



Südtiroler Archäologiemuseum
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South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology



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Media Information

Bolzano, 7 August 2025

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From Regensburg to Rimini – On the Brenner route across the Alps

New research findings about the Roman road from Pons Drusi (Bolzano, Italy) to Veldidena (Wilten/Innsbruck, Austria)

Bolzano, August 7, 2025 – Today we can cross the Alps over the Brenner Pass in five hours by car, but in ancient times the same journey took at least five days. In Volume 52 of the South Tyrolean Provincial Archives publication, archaeologist Günther Kaufmann from the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology presents new findings on this ancient thoroughfare. His findings have been put into a comprehensive overview of the section from Bolzano to Wilten/Innsbruck for the first time.

The majority of Roman traffic initially ran along the famous Via Claudia Augusta from Verona over the Reschen Pass to Augsburg. It was part of the policy of conquest north of the Alps under the Roman Emperor Augustus (63 BC to 14 AD) and connected Bolzano (Pons Drusi) with Augsburg, the capital of the province of Raetia.

A new road over the Brenner Pass was simultaneously being built in the 1st century AD, probably under Emperor Claudius. After Germanic invasions, the route over the Brenner Pass became an important military route from the late 2nd century onwards, connecting to the legionary camp in Regensburg (Castrum Regina). The road remained in use and was maintained until the end of the Roman Empire. In the High Middle Ages, it gradually deteriorated as alternative routes were preferred like the high road over Ritten-Renon with a stop at the monastic commandery Lengmoos-Longomoso.

Despite its long history of use, no ancient name has survived to the modern day; the Brenner route remains a via anonyma. **Kaufmann has now almost completely reconstructed the route of this road for the first time, using previously documented stretches of the route and Roman milestones, written historical sources, plot and place names, as well as new finds from archaeological digs in the Eisack Valley.**

He also succeeded in solving a long-known mystery in Roman maps and itineraries (Tabula Peutingeriana, Itinerarium Antonini): There is a systematic error in the given distances between road stations north of the Alps – with deviations of up to 20 kilometers. Kaufmann was able to eliminate the source of error by locating and relating inscriptions from existing milestones scattered across various museums to information from written Roman travel guides. His conclusion: *“This finally makes it possible to plausibly interpret the route: The road ran almost entirely along the orographically left, eastern bank of the Eisack River and crossed it for the first time near Sterzing-Vipiteno. A secondary road from the Puster Valley then joined the Brenner route north of Brixen-Bressanone.”*

Kaufmann's work shows that the Brenner road was intensively traveled and used, with interruptions, until the Early Middle Ages. Today it is one of the most important European thoroughfares for trade and tourism between the northern and southern slopes of the Alps.

“The work is an important part of fundamental archaeological research which the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology continues to do and publish, alongside our main focus the ‘Iceman’,” museum director Elisabeth Vallazza added and announced: *“In the coming months, further scientific publications will be issued about excavations in Säben-Sabiona and about the history of archaeology in the 20th century.”*

Publication: Kaufmann, G.: Römerstraßen in den Alpen – von Pontedrusi bis Veldidena. In: Pfeifer, G. / Andermann, K. (eds.): Verkehr und Unterwegssein in der Vormoderne. Historische Perspektiven auf ein zeitloses Thema. Proceedings of the international conference Brixen-Bressanone, Episcopal Palace and Seminary, 13 to 16 September 2023 (2024) 33-100;

Photos:

Roman milestone from Blumau © Museum Association of the Bolzano City Museum

Bridgehead that has been built over in Blumau © Galliazzo, Via Claudia Augusta

Tabula Peutingeriana showing the section between Trento and Wilten/Innsbruck © Wikimedia

Günther Kaufmann © South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology / Angelika Schwarz

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