

Google Street View Used to Find “Lost” 1930s-era British Cycleways

Historian uses CIA-funded technology to find buried and lost transport infrastructure.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, TYNE AND WEAR, UNITED KINGDOM, May 10, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A British historian has used the spin-off from an American military mapping project to discover nearly 300 miles of “lost” cycleways in the UK. These cycleways were installed beside English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish roads between 1934 and 1940, but were abandoned after the Second World War. Many were surfaced with red concrete, protected cyclists with curbs and extended for many miles. They were commissioned by the British government's Ministry of [Transport](#) and were built on both sides of the arterial roads constructed in the 1930s.



“

Fantastic fusion of historical knowledge with digital tech”
Robin Lovelace, Institute for Transport Studies, Leeds University, England.

Author and historian Carlton Reid used archive sources to identify the likely locations for the cycleways, and then confirmed their existence with Google Street View.

“From the comfort of my desk I've been able to back-up my hunches by zooming in to the images provided by the Street View cameras,” said Reid, who is funding further researches with a crowd-funding campaign.

“Some of the 1930s-era cycleways I've identified are either fully or partially buried, but most are above ground, in full view but they are not recognized for what they are, which is innovative-for-the-time cycle-specific infrastructure that's more than 80-years-old,” said Reid.

“The cycleways have been wide and often curb-protected since they were built, but it was quickly forgotten when and who they were built for,” he added.

“I've visited some of these cycleways in-the-flesh but the advent of open-access online imagery has meant it's quicker and cheaper to discover them from my desk.”

Google Street View is an off-shoot from Google Earth, the descendant of EarthViewer, a CIA-funded project that was used by the US military in war zones from the late 1990s onwards. Google acquired EarthViewer in 2004 and rebranded it as Google Earth in 2005. Archeologists often use Google Earth – and other open-access satellite-imagery services – to find hidden hill-forts and even buried

treasure, but this is the first time the satellite and street-level imagery has been used to discover hidden-in-plain-sight 1930s-era cycleways.

Reid has partnered with a London-based urban planner to bring back to life perhaps hundreds of miles of these forgotten cycleways. John Dales of Urban Movement will take Reid's historical research and use it to show local and national authorities that there's often plenty of space for [cycling](#) – because the space was allocated many years previously.

Cycle advocacy organizations often campaign for the sort of cycleways common in the Netherlands, and what Reid's project is showing is that the British Ministry of Transport worked with its Dutch equivalent in the 1930s to create just such a Dutch-style system. Reid discovered the extent of the 1930s-era cycleway network during the research for a cycle history book to be published next month. "Bike Boom" (Island Press, Washington, DC, June 2017) contains information on the 1930s-era cycleways with the Kickstarter campaign enabling him to continue his research work.

Environmental geographer Robin Lovelace said the project was a "fantastic fusion of historical knowledge with digital tech." Lovelace, a Leeds University academic who works for the Institute for Transport Studies, added that reviving the 1930s cycleways could lead to a "more sustainable transport future."

Gold-medal-winning Olympian Chris Boardman of membership organization British Cycling has described Reid's Kickstarter campaign as a "marvelous proposal" adding that it "could recover some of our lost past and give normal people the opportunity to change the way they travel, in safety."

Some of the cycleways Reid has digitally uncovered extend for a few miles either side of the suburban arterial roads built in the 1930s, but he has also identified residential cycleways (they are often now treated as "private roads" with cars parked on them). Archive maps show that the 18-mile Southend Arterial Road from Gallows Corner in Romford, near London, to Southend once had cycleways along its full length (they were known as "cycle tracks" at the time) and this cycleway linked in to others in the area.

"Let's rescue Britain's forgotten 1930s protected cycleways" was launched on Kickstarter on 25th April and exceeded its \$9,000 target within three days. 429 backers have so far pledged \$15,500. The campaign ends on 25th May.

NOTES

Carlton Reid is the Newcastle-based executive editor of trade magazine BikeBiz.com and author of "Roads Were Not Built for Cars" (Island Press, Washington, DC, 2015).

KICKSTARTER CAMPAIGN:

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/carltonreid/lets-rescue-britains-forgotten-1930s-protected-cyc>

PRESS MATERIALS (photos, videos, maps and more info):

<http://www.bikeboom.info/press/>

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