Early 2004

The 2004 excavations are now beginning to produce important new evidence. Work continues at the far western end of the site, dealing with the floors of wooden buildings lying above the primary fort ditches discovered last year. By the end of May the ditches should be producing the vital dating evidence, to indicate whether we have an unexpected Agricolan fort. Hopefully we will discover the source of the very fine masonry used in some of the civilian buildings in this area - they are likely to have been removed from a temple or yet another early bath house. Elsewhere, work near the Stone Wall replica has discovered three more mausolea near the visible example, each constructed above the demolished remains of third century civilian houses. One of these houses is exceptionally large, with a substantial courtyard, and evidence is emerging for a number of superior dwellings on the outskirts of the main settlement. Shortly the excavators will be looking below the floors of these civilian buildings, to discover the nature of the pre-Hadrianic timber buildings lying nearly a metre below. Volunteers coming to Vindolanda later in the year will certainly need their Wellington boots, because there are powerful springs nearby.

We are very grateful to the early season volunteers, who always bear the twin burdens of removing turf and topsoil and working in pretty poor weather - and we send our best wishes especially to those now serving in Iraq.
Work in progress in the middle of April, dealing with civilian buildings near the mausolea, just to the north of the Replica Walls.

**Mid 2004**

The hard work of the past 15 weeks is now poised to answer many of the questions that we have been asking - and if the weather finally improves, there should be some spectacular results in the next six weeks.

The far western excavation area continues to frustrate and challenge attempts to disentangle the multiple ditch systems lying below two successive timber layers and three later stone layers. But recent work has proved that there are two quite distinct sets of military ditches, both dating to the Trajanic or Flavian eras. They may represent temporary accommodation for the builders of the known periods I to III timber forts - or they may relate to hitherto unknown earlier occupation. We expect the answers before the end of August.

The flagged floor of a large civilian building of third century date, subsiding over the backfilled Severan ditch. The ditch was over 7 metres wide, and contains large quantities of worn out footwear and animal bones.

The excavation of the area between the Severan commander's residence and the replica Walls has revealed a large courtyard-type civilian building, much battered by post-Roman agriculture - and at its northern end its floors and walls have subsided sharply into the loosely back-filled Severan ditch. The first sections across that ditch have produced the expected harvest of Roman footwear - 84 of them so far - including two pairs of shoes with rather artistic stud patterns. A civilian well, only 85 cms in diameter, has been excavated to a depth of 2.5 metres, and it is hoped to bottom it before the end of the season. The pre-Hadrianic military timber buildings to the south of the Severan ditch are not as well preserved as in the past, and the prospects of finding writing tablets are not good.
The top of a narrow well in the civilian settlement. It is hoped to complete its excavation in August.