

THE INCA EMPIRE'S AMAZING ROADS

The Inca Empire was the largest empire to ever exist in South America. One remarkable Inca achievement was the empire's vast network of roads. Read the passage. Then answer the questions on page 2.



CONNECTING A VAST EMPIRE

In 1438, the Inca ruler Pachacuti began building an empire along the Andes Mountains. The Inca Empire eventually spanned over 2,500 miles, across areas that today are part of Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and northern Argentina. By the early 1500s, the Inca Empire included over 12 million people.

The Inca built a network of roads to connect their vast empire. Two main roads extended across the entire length of the empire from north to south. One road ran along the coast of the Pacific Ocean, while the other road traveled through the steep Andes Mountains. Smaller roads ran east and west, providing shortcuts between the two main roads. In all, the Inca built more than 10,000 miles of roads!

Building roads in such a mountainous region was difficult. Some areas were extremely steep and difficult to climb. So, the Inca often built long stairways and switchbacks that criss-crossed the mountain side. The Inca also built swinging suspension bridges supported by ropes and vines to cross the empire's canyons and rivers.

WHY WERE THESE ROADS IMPORTANT?

The vast road network allowed Inca farmers and craftspeople to **trade throughout the empire**. The Inca didn't have wheeled carts, so traders had to use pack animals to move their goods. Llamas were used most frequently since they had padded hooves that provided secure footing along the steep and rocky terrain.

The road system allowed the government to **move armies and emergency supplies** across the vast empire. To make long journeys more efficient, the Inca government built food supply huts and barracks for soldiers at regular intervals along the roads. Without the roads, it would have been impossible for the government to quickly respond to threats.

The roads also helped create an **efficient communication** system. A group of runners, known as *chasquis* (SHAH-skeys), were stationed at different points along the roads. Each runner carried the message as quickly as possible to the next checkpoint before handing it off to another runner. Using this relay system, messages could travel as fast as 250 miles per day on the amazing Inca road network!

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PART 1 Complete the sentences below.

1. In 1438, the Inca ruler _____ began building a vast and powerful empire in South America.
2. The Inca Empire stretched across 2,500 miles and included the five present-day countries of _____.
3. Inca workers built their main roads along the steep _____ Mountains and the coastline of the _____ Ocean.
4. The Inca built two main roads running from _____ to _____. They also built many smaller roads running _____ and _____, connecting the two main roads.
5. When travelers using the Inca roads needed to cross a river or canyon, they used a suspension bridge supported by _____ and _____ to assist the dangerous crossing.
6. Since Inca travelers didn't have wheeled carts, they used _____ as pack animals to carry large packages.

PART 2 Building roads allowed the Inca Empire to grow and thrive. Describe three ways the roads helped to meet the empire's needs.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

BONUS ACTIVITY

Parts of the Inca road network still exist today! Pick one of the two photos. Write a message to a friend explaining how the picture illustrates something that you have learned about the Inca Empire.



The Qeswachaka Bridge, by Aga Khan, CC BY 4.0