

"We've Always Done it That Way"

Does the statement, "We've always done it that way" ring any bells...?

The US standard railroad gauge (distance between the rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. That's an exceedingly odd number.

Why was that gauge used?

Because that's the way they built them in England, and English expatriate built the US Railroads.

Why did the English build them like that?

Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used.

Why did "they" use that gauge then?

Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing.

Okay! Why did the wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing?

Well, if they tried to use any other spacing,



the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts.

So who built those old rutted roads?

Imperial Rome built the first long distance roads in Europe (and England) for their legions. The roads have been used ever since.

And, the ruts in the roads?

Roman war chariots formed the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels. Since the chariots were made for Imperial Rome, they

were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

The United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches is derived from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman war chariot. And bureaucracies live forever.

So the next time you are handed a specification and wonder what horse's ass came up with it, you may be exactly right, because the Imperial Roman war chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the back ends of two war horses.

Now the twist to the story.....

When you see a Space Shuttle sitting on its launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters, or SRBs. The SRBs are made by Thiokol at their factory at Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs would have preferred to make them a bit fatter, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line from the factory happens to run through a tunnel in the mountains. The SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track, as you now know, is about as wide as two horses' behinds.

So, a major Space Shuttle design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a horse's ass.



2002 Legacy Park RUN/WALK Benefits Alberta Trails

Keith Henderson, Legacy Park Family Festival organizer, presents a cheque to Linda Strong-Watson of Alberta TrailNet. These proceeds from the 2002 Festival 5K Fun Run/Walk are designated for trail construction in the Edmonton-Fort Saskatchewan area.



In September, 2001, delegates from Nova Scotia attended the Rails to Trails Conservancy meeting in St. Louis Missouri and came home with the idea of forming an international event that would highlight trails worldwide. What started as a little idea is now growing and taking shape. A website has now been established to promote International Trails Day (www.internationaltrailsday.com). Trail builders, operators, groups, and users, including schools and communities, are encouraged to hold trail events on or in the week of June 5, 2004 (International Trails Day, 2004) and register these events as soon as dates are known on the new International Trails Day (ITD) website.

The committee team is now engaged in gathering data and photos from last year's June 7, 2003 International Trails Day events. If you would like to post your trail's past or upcoming events on this website please contact Dave Carter at dave@trailtc.ns.ca or phone: 902-463-8913, Fax: 902-463-3305.

This is a great opportunity to further the goal of promoting trails not only in Canada, but worldwide. We have the opportunity to show the rest of the world our spectacular trails, that Canada has a strong trails movement, and that we are willing to share our resources and experience with others. Registrations of events for 2004 are now being accepted! Post your trail event today.

Mark your calendars. International Trails Day in 2004 is June 5th

