

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ROADS

In the past, the various **trade routes**, developed where goods were transported from their source, were often named after the goods which travelled upon them. For example, the *Amber Route* travelled from Afghanistan through Persia and Arabia to Egypt, and the *Silk Route* stretched 8,000 miles from China, across Asia, and then to Europe.



The Silk Route.



Ancient Roman road (Volubilis, Marocco).

Without doubt, the masters of road building were the Romans, who built the best planned and most complex network of roads in the ancient world. Many of their original roads are still in use today, although they have been resurfaced many times.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, several centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire, the Inca Empire began to rise in South America during a period that corresponded with the Middle Ages in Europe. From Peru, the Incas spread into Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile, and, like the Romans, recognized the need for a system of roads that would enable them to extend their conquests and to govern their empire.

Because they had no wheeled vehicles, their roads could rise steep mountains. In the 18th century England, the technology of road construction largely improved thanks to two British engineers, Thomas Telford and John Loudon McAdam. Telford, originally a stonemason, invented a system of road building which required **digging a trench**, installing a foundation of heavy rock, and then surfacing with a thick layer of gravel. During construction, the centre of the road was raised, producing a **ridge** that allowed water **to drain off**. In the course of his career, Telford built over 1,000 roads, 1,200 bridges, and numerous



Inca road to Machu Picchu, Peru.

other structures. John Loudon McAdam invented a new process, “*macadamisation*”, for building roads with a **smooth** hard surface that would be more durable and less muddy than soil-based tracks.

to dig: *scavare*
 to drain off: *scolare*
 ridge: *costa*
 smooth: *liscio*
 trench: *fossato*
 trade route: *rotta commerciale*



A 'macadamised' country road.

1 PET-LIKE ACTIVITY. Read and decide if the statements are true (T) or false (F).

1. In the past, many roads had the same name of the goods which travelled upon them.
2. The Amber Route and the Silk Route were European roads.
3. The ancient Romans were the best road planners and road builders.
4. Today, there are no roads of Roman origin.
5. The Inca empire began to rise many years before the Roman civilisation.
6. Incas thought that a good road network was essential to rule their empire.
7. Incas built flat roads.
8. In the 18th century in England, two engineers invented new technologies of road building.
9. Telford built a lot of roads but no bridges.
10. The *macadamisation* process took its name from its inventor

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