

On the Road

We all make journeys and few journeys are made that do not involve travel along roads. As we rush from place to place it is all too easy to take them for granted. But the story of roads, of how and why they came into being, is as old and as fascinating as the story of mankind itself.

Using a series of journeys along different roads, Professor Aubrey Manning takes us on a journey from mankind's origins to the present day. As each journey progresses he will be joined by historians who will help him to understand the importance of the road along which he travels. Using a combination of interviews, CGI and re-enactments, the historical origins of the road will be brought to life. Its physical aspects, the types of transport used and the conditions of travel will all be considered, but above all the impact that the road had on society and the reason for its existence will be uncovered. The series will comprise four episodes as follows.

Lost Roads

Travelling along the ancient routes of the Icknield and Wessex Ridgeways, the importance of trade in creating permanent routes will be emphasised. From Neolithic axe heads found hundreds of miles from their origin, to Iron Age settlements with their signs of long distance trade in tin and salt, the origins of our roads will be explored. The use of ridgeways for driving animals to market will be examined. Cities would have starved without this vast movement of livestock, which lasted until the invention of the railway.

The Rule of the Road.

The Romans were the greatest road builders the world has ever known. Travelling along the two millennia old Ermin Street, the presenter will briefly look at Roman construction and surveying techniques, and explain how the basic framework of the modern day road network centred on London is a Roman creation. Without roads Rome could not have imposed its rule, nor collected taxes, and the importance of roads to governments ever since will be outlined. The journeys of the constantly travelling medieval Kings will be retraced. The 18th century military roads in Scotland, and the upgrading of the Holyhead-London road following the 1800 Act of Union with Ireland will also be featured. Further afield the Routes Napoleons and Autobahns will echo the theme.

The Fast Track

Travelling initially along surviving packhorse tracks, the presenter will uncover the story of travel in the days before the turnpike improvements of the 18th Century. Then, using modern day A roads, the legacy of turnpikes, the presenter will outline the huge leap forward in speeds of travel that these new roads ushered in. We will come to understand how the introduction of tolls, along with the rediscovery of Roman building techniques, enabled the industrial revolution and so heralded the modern world. This will be contrasted to the widespread popular revolt that road charging engendered. Echoes of the debate about 21st Century 'road pricing' proposals will be made explicit.

The Road to Nowhere?

The last programme takes the presenter to the M25, Britain's busiest road. Issues of traffic management, of driver education, of pollution and fuel use will be raised with interviewees at selected stops along the journey such as the Godstone traffic control centre. The road network is more extensive and busier today than it has ever been but at what cost to the environment and to our personal wellbeing? As the presenter nears the end of his journey he will ask whether the future of roads is for them to be bigger and yet bigger (Milau Bridge, France) or whether the new highway, the internet, will reduce the need for us to travel.

Locations and Authorities

Lost Roads

Locations:

Icknield Way

Ivinghoe Beacon : start of the Icknield Way. Iron / Bronze Age fort.

Galley Hill Burrows : Site of Neolithic barrows and Iron Age fort.

Wessex Ridgeway:

Uffington Castle / White Horse : Iron Age sites

Avebury Stone Circle

Authorities

Susan Oosthuizen

Department of Continuing Education, University of Cambridge. Landscape Historian. Walked the Icknield Way with Clare Balding for BBC Radio 4, June 2000.

Professor Aubrey Manning

Presented the Wessex Ridgeway in 'Seven Natural Wonders', Carnyx Films for BBC South.

Dr. J. Pollard

University of Bristol. Landscape historian and archaeologist

Dr. M. Aston

University of Bristol. Established tv landscape archaeologist.

The Rule of the Road

Locations:

Ermin Street A419/417 Cirencester to Gloucester road.

Watling Street – A2 and A5 Dover to Shrewsbury road

Authorities

Dr. Mike Ibeji

Roman Military Historian & Associate Producer Simon Schama's History of Britain

Dr. Hugh Davies

Author of 'Roads in Roman Britain'

The Fast Track

Locations :

Upper Calder Valley, near Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire. Paved packhorse tracks.

Hambleton Drove Road, near Ostmotherley, North Yorkshire

Blackstone Edge, A58, West Yorkshire – features in Defoe's pre turnpike 'Tour of England'.

Standedge, Marsden, West Yorkshire – site of early turnpike constructed by 'Blind Jack Metcalf'.

Steane Bottom Toll House on the A 6033 Todmorden to Littleborough road.

Authorities:

Professor Peter Edwards.
Roehampton University
Expert on horses in early modern England

Dorian Gerhold,
Transport Historian and author.
Foremost authority on turnpikes.

The Road to Nowhere ?

Locations:

M25, Godstone Control HQ
National Traffic Control Centre, West Midlands

Authorities :

Professor Margaret Bell
Professor of Traffic and Environmental Pollution, Leeds University

Professor Geoffrey Underwood
Professor of Cognitive Psychology, University of Nottingham
Author of 'Traffic and Transport Psychology'.