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Happy reading! ጽብብኛ ንብብ! Buona lettura!

## I.

# History of the Eritrean Roads

*We will let the Italian document tell the story.*

**W**hen the Italians first landed in Massawa, it can be said that, both in the territory that today constitutes Eritrea and in Ethiopia, there were no real roads. There were simply natural communication routes that had formed due to the continuous passage of people and animals.

It is possible that during the time when the Axumite Empire was in all its splendor and competed in power and civilization with neighboring Pharaonic Egypt, there were regularly constructed roads. This is suggested by the importance of the monuments still existing today and some references in ancient writings that demonstrate the high degree of civilization achieved by those populations.

But however well-founded this supposition may be, it is certain that until now no trace of artificial roads has been found, not even in that stretch that leads from ancient Adulis, today Zula—whose monumental palaces have recently been brought to light—to Axum via Cohaito. That was the ancient route habitually traveled by those who, having arrived from other seas, wanted to go to the capital of the powerful empire. Some trace, therefore, should have remained at least in some of those points where the caravans habitually had to stop and spend the night and where, consequently, buildings of the type that have been found in Adulis, Cohaito, and Axum must certainly have been erected.

The question may perhaps be resolved by continuing the research begun a few years ago; but until new discoveries prove otherwise, it is necessary to remain in the realm of suppositions.

What is certain is that, until a few years ago, there were only simple paths formed by the continuous passage of people and animals."

(Source: Michele Checchi, *L'ERITREA ECONOMICA DI FERDINANDO MARTINI, "La viabilità fra l'Eritrea e l'Etiopia"*, 1913. pp. 115–116)

[...]

"The first road construction work carried out in Ethiopia was that undertaken in 1868 by the English expedition sent against King Theodore. At that time, using very

rudimentary methods, a railway was built from the Marcato camp, near Zula, to the wells of Comaile; the path from the wells of Comaile, through the Suro gorge, to Senafè was also made passable, even for camels.

Today, nothing remains of the English works across the vast plain of Zula, and there would be no trace of that expedition were it not for the remains of a pier built at Cape Marcato—which allowed direct disembarkation from steamships—and pieces of locomotives half-buried in the sand on the seashore.

Even the Comaile road, which directly connects Zula with Senafè, is now, in some places, no longer passable even for camels.

The Egyptians, in 1875–76, did some adaptation work on the roads between Barésa Aideresò and Gurà, and between Cheren and Massawa, but these were minor works, of which little trace remains.

The means of transport used by the natives in Ethiopia and Eritrea are still the same as those used since time immemorial: the mule and the donkey on the plateau, the camel in the lowlands. The horse is also used, but generally as a luxury item or for sport, since the horse could not go where the mule goes, nor could it withstand the hardships to which the native rider subjects his quadruped. “Roads between Eritrea and Ethiopia”. (... *“La viabilità fra l’Eritrea e l’Etiopia”*, 1913. pp. 119–120)

The camel, used as a means of transport on the plains and on good mule tracks—which, for this reason, are called camel tracks—carries about 200 kg; however, adult and robust camels can carry up to 250 kg. It is very resistant, frugal, but also very slow. Its entire harness consists of a primitive but very practical pack saddle, which, with slight modifications, has also been adopted by us.

Some populations, taking advantage of the periodic migrations of livestock in search of pasture, also use cattle as pack animals, loading them with cereals when they descend to the plains and bringing them back loaded with salt when they return to the plateau.

Vehicles have never managed to come into use among the indigenous people. The Portuguese had already attempted to import small two-wheeled carts, but without any success; on the other hand, since until a few years ago there were no roads suitable for wheeled vehicles, it was natural that the indigenous people did not think of acquiring carts which, in most cases, they would not have been able to use.

The Europeans have imported into the Colony all imaginable types of vehicles: from the rich landau to the modest cart, from the light and almost elegant Sicilian cart to the large transport wagons, which have made it possible to bring heavy pieces of machinery weighing several tens of tons into the interior of the colony. (... *“La viabilità fra l’Eritrea e l’Etiopia”*, 1913. p. 121)

## II.

 **Dictator Isaias Let Die the 1,000 km of Roads Built Around 1913 That Once Connected Eritrea — the So-Called “Singapore of Africa”**

### Tweet 1/3

These historic roads, built under Italian rule before and after 1913, once linked every corner of Eritrea to its capital, Asmara:

1. Mai Atal–Asmara (80 km)
2. Asmara–Saganeiti–Addi Caieh–Senafe–Guna Guna (164 km)
3. Asmara–Decamere–Gura–Mai Haini–Tzerena–Belesa (river) (108 km)
4. Asmara–Addi Ugri–Addi Quala–Gundet–Mareb border (~128 km)
5. Asmara–Cheren–Agordat (171 km)

### Tweet 2/3

6. Baresa–Saganeiti (67 km)
7. Decamare–Teramni (33 km)
8. Addi Ugri–Godofelassi–Chenaferna–Coatit–Addi Caieh (69 km)
9. Asmara–Medrizien (17 km)
10. Asmara–Tzada Christian (9 km)
11. Asmara–Belesa (10 km)
12. Cheren–Dobach Pass (14 km)
13. Maldi–Massawa–Cheren Road (110 km)

### Tweet 3/3

The first five roads directly connected **Asmara**, the colonial capital, with all territories.

No. 6 was mainly **military**; Nos. 7–8 linked routes 2, 3, and 4; Nos. 9–12 served **local communities**; No. 13 became **abandoned**.

Nearly **1,000 km of colonial-era infrastructure** once united Eritrea — now left to decay under the dictator who promised to make it the “Singapore of Africa.”

(Source: *Ferdinando Martini, L'Eritrea Economica, 1913*)





#Eritrea #Asmara #History #Infrastructure #IsaiasAfwerki 30.10.2025

## III. The History of the Roads We Use Today in short

Before modern highways and vehicles, the Ge'ez-speaking people moved through networks of natural paths shaped by footsteps, animals, and trade. These ancient trails connected villages, markets, and schools long before formal roads were built. Over time, history left traces of these journeys — in monuments, coins, and stories — showing how travel shaped the culture and unity of early Abyssinian communities.

Subsection	Main Idea	Key Locations	Animals / Helpers	Learning Points
VII a. Ancient Paths of the Ge'ez-Speaking People	Before modern roads, people and animals made natural paths connecting villages, markets, and schools. We have monuments, religious books,	Highlands and valleys of Eritrea	Mules, donkeys, camels, occasional horses	Roads were formed by repeated travel; early communities connected by walking paths.
VII b. Monuments and Mystery	coins, dams, and crosses from Axumite times, but not roads.	Axumite Empire, Cohaito	—	Roads disappeared for unknown reasons; history still has mysteries to explore.
VII c. Natural Roads	First roads were natural, shaped by repeated footsteps and animal use.	Throughout Eritrean highlands and lowlands	Mules, donkeys, camels, horses	Animals were essential for carrying loads; horses were luxury or for sport.

Subsection	Main Idea	Key Locations	Animals / Helpers	Learning Points
<b>VII d. English Expedition (1868)</b>	The first modern road work in Ethiopia: small railway and trail improvements.	Zula, Comaile, Senafè	Camels for transport	English built limited infrastructure; some trails improved for expeditions.
<b>VII e. Egyptian Road Improvements (1875–76)</b>	Minor adjustments to some roads in northern and central Eritrea.	Barésa, Aideresò, Gurà (Ekkeleguzai), Cheren, Massawa	—	Small-scale improvements; little trace remains today.
<b>VII f. Italian Roads and Railways</b>	Modern roads and railways built across Eritrea, connecting cities, ports, and farms.	Throughout Eritrea	Mules, donkeys, camels	Modern infrastructure carried vehicles; traditional animal transport continued where needed.
<b>VII g. Lessons from the Earth and Floods</b>	Roads teach endurance; children and communities adapt to seasonal floods.	Mountains of Hamasien, plains of Barka, shores of Massawa, valleys of Senafè	Children, farmers, traders, mothers carrying water	Patience, persistence, and resilience; progress is shaped by everyday effort.
<b>VII h. Living Roads of Eritrea</b>	Roads remain alive, shaped by the people; even if the state forgets, people remember how to move forward.	Entire country	Everyone traveling	Roads are living proof of human connection and community memory.
<b>VII i. Historical Anchor (F. Martini, 1913)</b>	Factual record of early English and Egyptian road work, and traditional animal transport.	Zula, Comaile, Senafè, Barésa, Aideresò, Gurà, Cheren, Massawa	Mules, donkeys, camels, horses	Provides historical foundation; highlights research opportunities; shows continuity of traditional transport.

			
<b>Going to school</b>	<b>Loaded Donkeys</b>	<b>Loades Mules</b>	<b>Loaded camel ጽዕን ገመል</b>

		
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#### IV. **KIND OF ROADS** (sing. Road) = (**መንገድዲታት**) (sing. መንገድዲ)

መንገድዲ or መገድዲ ♦ አሳግድ, ድንጉር (rocky and steep/ sassosa e scoscesa) ♦ ጽርግያ, ጉድና, ስፕላሽ (spacious and comfortable/ spaziosa, e comoda), ስትራዳ/strada: **feminine noun**

1. (gen) **road**

(di città) **street**. e.g. (AUTOMOBILES) **to go off the road** ከደ ግዳም ጉድና/ስትራዳ andare fuori strada

2. (percorso) **way**. e.g. **to show sb the way** አርአየ (ረአየ) እታ መንገድዲ-ስትራዳ ናብ ሐድሐደ mostrare la strada a qn

3. (figurative) **path** ♦ **way** ♦ **road**

4. (fraseologia) (figurative: persona) **to get on in life** ገበረ መንገድዲ fare o farsi strada

### Roads and Paths Name in English with Picture

- **Causeway**  
a raised path or road over moist or low terrain.
- **Boulevard**  
A wide street in a city or town, typically lined with trees and dividing lanes for traffic.
- **Dirt**  
a road surface made of raw dirt or soil that is frequently encountered in rural areas.
- **Trackways**  
primitive trails or pathways that have been used repeatedly and are frequently seen in historic locations or natural settings.
- **Freeways**  
High-speed roads with controlled access and grade-separated interchanges.
- **Avenue**  
a wide street with a median dividing the lanes of traffic and frequently lined with trees in urban areas."
- **Approach**  
The road leading to a place or leading up to a bridge, overpass, or similar structure.
- **Zebra Crossing**  
a crossing where cars are expected to defer to pedestrians; usually marked with white stripes and black and white posts.
- **One-Way**  
A street or road allowing movement in only one direction.
- **Private Roads**  
Roads owned and maintained by individuals, businesses, or homeowner associations, often providing access to private property.

# Roads and Paths



**Causeway**



**Boulevard**



**Dirt**



**Trackways**



**Freeways**



**Avenue**



**Approach**



**Zebra crossing**



**A one-way**



**Private Roads**



**Overpass**



**Bridge**

.....

## Roads and Paths – Italian → English → Tigrinya

Italian	English	Tigrinya (nearest meaning)	Notes / Usage
<b>Sentiero</b>	Path / Trail	ጎልመንገድዲ (gwal menġeddi)	Narrow path, mainly for walking or animals
<b>Mulattiera</b>	Mule track / Pack trail	መንገድዲ በቕሊ (menġeddi beqli)	Used by pack animals or donkeys; slightly wider than a footpath
<b>Strada sterrata</b>	Dirt road	ጸብባብ መንገድዲ (ፃäbbäb menġeddi)	Unpaved road, suitable for carts, vehicles, or farm transport
<b>Carrareccia</b>	Cart track / Rural dirt track	ትልሚ መንገድዲ (tilmi menġeddi)	Dirt track often for small carts or rural transport; wider than mulattiera
<b>Viottolo / Stradello</b>	Small lane / Tiny road	ንእስተ መንገድዲ (nä'asti menġeddi)	Very narrow, pedestrian only; like a tiny lane or alley