# Boardwalks, the oldest types of constructed path

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Have you ever built a boardwalk?  Boardwalks are the oldest known types of constructed path. The Sweet Track, an elevated wooden walkway on the Somerset Levels, Glastonbury, is dated to 3807/6 BC making it the second oldest built road in the U.K.  The oldest, also of wood, was found during the excavation of a prehistoric peat bog adjacent to Belmarsh Prison in Plumstead, Greenwich. Radiocarbon dating has shown the structure to be nearly 6,000 years old and it predates Stonehenge by more than 500 years.  It was a track or platform by the River Thames that appears to have been constructed to make crossing a muddy area easier.

So whilst it wasn't the Romans that built our first roads, it is true that before them paths and tracks were generally unmade tracks. Of the pre-Roman roads accorded the status of Royal Highway, 13th-century historian Matthew Paris thought three became Roman roads - Ermine Street (keep this one in mind for later), Watling Street and the Fosse Way - the fourth, the Icknield Way, was not.

The Romans occupied Britain between AD 78 and AD 185 and built 16,000km (10,000 miles) of roads by AD 150. Some of these have since become part of our modern road network, whilst the remains of others can still be traced by walkers to this day. The techniques that we use to build roads are really not that much different from the Romans' techniques. The main problem then was water and all their roads had a camber and ditches at either side to manage it, just like ours.

It is thought that the Romans calculated distances from the "London Stone", which stood in the road until 1742 when it was felt to have become too much of a traffic hazard.  It stood at the centre of what was believed to be the centre of old London and in the centre of the gateway to the Governor's Palace.  It is now in the wall of a Chinese Bank in Cannon Street.

The roads were thought to have been originally maintained by the military,  but this later transferred to the provincial government in London (main roads) with local roads paid for by the local tribal administration, and it was the responsibility of the landowner to maintain a road crossing his land.

Do you remember Ermine Street? This became the Great North Road, London to Edinburgh, later called the A1 and remains the longest numbered road in Britain, running 410 miles.

Once the Romans left, road maintenance and creation ceased and the dirt roads returned.  Thus it remained until the creation of the first turnpikes 1,200 years later!