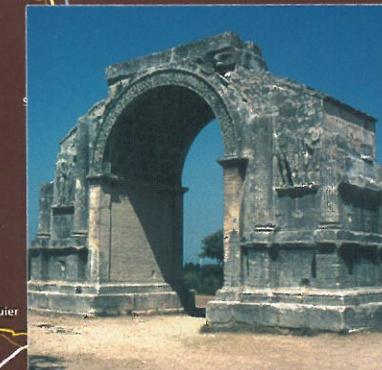


# THE VIA DOMITIA

Provence / Southern Alps

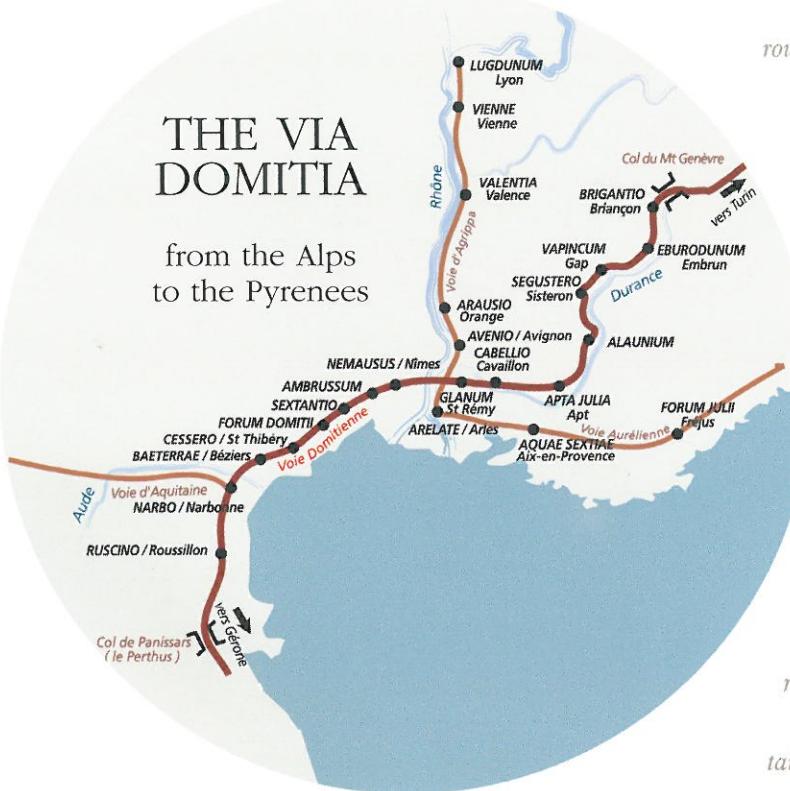
Itinerary from Tarascon  
to the Col du Mont-Genèvre





## THE VIA DOMITIA

from the Alps  
to the Pyrenees



Page de couv. : The Pont Julien, near Apt. The Glanum Arch, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence.

Many modern-day road networks follow the routes

created by the Romans 2000 years ago. Here, we

invite you on a journey along one of these ancient

routes which joins Rome to southern Spain— the

Via Domitia – on a stretch of the road from the

Rhone, across the Southern Alps, to the

Col du Mont-Genève. A route which is

lined with towns and relay stations

whose existence during the Roman

period is attested to in written documents

and by the presence of archaeological

remains. The paving is still recognisable on cer-

tain sections and the buildings and milestones,

which lie near the houses, places of worship and

tombs... bear witness to archaeological research.

## THE VIA DOMITIA

## Provence / Southern Alps



### *The Via Domitia and the Tavernoure milestone in the plain of Mane*

## THE VIA DOMITIA from Sisteron to the Col du Mont-Genèvre

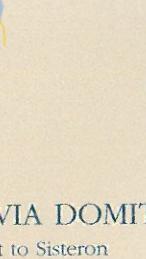
pages 10-11

## THE VIA DOMITIA from Apt to Sisteron

pages 8-9

## THE VIA DOMITIA from the Rhone to Apt

pages 6-7





THE VIA DOMITIA  
A page of history

Built, in 120 BC, during the period of the conquest of the Midi of Gaul, by the consul Cneus Domitius Ahenobarbus, the Via Domitia, named after its founder, was built to unite Italy with the Spanish provinces. It is, in fact, the most ancient route in France. Parts of it follow paths from Antiquity, passing over the Alps at the Col du Montgenèvre, before reaching the Rhone Delta, crossing the plains of the Languedoc and Roussillon and traversing the Pyrenees at the Col de Panissars, near Perthus. Along the road lie the towns of Briancon, Gap, Sisteron, Apt, Cavaillon, Nîmes, Beziers, Narbonne and Ruscino/ Chateau Roussillon. This inter-provincial route, built and maintained by the Roman state, and of public ownership was greatly frequented by armies, civil servants, traders, travellers and pilgrims during the Roman Empire and through to the Middle Ages.

## The construction of ancient roads

The Romans' civil engineering and building works reveal their sophisticated knowledge and techniques. The setting up of rural land registers and the planning of the road was carried out, following the orders of the administration, by surveyors equipped with high-performance surveying instruments (groma, dioptre, chorobate).

The route itself, which, in the plains was made up of long rectilinear sections, was improved with passages of rubble or backfill. It was actually built with superimposed layers of material laid following very precise rules.

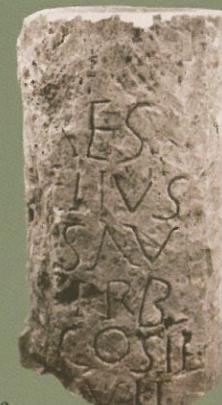
For the difficult sections, especially in the mountains, parts of the route were sometimes carved into the rock and, on certain overhanging stretches, it was held up by supporting walls. In the open countryside, it was made of earth and was only paved in certain parts (towns, fords...). Ruts on the road surface, when still visible, bear witness to intensive use.

The construction sites for the road, supervised by the provincial administration and by the army, made use of a large and varied workforce, from engineers and architects to labourers and, no doubt, the local population who were requisitioned for the work.

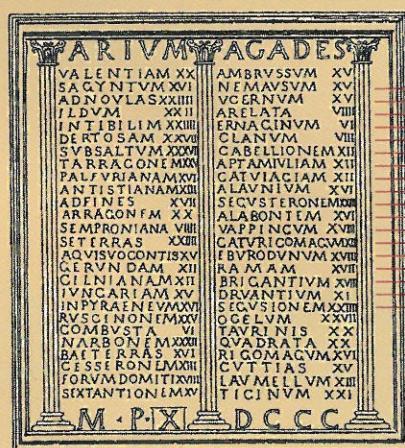
*The Via Domitia to Marcan, Goult.*

## Milestones

The ancient road was lined with large stones (1 to 3 m high), theoretically situated every mile (1 480 m) and designed to provide information to travellers. They showed the distances of the major towns on the itinerary and bore the names and the titles of the Emperor under whose reign they had been installed. These stones were generally laid during building, restoration or maintenance works on the road. For the Via Domitia, there are milestones bearing the names of Augustus (3 BC), Tiberius (32 AD), Claudius (41 AD) Antoninus Pius (144 AD), etc. However, no milestones have been found on the section of the route between Apt and Mont-Genèvre.



*Goult, a milestone dating from the end of the 3rd century.*



*One of the four Vicarello goblets, small bronze cylindrical vases on which were engraved the stages of the road between Cadiz and Rome and the distances between them.*

## The ancient routes

A certain number of written documents, dating back to Roman times, show the principal routes which served all of the Provinces of the Empire. These travel itineraries gave the names of the inns and the road stations – towns, villages and hamlets – and often the mileage between these halts. The only known map of the Roman world is the Peutinger map, a medieval parchment copy of a map, the original of which is said to date back to the Early Imperial period. A relatively dense network of secondary roads or pathways joined the vici and the villages.

## Type of traffic

Although it was principally a military road when it was built, the Via Domitia rapidly turned into a public roadway, one of the largest of the Roman Empire and also one of the most frequented. The *cursus publicus*, the postal service of the Roman administration, created by Augustus in 27 BC, and which continued to function until the end of Antiquity, was the road's principal user. Also, at certain strategic points, customs officers (*protorium*), and tolls at the bridges and ferries were to be found; as well as the military supply services, a network of public granaries for feeding the troops.

On this road, greatly appreciated by all, people travelled on foot, by horse, or by carriage in fast horse-drawn carts, such as the *cisum*, a lightweight two-wheeled cart, with only one seat and drawn by one horse, or the *carpentum*, a two-wheeled, covered carriage pulled by four horses. Goods were transported in four-wheeled carts – such as *raeda*, or *plastrum* – drawn by four, six or eight horses, mules or oxen. These vehicles are mainly known from their representations in triumphal or funereal bas-reliefs.

## The road stations

Along the road, guesthouses (*mansiones*) were to be found approximately every 30 km (the average distance travelled in a day), either built around existing local villages or resulting from new building projects. Between these, approximately every 15km, road stations (*mutationes*) were to be found, where it was possible to change horses and to rest. On the stretch of road, between the Rhône and the Alps, all of these road stations have now been identified, but none of them have been seriously explored to date.



One of the pillars of the Pont Julien at Apt.

## Construction works

On a road as important as the Via Domitia, the construction works – bridges and fords – were numerous. In fact, every body of water, even the most modest, was equipped to facilitate its crossing: if there was no bridge, a ferry boat was made available.

The bridges were built of stone – with large blocks of stone during the Early Imperial period (the Pont Julien near Apt) or with small stones during the 2nd century (the Pont de Ganagobie) – but also of wood, especially in the mountains. Many of them have been destroyed over the centuries by river spates. Smaller streams were crossed by means of fords (such as the Gué de Reculon at Saint-Michel-l'Observatoire).

## The Via Domitia during the Middle Ages

The ancient road which follows the Durance valley and which crosses over the Col du Mont-Genève was still greatly used during the Middle Ages by priests, traders, soldiers and, of course, the local population.

It was also a major route for pilgrims travelling from Spain and southern France to Rome (which explains its name in Provencal, the *camin roumieu*, still used on certain sections), but also for travelling from Italy to Saint-Jacques de Compostelle and Saint-Martin de Tours. A number of hostellries and religious centres – serving as accommodation for the pilgrims – were dotted along the road.



Reillanne, front of the altar (12th century), featuring Saint Martin with the staff and the beggar's bag of the Christian Pilgrims.

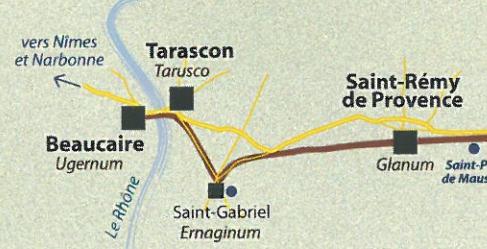


## THE VIA DOMITIA

from Rhone to Apt

### Tarascon

From the Early Imperial period, the Via Domitia probably crossed over the Rhone between *Ugernum/Beaucaire* and *Taruso/Tarascon*, by means of a ferry boat. From Tarascon, the road headed towards the western extremity of the Alpilles Mountains where the road town of *Ernaginum*, near the Romanesque chapel of Saint-Gabriel, was to be found. Archaeological digs on this site have revealed a great number of ruins and monuments (houses, necropolis, inscriptions...). The site lies at a crossroads: from north to south, the Via Agrippa from Lyon to Arles; to the south-east, the Via Aurelia which served all of Lower Provence to the Var; and, from west to east, the Via Domitia, coming from Narbonne and heading towards Upper Provence and the Alps. During Antiquity, this was one of the most important hubs in Gaul.



### Saint-Rémy-de-Provence

From Saint-Gabriel to *Glanum/Saint-Rémy-de-Provence*, the Via Domitia follows, the northern edge of the Alpilles Mountains, via Saint-Étienne-du-Grès, along a route which is still used today and which is known as the "Old road of Arles". At Saint-Rémy, it passes half-way between the ancient city of *Glanum* and the medieval and modern-day town of Saint-Rémy. *Glanum* was accessed by means of two secondary routes leading from the main road, one of which passed through the middle of the arch which marked the northern entrance to the ancient city. This Hellenic and Roman city, religious, administrative and residential centre has largely been excavated and constitutes one of the most important archaeological sites in the South of France.

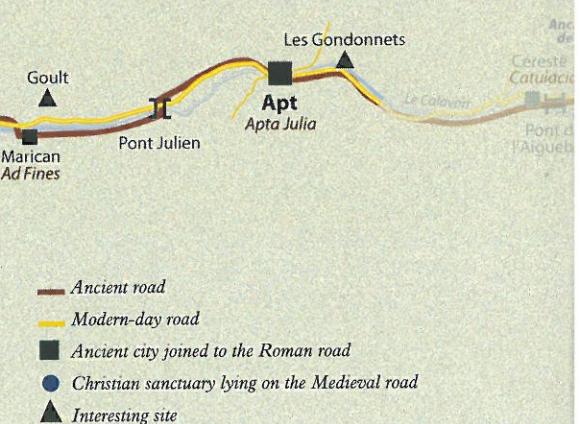
### Cavaillon

Lying on the edge of the Lower Durance, at a road and river junction, the Roman city of *Cabellio* lay at the foot of the protohistoric hill-fort built on the Colline Saint-Jacques. The city was laid out below the modern-day town and covered an area of 700 m from north to south and 400 m from east to west. Its main thoroughfare (*cardo*) lies below the present-day Grand'rue.

Public architecture of the period can only be seen by the remains of a tetrastyle arch – no doubt originally located on a crossroads –, which dates back to the first decade of our era and which was situated near the Romanesque Cathedral, until it was moved in the 19th century (place du Clos). The town was supplied with water by means of an aqueduct from the Vaucluse, of which only the ruins remain.

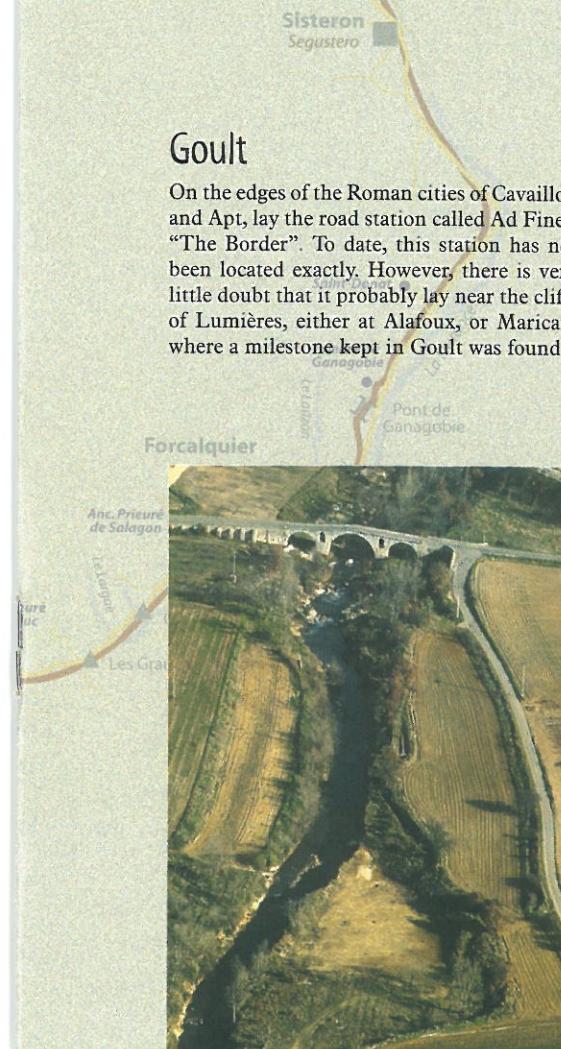


The Roman Arch in Cavaillon.



## The Tour de Sabran

After crossing over the Coulon, north of Cavaillon, the Via Domitia offers up a spectacular 6 km stretch of perfectly straight road to the Tour de Sabran, a medieval monument built at a traditional crossroads at the southern extremity of the Vaucluse Mountains. Here the road runs along a slightly raised embankment, and is cut through by a series of paths. These are the remains of the ancient centuriation grids (land divisions) which covered all of the Comtat Venaissin and the Calavon valley to Apt.



## Goult

On the edges of the Roman cities of Cavaillon and Apt, lay the road station called *Ad Fines*, "The Border". To date, this station has not been located exactly. However, there is very little doubt that it probably lay near the cliffs of Lumières, either at Alafoux, or Marican, where a milestone kept in Goult was found.

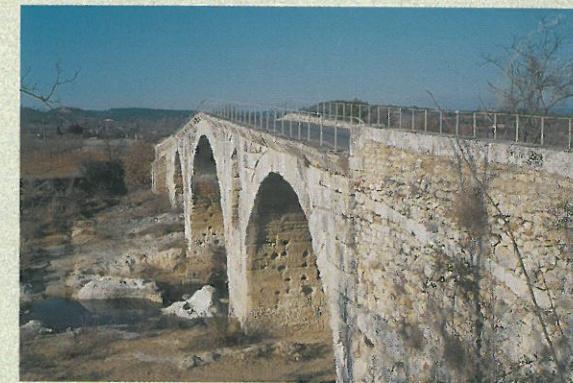
## The Pont Julien

Lying on the Calavon, at the end of the Défilé de Roquefure, the Pont Julien is the most important construction on the Provencal section of the Via Domitia. The original paving of the road, which is still clearly visible both upstream and downstream, crossed over the bridge in a zigzag. The construction (80 m long, 6 m wide and 11.50 m high) is made up of three semi-circular arches, with the central arch being higher than those on the northern and southern sides. The intermediate pillars are pierced through with large arched openings to facilitate water evacuation during spates and are fitted with semicircular upstream pier-heads. Built out of large blocks of limestone from the Luberon, the bridge is believed to date back to the beginning of our era. It replaced an older bridge, the traces of which can still be seen around the pillars.

This bridge, which is one of the best-conserved Roman bridges of Gaul, and one of the most prestigious Antique buildings in Provence, is currently the object of work carried out by the Conseil Général de Vaucluse, the Luberon Regional Park, the Regional Council and the State.

Near to the bridge, it is interesting to visit part of the Roman road lying downstream which is clearly visible for 6 km, as well as the Roquefure Gorges upstream.

A few kilometres in the direction of Apt, near to the Chêne, a milestone, dating back to 3 BC, was discovered in 1860 which is now preserved in the museum in Avignon.



The Pont Julien.

## Apt

Founded in 45/30 BC in a narrow passage of the Cavalon valley, a necessary passing point for the Via Domitia, the town of *Apta Julia*, was built on the southern side of the river. Today, the vestiges of the Roman town lie under the modern town, at a depth of 4 to 5 m. The Antique theatre, of which spectacular ruins still remain (up to 10m in height in some places), is partially visible in the basement of the Archaeological Museum. On the Place Jean-Jaurès, an interesting monument complex can be seen.

4 km east of Apt, on the right bank of the Calavon - 500 m north of the Antique road - an important Gallo-Roman construction has been unearthed on the property of the CAT de Tourville. There are large agricultural buildings, which include a wine storehouse, wine and oil presses and, lying above on the terraces, living quarters (thermal baths and kitchens...). Occupied from the end of the 1st century BC to the end of the 3rd century AD, this site was finally destroyed by a violent fire.

Aerial view of the Via Domitia, the Calavon and the Pont Julien.



## THE VIA DOMITIA

from Apt to Sisteron

### Céreste

Lying between the towns of *Apta Julia* / Apt and *Alaunium* / N.-D. des Anges at Lurs, the road station (*mutatio*) of *Catuacia* was said to be a modest resting place on the main road to the Alps. Its exact location is not known, but the distances given in ancient times confirm its position to be in the region of Céreste, perhaps to the east of the present-day, medieval-style village, where some important remains – among which the Pont sur l'Aiguebelle – are currently being studied. The bridge, measuring 6.50 m wide and, at least 36 m long, built with large and small stone, has two arches of approximately 6m in diameter set on a large foundation built with large stones, on which sits the central pillar and the two abutment piers. It may have been built at the same period as the Pont Julien.

*Remains of the ancient Pont de l'Aiguebelle at Céreste.*



### Col des Granons

When describing the Via Domitia, Strabon, the Greek geographer and historian from the beginning of our era, situates the border between the city of *Apta Julia* / Apt and the Pays des Voconces, in the region of the Col des Granons.

### Gué du Reculon

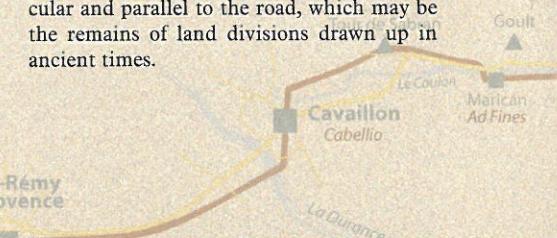
South of Saint-Michel-l'Observatoire, between La Bégude and the Prieuré d'Ardène, the Gué du Reculon comprises a ridge made up of 34 large jointed limestone blocks, behind which lies a paved roadway. The construction has a supporting wall 3.20 m high, in the shape of a “vaulted dam” in order to resist the pressure of earth and water. The “self-locking” assembling of the dressed stones of the double-vaulted facing has ensured the solidity and the longevity of the ford which measured 25 m long and 6 to 7 m wide.



*The Via Domitia and the Tavernoure milestone in the plain of Mane.*

### Tavernoure and the plain of Mane

At the centre of the plain of Mane, Tavernoure (from the word *taberna*, meaning inn) may have marked the place, or the proximity, of an ancient road station (*mutatio*). The milestone, which serves as a boundary between three villages, may date back to ancient times and may be related to the drawing up of the land registry. From here, it is possible to see the rectilinear route of the road, so characteristic of the Roman period, as well as the layout of the land divisions, lying perpendicular and parallel to the road, which may be the remains of land divisions drawn up in ancient times.

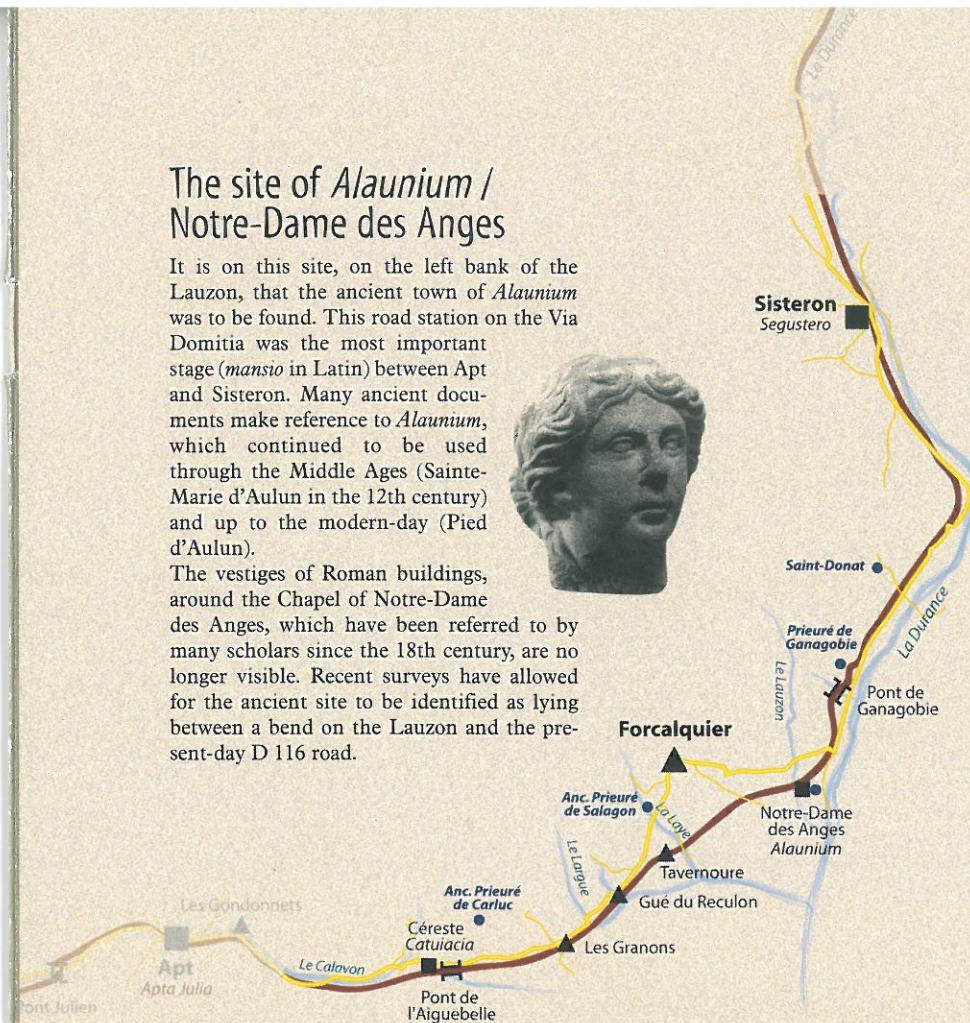


*The Gué du Reculon.*

## The site of *Alaunium* / Notre-Dame des Anges

It is on this site, on the left bank of the Lauzon, that the ancient town of *Alaunium* was to be found. This road station on the Via Domitia was the most important stage (*mansio* in Latin) between Apt and Sisteron. Many ancient documents make reference to *Alaunium*, which continued to be used through the Middle Ages (Sainte-Marie d'Aulun in the 12th century) and up to the modern-day (Pied d'Aulun).

The vestiges of Roman buildings, around the Chapel of Notre-Dame des Anges, which have been referred to by many scholars since the 18th century, are no longer visible. Recent surveys have allowed for the ancient site to be identified as lying between a bend on the Lauzon and the present-day D 116 road.



## The Pont de Ganagobie

Built on the Via Domitia, this bridge served during Antiquity – and continues to do so today – as a crossing for the Buès, a stream which empties into the Durance River. The construction, which lies on a narrow passage in the valley, has only one arch (7 m high below the keystone) and sits on solid abutment piers built onto the rock. It measures a total of 30 m long, 10 m high and 6 m wide and continues along both of the downstream banks along approach ramps, which held the road up in a cornice and of which it is still possible to see the supporting walls. On the right bank, the southern abutment pier has been given additional protection from the erosion of the fast-running water with two strong walls which continue upstream and downstream.

Many types of stone – complementary, but of the same period – were used for the construction of this bridge: the bases of the northern abutment pier are of large stone; the southern abutment pier and the protective walls are of medium-sized, ridged stones; the archivolts of the facade arches have a double row of elongated arch stones; the elevation of the construction, as well as the approach ramps, are made up of thick solid stone blocks, carefully dressed to form regular ashlar and laid horizontally, except on the upper parts of the bridge, where the courses follow the slight humpback shape of the road where it crosses over the vault. The construction dates back to 2 AD.



Funeral masks, sculptures adorning a 2nd century tomb from the roadside in Sisteron.

## Sisteron

North of Ganagobie, the Via Domitia led to Sisteron along the right bank of the Durance River; a road station may lie near to Château-Arnoux. Against the southern face of the Cluse de la Baume – a narrow cliff passage on the Durance and a necessary passage for the road towards Italy – the Gallo-Roman town of Segustero lay on the site of the old town of Sisteron, but is only known through some very rare archaeological discoveries, especially a mausoleum and tombs lying along the road at the southern entrance to the town. The interesting objects found there can be seen at the local archaeological museum. Sisteron was also a road junction, the end point for two important roads coming from the Mediterranean coast: the Fréjus road passing through Draguignan and Riez (milestones from the reign of Augustus and a bridge over the Verdon, today covered by the waters of the Sainte-Croix Lake); and the Nice-Cimiez road via Vence, Castellane, Senez and Digne, greatly used during the 3rd and 4th centuries.



The Pont de Ganagobie.



# THE VIA DOMITIA

from Sisteron to the Col du Mont-Genève

## Le Monêtier-Allemont

Between Sisteron and *Vapincum*/Gap, “the ancient route of Provence”, still recorded on some of the oldest maps, may correspond to the Roman road. A guesthouse, *Alabons*/Le Monêtier-Allemont, which has revealed a number of inscriptions and ancient buildings (in the area of Notre-Dame), lay on the road.



Via Domitia at Grand Larra, between Gap and Chorges.

Le Monêtier-Allemont  
*Alabons*

La Durance

## Gap

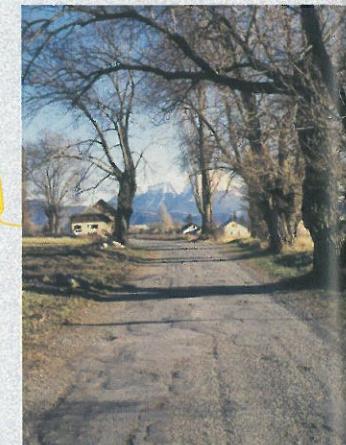
Situated at a crossroads, *Vapincum*/Gap was a modest town, which, during the Late Roman Empire was surrounded by a polygonal-shaped wall, built with small stones, in which were set circular-shaped towers. The objects and inscriptions found in the town, during archaeological digs, or by chance, can be seen at the Musée Départemental. Gap developed during Late Antiquity (5th century), when it

La Bâtie-Neuve  
*Ictodurus*  
Chorges  
*Caturigomagus*  
Saint-Michel  
de la Couche

Embrun  
*Eburodunum*  
Savines

La Chapelle de Rame  
*Rama*

La Durance



Via Domitia at Chorges.

became an administrative centre of the city-state and a diocese.

The ancient road to Italy is particularly recognisable to the east of Gap, on the left bank of the Luye valley, where, for most of the route, it follows the boundaries of the villages (south and then north of the RN94 road); along it lay the road station of *Ictodurus*, no doubt, 2 km west of La Bâtie-Neuve (towards Les Paris).

## Chorges

The trading centre and Roman town of *Caturigomagus*/Chorges was, above all, a border post between the Provinces of Narbonne and the Cottian Alps, later known as the Maritime Alps. The site came to light with the discovery in La Couche, in the south-east of the town, of an inscription to *Mercurius Finitimus*, “Mercury, God of the borders” (Gap Museum). Two inscriptions from the end of the 3rd century, preserved in the Parish Church, attribute to Chorges the title of city-state and lead us to believe that the Gallo-Roman town was situated near to the present-day settlement, perhaps directly north of the village.

## Embrun

Between Chorges and Embrun, the original route of the transalpine section of the road - which joined the Durance Valley near Savines, after having deviated from it upstream from Monêtier-Allemont in order to reach the crossroads at Gap - can no longer be seen (Serre-Ponçon Lake).

Very little is known of *Eburodunum*/ ancient Embrun, the road station (*mansio*) on the way to Mont-Genèvre, other than the fact that, at the beginning of our era, according to Strabon, the Greek historian and geographer, this high-lying settlement, as was the case for Briançon and, on the Italian side, Exilles and Suse, were just "villages". Of this administrative centre of the city-state, which became the main centre of the Province of the Maritime Alps at the end of the 3rd century AD, then later a diocese from the beginning of the 5th century AD, only a few inscriptions and modest artefacts remain, which lead us to believe that the ancient town was already located on the site where the medieval town was built.

Rame

From Embrun to Mont-Genève, the route of the transalpine section of the road is not known because of the narrowing of the Durance Valley, the rugged terrain, the harsh weather conditions and the frequent river spates. We have learnt the names of road stations in the area from ancient travel itineraries: *Rama*/la Chapelle de Rame (village of Champcella) and *Brigantio*/Briançon, and archaeological surveys lead us to believe that the road followed the right bank of the Durance.

Lying at the confluence of the Gourfouran and the Durance, at the hamlet of La Chapelle de Rame, the Roman road station was made up of a variety of buildings for travellers and their horses which are currently being studied. The site was occupied through the Middle Ages (castle and church), but was destroyed by flooding.

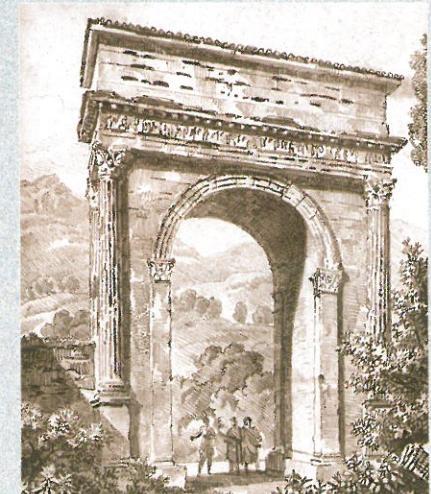


*Inscription from Embrun concerning L. Allius Verinus, decurion et duumvir of Embrun.*

## Mont-Genèvre

The Col du Mont-Genève, the traditional and much-used passage – the lowest in the western Alps (1 854 m) – joined the valleys of the Durance and the Doire Ripaire, Gaul and Italy and the Rhone valley and the Po Plain. From the Early Imperial Period, a small settlement grew at the summit of the pass: it was called *Druantum* or *Summae Alpes* (the summit of the Alps) or *Alpis Cottia* (Cottian Alps, after King Cottius, from the same period as Augustus). Apart from accommodation for travellers, it also contained a sanctuary dedicated to the sources of the Durance and the Doire – source of the name *Druantum* –, the protecting deities and also Jupiter, the God of the skies, who is honoured on almost all of the high alpine mountain passes. Recent excavations have revealed that, where the Roman road passed, the ancient ruins were to be found at a depth of between 1.50 and 2 m. From the mountain pass, the road led to *Segusio/Suse* via *Gaesao/Césanne*, *Martis/Oulx* and *Scingomagus/Exilles*: it passed into the town of Suse below an arch built in 9-8 BC, symbol of the peaceful conversion of the Kingdom of Cottius, which had been independent and autonomous, to a Federal Kingdom of Rome, before becoming the Cottian Alps Province in 63 AD.

Arch at Suse



## The Roman Roads in the Mediterranean



The Romans built an immense road network of more than 100 000 km of public roads. Even though the present-day road network covers much of the ancient route, today, often without being aware of it, we use the path of the roads built by the Romans.

Seven European and Mediterranean countries have joined together in order to promote this exceptional common heritage in the framework of the European programme Interreg IIIB MEDOCC:

FRANCE: Languedoc-Roussillon, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Corsica

SPAIN: Valencia, Catalonia, Andalusia

ITALY: Umbria, Lazio, Liguria, Valle d'Aosta

GREECE: Western Macedonia, Eastern Macedonia-Thrace

PORTUGAL: Algarve, Alentejo

TUNISIA: National Institute of Heritage

ALGERIA: National Agency for Archaeology and the Protection of Sites and Monuments

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[www.viaeromanae.org](http://www.viaeromanae.org)



## Visit the museums along the Via Domitia:

- **Saint-Rémy-de-Provence**, site museum 04 90 92 64 04 and archaeological site 04 90 92 23 79
- **Avignon**, Lapidaire Museum 04 90 86 33 84
- **Cavaillon**, Museum of Hôtel-Dieu 04 90 76 00 34
- **Apt**, Archaeological Museum 04 90 74 78 45, Industrial Museum 04 90 74 95 30 and the Vistor's Centre for the Luberon Regional Park 04 90 04 42 00
- **Mane**, Musée-conservatoire départemental de Salagon 04 92 75 70 50
- **Forcalquier**, Municipal Museum 04 92 75 00 14
- **Sisteron**, Municipal Museum 04 92 61 00 37
- **Gap**, Musée Départemental 04 92 52 64 30
- **L'Argentière-la-Bessée**, Silver Mines Museum 04 92 23 02 94
- **Montgenèvre**, Town Hall 04 92 21 92 88

## For more information:

- **Association Alpes de Lumières**, Forcalquier 04 92 75 22 01
- **Association Via Domitia**, Montpellier 04 67 22 81 00
- **DRAC**, Service régional de l'Archéologie, Aix-en-Provence 04 42 99 10 00
- **Service archéologique du Conseil Général de Vaucluse**, Avignon 04 90 16 11 80
- **Site internet Via Domitia** : [www.viaeromanae.org](http://www.viaeromanae.org)

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