



The Routes of Man: How Roads are Changing the World and the Way We Live Today

By Ted Conover

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Roads bind our world?metaphorically and literally?transforming landscapes and the lives of the people who inhabit them. Roads have unparalleled power to impact communities, unite worlds and sunder them, and reveal the hopes and fears of those who travel them. With his marvelous eye for detail and his contagious enthusiasm, Ted Conover explores six of these key byways worldwide. In Peru, he traces the journey of a load of rare mahogany over the Andes to its origin, an untracked part of the Amazon basin soon to be traversed by a new east-west route across South America. In East Africa, he visits truckers whose travels have been linked to the worldwide spread of AIDS. In the West Bank, he monitors highway checkpoints with Israeli soldiers and then passes through them with Palestinians, witnessing the injustices and danger borne by both sides. He shuffles down a frozen riverbed with teenagers escaping their Himalayan valley to see how a new road will affect the now-isolated Indian region of Ladakh. From the passenger seat of a new Hyundai piling up the miles, he describes the exuberant upsurge in car culture as highways proliferate across China. And from inside an ambulance, he offers an apocalyptic but precise vision of Lagos, Nigeria, where congestion and chaos on freeways signal the rise of the global megacity. A spirited, urgent book that reveals the costs and benefits of being connected?how, from ancient Rome to the present, roads have played a crucial role in human life, advancing civilization even as they set it back.

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The Routes of Man: How Roads are Changing the World and the Way We Live Today By Ted Conover Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #15001295 in Books
- Published on: 2010-05-09
- Formats: Audiobook, CD, Unabridged
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 11
- Dimensions: 6.50" h x 1.00" w x 7.13" l, .80 pounds
- Running time: 13 Hours
- Binding: Audio CD

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

[Signature]Reviewed by Jeb BrugmannIn *The Routes of Man*, Conover, author of the NBCC award-winning *Newjack*, reveals globalization's neural system growing along the world's expanding and connecting road systems. Governments and smugglers, armies and insurgents, and the local poor and international NGOs negotiate their ambitions at border crossings, checkpoints, and dives. Tracing the route of rare mahogany from Peru's illegal jungle logging camps to Manhattan's brownstones, he examines how highways connect the fates of forests, untouched tribes, and finicky antique collectors. In the Himalayan frontier of Kashmir, highways are ventures of national territorial control, and in China a growing superhighway system underscores the disparity between the haves and have-nots. Conover's voice is that of a sobered Kerouac, tamed by a bigger conscience, and on an open road increasingly controlled by corporate, government, and military interests. His acclaimed narrative gifts are on full display in a wonderfully evenhanded treatment of the roadway in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Highways have been co-opted for Israeli settlements, and Palestinian professors, engineers, and migrant laborers construct ever-shifting back-road routes and taxi-hops to earn their living. With Conover as our guide, we move through Israeli checkpoints in Palestine's West Bank and witness the daily indignities faced by corralled Palestinian commuters and the psychological angst of Israeli soldiers. There is no open road here, just a gritty, fractured infrastructure of hatred that strangles both nations. More subtly, Conover reveals the highway as common social territory, particularly as the meeting place between men and women. His treatment of east African truck drivers—whose travels are suspected to be linked with the global spread of AIDS—avoids stereotype and sensationalism. He is as attentive to and interested by the drudgery of transporting goods as with the truckers' polygamy or encounters with sex workers and police bribery. We meet truck drivers who are true gentlemen and tough, articulate women fully capable of negotiating roadside life. Conover maintains a commitment to accurate portrayal and embraces the whole world, not only its dramatic aspects. *The Routes of Man* seeks to describe more than to explain this ever-connecting world. It does the former with an agility that leaves the reader anticipating the next adventure. But the narrative fails to build the argument posed in its subtitle: that roads themselves have become a source of change in the world, independent of the nations, armies, and cities that build, control, and fill them with trade and traffic. But this many-textured journey is not to be missed. Conover deftly navigates the romance and harsh reality of a world intent on a real and not just a virtual connectedness. *Jeb Brugmann is author of Welcome to the Urban Revolution: How Cities Are Changing the World.*

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Reviewers were generally happy to follow Conover as he brought to life some of the world's most interesting and dangerous routes while managing to steer clear of the thousand "road-as-life" metaphors that could have congested the work. But they tended to criticize him with their own transit analogy: *Routes of Man*, many wrote, lacks the promised path connecting Conover's adventures perhaps because many of the essays originated as magazine articles in *National Geographic*, the *Atlantic*, and other publications. For some critics, this was no issue; the [hardcover's] subtitle, they argued, was clearly an imposition by the marketing department and shouldn't detract from the book. But others wanted more reflection from an author whom they respected for traveling so far and learning so much.

From [Booklist](#)

Roads bring medicine and disease, development and destruction, commerce and war. Curious about the

impact of new roads on isolated places, immersion journalist Conover, a National Book Critics Circle Award winner, rides in unreliable, body-battering trucks on harrowing roads in Peru to witness the illegal logging of mahogany trees, then, with all due irony, stays at a hotel for eco-tourists. In the spellbound Himalayan valley of Zanskar, he joins villagers walking down the only winter road: the frozen river. What will happen if India builds an all-season road? Is there a connection between truckers and the spread of AIDS in Africa? It seems so as Conover rides with a Kenyan truck driver who observes, "The road is very unfair, very harsh." Road-to-hell stories of Iraq and Afghanistan are matched by chilling experiences at the checkpoints that block roads and destroy lives in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Convivial, intrepid, and happiest in motion, Conover tempers concerns about the paradoxes of roads with appreciation for the ingenuity and fortitude of the road warriors who welcome him into their arduous lives. --Donna Seaman

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Edward Olivieri:

Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? Book is very important thing for us to be aware of everything in the world. Each book has different aim or goal; it means that book has different type. Some people truly feel enjoy to spend their time to read a book. They may be reading whatever they get because their hobby is usually reading a book. How about the person who don't like reading through a book? Sometime, person feel need book once they found difficult problem or perhaps exercise. Well, probably you should have this **The Routes of Man: How Roads are Changing the World and the Way We Live Today**.

Ronald Stauffer:

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Dennis Green:

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