



## ROMAN ROADS

The ancient track ways such as the Harrow Way, the Jurassic Way, the Icknield Way etc., all along the chalk ways, converging on Salisbury Plain, like the spokes of a wheel heading towards the hub, were no longer sufficient for Roman needs. Not only did the Roman army have to move swiftly to consolidate the Conquest but also it could only advance at the rate at which its supplies could be transported. So a network of roads was built, this time spreading out from London.

Roman military power had moved through Gaul to Britain so their skill at road building had been perfected and the speed with which they laid down the system was remarkable by any standards - although, interestingly, once the roads for military use were completed and the attention switched to those needed for civil use the quality dropped appreciably.

There are approximately 10,000 miles of known roads and possibly 2,000 miles to be found and it was a local man, I D Margary, who lived at Chartham Park, Felcourt who was responsible for discovering so much of the network. He worked under the auspices of the Council for British Archaeology, and travelled over 20,000 miles numbering and recording.

### Construction

1. In most cases surveyors from one hilltop to another laid down alignments. Across flat country three surveyors with poles stood in a line. If the second obscured the last from the view of the first then the line was straight.
2. The line was cleared of trees etc., to a width of at least 90 feet.
3. Parallel outer ditches were dug at the outer edges of the clearing.
4. The road zone would then be marked out in the centre with ditches about 30 ft apart, but this could be anything from 15ft to 50ft.
5. An embankment would be built up between the centre ditches from a scoop ditch on one or both sides of the road.
6. On this foundation usually large stones followed by smaller stone would be laid - it depended, however, on the geology of the area and in the Weald iron slag was used. In other areas flint or gravel were used. This was the 'metalling'.

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The embankment is the 'agger' - covered later with topsoil it is one of the more obvious clues to the existence of a Roman road. It can vary from a few inches to several feet in height. Along with boundaries and ditches it is classified as a linear earthwork.

We have two major Roman roads in our area - the London to Brighton which comes over Tilburstow Hill and through Blindley Heath, and the London to Lewes through Edenbridge and Cowden. They were built to serve the iron industry and there are a number of subsidiary roads. One of the clues to these is the place name Coldharbour, in the same way the place name Little London indicates a drove road from Wales to London.

The Roman road was not always dead straight but bent and kinked as necessary. For them to be so would have suggested inflexibility to the point of stupidity. Bridges were only used when there was no alternative. They were vulnerable and so fords were preferred. Steep gradients zigzagged. Marshes were crossed by the use of brushwood under the road proper if it was not possible to change the course.

Exposed sections of the London to Lewes road can be seen at Holtye and the Camp Hill car park on Ashdown Forest.

These sections are easy to visit. For the first go along the A264. If approaching from the East Grinstead direction pass the White Horse on the right, opposite the Holtye Golf Course, and then park in the lay-by just beyond. Continue walking a short distance in the Tunbridge Wells direction and you will see a stile and a Sussex Archaeological Society notice board on your right. Go over the stile. At this point you are not exactly on the Roman road, which is a little off to the right, but continue ahead and you are eventually exactly on the road. You will then come to the enclosed exposed section.

From this point the road continues south to pass east of the Gallipot and so to Ashdown Forest. Just before the B2188 it changes direction to the south west, crosses the B2926 and then changes direction again to Camp Hill. The second exposed section is by the car park.

There are no exposed areas on the London-Brighton road but there is an opportunity to see a superb and surprising survival of an agger and ditches just off the A22 where a bridle road turns off sharply to go over the land to Shawlands (see OS Explorer map 146 - Dorking, Box Hill and Reigate. GR 366 438). The road crosses Newchapel Road, heads through Green Wood, turns south west through Felbridge and then out of our area heading for Ardingly Reservoir.