



WAYWISERS

A waywiser is a type of surveyor's wheel that measures distances. The first mention of a type of waywiser occurred in the first century BCE when the Roman engineer Visuvius invented a wheel that dropped a pebble into a cup every time it rotated one full turn. Since then, waywisers have provided a rough measure of the distance between two points.

The wheel of a waywiser is commonly one meter in circumference (one yard in the United States). The wheel is marked in centimeters or inches (US) and contains a fixed ridge at 0⁰ which trips a clicking device on the handle each time a full 360⁰ rotation of the wheel occurs. Each click marks one meter/yard traveled. The total number of clicks between two points equals the rough distance in meters/yards.

Waywisers have been used consistently to determine property lines since the Middle Ages. An early waywiser provided the basis for property descriptions in *The Domesday Book*. In the 17th century, the British refined the waywiser and gave it its current name. They adopted a German word, *wegweiser*, which means "something that points the way." Waywisers have had several names over the centuries. Some users referred to them as *perambulators*, which was the British term for someone who walked for leisure. Other names – *clickwheel*, *trundle wheel*, *odometer* – have also been used for this device. Adaptations of the waywiser are the cyclometer used on bicycles, the pedometer for running and walking, and the odometers in automobiles.

Today, waywisers are generally called "trundle wheels." Law enforcement officers, street maintenance personnel, and utilities workers employ them to measure short distances over smooth, usually paved, surfaces at accident sites, and during water main repairs or the laying of cable and power lines.

The Roman engineer Vitruvius would probably recognize today's trundle wheels as similar to those he used as an architect and engineer in the army of Julius Caesar.