

CHAPTER TWO

Roman Roads

"In the beginning was the road."

THE COLOSSAL LEGEND of Roman roads is exceeded only by the legendary colossal size of the roads themselves. Up to three times the thickness of a modern superhighway and built by the hands of soldiers and slaves, the Roman road was unrivaled for nearly 2000 years.

20

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

It's hard to say whether the Roman road system grew as the empire grew or the Roman Empire grew as its road network grew. The relationship was symbiotic. Romans revered their roads. Outsiders revered the Romans because of their roads. Using its roads, Rome ruled Europe, northern Africa, and parts of Asia for the better part of 1000 years. Along its 50,000 miles of highways and 200,000 miles of secondary roads, the Roman Empire deployed its armies, quashed rebellions, and sacked and plundered cities. The roads were used for sending their newly taken riches back to the capital, giving additional meaning to the saying "All roads lead to Rome."

Herculaneum was buried some 50 feet deep when Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79. Its excavation revealed not only intact buildings but the incredibly durable Roman stone roads and curbs.

