

## Scots aim to mark the final frontier

SCOTLAND'S attempt to have the country's largest relic of the Roman invasion recognised on equal terms with the great pyramids of Egypt and the Great Wall of China was launched yesterday.

Frank McAveety, the minister for tourism, culture and sport, met European experts in an attempt to win World Heritage status for the Antonine Wall.

Built to keep Scots tribes out of the northern fringes of Rome's vast empire, the 37-mile-long Antonine Wall will officially be ranked as one of the most historically important sites in the world - if the bid is approved.

Stretching from Bo'ness on the River Forth to Old Kirkpatrick on the Clyde, the wall remains one of most significant structures of one of the most powerful and vast empires the world has ever seen.

The bid is being made in conjunction with other countries which have similar Roman frontier sites.

Mr McAveety, who hosted a reception for the delegates arguing the case for the historic barrier, wished the team luck in what will be the first bid to involve more than one country.

He said: "If this bid succeeds, the Antonine Wall will join the World Heritage site designation for Hadrian's Wall. Successful bids from Austria, Germany and Slovakia will see their sections of the frontier added to the designation, emphasising our shared history. I am particularly pleased that we are working closely with our European counterparts to make this trans-European bid a success."

Scotland already has four World Heritage Sites, the Heart of Neolithic Orkney, the St Kilda Archipelago, Edinburgh Old and New Towns and New Lanark mill town, each of which is hugely important to Scotland on both an economic and a cultural level.

The addition of the Antonine Wall would represent a feather in the cap for Scottish tourism.

The 2,000-year-old wall, named after Antonius Pius, the emperor at the time, was constructed in AD142 under the watchful eye of the newly appointed governor of Britain, Lollius Urbicus.

Unlike the stone-built Hadrian's Wall further south, the Antonine Wall was a rampart of soil faced with turf resting on a stone foundation. It originally stood 12ft high and was protected on the north side by a V-shaped ditch 40ft wide and 12ft deep.

South of the wall ran a cobbled road - the "Military Way" - which linked a network of forts at two-mile intervals that acted as barracks for the troops who garrisoned the frontier.

Despite its size, the wall was occupied for only one generation and was abandoned soon after AD160.

Substantial lengths of the remarkable monument can still be seen at various sites today. Perhaps the best example exists at Rough Castle, near Bonnybridge, the remnants of a fort with ramparts 20ft thick, which would probably have provided accommodation for 500 men.

Ron Greer, the secretary of the Antonine Guard, a Roman living-history group, said: "This application has been a long time coming, and we welcome it very much, but we do have serious reservations about the present condition of the wall.

"This relic happens to be Scotland's largest single piece of physical archaeology.

"Its treatment in the past, with one or two exceptions, has been little short of an utter disgrace."

Dr David Breeze, the chief inspector of ancient monuments for Historic Scotland, said: "The Antonine Wall is the second-best surviving frontier of the Roman Empire, so there is a real reason to acknowledge its importance.

"It was one of only three linear barriers in the empire, which is remarkable when you consider the frontiers ran for some 5,000km. In helping us understand Roman frontiers and how they worked, it is a very important monument."

It is estimated that the bid for World Heritage status will take two years to prepare, involving consultation with local landowners and interest groups.

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