

## **A glance at roadscape of principal roads from Colombo to provincial towns in the mid nineteenth century Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

The present study is a cursory survey on the roadscape of principal roads which have linked Colombo with provincial towns in the mid nineteenth century. There were seven principal roads from Colombo, the Capital City of Sri Lanka to provincial towns in and around the island. Some of these roads were passable by wheeled vehicles, but some of them were bridle paths which were used by horse riders and packed bull transporters. All these roads were leveled and remained as graveled roads and most of them developed as metaled roads used by mortar vehicles, at least partially, by the end of the century. Bridges were very rare over rivers and streams in these roads; hence, fords and ferries were used to cross water courses during this period. Toll stations were found usually in some of these places. Rest houses, postal stations, forts and garrisons were found in some places. Some roadside villages were transformed as bazars and townships and some places were newly developed as urban centers. Among these principal roads, the road which was known as ‘Round the island road’ linked all coastal towns with Colombo and were used by Portuguese and the Dutch who occupied the maritime provinces, prior to British. Starting from Colombo towards north, it goes to Jaffna in the North, Trincomalee and Baticaloa in the East and Hambantota, Matara and Galle in the South reaching Colombo, passing altogether 770 miles. Abandoning the traditional road from Colombo to Kandy via Hanwella and Attapitiya, a new road was constructed by British in 1821, via Mahara and Ambepussa to Kandy. This 72 miles road was the first road constructed in Sri Lanka during the British period and the present Colombo-Kandy road is a development of this road, with a few minor deviations. Apart from this road, three more roads were considered as alternative principal roads to Kandy from Colombo. One of them was the road, 84 miles via Kurunegala. Another road was 94 miles via Yatiyantota, Ginigathhena and Gampola to Kandy. The road which meets the main Kandy road at 45<sup>th</sup> mile stone, coming via Ruvanwella and Ballapana from Colombo which is 82 miles long was the third alternative road. Road to Badulla via Rathnapura and Balangoda which is 135 miles was a principal road of the mid nineteenth century. The road across the country to Trincomalee via Kurunegala and Dambulla which is 159 miles was considered only second to Colombo–Kandy main road in importance, by British during this period. A search on colonial records, photographs and remaining physical remnants will be the sources of this research which is asking for more advanced research on the subject.

**Key Words:** *Roadscape, Colombo, mid nineteenth century, provincial towns, Sri Lanka*

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