

On Historic Routes

Experience History on the Ways that Shaped our World

The *Explore it Yourself Guide* to Historic Routes

Thanks a lot for subscribing to my *On Historic Routes* newsletter!

If you like seeing new places and are interested in history, I am sure this guide has something in it for you.

My goal is to show you that experiencing history is far from a dry, theoretical exercise but an enjoyable thing to do.

Seeing places through a historical lens can give you a whole new perspective.

I would like to show you that it does not take much to get a rewarding experience from a historic route.

I hope that this short guide will give you some inspiration for your next weekend trip, adventure or even book to read.



Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. The end of St. James' Way, the world's most famous pilgrimage route.

How to Find Historic Routes?

People have been exploring, traveling, conquering and trading for thousands of years all across the world. All along these routes, traces can be found today.

It is certainly very much depending on where you live what these routes might look like.

Let me try to give you some ideas and see how these might apply to places you know.

The pictures give some examples on what I see as parts of historic routes. You can also have a look at [my blog](#) for more examples.

Historic routes is a somewhat loose concept. This might make it somewhat difficult to grasp but allows to include a wide range of ideas, cultures and historical context.

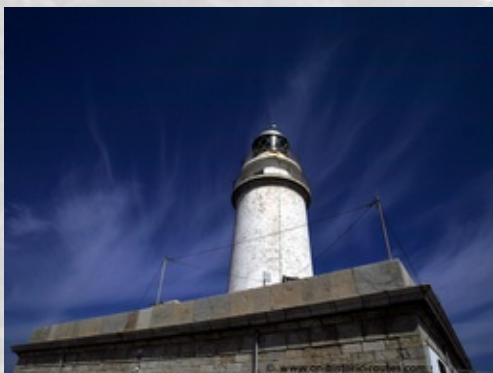


Remains of the Limes Germanicus. A 2000 year old Roman border fortification in Germany

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Near the sea



Lighthouse at Cape Formentor, Majorca, Spain. It protects shipping in the Mediterranean Sea.

Ports: Coastal cities often have a long and rich history. Do you know what goods have been traded here or where the ships went and came from?

Lighthouses: If there is a lighthouse, there is usually a sea lane that it is protecting. Is it still being used today?

Shipwrecks: There is a story behind every shipwreck. Putting together the story and the location however is not always easy.

In the Mountains



Mountain pass in the Scottish Highlands. The trail was an important connection between two valleys in the past.

Passes: Today, a lot of people look at the peaks when it comes to outdoor activities. I think, mountain passes are at least as interesting. These are the places where people crossed the mountains in the past. Do you know who has used the pass before? Has the access route to the pass changed? This can be due to different means of transportation (foot/pack animals, railroad, cars).

Mountain trails: Maybe your favorite trail was used for something else in the past. What looks like a remote path today might have been a trade route centuries ago or used by smugglers, who wanted to avoid busier routes.

Mines: Our sources of raw materials are often found in more mountainous terrain. Do you know what has been mined there? Who discovered the deposits and how was the material transported?

Rivers



Rail bridge across the Firth of Forth near Edinburgh.

Bridges/ferries/fords: Rivers are both, a natural transport route and an obstacle to overcome when you travel on land. Fords are most basic means to cross a river but they often developed into a ferry or even a bridge. Is there a story to a river crossing you know? More than often cities developed at the site of a traditional crossing. I am sure you know an example.

Canals: These man-made routes always have a history attached. They are often accompanied by a path, which makes it easy to travel along and to explore.

The river itself: Before rail and road transport became relevant, goods and people regularly traveled on rivers. How was a river next to your place used for transportation?

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Cities

Routes are meant to connect people and communities. Cities therefore were often built where routes ended or met.

What are the routes that led to your city?



Historic storehouses for salt in Lübeck, Germany. The 'white gold' was stored here before being shipped throughout the Baltic Sea.

Trade: This is among the main reasons for a route from any historical period. Goods always had to be manufactured, stored and transported. What are the traditional trades or industries?

Religion: Just as trade, religion is an old and powerful motivator for building roads. Is there a religious center you know of? Maybe a pilgrimage route is leading there.

Are there historical festivals or is there a famous person from your town?

Politics: Maybe your town was a center of power. What other areas or cities were within that realm? Ceremonial or parade routes might also be something to look for.

Cities around the world are such diverse places that this short list can only scratch the surface to get your imagination going.

Wars



Shipwreck from World War II on the beach near Dunkerque, France. Remains of the evacuation of British troops in May 1940.

Battle sites: Do you know of a battle site near your place? Even if there is no museum, maybe a memorial gives you a hint what to look for. Battle re-enactments are also a valuable source.

Campaign routes: Battles don't just happen. Armies need to get to the battle site somehow. History books about a conflict you are interested in often come with maps that can be applied to today's situation.

Why not try to follow a historic campaign route and look for traces?

Fortifications: Depending on your place on the globe and the respective time period, these come in all forms and shapes. Castles, hill-top entrenchments, bunkers, walls and many more. A common feature is that they mark a strategic location of some sort. Can you find out if there is a route this fortification tried to protect?

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Ways to Explore Historic Routes

It is of course up to you how you explore historic routes but I think there might be an easy start to it. You can get some new perspective on places without much effort.

You might begin by reading a book or watching a documentary.

However, I really would like to encourage you to get outside and visit a place. This can be close to your home and be done by car or public transport.

You will probably have an even better experience when you travel along a historic route and get a feeling for the route by visiting places along the way.

Again, this can be as easy as a day-trip by car, bike, boat or just walking.

You can always increase the length or difficulty of your adventures.

Have a look at [my blog](#) for more inspiration as well.

I will also send you regular updates on ideas and events through my newsletter.



Monument to the Chaussée Brunehaut, ancient roads around Bavay, France that trace back to Roman times.

Your Own Experience on Historic Routes

Did you find this guide helpful? Is there anything I can improve? Just let me know.

I hope that the guide gave you an idea how to experience history in a new way.

I would love to hear from you and about the historic route that you visited.

Just send me an e-mail to jens@on-historic-routes.com or contact me on [Twitter](#).