

Getting There in Ghana

Mediterranean Sea

When a Missouri Department of Transportation archaeologist goes on vacation in Ghana, Africa, what does he do for fun? He takes pictures of the roads, highways and bridges, of course!

By Matt Hiebert

Photography by Larry Ayres

A f r i c a



Atlantic Ocean

Recently, MoDOT Cultural Resources Archaeologist Larry Ayres and his family visited his missionary sister and brother-in-law in the African nation of Ghana. While Ayres took photos of the people, animals and architecture of the land, his professional curiosity steered his attention to Ghana's transportation system.

"I couldn't help it," Ayres says. "One day, we were out by the roadside and I realized that I was standing next to a sign that said 'Highway Department.' It really hit home with me, and I started taking pictures of their roads, culverts and bridges."

Ayres says he saw several highway features that would be considered unusual for

Missouri. Although relatively new to the Show-Me State, roundabouts have been a common traffic-control feature on Africa's Gold Coast. One pretzel-like, three-deck interchange even had a roundabout as its middle layer.

"Another roundabout I saw was 20 acres in diameter and had a cornfield growing in the middle of it," he says.

One huge difference between here and there, Ayres notes, is the philosophy toward roadside upkeep. While Missouri prides itself on its Adopt-a-Highway program and well-maintained roadsides, Ghana is limited in this capacity both by resources and climate.

"If they cut the grass at all in the dry season, it just dries up and disappears," he says. "The time I did see a highway crew out mowing, it was a dozen men walking along the roadside with machetes."

Ayres says Ghana has modern highways around its capital, Accra, but a few miles from town things get bumpy. Without niceties like truck scales or laws governing load limits, Ghana's dirt highways take a beating.

"Some of their roads are in terrible shape," Ayres says. "They have extremely overloaded trucks, and in the rainy season, there's no way to keep them up. They have major international highways that are made of dirt and full of potholes."



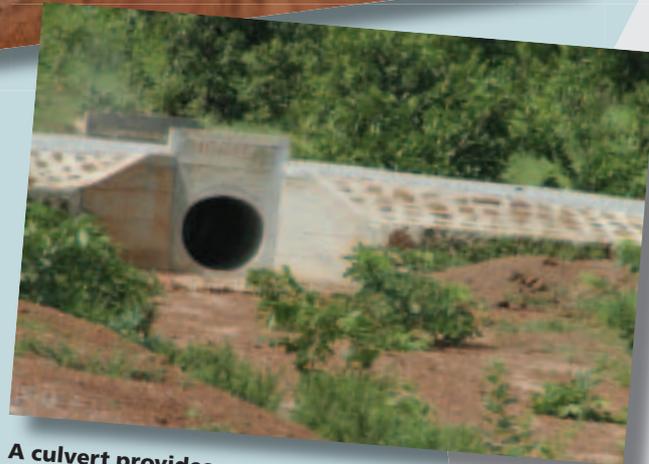
A modern, well-maintained road with a view of the countryside



A highway project that ran out of funds



Which way is up? Typical intersection signage



A culvert provides an opportunity for a decorative roadside

But as Ayres explains, the people of Ghana are resourceful and often take road repairs into their own hands.

“Local people will take a shovel, go out and fill potholes on their own,” he says. “Then they stand there and hope that somebody will stop and give them a little bit of money for doing it.”

Of course, some road repairs are beyond the capacity of a mere hand shovel. But Ayres says the Ghanaians have a way of dealing with these larger indentations.

“You have to keep an eye out when you drive,” Ayres says. “If you see something that looks like a branch sticking out of the

middle of the road, you avoid it. People tend to stick markers like that into the potholes that are too deep to repair.”

Ghana is home to Lake Volta, the largest man-made lake in the world. Again, climate dictates where and when a vehicle can cross the lake’s many coves and inlets.

“They don’t have as many bridges as Missouri,” Ayres says. “There are a lot of roads that go up to the lake and then just disappear. In dry times of the year you can drive through, but in the wet season you just don’t go that way.”

Despite all the differences, Ayres also notes that there are many similarities between Ghana’s transportation challenges and those of Missouri.

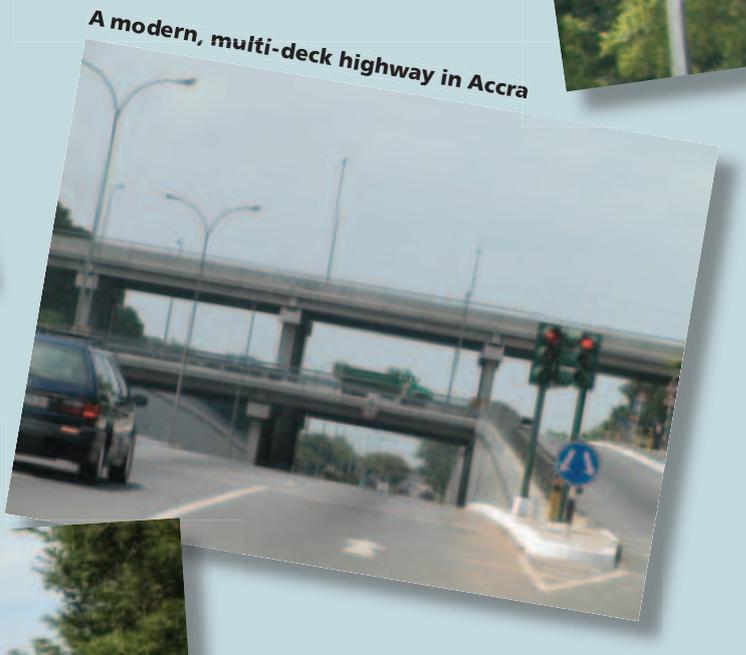
“During our trip, there was a big debate over paving a large road that leads to a tourist area,” Ayres says. “The road was in terrible shape, but it’s just like here: everybody wants the money to be spent somewhere else.” ■

Matt Hiebert is a senior writer for Pathways and an outreach specialist at MoDOT General Headquarters.

This means there’s no speed limit so drivers go as fast as they want.



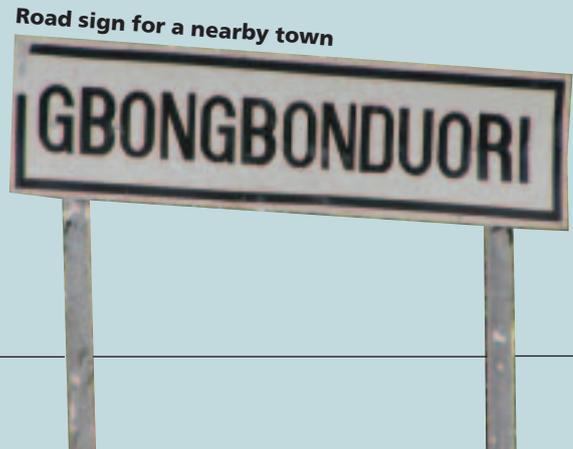
No curbs or sidewalks along this road



A modern, multi-deck highway in Accra



Overloaded trucks are extremely hard on Ghana’s roads.



Road sign for a nearby town