

Incan Roads and Bridges

The Incan Transportation System

The Incas built one of the ancient world's best transportation systems. They built roads and bridges to keep the empire together. The transportation system allowed them to have fast communication between villages and cities. They also used it to move food and other supplies. The roads also allowed military troops to move faster.

Incan Roads

The Incan roads stretched for more than 10,000 miles. The Incas had two major roads. The **Royal Road** was 3,250 miles long. It went from the northern border of the empire through Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia into Argentina and Chile.

The other major road, the **coastal highway**, was 2,520 miles long. It ran from the village of Tumbes in the north, through the desert, then into Chile.

Several other roads ran between the two major ones. The standard width of the roads was 24 feet. They were narrower only when natural barriers were in the way. The roads included side walls to keep out sand drifts and to mark the road. There were also markers along the road to tell the distance to the next village.

Incan workers provided the labor to build the roads as part of the "labor tax" they paid to the government. Government engineers directed the workers.

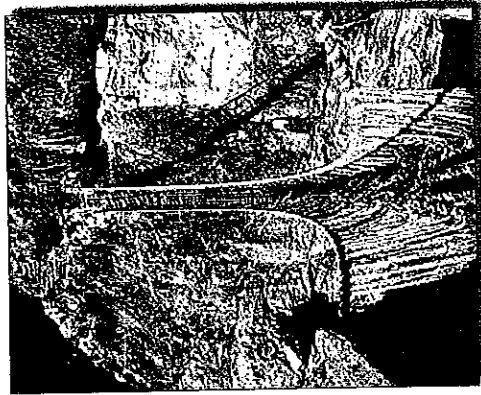
The roads belonged to the government. No one could use the road without special permission. The Incas did not use wheeled vehicles on their roads. The travelers and messengers walked to their destinations. The Incas used llamas to carry goods on the roads. They built rest houses called **tampus** about every 12 to 20 miles along the roads. In addition to providing a place to rest, most tampus also had food available.

Incan Bridges

The Incas built causeways to elevate the roads in swampy areas. They also built amazing bridges, which they called **chacacs**. The hanging bridges are the most famous of the Incan chacacs. One Incan bridge was over 250 feet long. Built in 1350, it lasted until 1890.

The Incas used the fibers of the **maguëy plant** to weave the cable for the bridges. The main cables were from four to five feet thick. Incan workers had to replace the cables about every two years.

The Incas also built pontoon bridges made of reed boats tied together. Another type of Incan bridge had a basket hung from a cable stretched between two stone towers. Travelers got into the basket, and a workman then pulled along the cable to the other side.



This hanging rope bridge is renewed every year with traditional methods once used by the Incas.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Knowledge Check

Matching

1. labor tax _____
2. coastal highway _____
3. maguëy _____
4. Royal Road _____
5. tampus _____
6. chacacs _____

- a. Stretched from the northern border through Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and into Argentina and Chile
- b. Stretched from the village of Tumbes through the desert and into Chile
- c. fibers from this plant were used to weave the cable for Incan bridges
- d. what the Incas called their bridges
- e. workers built the roads to pay this to the Incan government
- f. rest houses along the Incan roads

Multiple Choice

7. What material was used to make the boats for pontoon bridges?
 - a. maguëy fibers
 - b. reeds
 - c. oak
 - d. stone
8. How wide were most Incan roads?
 - a. 6 feet
 - b. 10 feet
 - c. 18 feet
 - d. 24 feet
9. What did the Incas use to carry their goods on the roads?
 - a. sleds
 - b. wheeled carts
 - c. llamas
 - d. horses

Constructed Response

10. Why would rope bridges have to be repaired or replaced every year or so? Use what you know about rope and details from the reading selection to support your answer.

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Inca and His Government



The Inca was carried in a golden litter by servants.

The Inca
Inca was the title of the ruler of the Incan empire. At first, the word *Inca* meant "the children of the sun god Inti." It later became the title of the ruler. Today, we also use Inca to mean the people of this civilization.

The ancient Incas believed their ruler was a descendant of the gods. They worshiped him as both a god and a ruler, and he had absolute power.

The Inca's Family
The Inca had many wives. His main wife was his queen. Her title was *coya*. The Inca's sister could also be his *coya*. The Inca might have over 100 children. The oldest son of the Inca did not automatically become the next ruler; instead, a council of nobles chose the next ruler. Usually, the council chose the most promising son of the *coya*. At times the selection of the new Inca led to fighting among the supporters of various sons.

The Inca's Lifestyle
A *borla*, or Incan crown, was worn by the Inca. It had a fringe of brightly colored cords. Gold tubes decorated the end of each cord. The Inca wore garments of the finest wool. Each of his garments was worn only once. The Inca ate and drank only from gold plates and goblets. Servants carried the Inca on a platform and chair made of gold since he didn't walk great distances. The chair, called a *litter*, had a canopy of gold and jewels to protect the Inca from rain, and the rays of the sun. Each Inca had a new palace built. The walls of the Inca's palace were decorated with gold. The Inca's throne was also gold.

The empire had a 30-day period of mourning after the death of the Inca. Priests mummified the Inca's body. Many of the Inca's servants volunteered to die, because they believed that they would then be able to continue to serve the Inca. The old palace became a shrine for the previous ruler. They put the Inca's mummified body into the shrine, and the people then worshiped the mummies of the Incas.

The Government
The Incas had an efficient government. The rulers, priests, and generals all came from the noble class. Most were relatives of the Inca. The Inca used the road and bridge system to help him govern. Messengers and soldiers were able to move quickly throughout the empire.

All Incan men gave the government physical labor. This was the *mita*, the work or labor tax. The government built the great palaces, public buildings, and roads with this labor.

Knowledge Check

Matching

1. Inca _____
2. *coya* _____
3. *borla* _____
4. *litter* _____
5. *mita* _____

- a. word meaning "the children of the sun god Inti," the ruler of the Incan empire, and the people of this civilization
- b. a canopy-covered chair on a platform on which the Inca was carried
- c. the Incan crown
- d. the main wife of the Inca or the Inca's sister
- e. the work or labor tax all Incas had to pay to the government

Multiple Choice

6. The ancient Incas believed their ruler had descended from whom or what?
 - a. the gods
 - b. the stars
 - c. the earth
 - d. the spirit of the llama
7. Who chose the next ruler after the Inca died?
 - a. the *coya*
 - b. The people voted.
 - c. a council of nobles
 - d. There was a contest of strength.
8. What happened to the Inca when he died?
 - a. His body was thrown into a volcano.
 - b. His body was mummified.
 - c. His body was buried under the temple.
 - d. His body was burned.
9. How was the Incan government able to get the great palaces, public buildings, and roads built?
 - a. They used slaves.
 - b. They paid workers to do it.
 - c. They used the army.
 - d. They used citizens paying their work tax.

Constructed Response

10. Give some evidence that the Incan people treated the Inca like a god. Use details from the reading selection to help support your answer.
