



**THE ENGINEERING INSTITUTE OF CANADA**

*and its member societies*

**L'Institut canadien des ingénieurs**

*et ses sociétés membres*

## **EIC's Historical Notes and Papers Collection**

(Compilation of Articles, Notes and Papers previously published as  
Articles, Cedargrove Series, and EIC Working Papers)

## **ENGINEERING HISTORY PAPER #74**

### **“The Silk Roads”**

**By Andrew H. Wilson**

(produced as Cedargrove Series #49/2018 – Mar 2018)

\*\*\*\*\*

EIC HISTORY AND ARCHIVES

\*\*\*\*\*

© EIC 2018

## **Abstract**

This paper is a little different. Instead of being in the usual narrative form, the text is a series of sequential notes on the subject matter, with a few accompanying photographs and maps, based on the author's recent original powerpoint presentation.

The paper notes briefly the histories and circumstances of the Silk Road of antiquity and the new Silk Road that is presently under discussion and construction, but with very little direct reference to their engineering.

The powerpoint version was presented by the author to the Ottawa Branch of the Canadian Society of Senior Engineers on March 19.

## **About this Series**

Principally, the Cedargrove Series is intended to preserve some of the research, writings and oral presentations that the author has completed over the past half-century or so, but has not yet published. It is, therefore, a modern-day variant of the privately-published books and pamphlets written by his forebears, such as his paternal grandfather and grandmother, and his grandfather's brother John.

## **About the Author**

He is a graduate in mechanical engineering and the liberal arts and has held technical, administrative, research and management positions in industry in the United Kingdom and the public service of Canada, from which he retired over 30 years ago.

He became actively interested in the history of engineering on his appointment in 1975 to chair the first history committee of the Canadian Society for Mechanical Engineering, and has served both CSME and the Engineering Institute of Canada in this capacity for varying periods of time until 2003. He has since provided history-related advice and assistance to CSME, EIC and the Canadian Society of Senior Engineers.

This paper is based on the text of a powerpoint presentation made recently by the author in which he drew attention to the histories of the Silk Road of antiquity, established by authorities in China over 2000 years ago, and the Silk Road currently being established, also by the leadership of China. It is factual rather than discussive, shorter rather than longer, and light on engineering details.

\*\*\*\*\*

This paper is about the old Silk Road as well as the new one. They were (are are) basically land-based trade routes with maritime components. And they were both initiated in China.

\*

What got me started looking into these Roads? For the old one, it was a photograph in a review of a new book on the history of Central Asia with the subtitle, *The Age of the Silk Roads*. The photograph showed an ancient, rickety, wooden bridge, built on the cantilever principle, over which a traveller and his loaded donkey were crossing a gorge somewhere in the 3,800-metre-high Baroghil Pass that leads from Afghanistan to Pakistan. In other words, it represented what could have happened somewhere along the old Silk Road a thousand or more years ago.

For the new one, it was reading on the Internet about Chinese President Xi and his proposals for it...

...plus the designation by UNESCO in 2014 of a series of 30-odd sites on the stretch of the old Silk Road running from Chang'an in China along the Tianshan corridor to Kyrgyzstan, as part of its World Heritage Sites program.

\*

I have included a few photographs from the powerpoint presentation. Generally speaking, they represent old Road structures from its later history, although the scenery photographs are contemporary.

\*

The old Silk Road...

Silk was first made in China around 2700 BC, but the production of silk threads was kept secret for over 3000 years. It was first known outside China in India, Japan and Persia.























