A list of Britain's Tribes by Roman geographer Ptolemy

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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | Caledones (Caledonii)  This is the name of peoples who lived in the Scottish Highlands and  Islands.  The Romans used the word Caledones to describe both a single tribe who  lived  in the Great Glen between the modern towns of Inverness and Fort  William.  They also called all the tribes living in the north Caledonians. We know  the  names of some of these other tribes. They include the Cornovii and  Smertae  who probably lived in Caithness, the Caereni who lived in the far west  of  the Highlands, the Carnonacae and the Creones in the Western Highlands.    The Vacomagi lived in and around the Cairngorns. Other unknown tribes  lived  in Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides. Warriors from many of these tribes  came together to resist the Romans under a leader called Calgacus at  battle  of Mons Graupius in AD 84. Although the Romans won this battle, they  never  successfully conquered the Highlands. The Romans admired the Caledonii  for  their ability to endure cold, hunger and hardship. Tacitus described  them as  red-haired and large-limbed.  All these tribes lived very different lifestyles than neighbouring  peoples  in other parts of Scotland. In many areas they lived in tall stone  towers,  called Brochs, or other fortified sites, called Duns. Unlike the Taexali  and  Venicones, the Caledones rarely made religious offerings of fine metal  objects.    Taexali  Little is known about this group who lived in what is today Grampian,  except  that the people lived in small undefended farms and hamlets. They shared  much with their neighbours the Venicones to the south.These low lying  and  fertile parts of eastern Scotland provide archaeological evidence for  different types of settlement and rituals compared to those of the  Highlands  and Islands to the west and north.  Although the Taexali were defeated by the Romans in AD 84, they were  never  permanently occupied. Like the Venicones and Caledones, they lived  beyond  the northern most frontier of the Roman Empire; the Antonine Wall.    Carvetii  This tribe lived in what is today Cumbria.  They are a poorly known group which were made into their own civitas (an  administrative units or 'county') in the Roman Province. There  is very  little archaeological evidence for the people who lived in this area  before  the Roman Conquest.  Like their neighbours, the Novantae, these peoples probably lived in  small  farms and did not use coins or have big hillforts.  The Carvetti might have been a smaller tribe within the large kingdom or  federation of the Brigantes.    Venicones  This tribe lived in what is today Tayside.  The Roman army campaigned several times in the territory of this people,  but  they were never permanently conquered and occupied. The archaeological  evidence shows that this people and their northern neighbours, the  Taexali,  had much in common.  The Venicones were one of the few groups in northern Britain at this  time  that buried their dead in stone lined graves, such graves and cremation  burials are very rare in other parts of Britain before the Roman  period.Archaeologists suspect many Iron Age peoples often practised  complex  funeral rituals in which bodies were naturally allowed to decompose.  The Venicones and Taexali also made offerings of prestigious decorated  locally made metal objects in bogs and lakes, including massive bronze  armlets.Only the Venicones and Taexali wore these unusual ornaments,  which  could weigh over 1.5 kg each and were worn one on each arm.    Epidii  Little is known about this mysterious tribe except that they lived in  the  modern region of Kintyre and probably the islands of Arran, Jura and  Islay.    Damnonii  This is the tribe or people who lived in the central part of Scotland  around  what is today Glasgow and Strathclyde.  The name of this tribe could be spelt either as Damnonii or as Dumnonii  although theDumnonii is also the name of the people who lived in Devon  and  Cornwall at this time.Many tribes in Britain and France at the time of  the  Roman Conquest shared similar names which may have been as a result of  inter-tribal contact. It could, however, be coincidence, as people used  similar types of names for themselves such as 'the people of the  mountains',  'people of the horn' or 'the brave people' etc.  The Damnonii were conquered by the Romans and for many years their  territory  was occupied by the Roman army before they retreated further south to  the  line of Hadrians Wall.    Novantae  The Novantae were a little known tribe or people who lived in what is  today  south-west Scotland.  The people living in this area did not build massive forts on the tops  of  mountains, as did the Votandini, nor did the make many offerings of fine  metal objects.  Like their neighbours to the south, the Carvetii, archaeologists have  found  little evidence for the lives of these peoples before the Roman  Conquest.  They were clearly farmers and herders, but few of their farms and other  settlements have been excavated by archaeologists so far.    Selgovae  A British tribe of Scotland, the name is thought to mean  'hunters'.  The Roman geographer Ptolemy places them in the Southern uplands of  Scotland, although it is not clear from the little evidence we have as  to  exactly where this people lived. Some scholars place their location as  the  upper Tweed Basin, and it is unclear if they were part of the Votadini.    The Selgovae might have used Eildon Seat as their principal settlement,  but  this might have been a Votadinian site.  Like the Votandini, they were conquered in AD 79-80 by the Roman army.    Votadini  The Votadini were a very large tribe or people that lived in the south  east  of Scotland. In the north, their territory started at Edinburgh and the  Firth of Forth and stretched as far south as Northumberland in northern  England. It is not clear where the boundary between the Votadini and the  other large tribe, the Brigantes, was, although it probably frequently  shifted as a result of wars and as smaller tribes and communities  changed  allegiances.  The Votadini, like the Brigantes, were a group made up of smaller  tribes,  unfortunately the names of these smaller tribes and communities remain  unknown.  Archaeologically, the territory of the Votadini was very different to  that  of either theVenicones or the Novantae. Large walls, banks and ditches  surrounded most of their farms and the people made offerings of fine  metal  objects, but never wore massive armlets.  There are also at least three very large hillforts in their territory  (Yeavering Bell, Eildon Seat and Traprain Law), each was located on the  top  of a prominent hill or mountain. The hillforts may have been used for  over a  thousand years by this time as places of refuge and as places for  meetings  for political and religious ceremonies.    Brigantes  This large tribe was, like the Votandini, a federation of smaller  communities. The name means 'upland people' or 'hill  dwellers'. This name is  very appropriate as the Pennines formed the heart of their territory.  After the Roman Conquest, the Brigantes were formed into a very large  civitates, or administrative unit that covered most of Yorkshire,  Cleveland,  Durham and Lancashire. It stretched from the North Sea to the Irish Sea.  We  know the names of some of the smaller tribes they made up the Brigantes  at  the time of the Roman Conquest. They include the Setanti in Lancashire ,  the  Lopocares, the Corionototae and theTectoverdi around the Tyne valley.  This  huge area was very varied. As well as people living in the Dales and  hills,  many people farmed the fertile land in Durham, Tyneside and Teeside. At  the  time of the Roman Conquest people in this region wore swords carried in  distinctive local metal scabbards that were highly decorated.  An important centre for the Brigantes was built at Stanwick in North  Yorkshire in the first century AD. This was probably the capital of  Queen  Cartimandua who ruled theBrigantes. Cartimandua was friendly towards the  Romans, but her husband was anti-Roman. The Romans invaded and occupied  the  territory in AD79.    Parisi  The Parisi lived in East Yorkshire. They were a small, but distinctive  group  of people who farmed the chalk hills of the Yorkshire Wolds. The Parisi  share their name with the people who lived in France around what is  today  Paris although whether both tribes shared strong links is hotly debated.  The  British Parisi are known for their unusual 'chariot-burials' and  cemeteries.  Unlike other people living in Britain between about 300 and 100 BC, the  people in East Yorkshire buried their dead in large cemeteries. This was  much like the way many peoples in France and Germany buried their dead  at  the same time. However, in other respects, the East Yorkshire Parisi  lived  in British style houses, wore British style ornaments and used British  style  pottery. At the time of the Romans, the Parisi had stopped burying they  dead  in this unusual way. However, the carried on other distinctive styles of  life and remained separate from their large, powerful neighbours,  theBrigantes. After the Roman Conquest they were made into their own  small  civitas with their capital at Petuaria (modern Brough on Humber)    Cornovii  The Cornovii are a surprisingly obscure tribe, given that they lay well  within the boundaries of the Roman province and their civitas capital,  Wroxeter, was one of the largest in Britain. They share their name with  a  Caledonian tribe who lived in the far north of Scotland. The name  probably  means 'people of the horn'. There is no reason to think that  this group  shared any common ancestry with the group in Caithness.  Many tribes or peoples in Europe at the time of the Roman Conquest  shared  similar names. This might be because these tribes had contacts with each  other. But it is just as likely to be a coincidence, as people used  similar  types of names for themselves such as 'the people of the  mountains' or 'the  brave people' etc. The Cornovii never issued coinage and before the  Roman  Conquest left little evidence to recognise them. They probably lived in  what  are today the modern counties of Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire.    Deceangli  The Deceangli, the Ordovices and the Silures were the three main tribe  groups who lived in the mountains of what is today called Wales.  However, in  prehistory Wales, England and Scotland did not exist in anyway as  distinctive entities in the ways they have done so for the last 1000  years.  The Deceangli were the peoples of what is today north Wales and probably  included the peoples who lived on the Isle of Anglesey.  The Romans considered Anglesey, or Mona as they and the locals at the  time  called it, as a stronghold of the Druids. Because the Druids played an  important role in encouraging the recently conquered Britons to resist  the  Roman Conquers, the Roman army specifically targeted Anglesey for  destruction. On the eve of Boudicca's revolt in what is today East  Anglia,  the Roman Army has only just completed the long and difficult task of  conquering the tribes living in the Welsh Mountains. The final episode  of  that conquest was the invasion of Anglesey and the slaughter of the  Druids  there.    Ordovices  This group covered much of the mountains and valleys of what is today  mid-Wales. They were the northern neighbours of the Silures and the  Southern  neighbours of theDegeangli.  Like the Silures and Degeangli, these peoples lived in small farms,  often  defended against attack. After the emperor Claudius invaded southern  England  in AD 43, one of the main leaders of the Britons, called Caratacus  escaped  to the Ordovices and theSilures. They were stirred into rebellion by  Caratacus and for a long time successfully resisted the Romans.  The Roman general Agricola only finally defeated the Ordovices in 77-8.  The  tribe was incorporated into Britannia and became a civitas (an  administrative district).    Corieltauvi  This large tribe appears to have been created only shortly before the  Roman  Conquest of Britain. It offered no resistance to the Romans and was  quickly  turned into a civitas (an administrative district equivalent to a modern  county) with its capital at the city of Leicester.  The Corieltauvi combined groups of people living in what is today most  of  the East Midlands (Lincolnshire. Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire,  Derbyshire, Northamptonshire). Before about 50 to 1 BC, archaeological  evidence suggests two different groups or tribes lived in this region.  One  lived in what is today Lincolnshire, the other in what is today  Northamptonshire. Both areas were different to each other and were  important  centres of population and economy in the period c. 400 and 100 BC.  The Corieltauvi are known from their coins that are found throughout the  East Midlands. This group appears to have been a new federation that  united  earlier different groups. This was a region were people lived in  villages,  and some times larger settlements. Leicester was certainly an important  large settlement before the Roman Conquest, as were a number of large  settlements in Lincolnshire, such as Dragonby and Old Sleaford.    Iceni  This was another tribe that issued coins before the Roman Conquest.  Their  coins and other archaeological evidence shows that the tribe's  territory was  in the modern counties of Norfolk and parts of Suffolk and  Cambridgeshire.  They appear to have been a wealthy and powerful group of tribes between  200  and 50 BC.  From their territory come the finest hoards of gold treasure found in  Iron  Age Britain; the Snettisham torcs. Other hoards of elaborately decorated  bronze chariot fittings point to a love of conspicuous display by the  nobles  of the Iceni. This tribe also shunned contacts with the Roman world and  the  changes they brought with them that characterised the life styles of  Catuvellauni and Trinovantes at this time.  The Iceni had important religious centres at Snettisham and at Thetford.  But  when they were made into Roman Civitas, the Romans did not choose either  of  these centres, but the settlement at Caistor, near what is today  Norwich.  Was this because the Iceni led the most successful revolt against Roman  rule  in the history of Roman Britain? When the Romans invade southern Britain  in  AD 43 the Iceni were friendly towards the new rulers. Their king  Prasutagus  became a client-king of Rome. But on his death the kingdom was  incorporated  into the Roman province and together with other abuses led to the  Icenian  revolt led by Prasutagus' widow, Queen Boudicca.    Demetae  These were the people who lived in the fertile lands of Pembrokeshire  and  much of Carmarthenshire in southwest Wales. They lived in small farms  scattered across the countryside and shared many features of their lives  with their neighbours across the Bristol Channel in Devon and Cornwall.  They  were friendly towards the Romans and quickly adapted to Roman rule,  unlike  their more warlike and scattered neighbours in the mountains of Wales;  the  Silures and the Ordovices.  Because of this the Demetae did not need to be intensively garrisoned by  the  Roman army, except along their eastern border, which may have been to  protect them from their hostile neighbours, the Silures. The tribe was  incorporated into the province of Britannia and became a civitas (an  administrative unit, or county, within the Roman province). The capital  of  the Roman civitas was at Carmarthen (Moridundum Demetarum).    Catuvellauni  The Catuvellauni were the tribe that lived in the modern counties of  Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and southern Cambridgeshire. Their territory  also probably included tribes in what is today Buckinghamshire and parts  of  Oxfordshire. The tribal name possibly means 'good in battle'.  The Catuvellauni existed as a tribe at the time of Julius Caesar, but in  the  following years became an extremely powerful group. Their first known  king  was Tasciovanus, who is known from the coins he minted with his name on  them. He founded a royal and ritual centre at Verulamium, modern St  Albans  in about AD10. There were several other large settlements or clusters of  villages in their territory, such as at Baldock and Welwyn.  Before this time, the Catuvellauni, Trinovantes and Cantiaci were very  different from other British tribes. They had been using coins for at  least  a century, adopted the same way of burying the dead as was practised in  northern France, and eat and dressed in ways more common in France than  other parts of Briton. Tasciovanus successors created a large kingdom  through conquest and alliance that included the Trinovantes andCantiaci.  The most successful king was Cunobelinus (Cymbeline), but after his  death in  the late 30's AD, his kingdom was beset by rivalries between his  successors.  This was the excuse used by the Roman Emperor Claudius to conquer  southern  Britain in 43 AD. TheCatuvellauni were one of the most pro-Roman of  British  peoples who very quickly and peacefully adopted Roman lifestyles and  Roman  rule.  A very rich grave of a pro-Roman Catuvellaunian ruler who lived at the  time  of the Roman Conquest has been excavated at Folly Lane, St Albans. They  became one of the first civitas in the new province, Verulamium becoming  one  of the first and most successful cities in Roman Britain.    Silures  Several Roman authors including Pliny, Ptolemy and Tacitus mention this  tribe and later civitas (administrative unit in a Roman province). Their  territory was south east Wales - the Brecon Beacons and south Welsh  valleys.  A people of the mountains and valleys, we know relatively little about  how  they lived.  Like the other tribes of the Welsh Mountains, they were difficult for  the  Romans to conquer and control. For a time in the period around AD 45-57,  they led the British opposition to the Roman advance westwards.  Tacitus describes them as a strong and warlike nation, and for ten years  or  more the Romans fought to contain, rather than conquer them. Although  defeated and occupied by the early 60's, their bitter resistance may  explain  the late grant of self governing civitas status to them only in the  early  2nd century. The capital was established at a previously unoccupied site  at  Caerwent and was given the name Venta Silrum. Tacitus described them as  swarthy and curly-haired, and suggested their ancestors might be from  Spain  because of the similarities in appearance with some peoples in Spain.  However, there is no evidence to suggest any genetic links between south  Wales and parts of Spain.    Dubunni  This large tribe lived in the southern part of the Severn Valley and the  Cotswolds and were one of the few groups to issue coins before the Roman  Conquest. The main distribution of these coins shows that the Dubunni  occupied or ruled an area as far south as the Mendips, and the coins  also  hint that the group was divided into northern and southern subgroups.  The Dubunni lived in very fertile farmland in farms and small villages.  They  did not resist the Roman Conquest, unlike their neighbours, the Silures.  Indeed, they may have been one of the first tribes to submit to the  Romans,  even before the Romans reached their territory. The Dubunni had a  central or  important settlement at Bagendon in Gloucester, on the eastern edge of  their  territory. This centre was replaced by the important Roman city of  Cirencester, which became the capital of theDubunnic civitas after the  Roman  Conquest.    Dumnonii  The Dumnonii were the British tribe that occupied the whole of the South  West peninsula and parts of Southern Somerset. They did not use coins,  nor  did they have large settlements to act of political centres for the  tribe,  and there is no evidence for a dynasty of Dumnonian kings.  The Dumnonii were probably a group of smaller tribes that lived across  the  large area of Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. The people lived in small  farmsteads, usually surrounded by large walls, however, there were also  local differences in the types of settlements and other aspects of life  between different parts of Devon and Cornwall. There is also evidence  for  contacts and trade with Brittany with whom they shared similar styles of  highly decorated pottery. Cornwall was one of the few parts of Britain  where  the dead were buried at this time.  The Dumnonii appear to have accepted the Roman conquest without  resistance  and as a result few garrison forts were placed in their territory,  although  this area never fully adopted Roman ways of life.  Life styles and types of settlements remained little changed from the  Iron  Age through the Roman period. The Romans granted them civitas status and  the  town of Exeter (Isca Dumnoniorum) was their administrative centre.    Durotriges  Centred in Dorset, this people were also found in southern parts of  Wiltshire and Somerset and western Dorset. This was a people that minted  and  used coins before the Roman Conquest, but there is no evidence from the  coins or burials for a strong dynasty of kings. Rather the Durotriges  seem  to have been a loosely knit confederation of smaller tribal groups at  the  time of the Roman conquest. One of these smaller tribal groups that  lived  around Dorchester, buried their dead in inhumation cemeteries.  A unique feature of the Durotriges at this time was that they still  occupied  hillforts. Although hillforts are one of the most well known features of  the  Iron Age, most were no longer occupied at turn of the first millennium.  Best  known of these Durotrigeanhillforts is that of Maiden Castle near  Dorchester, others include South Cadbury Castle and Hod Hill.  A major trading centre existed at Hengistbury Head from which  cross-channel  trade with Gaul was controlled. This may be the settlement called Dunium  by  Ptolemy which was located on the border between the Durotiges and  Atrebates.  Cross channel trade was not an important source of goods for the  Durotriges,  who preferred local products.  A particular type of pottery made at Poole Harbour was traded through  out  the territory of the Durotriges. At the time of the Roman invasion the  Durotriges put up a spirited, if unsuccessful opposition and they are  almost  certainly one of the two tribes that Suetonius records fighting against  Vespasian and the 2nd legion. After the conquest they were made into a  civitas with their capital was at Durnovaria (Dorchester) in the  mid-70's.  Later a second Durotrigean civitas was created, administered from  Lindinis  (Ilchester).    Belgae  The Belgae were probably not a British tribe. The Romans applied the  name  Belgae to a whole group of tribes in northwest Gaul, but the appearance  of a  civitas of this name in Britain is something of a mystery.  According to the Roman geographer Ptolemy the territory of the Belgae  included not only Winchester but also Bath nearby and an as yet  unidentified  settlement called Ischalis.  It seems likely that Ptolemy has made an error here since the resulting  shape of the territory of the Belgae would bear little resemblance to  pre-Roman tribal geography and would be something of an administrative  nightmare. If the civitas was actually focussed around Winchester  (called by  the Romans Venta Belgarum - 'town of the Belgae') there is still  a problem,  since this area seems to have been part of the old kingdom of  theAtrebates.  The civitas of the Belgae was therefor most probably an artificial  creation  of the Roman administration, like the neighbouring civitas of the Regni,  and  was created at about the same time in c. AD 80 following the death of  King  Cogidubnus. Its administrative capital at Winchester was known as Venta  Belgarum, which was an important settlement before the Roman Conquest.    Atrebates  This is another British tribe that shares a name with a tribe in  pre-Roman  France. They were the second most powerful group in southern Britain at  the  time of the Roman Conquest, they issued and used coins, and had many  contacts with France.  They probably consisted of a group of tribes ruled by a single dynasty,  their territory originally stretched from what is today West Sussex,  Hampshire and Berkshire.  After the Roman Conquest, their territory was divided into three  separate  civitates, one such centre was at the major settlement at Silchester,  near  Reading.  Another major Royal centre, comparable to those at St Albans, Colchester  and  Stanwick, was at Chichester. The Atrebates had long links of trade with  France and it is likely that people from the Atrebates were related by  married to people from French tribes. Commas, a French leader from the  French tribes called the Atrebates, fled to Britain during Julius  Caesar's  conquests of Gaul. Commius then appears as the name of theAtrebates  ruler.  From about 15 BC, the Atrebates seem to have established friendly  relations  with Rome, and it was an appeal for help from the last Atrebatic king,  Verica, which provided Claudius with the pretext for the invasion on  Britain  in AD 43. After the Roman Conquest, the territory of the Atrebates was  divided up, with Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum) becoming the capital of  a  Roman civitas that administered the area of modern Berkshire,  Oxfordshire,  Surrey and north Hampshire.  The name Atrebates means 'settlers' or 'inhabitants'    Regni  Like the civitas of the Belgae, the Regni are not a tribe or people  known at  the time of the Roman Conquest, rather the Romans created this civitas  (an  administrative unit within a Roman province), possibly around a smaller  tribal group that were part of theAtrebates.  Before the Roman Conquest, the whole of the territory between what is to  today West Sussex, Hampshire and Berkshire was the territory of the  Atrebates, this important kingdom had two major centres at Silchester,  near  Reading, and Chichester.  West Sussex was an area with very strong links to France before the  Roman  Conquest and was one of the first areas to use coins and adopt north  French  styles of cremating the dead.  Between about 10 BC and AD 43, Chichester became an important Royal  centre,  on a par with St Albans, Stanwick or Colchester. This area was very  pro-Roman and served as one of the bases for the Roman Conquest of  Britain.  The ruler of the area was King Cogidubnus, who started the great palace  at  Fishbourne, outside Chichester, after the Conquest.  Because of his help to the Romans, Chichester at least remained a client  Kingdom and not part of the new Roman province until Cogidubnus'  death in  about 80 AD. After this time, the territory of the Artebates was divided  up  into three civitas, with the Regnibeing the civitas centred on  Chichester  and administering West Sussex.    Cantiaci  This is the name of the tribe or people who lived in north and east  Kent.  Like other peoples in southeast Britain at the time of the Roman  Conquest,  this group was very open to influences from France and the Mediterranean  World and they eventually became part of the large kingdom of  Cunobelinus.  Like the Catuvellauni and Trinovantes they buried their dead according  to  the north French custom of cremation.  After the Roman Conquest they became a civitas based on their principle  settlement at Canterbury.    Trinovantes  The Trinovantes are the first British tribe to be mentioned by a Roman  author, appearing in Caesar's account of his invasion of 54 BC. By  this date  they seem to have been already involved in a power struggle with the  neighbouring tribes to the west who were to be forged into the kingdom  of  the Catuvellauni under Tasciovanus. This group shared the same ways of  life  and religious practices as the Catuvellauni and Cantiaci.  They used coins, cremated their dead, ate from plates and drank from  cups,  They became part of the large kingdom established by the rules of the  Catuvellauni.  The king Cunobelinus essentially absorbed the two tribes into one larger  kingdom and he or his predecessors, established Colchester as a new  royal  site on the same model as St Albans. It was Colchester, that became the  target for the Roman Emperor Claudius' invasion in AD43.  After the Roman Conquest, the Trinovantes were restored as tribal entity  in  the form of a civitas (an administrative unit or county) within the new  Roman Province. The capital of the civitas was the Roman city of  Colchester,  which was originally founded as colony for retired Roman soldiers.  The albion  Claudius Ptolemy Born c. AD 90 Egypt Died c. AD 168 (aged  77-78)Alexandria,  Egypt. Occupation mathematician, geographer,astronomer, astrologer.. | | |