Pitch Encyclopedia Article

Pitch

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Pitch, a derivative of bituminous coal from which the oil has been removed, is popular as a road-paving material for several reasons: it is easily applied to the road after heating, it forms a good seal against moisture, and it is pliable enough when hardened to allow for a smooth ride for the traveler.

Excavations show evidence that pitch was used at Jericho circa 2500 B.C. to seal the spaces between the stones of its infamous wall. The Babylonians, Vikings, and others also used pitch in shipbuilding to seal hulls against water. Road-building pioneers Pierre Trésaguet and Thomas Telford used it as a filler between paving stones, a method rejected by John McAdam, who preferred to allow surface rock to absorb moisture. Pitch is now used worldwide for road surfacing, often mixed with rock or cement to strengthen it. Roads surfaced in this way are referred to as bitumen roads in some countries, while the terms asphalt or blacktop are commonly used in North America. Pitch is also used in the manufacturing of electrodes.