

## Telegraph Road — for me it's nearly 4,000 mile long

By Rick Astley

Telegraph Road is certainly known to every member on the US side of the border and probably also by most who live in Canada. Although I didn't know it at the time, long before I could reliably point to Detroit on a map, I was somewhat familiar with the road too.

Back in the mid-80s, like most parents of teenagers, I would often have to ferry my eldest son to and from some activity or other, in our case, from our home in a small English village to the nearest town about 14 minutes away. Those 14 minutes are significant because it happened to be the same length as a track my son and I would love to play on the car's cassette player, he on air guitar, me on dashboard drums, at a volume his mother wouldn't have approved of. The track was called *Telegraph Road* and it was written and played by Dire Straits. The song's length meant that it was never heard on the radio and the fact that it would often change mood, volume and tempo, made it impossible to dance to, so it was never played in clubs, or rather, discotheques as they were then known.

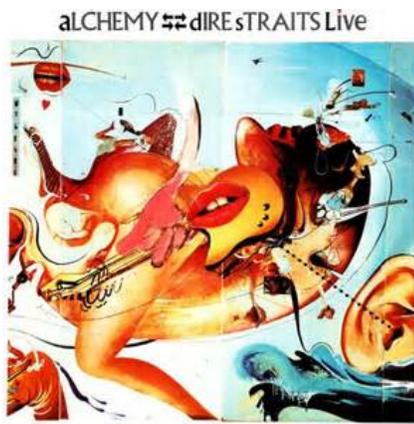
The track, and Dire Straits' music in general, became part of our father-son bonding. In fact years later, when my son was in college in Montreal, he bought tickets for my birthday to see the group at the Forum (at that time the Canadiens' hockey arena). On the day of the concert, I finagled a business trip there from my home in Toronto and once I had been to my hotel and changed out of my business suit, I treated him to dinner and we went to the concert together. As a student, he could only afford the cheapest seats but they happened to be great, being to the side and slightly to the back of the band, but quite close to the stage. There were "No Smoking" signs everywhere, which were totally ignored by the largely student audience and we both felt a little dizzy from the fog of smoke — which wasn't from burned tobacco!

Fast forward again and I was transferred to my company's Detroit office, which was, you guessed it, on Telegraph Road. Of course, I saw the significance of the road's name but I thought it an unremarkable coincidence as, although I knew that the song was about a road somewhere in America, I imagined that lots of US cities had a Telegraph Road, and so I thought little more about it.

It wasn't until very recently that I learned that the Telegraph Road I was introduced to in a song 30 years before, is the same road I worked on in Southfield nearly 4,000 miles away, and decades later. Mark Knopfler, the singer, lead guitarist and song writer for Dire Straits, like other great rockers including the Beatles and Springsteen, was from a gritty part of the world, in his case from a ship-building region in the north-east England. It turns out that Knopfler went on a bus trip around the States in the late 70s and it took him on "our" Telegraph Road. I can well understand how, like me on my first visit to the US, also in the 70s, he would have been awed by the wide streets and bright advertising signs, as he traveled through the unfamiliar scenery. In fact, he saw Telegraph Road as going on-and-on forever and, inspired by a book he was reading at the time, he started to think how the road might have evolved, and those thoughts became the genesis for the lyrics of the song. He didn't get it all right, and it's not sugarcoated, but if you're familiar with Telegraph Road, you might be interested in how it was seen through a stranger's eyes.

For space and copyright reasons, we can't print the whole lyric here but it starts off, "*A long time ago came a man on a track, walking thirty miles with a pack on his back and he put down his load where he thought it was the best. Made a home in the wilderness*"

It then goes on to describe how others came by and how a community grew up, "*Then came the churches then came the schools. Then came the lawyers and then came the rules*" and eventually, "*Telegraph road got so deep and so wide. Like a rolling river. . .*"



The [full lyrics](#) can be found on-line as well as the 14 minute [studio recording](#) from the *Love Over Gold* album and a slightly shorter [live version](#) from the *Alchemy* album. And make sure you wind the volume up; it starts very quietly.

If you like your rock music less profound, rawer and shorter, check out Dire Strait's [Solid Rock](#) too.