

HIGHWAYS IN ITALY

IN the art of highway construction the Roman methods have proved an invaluable guide in Italy. The work accomplished during the past 20 years in this country certainly shows close resemblance to the methods employed by the Roman masters.

In England, Syria and Trans-Jordan, many of the foundations of the Roman roads are still well preserved, while in Italy itself several highways, including the Appian Way and the famous straight stretch from Rimini to Parma, have conformed to the general principles of Roman road-making.

Briefly, the Roman method consisted of excavating a proposed site to a depth depending on the nature of the country. In alternative layers were placed large stones and smaller stones, each layer being thinner until, near the surface, rubble was used. The whole bed was rolled, sealed off with a glutinous material and finally paving stones provided a splendid durable surface.

As in other parts of the world, Italy has not been quite so thorough as the Romans in road preparation. In the past 20 years, however, progress has been achieved and the Italians can point with pride to their roading system. Most of the 105,000 miles of highways in Italy are located in the north where the country is more suitable, but nevertheless despite the mountainous nature of the country as a whole, an average of one road mile to a square mile of territory has been attained.

Naturally, costs have not been light as, for instance, in Sicily a six mile stretch from Falerna to the coast required an expenditure of L120,000, or nearly L12 a yard.

A direct parallel with N.Z. has been provided with the division of the highway system into three classes, namely national, provincial and communal, with neighbouring and secondary roads. Construction and maintenance of national roads are a Govt. charge, and Roman constructional methods have been adhered to except with

regard to the addition of an asphalt surface. Provision for cyclists is made by a track on both sides of the road.

Small stone bays, storing materials for maintenance, are located at regular intervals on the highways, while beautification has been advanced with the planting of shrubs and flowering trees. Sign board advertisements are conspicuous by their absence. Specified groups of men are detailed for particular stretches and inspectors or foremen are provided with quarters—red houses now so familiar to New Zealanders.



The administration of provincial roads is borne by each province and they are generally well surfaced but, as is the case in New Zealand, improvement is urgently required for communal roads, which serve as vital links for the various settlements.

Visitors to Italy cannot but be impressed with the system of highways, particularly those covering the main arterial routes. The war with accompanying heavy army traffic and wholesale bombing has certainly, in many places, wrought havoc, but in the main, evidence is clear that Italy, in pre-war years, could point with justifiable pride to her vast network of excellent road communications.