

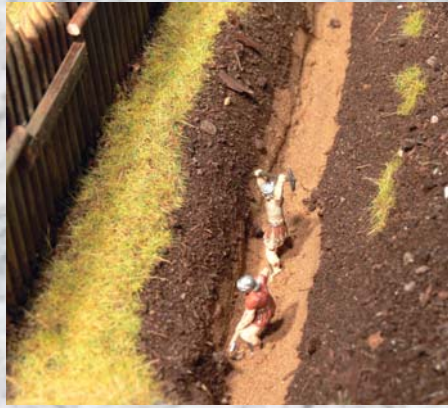
LIMES ▽ CONSTRUCTION ▽ SITE

STEPHAN ▽ BERRY



The diorama shows the limes of the Roman province *Germania superior* (in the southwestern corner of modern Germany) in its final stage, as it presented itself in the second century AD. From the time of Augustus on, the borderline was continually shifted into the territory of "*Germania libera*" and at the same time the limes construction became more elaborated.

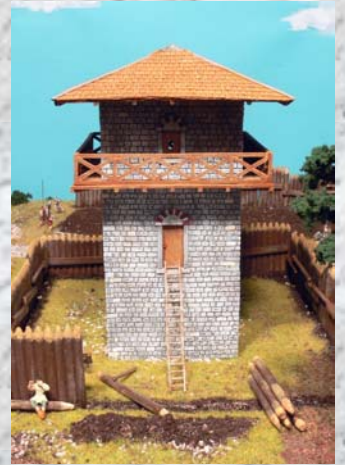
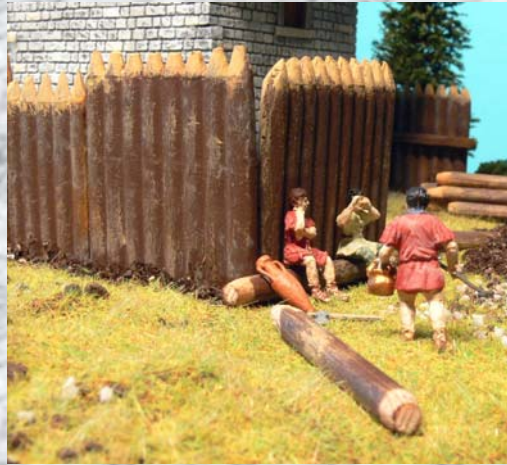




The final stage comprised a palisade, a trench and a rampart, as shown here. A road ran parallel to the rampart, and towers – first wooden buildings, later replaced by stonework – were placed in regular intervals, sometimes surrounded by an additional palisade.

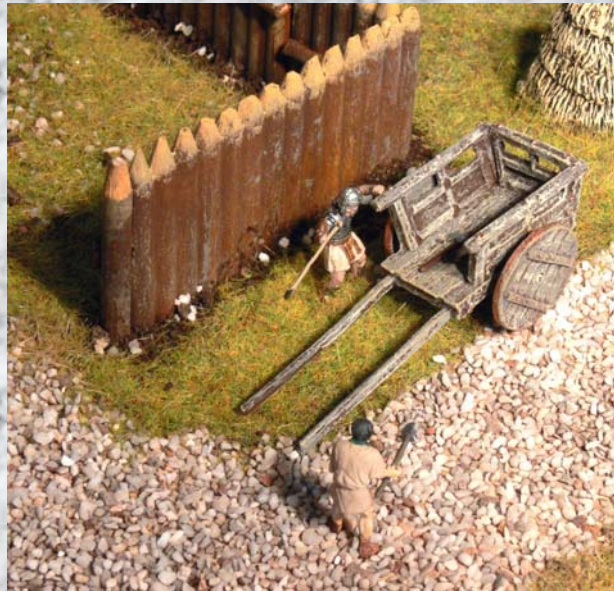


The towers were located within visibility distance, and at night fire signals served for communication in case of an emergency. A large pile of straw, ready to be set on fire, next to a watchtower is shown on a well-known panel from Traian's column.

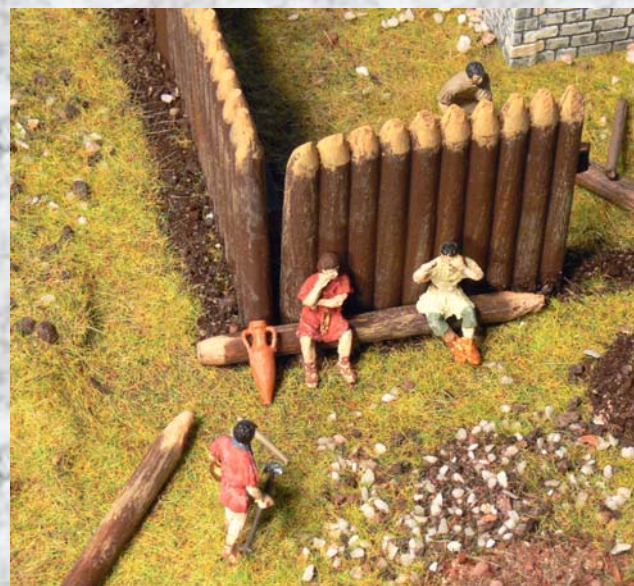


According to a popular view, all Roman roads were carefully paved using large slabs of stone. In reality, however, a large number of roads were graveled as in this scene here.





But what was the limes, after all? It was clearly not intended as a strong fortification that could withstand a major attack. However, it was neither merely a demarcation line, serving only the purposes of customs and immigration control, as some have argued. To understand the role of the limes, one must drop the artificial differentiation between a “military fortification” and a “mere demarcation line”, because this distinction was irrelevant from the Roman point of view: Border patrol, coast guard, customs, immigration officers, military defense, reconnaissance, intelligence, police operations – all these functions, which are in a modern state divided between a number of different authorities, were performed by the imperial Roman army.





Thus the limes, although too weak to fend off a large army, nevertheless had an important safety function. It presented an obstacle for smaller bands of raiders, and even when plundering barbarians could breach the line, they had to cross the obstacle twice – providing the Roman border troops with additional time for countermeasures. That such security concerns played an important part in Roman strategy, is clearly illustrated by the fact that they used the long stretches of the rivers Rhine and Danube as borders and that they were extremely reluctant with respect to building permanent bridges across these streams.



The tower is a very nice resin model from Fine Scale Factory (WS002). The soldiers are a mix of plastic and white metal figures from various sources (Art Miniaturen JS 72/0073, Caesar Miniatures History 041, Fine Scale Factory AR10, Hät 8075, Orion Haron 72008 - with minor conversions, Strelets M007). The palisades are modified ones from ZVEZDA sets (e.g. 8503, 8518), the cart is from Art Miniaturen (JS 72/0083), and the haystack from Kai Fuhrmann Figuren (KF 93046)

Further reading:

Archäologisches Landesmuseum Baden-Württemberg (2005) *Imperium Romanum: Roms Provinzen an Neckar, Rhein und Donau*, Esslingen am Neckar.

Isaac B. (1988) The Meaning of the Terms Limes and Limitanei. *Journal of Roman Studies* 78: 125-147.

Millar F. (1982) Emperors, Frontiers and Foreign Relations, 31 B. C. to A. D. 378. *Britannia* 13: 1-23.

Rabold B., Schallmayer E. und Thiel A. (2000) *Der Limes. Die Deutsche Limes-Straße vom Rhein bis zur Donau*. Theiss, Stuttgart.

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