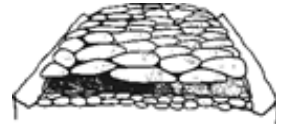


# Roman Roads



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The Romans were famous for their roads. Some Roman roads exist to this day, nearly 2000 years after they were made.

The Celts travelled round Britain on horseback, in carts pulled by oxen, or on foot. Before the Romans arrived, Britain had no proper roads. There was a haphazard collection of paths and tracks to connect local farms and hamlets, and there were some longer routes for trade. It was not unusual for these tracks to be in very poor condition as they were usually on high ground and open to all types of weather.



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The Roman administration, however, required a better network of higher quality roads. With so much of Western Europe conquered by the Romans, the Romans needed roads to move their troops around quickly. Poorly built roads would not help this. They also needed to be able to send messages and orders quickly so that the emperors could keep control of their empire. The Romans were making a lot of money from trade in Europe, so good roads were crucial to be able to move goods efficiently, raising funds to help the expansion and control of the Roman Empire.

The Romans largely ignored the existing road network as they wanted to connect the new towns and forts they had built away from the Celtic settlements. They were famous for building remarkably straight roads, and often filled in wet ground or cut a way through small hills. However, if faced with a large natural obstacle

they would build the road around it, or zig zag a road up a hill. They weren't stupid!

The most vital priority was moving troops and supplies from the ports in the South East that they landed in after sailing across the channel, to the military centres in Londinium (London) and Camulodunum (Colchester), so this is where the first roads were built. After this, the next job was to be able to efficiently move troops and supplies between the military centres and the forts that the Romans had built on their front line.

The first frontier was set up along a road extending from Exeter to Lincoln, running through Bath, Gloucester, and Leicester. This was known as the Fosse Way, the first great Roman road in Britain. The word Fosse comes from the Latin word for ditch (Fossa). For many years the land occupied by the Romans in Britain was protected by a defensive ditch running between Exeter and Lincoln. It is unknown whether the ditch was filled in and the road built later, or whether the road was built to follow the ditch.

As the Romans pushed further into Britain, so the roads were extended. Other famous Roman roads are Stane Street, Dere Street, Ermine Street, Akeman Street, Portway and Watling Street. Once the main routes had been established they turned their attention to expanding the network of minor roads to and from the new towns they had built, to better aid the flow of trade. During the first hundred years of Roman occupation it is believed that between 8000-10,000 miles of roads were constructed. All by hand!

The Romans did not have a compass or map to help them build roads. Surveyors used a tool called a groma. This was an instrument that had two pieces of wood nailed together at right angles to make a cross. There was a weight hanging from each of the four ends. The surveyor knew that he had a straight line when one lead weight from the same piece of wood lined up with the one in front of it. Wooden posts were then dug into the ground to mark out the straight line that the road would follow.

The roads were literally highways, they were built higher than the ground around them to help the rain drain off them. Two ditches, each about 60cm wide, were dug either side. The roads were built wide enough for two chariots to pass each other. The earth dug from the ditches was piled in the middle to build the road up. The materials used varied depended on what was available in the area, but there tended to be three layers. The first layer would be large, rough stones to make a hard surface. Broken stones or tiles would form a second layer, perhaps mixed with sand or cement. The top layer was gravel or small stones, compacted to make a smooth, hardwearing surface. Some roads would have paving stones laid on the top. This was more usually done in larger towns.

It was Roman soldiers that were tasked with most of the road building. They were well practiced so knew what they were doing, and they were trusted to do a good job.

When the Romans left, the Britons stubbornly did not bother using the roads they had built!

### Now answer the questions in full sentences:

- 1) How did the Celts travel around Britain?
- 2) Why were the roads the Celts used often poor quality?
- 3) Why did the Romans put so much effort into building roads?
- 4) Why didn't the Romans just improve the existing roads?
- 5) Where did they build the first roads? Why?
- 6) Where did the Fosse Way start and finish?
- 7) Can you explain in your own words how a groma was used?
- 8) Why do you think they didn't use paving stones on all of the roads?
- 9) Why was it Roman soldiers not slaves who built the roads?
- 10) Why do you think the Britons didn't use the roads that the Romans had made?



# Roman Roads Answers

1. How did the Celts travel around Britain?  
**The Celts travelled on horseback, walked or travelled in carts pulled by oxen.**
2. Why were the roads the Celts used often poor quality?  
**The Celt roads were often poor quality because they were built on high ground and were affected by all types of weather.**
3. Why did the Romans put so much effort into building roads?  
**The Romans put so much effort into building roads because they wanted to move their troops, supplies, trade goods and messages around the country quickly and easily so that they could keep control of their empire.**
4. Why didn't the Romans just improve the existing roads?  
**The Romans didn't use the existing roads because they wanted to connect the new towns and forts that they had build which were not near the Celtic settlements.**
5. Where did they build the first roads? Why?  
**The Romans built the first roads in the South East of England where they landed after sailing across the channel. This was so they could move their troops and supplies up to London and Colchester where the military centres were.**
6. Where did the Fosse Way start and finish?  
**The Fosse Way started in Essex and finished in Lincoln.**
7. Can you explain in your own words how a groma was used?  
**A groma was used to help the Romans build straight roads. Two pieces of wood were attached to make a cross and a lead weight was hung from each end from string. When one weight lined up with another from the same piece of wood, they knew that the line was straight.**
8. Why do you think they didn't use paving stones on all of the roads?  
**Pupil's own response, such as: I think that they didn't use paving stones on all of the roads because it would have saved time not using them. That is why they only lay paving stones in larger towns that were busier.**
9. Why was it Roman soldiers not slaves who built the roads?  
**Roman soldiers built the roads rather than slaves because they were trusted to do a good job and they were well practiced which means that they knew what they were doing.**
10. Why do you think the Britons didn't use the roads that the Romans had made?  
**Pupil's own response, such as: I think that the Britons didn't use the roads that the Romans had made because they were a reminder of the fact that the Romans had conquered their country. It would also be like admitting that the Romans had done a good job by making the roads.**