marching more than 15 km were covered.

Over the next weeks, the average speed was about 5-6 km/h, although it dropped under bad weather conditions, at steep roads, and also during the later afternoon.

On the last day the group had to press ahead in order to reach Trent around noon (it arrived with a delay of one hour due to a nerv-wrackingly stupid roadway arrangement). On this last day a top speed of more than 6 km/h was reached.