

Motorway Men Beat the Bog Menace

By the 1970's Chat Moss was losing its reputation as the terror of the highway engineers with the arrival of the motorway age. For while Robert and George Stephenson scored one notable victory with the construction of their "floating" railway in 1830, nobody had dared to build a major roadway across its soft surface until Britain's modern motorway builders moved in.

The method used by the Stephensons in making the railway float on the surface of the moss could not be copied by the motorway engineers because the motorway surface would crack up if they attempted to build on the spongy peat. The peat had to be cut away to form a much stronger base. Only the conventional type of light excavator could be used to cut the peat but these had to be mounted on wooden mats to stop them sinking into the soft clinging peat. The method of cutting the shallow sloping embankments first and then taking away the larger mass of material away from the centre of the valley lessened the risk of land slips and ground collapse with such a watery unstable material.

The excavation work progressed faster than expected with an average of 15,000 cubic yards being cut away each week. The engineer believed that given the right weather conditions, they could be finished two months ahead of schedule. This was an advantage as it would mean that any operations connected with the motorway would not interfere with the farmers next planting season. The local farmers were likely to have good reasons to thank the coming of the motor way for although some suffered the loss of a portion of their land, they had the benefits of an improved drainage system running along the motorway's edge.

Once the drainage had been laid through the farming land the motorway engineers still had one more job to do and that was to construct a new pattern of farm roads on each side of the motorway.

Having destroyed the existing pattern of farmland track and paths by building their "great divide" the road makers had the responsibility to see that a new set of farm roads were laid out on each side of the motorway. Even this comparatively simple task caused problems for even a small bulldozer was likely to become bogged down on this peaty surface. It was surprising to find the motorway engineers praying for a period of really cold weather to make the peat hard enough to work on, conditions which usually make for slower, not quicker, progress in road-building work.

This section of the M62 opened in August 1974, creating a continuous link between Hull and Liverpool.