

ROMANS, ANGLO-SAXONS, AND VIKINGS IN BRITAIN

CELTIC BRITAIN: THE LAND THE ROMANS CONQUERED

THE ISLAND: TACITUS' DESCRIPTION

Where?

The largest island known to us, so placed that it runs parallel to both the coast of Germania [Germany] to the east and Spain to the west. On its south side it actually lies within sight of Gaul [France]. Its northern shores, with no land facing them, are beaten by a wild and open sea.

[A]

What shape and size?

The general shape has been compared to a long diamond. Such indeed is the shape south of Caledonia [Scotland].

But when you go further north, you find a huge and shapeless mass of country.

[B]

What are the people like?

We are dealing with savages. But they are of different physical types. The reddish hair and large limbs of the Caledonians [Scots] suggest that they came from Germany. The dark, sly faces of the Silures [Welsh], their curly hair, and the fact that Spain lies opposite leads us to believe that Spaniards crossed in ancient times to live there. The people closest to the Gauls likewise are similar to them.

[C]

Behaviour?

How do they behave? There is the same rashness as the Gauls in rushing into danger, and the same cowardice in avoiding it when they can.

[D]

What religion?

In both this country and Gaul you see the same religion and religious ceremonies.

[E]

What language do they speak?

There is no great difference in the language that they and the Gauls speak.

[F]

What is their climate like?

It is wretched, with its frequent rains and mists, but there is no severe cold. Their day is longer than in our parts of the world. The nights are light, and in the extreme north so short that evening and morning can hardly be told apart.

[G]

What crops do they grow?

They grow good crops, except olives, vines and other plants which grow in warmer lands. They are slow to ripen, though they shoot up quickly. Both facts are because of the extreme moistness of the soil and the air.

[H]

What wealth does the country have?

It yields gold, silver and other metals that made it worth conquering. Its seas, too, produce pearls.

[I]

THE ISLAND: FACTS	
your name	date
where?	shape?
size?	people?
how people behave?	religion?
language?	climate?
crops?	wealth?