

# **Finding the site of Boudica's last battle: an approach via terrain analysis.**

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For many years archaeologists, historians and other interested parties have sought the location of Boudica's last battle in AD60 or 61 using the sparse archaeological evidence, the accounts of Cornelius Tacitus and Cassius Dio and, to a greater or lesser extent, various insights or specialised knowledge, frequently military. This article is a description of an attempt to find likely battle sites using terrain analysis techniques.

A précis of events in 60/61AD based on Tacitus<sup>1</sup> would mention that Caius Suetonius Paullinus was the Roman Governor in Britain who commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Legions, together with an unknown number of auxiliary and cavalry units, and that he was interrupted in his conquest of the Druidic stronghold on Anglesey by news of a rebellion by the Iceni, a tribe in modern East Anglia led by Boudica, a woman driven by revenge for grievous slights by Roman oppressors. The Iceni, together with other local allies, including the Trinovantes located in modern Essex, stormed and destroyed Colchester, the principle Roman town in Britain. Meanwhile, the veteran cohorts of the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion, led by their commander Petillius Cerialis, marched from their fort (probably Longthorpe near Peterborough) to suppress the revolt and possibly to save the Romans in Colchester but were met en route, at an unknown location, by the already victorious Britons. The veteran infantry of the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion were destroyed and Cerialis retreated, with his surviving cavalry, back to their fort. This news would have reached Suetonius as he marched from Anglesey towards London with cohorts and auxiliaries from the 14<sup>th</sup> and the veterans of the 20<sup>th</sup> Legions, numbering, according to Tacitus, 10,000 armed men. Hearing that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion, based in Exeter, was not, as Suetonius had ordered, marching to join him would more than double the bad news. Suddenly, Suetonius had lost something approaching half of his effective combat strength; he was marching the 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Legions through hostile territory towards London, and faced the possibility of meeting a horde of Britons, possibly numbered in the hundreds of thousands<sup>2</sup>. On reaching London he decided to abandon the proto-city, marched his men, and any civilians who could keep up, away from the Britons who were about to destroy the town. A less destructive fate befell St. Albans to the north of London. The horde of Britons followed Suetonius as he attempted to march away from the greatest danger to his army but he was forced by circumstances to offer battle. The Roman legionaries, auxiliaries and cavalrymen were victorious, apparently killing tens of thousands of Britons for little loss. See Figure 1 for town and place names, Roman roads, legionary forts and the areas occupied by tribes.

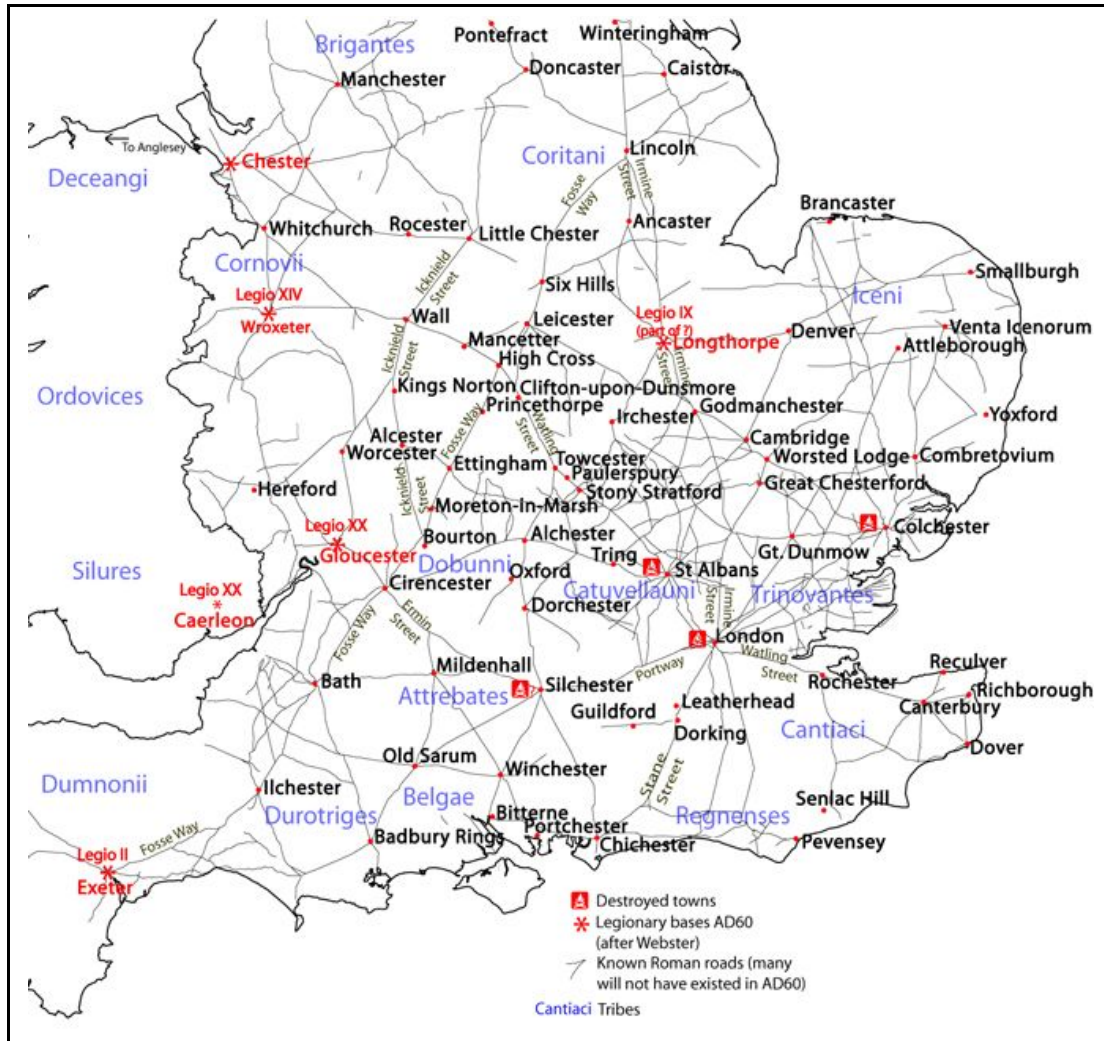


Figure 1: Location names, tribes, Roman roads and legionary bases.

## The Method

The aim of this study was to marry the primary written account, that of the *Annals* written by Tacitus in 109AD, with satellite-derived elevation data and to use the result within a computer program designed for geographical and terrain analysis to find likely battle sites across the southern UK. The elevation data are the Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM)<sup>3</sup> at 90 metre resolution which, when manipulated within SAGA<sup>4</sup>, the computer program, allows the display of terrain features such as rivers, slope, ridges, the concavity or convexity of slopes, aspect and, particularly important for this study, river valley bottoms and plains. Other information loaded to SAGA, and used to aid the investigation, included Roman towns, forts and roads (Fig.1). Having built a terrain model the next step was to match Tacitus' account with the terrain features.

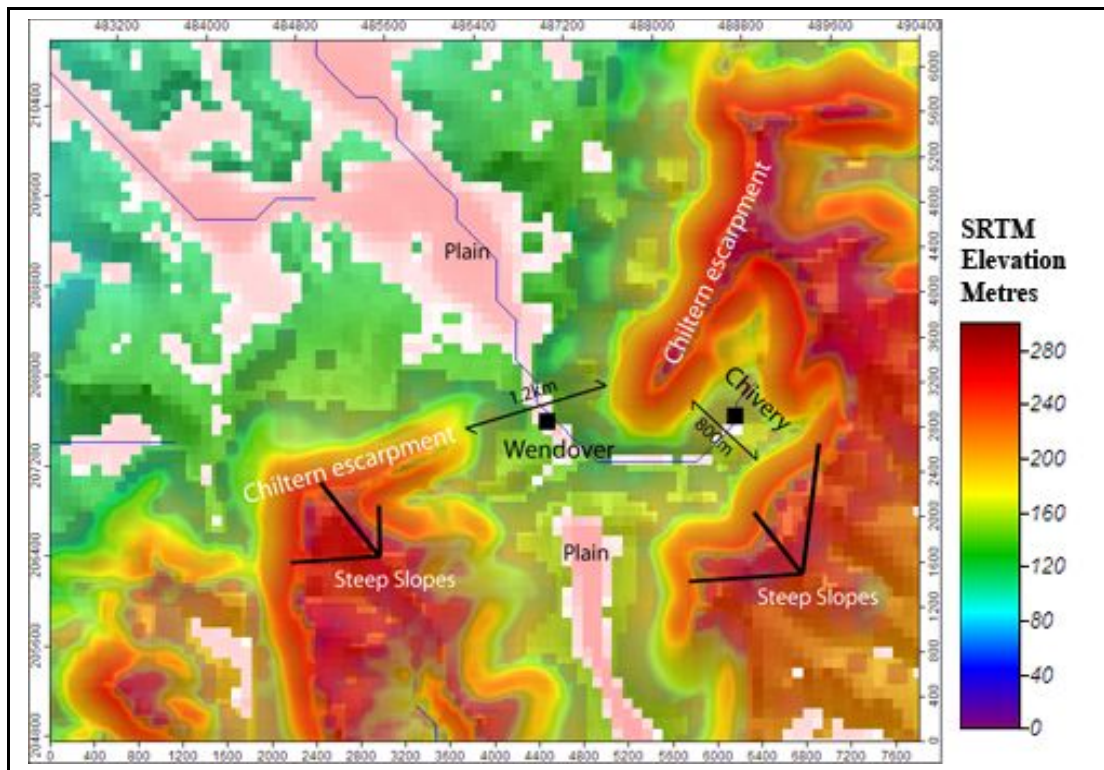
Tacitus was a Roman senator, consul and the son-in-law of Gnaeus Iulius Agricola who, at the time of the Boudican revolt, was a tribune with one of the legions stationed in Britain. As a senior officer of senatorial rank, Agricola would have been very involved in the details of the Roman campaigns in Britain; he may even have been present at Boudica's last battle, but he certainly would have narrated an accurate

and detailed account of the battle to Tacitus. Unfortunately, the *Annals* is a year-by-year account of the history of imperial Rome and necessarily has to briefly cover a large number of events. The same is true for the description of the battle site, the key passage being:

*14.30.34. Suetonius had the fourteenth legion with the veterans of the twentieth, and auxiliaries from the neighbourhood, to the number of about ten thousand armed men, when he prepared to break off delay and fight a battle. He chose a position approached by a narrow defile [faux], closed in at the rear by a forest, having first ascertained that there was not a soldier of the enemy except in his front, where an open plain [aperta planities] extended without any danger from ambuscades. His legions were in close array; round them, the light-armed troops, and the cavalry in dense array on the wings. On the other side, the army of the Britons, with its masses of infantry and cavalry, was confidently exulting, a vaster host than ever had assembled, and so fierce in spirit that they actually brought with them, to witness the victory, their wives riding in waggons, which they had placed on the extreme border of the plain.*

Clearly the meaning of the Latin word *faux* is critical. In various Latin dictionaries it is translated as throat, gullet, jaws, gorge, ravine, chasm, isthmus, pass and defile. Typically in modern translations of Tacitus it is defined as meaning a defile, a terrain feature that is robust, not gracile: a feature with significant elevation changes. *Faux* does not seem to apply to shallow-banked river valleys or indentations or hollows in gently rolling terrain.

Tacitus later states the Roman army “kept its position, clinging to the narrow defile as a defence”<sup>5</sup>. The key topographical elements are the defile and plain which in turn suggest the location is similar to, but not exclusively, that found at escarpments where low, relatively flat ground abuts ground that rises sharply and is commonly wooded even today. Within the face of escarpments are frequently found narrow defiles cut by rivers, streams and periglacial action. Tacitus even limits the extent of the plain by stating that the Briton’s wagons are placed on the “extreme border”. The width of the defile can be estimated from the “close array” of the legions (approx. 0.5 to 1.0 metre per legionary) and the standard Roman practice of having ranks of cohorts behind the frontline that act as reserves. Without knowing the precise numbers of legionaries, or others making up the “ten thousand armed men”, an estimated defile width of 750 to 1250 metres seems reasonable.



**Figure 2: Example of two battles sites (Wendover and Chivery) along the Chiltern escarpment. The pink-red colour, in low lands and valley bottoms, marks the location of plains (slopes less than 4 degrees). Bounding graticule in metres, British Grid; rivers are computer generated.**

Although Tacitus' description allows for little misunderstanding in its gross form, i.e. a defile facing an open plain, an extremely complex algorithm would be required to search a digital terrain model for such features, and allow sufficient flexibility such that subtle variations would also capture battle sites that do not match the gross description. For this reason the list of possible battle sites for southern Britain in Table 1 has been derived from visual examination of the terrain model using the following criteria:

- 1) a defile of approximately 1km width set within an elevated area
- 2) an adjacent, lower elevation, plain (less than 4 degrees of slope) or an extensive, lower elevation, flat area with gentle slopes
- 3) a plain of at least 1km diameter to accommodate the British horde and wagons
- 4) a defile whose flanks rise at least 30 metres higher than the bottom of the defile and have a steep slope (generally  $> 8$  degrees)
- 5) the flanks extend at least 1.5km in both directions to discourage mass flanking movements by the Britons. These flanks could be a mix of high and broken ground.
- 6) A gentle, positive slope ( $< 5$  degrees) exists between the Britons and Romans. Roman commanders naturally prefer to charge down-slope, although, there are instances of the reverse
- 7) a river or stream, sufficient to water 10,000 men and 1,000 horses and capable of protection by the Roman force

- 8) a general requirement that the site cannot be easily flanked, for example by an adjacent road or valley
- 9) the Roman army must be able to march radially away from London using roads to reach the site vicinity
- 10) the battle site should not so intimidate the Britons that they would not offer battle but instead besiege the Romans – it must be inviting to the Britons and appear to be a trap for the Romans

Figure 2 shows two examples of possible battle sites at Wendover and Chivery within the western escarpment of the Chilterns. There is a close correspondence of the topography, and general situation, to the criteria listed above and to Tacitus' description.

The criteria were not held rigid when selecting sites: often one criterion was given precedence over another. In passing it should be noted that relatively few sites are located across Roman roads, this being quite natural, as road construction would avoid steep ground if possible. In other instances, for example along the west-facing Chiltern escarpment (Fig.3), the Romans would need to lead the Britons to the preferred battle site and this necessitated leaving the easterly to westerly traversing road and march across country before arriving at the westerly-facing battle site. Some battle sites are reached after at least half a day's march across country, while some are 15km or more from a road and would have taken a full day to reach (normal marching rate on roads = c. 20 Roman miles/day or 29 kilometres).

The battle sites marked on Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 have been placed in the most optimised positions with regard to the criteria listed above and after examination of various maps but, in reality, each could be re-sited by 10s or 100s of metres depending on conditions in the general vicinity – conditions that might be only apparent when the site is visited.

In the south of Britain there are few possible battle sites selected west of the Fosse Way (Fig.1) because there is no archaeological evidence for the destruction of forts or towns on or west of the road, for example at Cirencester.

**Table 1. List of battle sites.**

Site Number	Nearest Place Name	County	Latitude	Longitude
1	Eynesford	Kent	0.184235175	51.33757893
2	Wouldham	Kent	0.462491672	51.34302932
3	Godmersham	Kent	0.957370514	51.21420759
4	Westwell	Kent	0.850619041	51.20277534
5	Challock	Kent	0.884542368	51.20751807
6	Stowting	Kent	1.037139138	51.14144953
7	Beachborough	Kent	1.105225044	51.10650339
8	Ottinge	Kent	1.101433594	51.1403476
9	Chartwell	Kent	0.086421366	51.24448236
10	Lewes	East Sussex	0.011401123	50.88027407
11	Southease	East Sussex	0.026603781	50.82984283
12	Alfriston	East Sussex	0.158873647	50.80502547
13	Filching	East Sussex	0.218638388	50.79958348

14	Long Hill	East Sussex	-0.053589131	50.86476372
15	Clayton	West Sussex	-0.155066171	50.90997834
16	Pyecombe	West Sussex	-0.181443145	50.90291131
17	Poynings	West Sussex	-0.199993053	50.89109728
18	Botolphs	West Sussex	-0.301007924	50.86713982
19	Bramber	West Sussex	-0.343680727	50.87105732
20	Washington	West Sussex	-0.407993396	50.89703517
21	Houghton	West Sussex	-0.548575656	50.89061716
22	Merstham	Surrey	-0.150529871	51.27094413
23	Cocking	West Sussex	-0.757773763	50.94111144
24	Redhill	Surrey	-0.16834694	51.23967114
25	Faygate	West Sussex	-0.26750947	51.09647609
26	Milland	West Sussex	-0.804993305	51.01998181
27	Redford	West Sussex	-0.775307281	51.02532166
28	Linchmere	West Sussex	-0.757751478	51.06719356
29	Dorking	Surrey	-0.331750118	51.23669849
30	Wotton	Surrey	-0.390475692	51.22509814
31	Chilworth	Surrey	-0.527068568	51.21873955
32	Compton	Surrey	-0.632348603	51.22003814
33	Godalming	Surrey	-0.611193131	51.18895775
34	Wonersh	Surrey	-0.525682937	51.19473686
35	Peaslake	Surrey	-0.439485175	51.17909044
36	Holmbury St. Mary	Surrey	-0.40791142	51.18086575
37	Virginia Water	Surrey	-0.575523816	51.40199277
38	Farnham	Surrey	-0.783449086	51.22047542
39	Cliveden	Berkshire	-0.694929805	51.55376382
40	Little Marlow	Buckinghamshire	-0.732029257	51.59101984
41	Luton	Bedfordshire	-0.419201992	51.88485256
42	East Haddon	Northamptonshire	-1.041312492	52.30458866
43	Hints	Staffordshire	-1.769370564	52.6256369
44	Ramsdean	Hampshire	-1.002759655	50.99384577
45	Haslemere	West Sussex	-0.728934965	51.0894764
46	Easthamstead	Berkshire	-0.731637804	51.37244794
47	Langley Common	Berkshire	-0.894462928	51.39531264
48	Dagnall	Buckinghamshire	-0.555387339	51.82825824
49	Aldbury	Hertfordshire	-0.604823588	51.81295734
50	Wiggington	Hertfordshire	-0.617071884	51.79226644
51	Hanghill	Hertfordshire	-0.688351712	51.77857818
52	Wendover Dean	Buckinghamshire	-0.726434007	51.72930931
53	Newnham	Northamptonshire	-1.17488931	52.23116961
54	Everdon	Northamptonshire	-1.142246538	52.2035884
55	Cockernhoe	Bedfordshire	-0.342331734	51.90837099
56	Brington	Cambridgeshire	-0.392470299	52.36099827
57	Tetworth	Bedfordshire	-0.221016949	52.16932397
58	Brogborough	Bedfordshire	-0.5817572	52.03864734
59	Cogenhoe	Northamptonshire	-0.78688906	52.25007627
60	Chacombe	Northamptonshire	-1.288640124	52.09399229
61	Warmington	Warwickshire	-1.377128818	52.12744062
62	Brailes	Warwickshire	-1.552189592	52.04135084
63	Long Compton	Warwickshire	-1.565149348	51.9911483
64	Wiggington	Oxfordshire	-1.421333295	52.00078497
65	Halse	Northamptonshire	-1.205109326	52.07298149
66	Maugersbury	Gloucestershire	-1.687752397	51.91821105
67	Icomb	Gloucestershire	-1.682925143	51.89717442
68	Salford	Oxfordshire	-1.572165093	51.95220349
69	Claygate Cross	Kent	0.303934584	51.27931373
70	Mereworth	Kent	0.369405022	51.25493093

71	Nettlestead	Kent	0.415852319	51.24487791
72	Godstone	Surrey	-0.06433654	51.26470858
73	Bletchingley	Surrey	-0.091805036	51.2410658
74	Redhill North	Surrey	-0.175511346	51.25875727
76	Egerton	Kent	0.713157404	51.20534947
77	Winchet Hill	Kent	0.465233179	51.1389529
78	Robertsbridge	East Sussex	0.493999281	50.98238566
79	Plummers Plain	West Sussex	-0.239661952	51.03771934
80	Lodsworth	West Sussex	-0.671750718	51.00200181
81	Bignor	West Sussex	-0.619022218	50.91340792
82	East Meon	Hampshire	-1.036197722	50.99280838
83	West Meon	Hampshire	-1.072121649	50.99260296
84	Old Winchester Hill 1	Hampshire	-1.089915108	50.98813739
85	Hawkey	Hampshire	-0.946562454	51.05157807
86	Empshott	Hampshire	-0.944381257	51.06990789
87	Selborne	Hampshire	-0.942191886	51.08851557
88	Blacknest	Hampshire	-0.860408418	51.16959337
89	Isington	Hampshire	-0.871172576	51.17766557
90	Westhumble	Surrey	-0.337069614	51.25386041
91	Box Hill	Surrey	-0.302845678	51.24218539
92	Wotton	Surrey	-0.369187689	51.21120384
93	Bletchingley 2	Surrey	-0.105018435	51.25322638
94	Ide Hill	Kent	0.119643578	51.24519026
95	Bowyer's Common	Hampshire	-0.909894688	51.03276609
96	Shoreham-by-Sea	West Sussex	-0.291226102	50.8472451
97	Warningcamp	West Sussex	-0.538010041	50.8644136
98	Lavant	West Sussex	-0.792751605	50.87870389
99	Alton	Hampshire	-0.972205007	51.15293727
102	Ashmore Green	Berkshire	-1.280038196	51.41877062
103	Newbury (Long Lane)	Wiltshire	-1.301643425	51.42471511
104	Hermitage	Berkshire	-1.28288038	51.44795618
105	Stanford Dingley	Berkshire	-1.18597605	51.45229628
106	Marlston Hermitage	Berkshire	-1.230263579	51.44510085
107	Halfway	Berkshire	-1.409380981	51.40970781
108	Chieveley	Berkshire	-1.31246338	51.45033538
109	Winterbourne	Berkshire	-1.350398877	51.44334508
110	Marten	Wiltshire	-1.588148924	51.34530103
111	Whitchurch Hill	Oxfordshire	-1.063670971	51.49575412
112	Henley-on-Thames	Oxfordshire	-0.901027709	51.53814837
113	Eddington	Berkshire	-1.521853088	51.41795725
114	Hungerford (B4000)	Oxfordshire	-1.592027443	51.53416524
115	Uffington Castle	Oxfordshire	-1.578640377	51.55776198
116	Stow-on-the-Wold	Gloucestershire	-1.720442279	51.91536122
117	Lower Swell	Gloucestershire	-1.74176674	51.92180961
118	Sherborne	Gloucestershire	-1.731121413	51.84218415
119	Cornwell	Oxfordshire	-1.596166596	51.92942569
120	Ogbourne St. George	Wiltshire	-1.713779653	51.46988467
121	Badbury	Swindon	-1.723039477	51.5266289
122	Clifton-upon-Dunsmore	Warwickshire	-1.208705652	52.37103789
123	Brington	Northamptonshire	-1.04296778	52.25736385
124	Boddington	Northamptonshire	-1.302980915	52.1776813
125	Priors Marston (multi choice)	Warwickshire	-1.291322382	52.20409187
126	Stoneton	Warwickshire	-1.330163285	52.1906355
127	Napton on the Hill	Warwickshire	-1.308680667	52.24781844
128	Aston Le Walls	Northamptonshire	-1.274746607	52.16626827
129	Prescote	Oxfordshire	-1.309445897	52.13161993



130	Great Oxendon	Northamptonshire	-0.917708993	52.4421096
131	Laughton	Leicestershire	-1.013608044	52.47812642
132	Husbands Bosworth	Leicestershire	-1.051026676	52.46216588
133	Cranoe	Leicestershire	-0.892004412	52.54571496
134	Hallaton	Leicestershire	-0.831071079	52.55719783
135	Harringworth	Northamptonshire	-0.665548296	52.56389173
136	Oakham	Rutland	-0.709713299	52.66797565
137	Little Dalby	Leicestershire	-0.862640145	52.72718866
138	Chilcomb	Hampshire	-1.268668455	51.05522962
139	Winchester	Hampshire	-1.319037938	51.04901625
140	Standon	Hampshire	-1.392102485	51.03911854
141	Hursley	Hampshire	-1.423036383	51.04372723
142	Swaythling	Southampton	-1.381523124	50.93516176
143	Tidcombe	Wiltshire	-1.589420218	51.32725717
144	Brunton	Wiltshire	-1.655598979	51.30683779
145	Manningford	Wiltshire	-1.767661819	51.31123338
146	Upavon	Wiltshire	-1.806765932	51.28441585
147	Alton Priors	Wiltshire	-1.830397984	51.36722309
148	Tidworth	Hampshire	-1.688383466	51.21474199
149	Shipton Bellinger	Hampshire	-1.671117741	51.19863526
150	Collingbourne Ducis	Wiltshire	-1.643560604	51.26773213
151	Andover Down	Hampshire	-1.449165918	51.21419291
152	Mottisfont	Hampshire	-1.529850062	51.04365678
153	Romsey	Hampshire	-1.491734679	50.96235429
154	Horspath	Oxfordshire	-1.157134665	51.73545065
155	Forest Hill	Oxfordshire	-1.152886449	51.75886339
156	Bossington	Hampshire	-1.518588517	51.07230966
157	Wolverton	Hampshire	-1.192302464	51.31499704
158	Tufton	Hampshire	-1.364376204	51.21299229
159	Chilbolton	Hampshire	-1.450691532	51.15698455
160	Upper Bullington	Hampshire	-1.339741745	51.17339056
161	Lopcombe Corner	Wiltshire	-1.641453452	51.1220106
162	Easton	Wiltshire	-1.702195828	51.33843201
163	Palestine	Hampshire	-1.636445787	51.1821267
164	Boscombe Down East	Wiltshire	-1.670074462	51.13600132
165	Calstone Wellington	Wiltshire	-1.93468022	51.39774535
167	Bishops Cannings	Wiltshire	-1.940874195	51.38427999
168	Roundway	Wiltshire	-1.995633468	51.3688067
169	Cherhill	Wiltshire	-1.952458204	51.42887314
170	Compton Bassett	Wiltshire	-1.944918573	51.45309096
171	Studley	Wiltshire	-2.049500158	51.45091022
172	Lyneham	Wiltshire	-1.998695337	51.49269149
173	Tockenham Wick	Wiltshire	-1.972477686	51.52681726
174	Wootton Bassett	Wiltshire	-1.911182774	51.55153979
175	Brinkworth	Wiltshire	-1.960797531	51.56354276
176	Bromham	Wiltshire	-2.064627409	51.38320449
177	Littleton Panell	Wiltshire	-2.003476391	51.29275468
178	West Lavinton	Wiltshire	-1.992337603	51.27013225
179	Cheverell Parva	Wiltshire	-2.021508012	51.27412269
180	Erlestoke	Wiltshire	-2.056518186	51.27810319
181	Bratton	Wiltshire	-2.117496205	51.26974087
182	Upton Scudamore	Wiltshire	-2.175691787	51.23274031
183	Warminster	Wiltshire	-2.154557366	51.2188759
184	Heytesbury	Wiltshire	-2.100343831	51.18625339
185	Knook	Wiltshire	-2.077396539	51.1833569
186	Codford	Wiltshire	-2.044216203	51.17164989
187	Sutton Veney	Wiltshire	-2.167173308	51.17370395



188	Corton	Wiltshire	-2.108025716	51.1625048
189	Stockton	Wiltshire	-2.030970884	51.14903144
190	Wilton	Wiltshire	-1.869834575	51.08042907
191	Teffont Evias	Wiltshire	-1.997650867	51.07584383
192	Broad Chalke	Wiltshire	-1.94964239	51.02992138
193	Salisbury	Wiltshire	-1.773817749	51.05799234
194	Potterne Wick	Wiltshire	-1.976073716	51.3246443
195	Longbridge Deverill	Wiltshire	-2.175458774	51.15878088
196	Norton Ferris (south)	Wiltshire	-2.271834744	51.12433306
197	Norton Ferris (north)	Wiltshire	-2.265120219	51.13435298
198	Maiden Bradley	Wiltshire	-2.275038628	51.14649859
199	East Knoyle	Wiltshire	-2.14508411	51.06702793
200	Gore Common	Dorset	-2.240564805	50.99352619
201	Spetisbury	Dorset	-2.11760319	50.8224641
202	Henbury	Dorset	-2.066727616	50.78599674
203	Charborough Park	Dorset	-2.118517562	50.76969309
204	Winterborne Kingston	Dorset	-2.192345695	50.77789193
205	Wendover (High st.)	Buckinghamshire	-0.738918586	51.75983228
206	Prince's Risborough	Buckinghamshire	-0.8461742	51.70542694
207	Saunderton	Buckinghamshire	-0.82853439	51.68173236
208	Watlington	Oxfordshire	-0.999176129	51.63375057
209	Brightwell-cum-Sotwell	Oxfordshire	-1.186795956	51.61992255
210	Ipsden	Oxfordshire	-1.105199591	51.56383114
211	South Stoke	Oxfordshire	-1.142742403	51.54085938
212	Tidmarsh	West Berkshire	-1.082062209	51.46857936
213	Whitchurch-on-Thames	Oxfordshire	-1.093709232	51.49166535
214	Reading	Berkshire	-0.976184342	51.44439204
215	Compton	Oxfordshire	-1.250347903	51.54033624
216	Chilton	Oxfordshire	-1.264848354	51.54956295
217	Botley	Oxfordshire	-1.297961173	51.75317225
218	Upper Slaughter	Gloucestershire	-1.770385879	51.90696139
219	Walton	Warwickshire	-1.58496869	52.17775434
220	Offchurch	Warwickshire	-1.483808637	52.2955532
221	Merevale	Warwickshire	-1.577530771	52.58082374
222	Dadlington	Leicestershire	-1.406125285	52.5879237
223	Sheepy	Leicestershire	-1.493449953	52.62180795
224	Hammerwich	Staffordshire	-1.891271065	52.6727018
225	Perry Bar	Birmingham	-1.910904449	52.5256275
226	Frankley	Birmingham	-2.030744431	52.40282641
227	Arrowfield Top	Worcestershire	-1.960465306	52.36355664
228	Bordesley	Worcestershire	-1.94393247	52.32535102
229	Olney	Milton Keynes	-0.691515	52.16606795
230	Chipping Campden	Gloucestershire	-1.762614769	52.05238621
231	Tackley	Oxfordshire	-1.320325636	51.87112983
232	Hanborough	Oxfordshire	-1.365001149	51.82221552
233	Daglingworth	Gloucestershire	-2.004689574	51.73961352
234	Cloford	Somerset	-2.398910938	51.19078309
235	Wanstrow	Somerset	-2.423630093	51.1839881
236	Hemington	Somerset	-2.378242293	51.27398359
237	Blatchbridge	Somerset	-2.323147218	51.21098386
238	Batcombe	Somerset	-2.461226723	51.14424377
239	Pylle	Somerset	-2.566882424	51.15151142
240	Galhampton	Somerset	-2.506699113	51.07082864
241	Blackford	Somerset	-2.500562479	51.03964953
242	Charleton Horethorne	Somerset	-2.475755433	51.01001136
243	Sandford Orcas	Dorset	-2.538970971	50.99017897
244	Trent	Dorset	-2.595597266	50.96625247

245	Stoke Trister	Somerset	-2.364389971	51.05907851
246	Fifehead Magdalen	Dorset	-2.321305429	50.98643204
247	Oborne	Dorset	-2.487477599	50.9590215
248	Haydon	Dorset	-2.459154174	50.93502988
249	Iwerne Courtney	Dorset	-2.200644924	50.91210862
250	Higher Ansty	Dorset	-2.346195452	50.84490604
251	Lillington	Dorset	-2.53154811	50.90851067
252	Compton Chamberlayne	Wiltshire	-1.940185677	51.06633985
253	Fovant	Wiltshire	-1.979529201	51.05884874
254	Swallowcliffe	Wiltshire	-2.02643481	51.0477043
255	Old Winchester Hill 2	Hampshire	-1.095600498	50.9746901
256	Warnford	Hampshire	-1.111098249	51.00584117
257	Chivery	Buckinghamshire	-0.714136706	51.75992137
258	Mancetter	Warwickshire	-1.525076651	52.55846734
259	Hyde End	West Berkshire	-1.205228112	51.36678752
260	Speen	West Berkshire	-1.344167384	51.41716101
261	Axford	Wiltshire	-1.644831	51.431555
262	Thatcham	West Berkshire	-1.245888	51.414709
263	Cold Ash	West Berkshire	-1.264208	51.416131



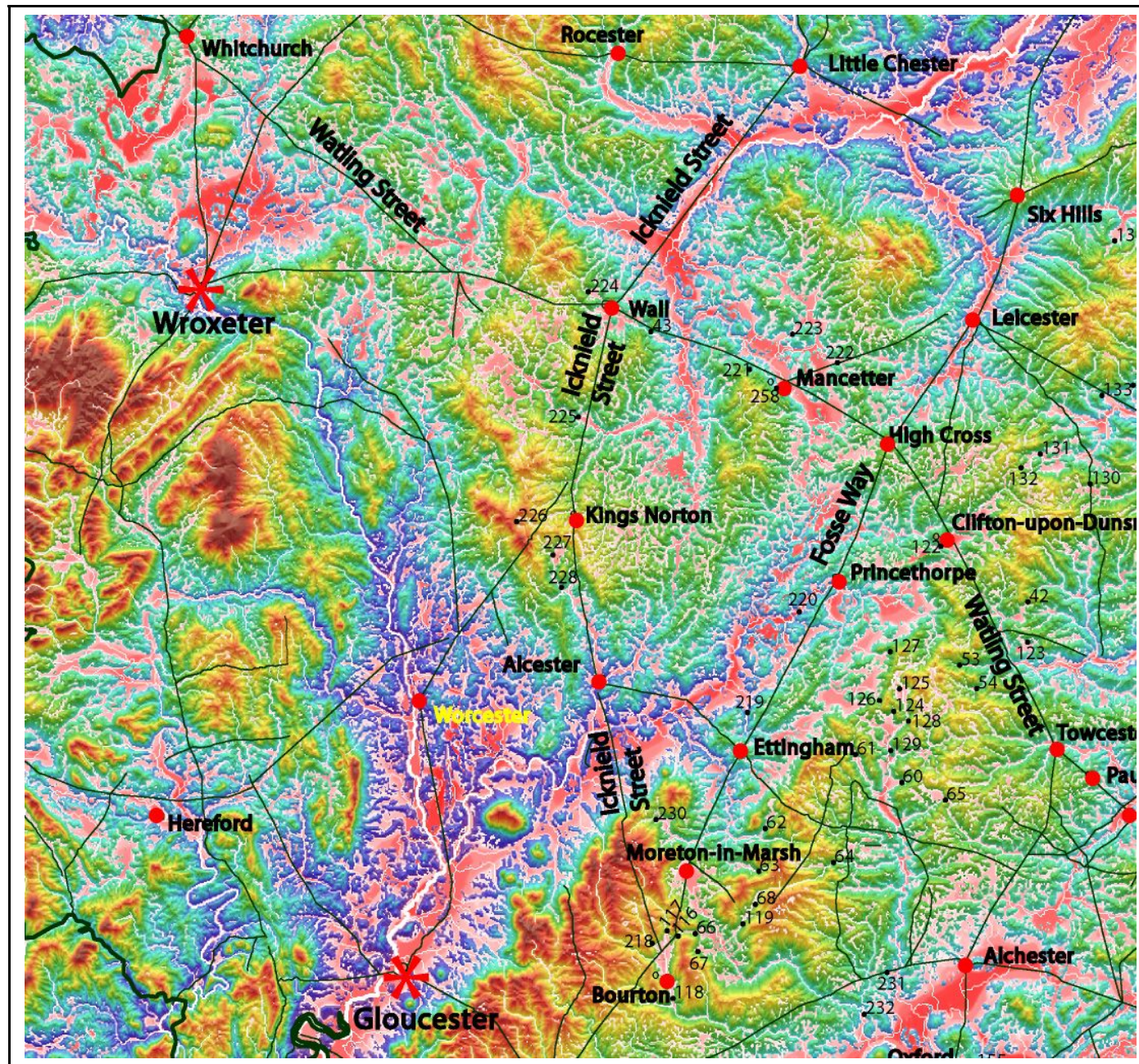


Figure 3: Battle site locations (black dots) and numbers (for cross-referencing with Table 1) for the North West quadrant of the study area. Roman roads and towns (red dots) shown for location purposes. Wroxeter (red star) was a legionary fort.



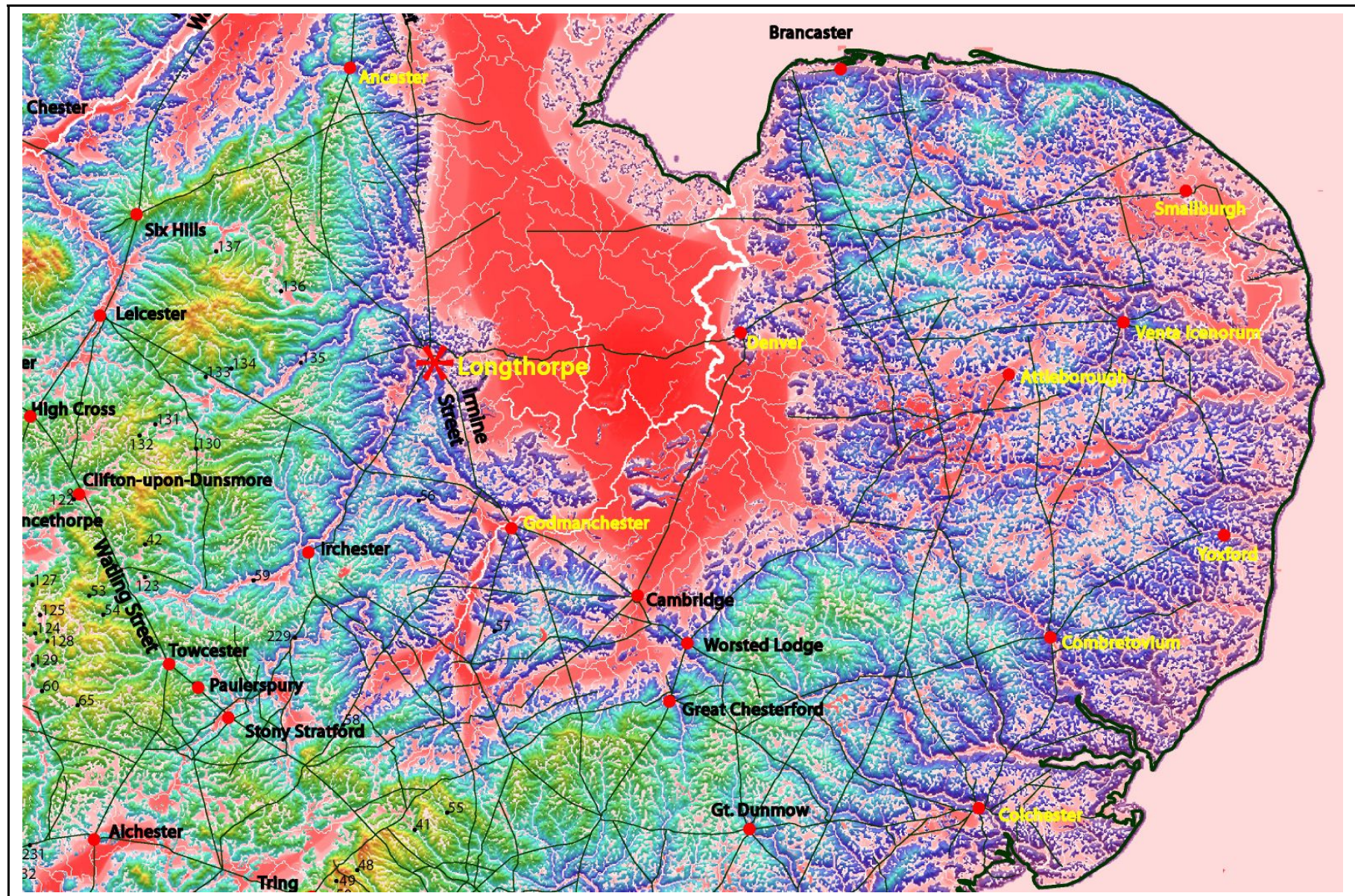


Figure 4: Battle site locations (black dots) and numbers (for cross-referencing with Table 1) for the North East quadrant of the study area. Roman roads and towns (red dots) shown for location purposes. Longthorpe (red star) was a legionary fort.



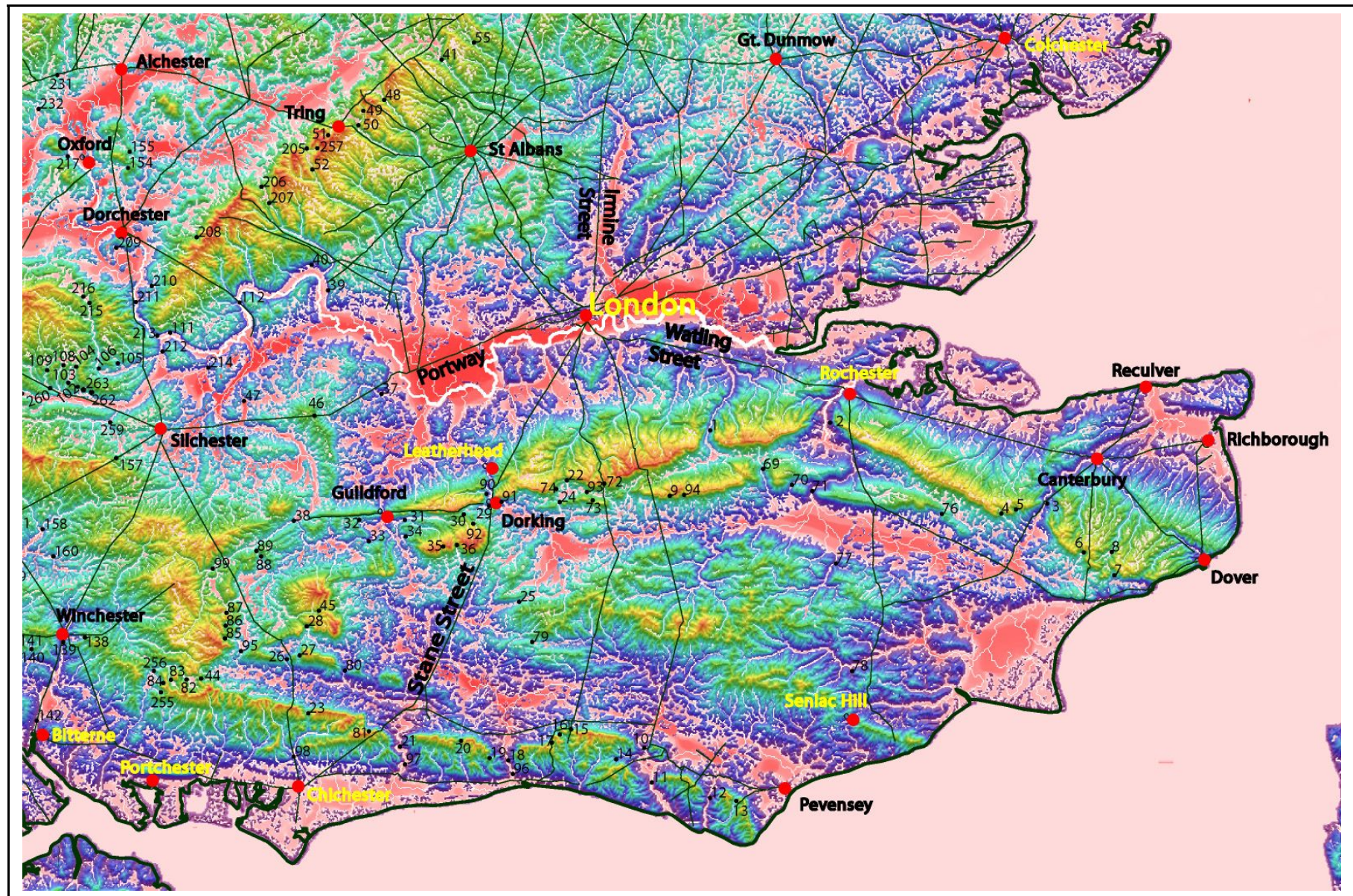


Figure 5: Battle site locations (black dots) and numbers (for cross-referencing with Table 1) for the South East quadrant of the study area. Roman roads and towns (red dots) shown for location purposes.



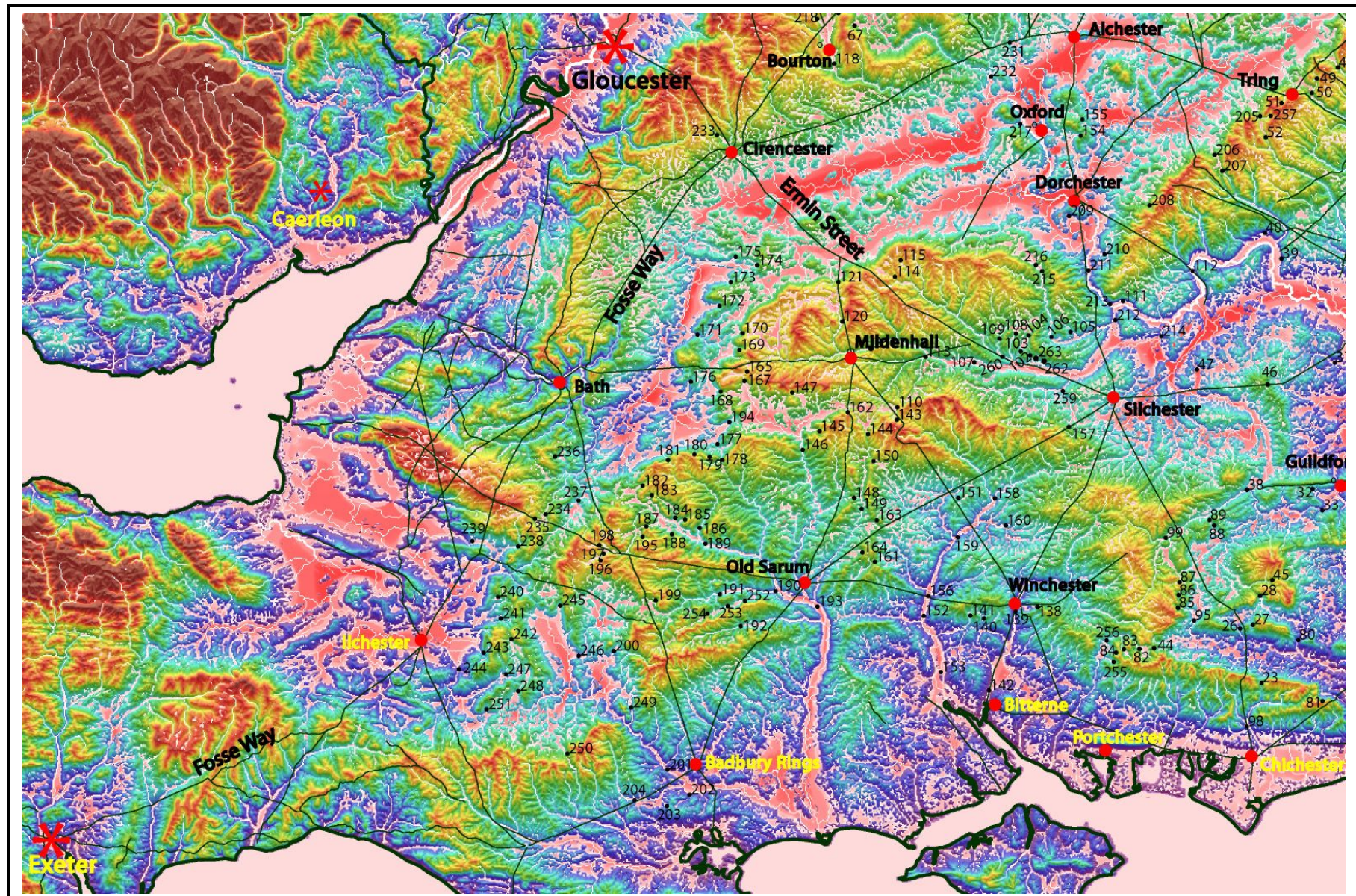


Figure 6: Battle site locations (black dots) and numbers (for cross-referencing with Table 1) for the South West quadrant of the study area. Roman roads and towns (red dots) shown for location purposes. Gloucester and Caerleon (red star) were legionary forts.



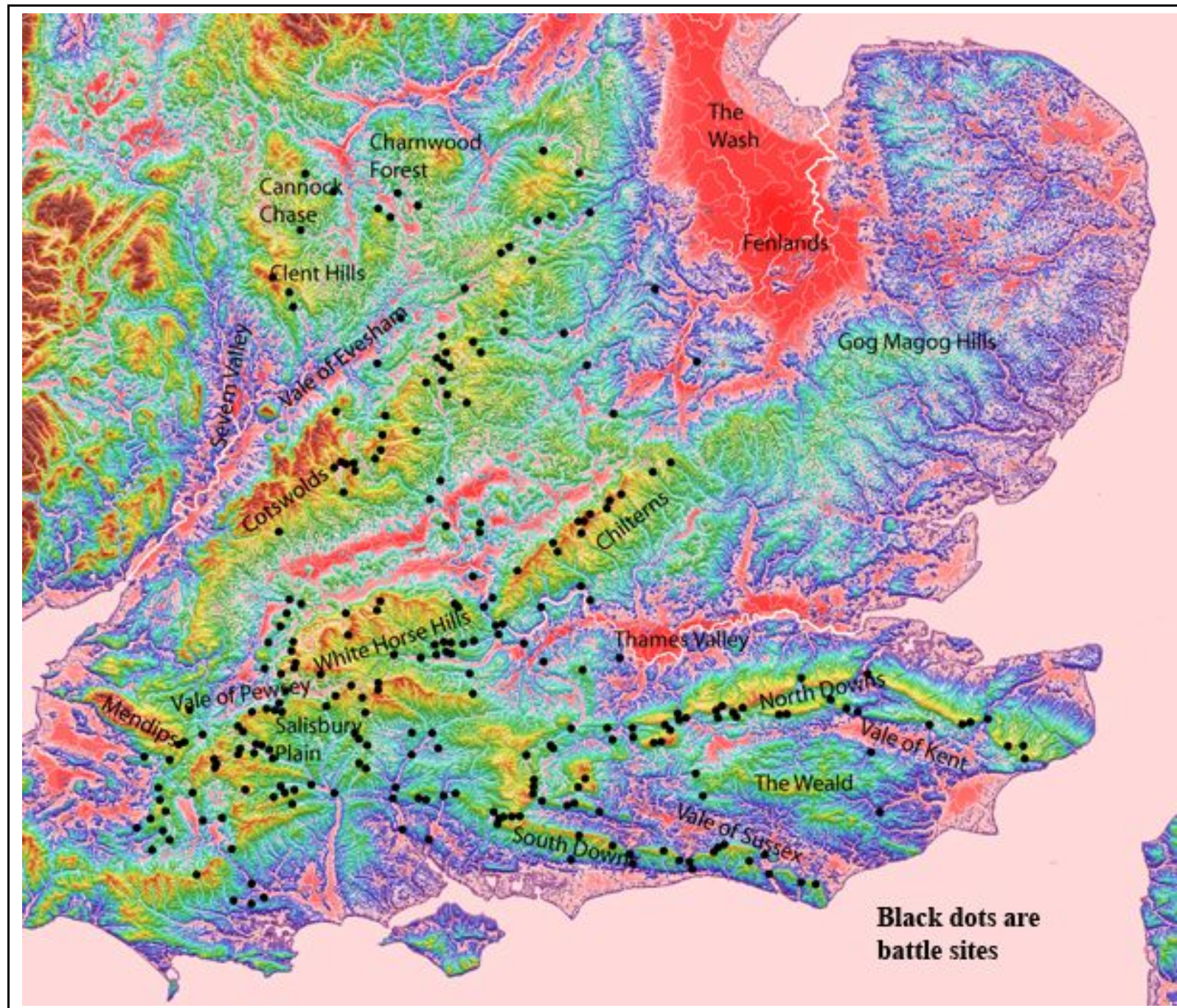


Figure 7: Battle sites (black dots) and geographical names for the study area overlying elevation data.



Examination of Figures 3,4,5,6 and 7 shows that the terrain analysis results in possible battle sites predominantly located in the chalk and limestone regions of Britain and particularly at the margins of these upland areas. Of course, the converse is true, with very few sites located in the lowland regions except where relatively deep incisions by rivers have created the required profiles. Of particular note is that there are only one or two sites within the Iceni and Trinovantes tribal areas of eastern England.

The initial visual selection for southern England, which did not take into consideration any strategic or political concerns but is solely based on the criteria previously mentioned, identified 263 possible sites. Examining the words of Tacitus and applying some simple observations may help identify the area in which the actual battle site is located.

## Opening events leading to the battle

Tacitus recounts how the Iceni and Trinovantes rose and attacked Colchester, the Roman *colonia* in Essex populated by retired legionaries. The news of the uprising would have reached Suetonius Paullinus, the Roman Governor, in or near Anglesey a few days later (see Fig.1).

On hearing the news Suetonius assessed that the subjugation of the Druids on Anglesey was almost complete; that his main legionary forces were located with him (the 14<sup>th</sup> Legion and the veterans of the 20<sup>th</sup> Legion) while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion was in Exeter and the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion was probably in Longthorpe and other local forts. Suetonius was a very experienced, prudent commander, having successfully crushed uprisings in the Atlas Mountains<sup>6</sup> and Wales, and well versed in assessing the full import of the news that reached him, namely, the warriors of the whole of eastern Britain had risen, that hot-heads and discontents from other tribes were rushing to Boudica's banner and that he must snuff out the rebellion quickly or face losing the whole province. He would already know that preparations for the Anglesey campaign meant that his supplies for the year had been concentrated in and around north Wales, and that throughout the rest of Britain the supplies available were sufficient for the local garrisons but not for a prolonged campaign by a concentrated force. The exception might have been the Channel forts and ports at Reculver and Richborough (Fig.1) but these were far away, the wrong side of the uprising and large parts of the Roman supporting fleet, the *Classis Britannicae*, had been supporting his campaign in Anglesey and that the remainder in the Channel region were probably not capable of transporting large quantities of fresh supplies to him. Suetonius might therefore have decided to conduct an enclosing, crushing campaign by all the forces available to him that were capable of independent action with the supplies they already held. Above all else, the revolt had to be crushed quickly and before winter if Suetonius was to avoid a protracted uprising.

Consequently, he and his units of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Legions may have marched down Watling Street towards London but probably halted at or near Towcester to assess the situation before intending to move eastwards into Iceni and Trinovante territory. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion may have been commanded to leave Exeter and march to London, with the

probable intention of requisitioning supplies from the merchants there, before marching in an easterly or north-easterly direction into Trinovante territory and approaching Colchester. Meanwhile, the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion under Petillius Cerialis<sup>7</sup> may have been ordered to form the northern pincer of this encircling movement and to march in a south-easterly direction (taking the axis Godmanchester-Cambridge-Colchester). The 9<sup>th</sup> was the garrison legion for the area to the north and west of the Iceni tribal lands and Suetonius might have required it to hold the forts it already occupied to form a barrier to northwards expansion of the revolt and to dissuade any rebel reinforcements arriving from the Coritani in the north (Fig.1). For this reason possibly only the veteran cohorts, some auxiliaries and cavalry of the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion marched with Cerialis.

Some commentators suggest that the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion marched independently southwards to face the rebels, possibly at the plea of the citizens of Colchester, or that Suetonius ordered the one Roman legion in the vicinity to put down the uprising alone. Firstly, neither Cerialis, nor any other Roman legionary commander expecting future promotion, would advance his legion without having first received orders from his commanding officer to do so. In support, it is worth noting that Cerialis became Governor of Britain in 71AD. Secondly, Suetonius would have been aware of the size of the uprising (the Iceni and Trinovantes may have been the most populous and richest of Britons, much like the people of Norfolk/East Anglia during the Middle Ages); that the Iceni were extremely warlike and had risen earlier before being crushed in battle in 47AD; that the Britons throughout the island were deeply unhappy about the slaughter of their Druidic priests on Anglesey and that, consequently, this already large uprising would grow and be difficult to suppress. Therefore it is unlikely that he would have ordered a single legion to suppress the revolt and at the same time to maintain its presence in the local forts. In addition, Suetonius' character and experience suggests a man of deep military pragmatism: he might not have unduly concerned himself with the fate of Colchester but, instead, might have concentrated on marshalling all of his forces to crush the rebel tribes with the sole intention of putting down the revolt and saving the province. At least, that might have been his plan but it quickly went awry.

For at Colchester Tacitus recounts that the "temple where the soldiers had assembled, was stormed after a two days' siege. The victorious enemy met Petillius Cerialis ... who was coming to the rescue, routed his troops, and destroyed all his infantry" <sup>8</sup>. Cerialis retreated with his remaining cavalry to a fort. The number of infantry killed is not known but Tacitus does say that 2,000 legionary replacements arrived from Germany in the aftermath of the final battle<sup>9</sup> and that the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion had their number made up - suggesting that a significant portion of the 2,000 went to the 9<sup>th</sup>. If Suetonius' plan was to encircle the rebels then he had just lost the northern arm: whatever the plan, this was a very serious event that endangered the whole province.

At about the same time as the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion was routed, Suetonius would have heard that Poenius Postumus, the acting commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion in Exeter, was refusing to obey Suetonius' order to march and help put down the revolt. No reason for the refusal is given<sup>10</sup>. It can be reasonably expected that Suetonius might have ordered the actual commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion, and/or other senior officers and a cavalry unit, to

march to Exeter, relieve Postumus of his command and bring the 2<sup>nd</sup> eastwards as rapidly as possible. We do know that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion was not present at the final battle with Boudica but it may have been en route and might have played a significant part in Suetonius' strategic plans prior to the battle.

Suetonius had now lost the northern and southern arms of his encircling force, if that is what he was planning, and was only left with those forces he directly controlled, the 14<sup>th</sup> Legion and the veterans of the 20<sup>th</sup> Legion, together with an unknown number of auxiliaries<sup>11</sup> and cavalry, located somewhere along Watling Street between Chester and London (Fig.1).

Tacitus continues his account by stating that, "Suetonius, however, with wonderful resolution, marched amidst a hostile population to Londinium"<sup>12</sup>. This tells us that the local population, and possibly the Boudican rebels were harassing him as he marched south and that he did arrive in London. Unfortunately, Tacitus does not state specifically that the 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Legions were with Suetonius and this omission has led to some commentators<sup>13</sup> suggesting that Suetonius swiftly rode to London with a cavalry unit, but without his legions, assessed the situation, declared that London could not be held, offered to escort citizens to safety and then dashed back up Watling Street to his waiting infantry before offering battle somewhere along the road. However, there is no literary evidence that this did happen and it is far more plausible that Suetonius arrived in London with his legions.

For example, Nicholas Fuentes<sup>14</sup>, in summarising the reasons against a cavalry dash, included the cautious, prudent and experienced character of Suetonius; the disastrous consequences of Suetonius not re-establishing contact with his infantry; the damaging effect on the morale of the infantry as he rode away to London; that as the Governor for two years he would not need to travel to London to assess its defences and, finally, that few refugees could keep up with the pace of a cavalry unit as it returned rapidly up Watling Street. To these existing reasons, more can be added.

Continuous communication between Roman legionary units, forts, supporting navy, supply depots and the army headquarters was always of great importance to the Romans. For Suetonius to have left his headquarters for the cavalry dash southwards would result in a loss of communication between the army commander and the rest of his units in Britain. To have broken communication, or at best greatly delayed the transmission of news and orders to and from the commander, at a time when the whole of the eastern province was in violent uproar, the only colonia had been destroyed, the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion routed and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion was not obeying orders, would have been unthinkable.

Another reason against the cavalry dash is the poor martial rigour, even insubordination, of Suetonius' legions when faced with hordes of fanatical Britons. This behaviour was displayed on Anglesey when the opposing armies faced each other. Tacitus says the enemy, "scared our soldiers by the unfamiliar sight, so that, as if their limbs were paralysed, they stood motionless, and exposed to wounds."<sup>15</sup> Suetonius had to appeal to his men, to urge them on, before they launched their attack and destroyed the enemy. These same men, many of them veterans of campaigning in

Briton, were with Suetonius as he marched south along Watling Street: men who did not obey the commands of their unit commanders to engage the enemy, men who were so terrified by the Britons that they stood rooted to their positions in the line and only obeyed commands when given by their army commander, the Governor of the province, Suetonius. He, the only capable man, imploring and commanding his infantry, restored the combat effectiveness of the army. It is unlikely that Suetonius would gallop away from these suspect troops and leave them with officers whose orders, in the heat of battle, they did not obey – in these circumstances Suetonius might have thought that he would return to a scene of massacre. Also, no doubt to Suetonius' private despair, this episode indicates that the legionary officers were not capable of commanding their soldiers when the need was greatest. He could not leave his men!

And surely, rather than Suetonius march to London with a cavalry unit to gather information, it makes more sense for him to have delegated the task to an experienced but younger officer? Plus, in 60/61AD Suetonius was probably a fit, fifty to sixty year old man used to spending his day in the saddle but, nevertheless, he would be aware that a younger man would have had a better chance of speedy success.

Finally, this militarily improbable, and improper, action would have been mentioned by Tacitus: he does not explicitly state that the legions were with Suetonius in London, because that was to be expected.

Therefore, in conclusion, it is more plausible and most likely that Suetonius and his army marched together down Watling Street, harassed by the rebels, slowly losing soldiers to ambushes and hit-and-run tactics and being aware that the horde of Britons that had routed the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion might be on their left flank. It is possible that this horde partially burned and destroyed St. Albans (Fig.1) as it followed Suetonius' legions to London.

Having reached London Suetonius had to urgently assess his strategy, which essentially amounts to deciding on the direction of march for his army – north and back along Watling Street, east and into the rebels heart-land, south and across the Thames or, west and towards his only other significant armed unit, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion. This decision obviously determines the most likely area for the site of Boudica's last battle.

However, before examining these strategic directional decisions in some detail, a few notes on the general situation might be appropriate. In probably no more than three weeks, possibly two, the Romans have been reduced from being the rulers of most of southern Britain, the suppressors of the Welsh tribes and the destroyers of the Druidic enclave of Anglesey, to hunted fugitives, either ensconced in their forts in the north and west country or about to be overwhelmed by a frenzied attack on London. The 9<sup>th</sup> Legion has been destroyed as an effective field unit and Suetonius can only hope that it can hold the forts it already occupies. We do not know the manner of the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion's rout but a rebel ambush, in overwhelming numbers, while the unit was marching is probable. In the Roman mind this tragedy would invoke memories of the German disaster in 9AD when Varus lost three legions in the Teutoburg Forest. It is

reasonable to assume that many Britons would also know of this event, and other more recent Roman defeats in Britain, when Roman forces had been surrounded or, at least, out-flanked by superior numbers of marauding warriors in terrain least suited to the disciplined, collective defence of the Roman legions.

The reversal of relative strength, detrimental to the Romans but beneficial to the rebels, must have been shockingly clear to Suetonius and his senior staff. When the rebels arose the Romans could march four legions, from positions of strength in the west and north, in their attempt to enclose and then concentrate their forces against the Iceni and Trinovantes. Now the only Roman force facing the rebels in the field, Suetonius' army, has been pushed by rebel forces, and pulled by the need for supplies and a refuge, into an unfortified, indefensible London. Fortunately London was the nexus of the road system in Britain and this allowed Suetonius to determine the right direction to move away from total destruction and towards a strategic position where he could regroup, resupply, reinforce and then relaunch the suppression of the rebels. So, which direction out of London did he take?

### **Which way out of London?**

To move eastwards or north east, into the Iceni or Trinovantes tribal lands, and bring them to battle would have been the most imprudent option for several reasons: Suetonius' legionaries may have been tired after their long, harassed march from north Wales; they may have been demoralised by the rout of the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion and the refusal of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion to come to their aid; they would be out-numbered in the home land of their enemies; they would know that they could be readily out-flanked by the mobile Britons, that the possibility of encirclement and destruction was high; that there are very few locations where the terrain would aid them and that they would be marching away from any assistance. To many legionaries the prospect might appear as a death-march, with fearful reminders of Varus' fate. For Suetonius all of these points, together with his doubts about the fortitude of his legions, would be clear, as would the knowledge that his 10,000 men might be out-numbered by ten or twenty fold and that communication with the rest of Britain would be cut. He may have wondered how he would escape an ambush by such a force or how his men would survive if the Britons chose to encircle and starve them into submission, rather than engage in battle. To a prudent and cautious commander the way east offers very little prospect of success but a high probability of destruction, death and the loss of the legionary standards. In summary of the above points it can be said that, both strategically and tactically, for each eastwards step the Romans might have taken they would get weaker, while the Boudican rebels would get stronger.

Many of these aspects are necessarily supposition. However, there two pieces of literary evidence emphatically against an eastwards march. First, Tacitus says that Suetonius, "received into his army all those (civilians) who would go with him"<sup>16</sup>. Put simply, refugees do not voluntarily join an army that is deliberately marching into battle, they flee in the opposite direction, towards friendly lands and ports, nor does an army commander, who is deliberately seeking battle, encumber his small force with non-combatants. The second piece of literary evidence is that Tacitus tells us London

was destroyed. Of course, this is also supported by the archaeological findings. For Suetonius to march eastwards towards the approaching horde and still for London to be destroyed is not impossible but would require some sort of flanking manoeuvre by the rebels to enable them to get behind Suetonius. Put simply, it is highly unlikely that an eastwards march by Suetonius would cause the rebel leaders to think that destroying London was more important than destroying Suetonius and his army. In conclusion it can be said with some confidence that Suetonius did not march eastwards.

To leave London by way of Watling Street, and a return to the north, may have been a less suicidal option but its likelihood as the route taken is outweighed by more negative than positive aspects. On the positive side would have been a move closer to the remains of the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion with the prospects of some of its units joining Suetonius but, if this was possible then it might be supposed it would have done so while Suetonius was marching south to London. Another positive aspect is the general move back towards the military zone (roughly the area west of Icknield Street from Chester in the north, through Wroxeter and further southwards to Gloucester, Caerleon and finally Exeter, Fig.1). Such a move might have thrown off the following rebels, enabled Suetonius to regroup with units of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Legions he had left in the military zone, before marching south, towards Gloucester, to join with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion and then launch an eastwards directed campaign towards London along Ermin Street and the Portway (Fig.1). The negative aspects include the realisation that much of the above can be more readily accomplished by marching westwards out of London along the Portway, towards Silchester (Fig.1), and hence to the military zone. In further negation, the legionaries might have balked at returning along a road where they knew they would be harassed again, where much of the stored supplies had already been consumed or destroyed during their southern march and to a final destination far from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion in Exeter, the last whole legion which could come to their aid. Suetonius might have thought that many of the negative points against the eastwards route also apply to the northerly and that he would have to march with the Britons threatening his right flank unless the route was already blocked by the horde that destroyed the 9<sup>th</sup> Legion and then followed him down Watling Street. What also might have weighed on Suetonius' mind might have been the political effect of a northern march. For the Romans would have moved away from their oldest, firmest and most resolute allies among the British tribes, those south of the Thames, towards those more recently persuaded of Roman rule: Suetonius might have thought that the sight of a Roman army retreating northwards might have caused political upheaval in the northern tribes, possibly resulting in them attacking him in consort with the eastern tribes. Finally, the entrainment of the London civilians within his army strongly suggests, as it does for the eastern march and for the same reasons, that Suetonius marched either south, by crossing the Thames at London, or westwards towards Silchester.

To march south of the Thames would mean crossing the Roman bridges, probably located at a site near Westminster and in the modern London borough of Southwark, and then turning either east along Watling Street towards Canterbury and Richborough or south along Stane Street towards Chichester and the ports on the south coast (Fig. 1). If Suetonius crossed the bridges then he would probably have

attempted to destroy them but, although generalised burning has been found at Southwark, no direct evidence for or against destruction of the bridges has yet been found. Not that the destruction of the bridges would have stopped the Britons crossing the Thames, as they had for millennia used fords and firm ground through the marshy estuary, probably in the vicinity of East Tilbury and possibly elsewhere<sup>17</sup>. In addition there were probably other bridges besides the Roman: for example, Cassius Dio, in his account of the later stages of the Battle of the Medway in 43AD, mentions that some Roman units pursued the retreating Britons across the Thames using a native bridge<sup>18</sup>. These other methods of crossing the Thames might have been used by the rebels prior to Suetonius leaving London, thereby blocking the routes south to safety, in which case he would have been forced to march west along the Portway. However, there is no archaeological evidence for this supposition. Assuming Suetonius did successfully cross the Thames then a turn to the east would lead to the safe havens of Richborough and Reculver, places where he could have rested for the winter, awaited reinforcements from Europe and then resumed his suppression of the revolt the following year. The negative consequences of this strategy might include: turning the south east of Britain (Kent etc.) into a conflict zone, thereby spreading the uprising to those areas most Romanized, and making the eventual reinforcing actions from Europe more difficult and costly; causing a more widespread uprising amongst the British tribes, as they realised that the Roman forces were split between Suetonius and the western military zone; the loss of many more Roman forts, settlements and lives as the rebels freely rampaged across much of Britain; the tribal force might have grown considerably by the following year necessitating the re-conquest of much of Britain; and Suetonius might have thought he would be replaced as Governor if he essentially retreated to somewhere like Richborough. Stane Street would have similar consequences, although Suetonius might have planned to turn westwards and strike towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion at Exeter. In favour of the Stane Street route is the large number of battle sites along the North and South Downs that match Tacitus' description very well (Figs. 5 & 7). Finally, Tacitus' account of the civilians marching with Suetonius is more credible if he turned south out of London, rather than eastwards or north along Watling Street.

Nevertheless, a southern escape from London is less likely than one to the west. For strategic reasons moving west from London into the western military zone, especially with the prospect of joining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion, was far more favoured than any other route. Suetonius would have reunited his military forces in Britain, making it less likely he would have been replaced, and would not have endangered the south east of Britain, hence making the assistance from Europe at Richborough far more effective, together with the resultant pincer movement of his army marching from the west while the continental reinforcements marched east towards London. Essentially Suetonius would have retreated to a place of relative safety where, if necessary, he could pass the winter preparing for the next campaigning season, by his presence in the military zone dissuade the Welsh tribes from joining the rebellion and await the continental reinforcements.

For tactical reasons a march west out of London was also the most favoured. Taking the Portway to Silchester was the shortest and quickest route to the military zone and the all-important the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion. It passed through the land of Rome's "most loyal"<sup>19</sup>



ally, the client king Cogidubnus of the Atrebates, whose capital was at Silchester [*Calleva Atrebatum*] and who might be relied upon to assist Suetonius and, at least, would have granted him free passage, safe from local harassment. Also, moving westwards would have placed the rebel forces in Suetonius' wake, they would have been forced to follow as quickly as they could, which may, en masse, have been more slowly than the retreating Romans – not that this implies that units of tribesmen could not catch the Roman rear-guard and harass them.

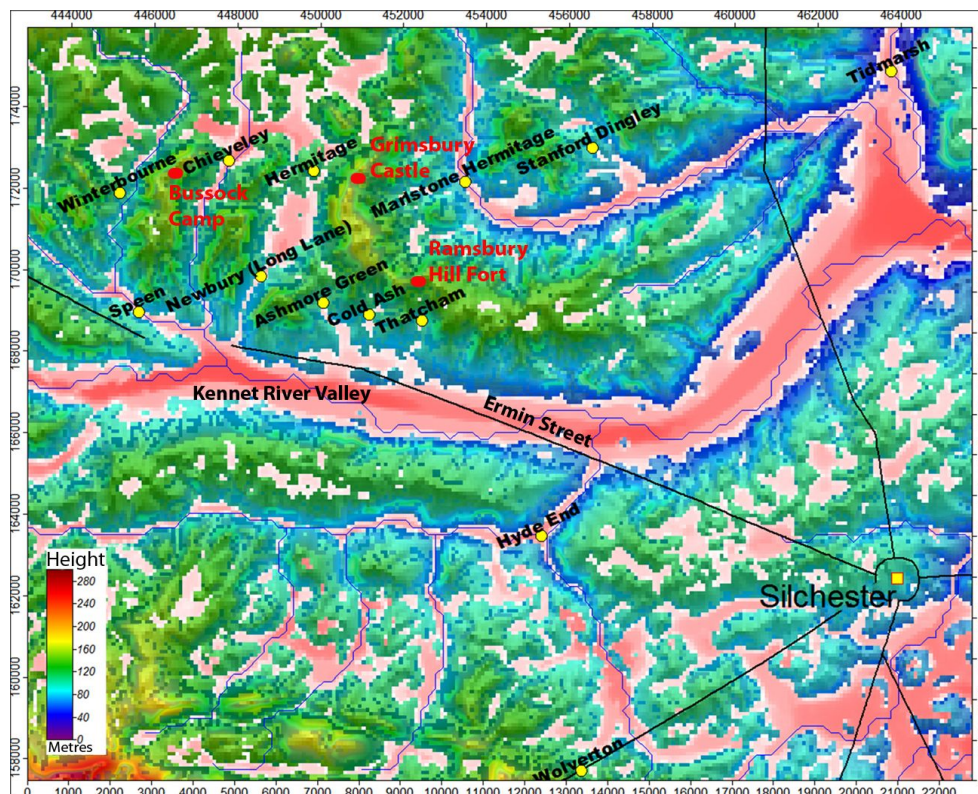
Additionally, Silchester was, like London, a nexus of roads. Suetonius could have turned north towards Dorchester, or south-east towards the coast at Chichester, or south-south-west towards Winchester, or south-west towards Old Sarum, or north-west, along the Kennet Valley, towards either Cirencester and Gloucester or Mildenhall and Bath (Fig.6).

## **The Kennet river valley**

The archaeological evidence is sparse and inconclusive for narrowing down the search for the battle site. Nicholas Fuentes identifies possible Boudican destruction evidence at three sites running roughly westwards from London: at Putney, Brentford and at Staines where the Portway crosses the Thames<sup>20</sup>. He also puts forward Virginia Water (Fig. 5, and Table 1, number 37) as a possible battle site, it being the first location west of London and Staines to roughly match the terrain described by Tacitus. However, although this study lists the location as a possible battle site this is dependent on Nicholas Fuentes being correct in supposing that the Portway took a more southerly route (his Figure 2), across the Thames flood plain west of Staines. If the commonly accepted, more northerly route is correct then the battle site is flawed, the Romans being easily out-flanked amongst the shallow hills and valleys. From here the Portway proceeds westwards to Silchester.

In 2008 Michael Fulford, leader of the archaeological examinations being conducted at Silchester, announced<sup>21</sup> that there was a significant episode of destruction between AD50 and AD75, followed by rebuilding along a 45 degree realignment of the urban plan. He tentatively linked the burning and destruction to the Boudican revolt but made it clear that there could be other explanations rather than the Boudican horde being directly responsible. Nevertheless, and applying all cautionary caveats, this is possibly an extremely important finding and would greatly assist this study in supporting Suetonius' westwards march.

If Suetonius, his army and citizens from London, did arrive at Silchester then it was probable that the Roman commander would recommend an abandonment of the poorly-fortified town by Cogidubnus and his Atrebates, before the Boudican horde overran it. In which case, Suetonius might have preferred to take the road to Mildenhall and Bath, it keeping to lower, more easily-traversed terrain than other roads out of Silchester (Fig.6). This road would also have kept his force within the territory of the Atrebates rather than taking roads north or south that traversed respectively the less-friendly territories of the Dobunni and Belgae.



**Figure 8: The Kennet river valley, possible battle sites (yellow dots) and Iron Age hill forts.**

The question then arises how far from Silchester might he have marched? Did he owe protection to the citizens of Silchester? Could they march quickly towards Roman forts at, for example, Cirencester or did they take refuge in one of the old Iron Age forts in Berkshire? (Fig.8). And did this then mean Suetonius had to place his force between the citizens and the rebels?

These questions collectively suggest that time, energy, resources, armed support and kindly political will might have been rapidly diminishing, or in doubt, resulting in a battle site located quite close to Silchester – possibly only one or two day's march away.

This makes the region of the Kennet river valley *quite favourable* for the site of Boudica's last battle.

However, only time, some luck and/or systematic examination will reveal the actual battle site but hopefully this study's examination of terrains, geographic features and the words of Tacitus will aid the hunt for the location which may be somewhere west, or north, of Silchester.

## The battle

As always in this saga, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion is tactically critical. For Suetonius to face and defeat the Boudican rebels that summer he might have thought he needed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion and, as has already been mentioned, he may have earlier sent senior officers to take command of this recalcitrant unit and march it towards him. Possibly Suetonius had intended to combine his forces, commit them to battle and so destroy the rebel horde, rather than to over-winter in the military zone. But, something did not go to plan: maybe the civilians with Suetonius slowed him down too much; might his legionaries have been too tired after their exertions that summer (they had already marched 440km/275miles from Anglesey); possibly the Atrebates were not as friendly as he had hoped; Dio<sup>22</sup> mentions that Suetonius was running short of supplies; maybe the harassing attacks by the following tribesmen were too severe, causing him to lose too many men; or, maybe, news reached Suetonius that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion had not left Exeter after all or would not reach him in time. For whatever reason(s) Suetonius “prepared to break off delay and fight a battle”<sup>23</sup> with the surviving men of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Legions marching with him.

Tacitus tells us indirectly that Suetonius had probably already identified the battle site long before it became necessary to use it. For example, the description of the battle site – a defile, approached by a plain and backed by a forest – is not suggestive of a site chosen in extremis, more likely one pre-selected by an experienced officer who had, while following one tactic, namely march west and join the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legion, already thought of other contingencies and options. Having the battle site already in mind is not surprising when one considers the life of a Roman Governor, forever in the saddle, riding from one legionary inspection to yet another meeting with a client king, who relieves the boredom by examining the passing terrain, assessing its potential as a battle site and possibly using this pastime as an educational tool for his younger officers. Tacitus also mentions that, “there was not a soldier of the enemy in his front (battle line)”<sup>24</sup>, suggesting that Suetonius had marched directly and rapidly to the site, possibly as a half-day quick march across country, sufficiently quickly to throw off the following rebels and outstrip any enemy flanking units and with sufficient time to rest his men, feed and water them and arrange his battle line before the Boudican rebels arrived and were themselves prepared for battle. Suetonius might have expected to have to wait for more than a day until the rebels had all gathered, together with “their wives riding in waggons, which they had placed on the extreme border of the plain”<sup>25</sup>, and might have chosen a site where the water supply could be protected – probably requiring the defile to contain a substantial stream that flowed towards the rebel army.

Further indirect evidence of a premeditated battle plan is the realisation of how superior the terrain of the battle site was for Roman combat tactics and the situation Suetonius was in. Above all else he could not allow his legionaries to be out-flanked or, far worse still, surrounded. Nor, for the sake of morale, could his soldiers think that that event was probable. The legions were in a narrow defile, as already mentioned, probably about 1km wide, with rising ground at their sides where the lighter auxiliary and cavalry units could hold the flanks. The approach of the Britons to the Roman line was by a narrowing defile, forcing the horde of Britons to compress

themselves, or limit the number of warriors and chariots engaging the Romans, thereby lessening their combat effectiveness. The Romans were probably at the top of a down-slope that favoured them in a charge by increasing their collision speed with the front rank of rebels. Above all else, the premeditated nature of the site is clearer when realising that it was a trap for the Britons, rather than just a refuge of last resort for the Romans. Suetonius had, in advance, chosen a battle site that appealed to the Britons; he had already reasoned that the Britons would think the Romans were trapped, in a weak position and ripe for destruction. Suetonius was, in choosing this superior terrain, inviting the Britons to attack because that would allow his men to control the battle once the Britons start their close approach, that was to launch waves of javelins at the compacted horde and then to charge, in compressed formation, at the Britons, driving them back with their shields before their swords stabbed and slashed the horde to destruction. To Suetonius, his officers and veterans, this outcome would be clear, but it was hidden from the Britons. In essence, Suetonius used his superior education, military training and combat experience to select a battle site, from among all those he had already seen on his travels, which allowed the best soldiers in the world to use their honed tactics to best effect and to hide her own destruction from Boudica's eyes and mind.

- <sup>1</sup> Tacitus *Annals* 14.20.29 - 14.30.39 translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb
- <sup>2</sup> Dio 62.8.2
- <sup>3</sup> Data taken from Jarvis A., H.I. Reuter, A. Nelson, E. Guevara, 2006, Hole-filled seamless SRTM data V3, International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), available from <http://srtm.csi.cgiar.org>.
- <sup>4</sup> SAGA, System for Automated Geoscientific Analyses. <http://www.saga-gis.org/en/index.html>
- <sup>5</sup> Tacitus *Annals* 14.30.37
- <sup>6</sup> Pliny the Elder *Naturalis Historia*
- <sup>7</sup> Tacitus *Annals* 14.30.32
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid 14.30.32
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid 14.30.38
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid 14.30.37
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid 14.30.34
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid 14.30.33
- <sup>13</sup> Graham Webster, "Boudica. The British Revolt against Rome AD60 ", 1978.
- <sup>14</sup> Nicholas Fuentes, "Boudica re-visited", London Archaeologist v.4 12 1983 pages 311-317
- <sup>15</sup> Tacitus *Annals* 14.30.30
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid 14.30.33
- <sup>17</sup> John Peddie, "Conquest: The Roman Invasion of Britain", 1987
- <sup>18</sup> Dio *Histories* 60.20.6
- <sup>19</sup> Tacitus *Agricola* 14
- <sup>20</sup> Nicholas Fuentes, "Boudica re-visited", London Archaeologist v.4 12 1983, page 314
- <sup>21</sup> Times Online, "Boadicea's revenge served hot", Sept 29 2008.  
[http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/court\\_and\\_social/article4848610.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/court_and_social/article4848610.ece)
- <sup>22</sup> Dio 62.8.1
- <sup>23</sup> Tacitus *Annals* 14.30.34
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid