

The Panama Canal

The World's Most Important Shortcut

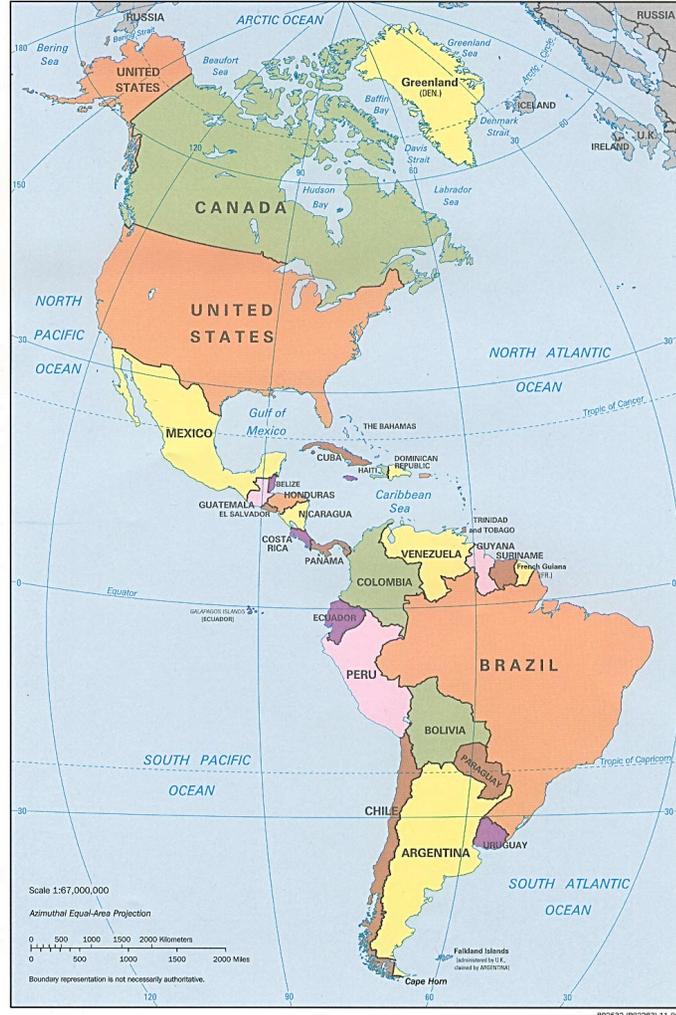


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Where is Panama?

North and South America



The U.S. took control of an area in Panama in order to build a canal.

What is an isthmus?

Panama is an isthmus. An isthmus is a narrow strip of land which has water on each side and connects two larger bodies of land.



Courtesy of: <http://www.1uptravel.com/worldmaps/maps/pm-map.jpg>

What is a canal?

An area of water that is dug across land. Canals connect bodies of water so that ships can travel between them.



Early History



- 1513 Vasco Nunez de Balboa crosses the isthmus of Panama and becomes the first European to see the Pacific Ocean
- 1524 Spanish explorer Hernon Cortes suggests that a path across the isthmus of Panama would be a great idea
- 1534 The King of Spain wants to build a canal through Panama
- Although these people knew how wonderful it would be to create this they didn't have the ability to do it

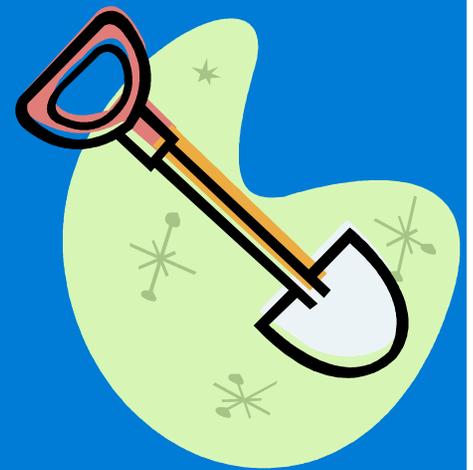
The 1800's

1835 France is given a permit to build a canal across Panama. However first they have to come up with a plan to build the canal. In 1881 they finally start.



Building the Canal

The next few pictures show what the area looked like when the French started building the canal. What challenges do you think they faced building a canal in this type of area?



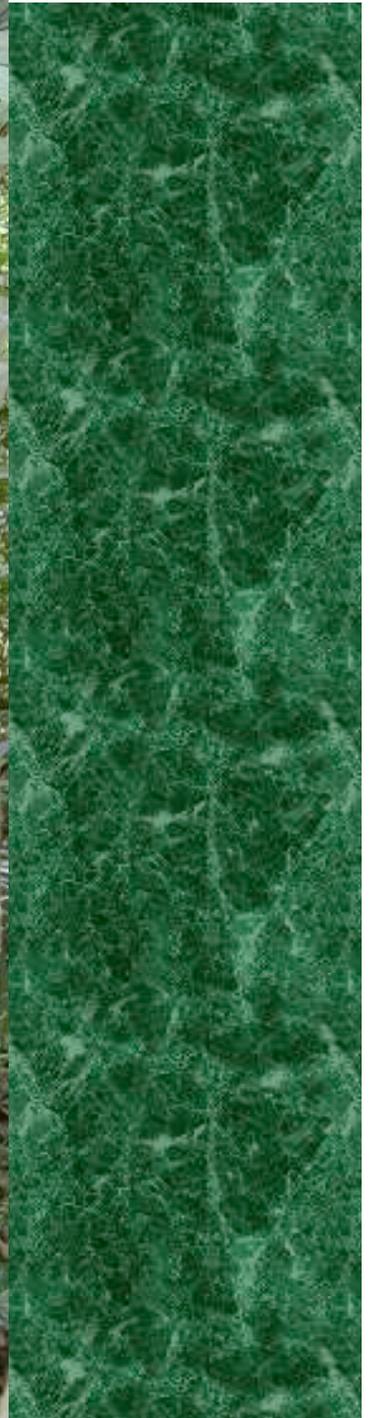
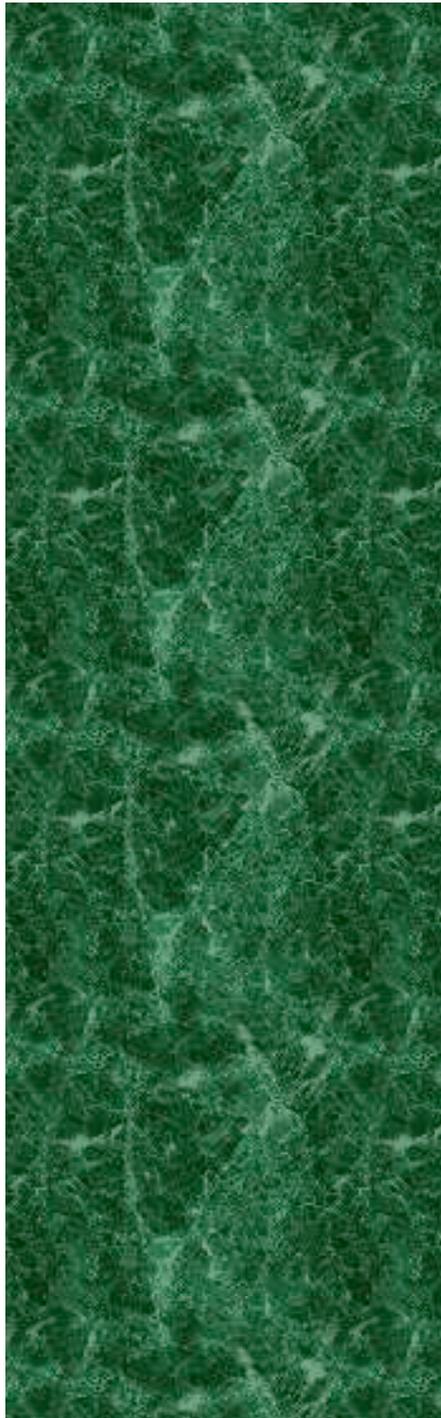
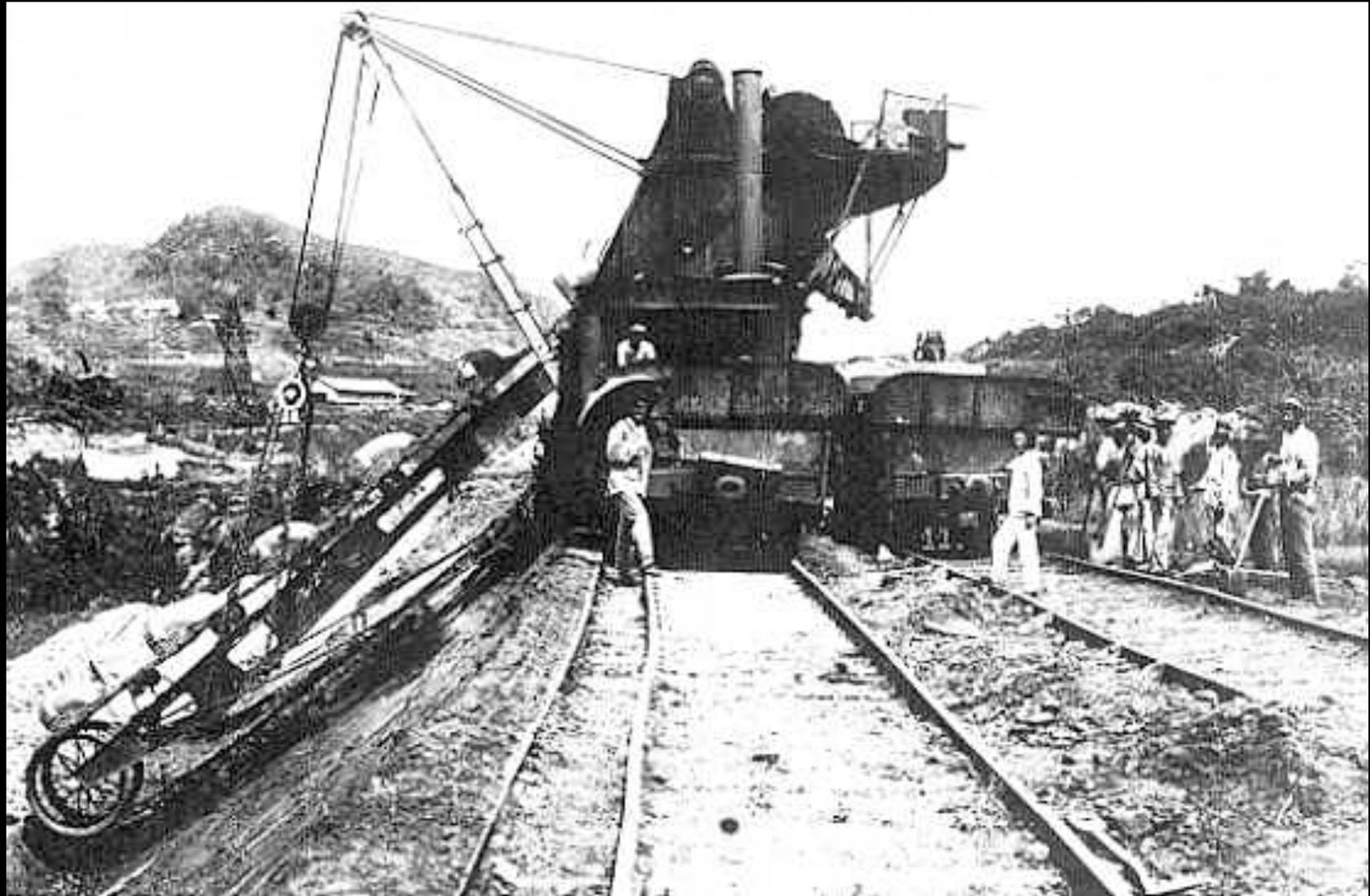




Image Courtesy of: <http://www.anu.edu.au/BoZo/jennions/images/Panama%20lake.jpg>



Courtesy of: <http://www.canalmuseum.com/photos/panamacanalphoto002.htm>



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Courtesy of: <http://www.canalmuseum.com/photos/panamacanalphoto003.htm>

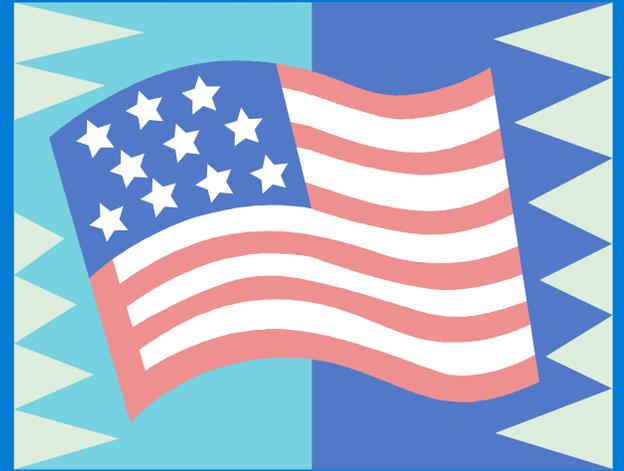
The French Give Up

- 1881 A French company begins construction on the canal. After eight years France gives up on the project.
- Over 20,000 construction workers died working on the project for France and the company trying to build the canal goes bankrupt.

The U.S. gets involved

- At this point in time, the country of Panama was owned by Colombia. The U.S. offered to buy the section of land where the canal was located.
- Columbians were hesitant to give the U.S. permanent control over this section of Panama, so they did not accept the offer.
- Instead of making another offer, the U.S. secretly told the Panamanians that they would get support from the U.S. if they rebelled from Colombia.
- So, the Panamanians rebelled against the Columbians. The U.S. helped with the rebellion.
- After the rebellion, the new independent country of Panama gave the U.S. control of the canal.

The United States



- 1904 The United States begins working on the Canal
- 1914 The canal is completed
- 1977 The United States signs a treaty with Panama and agrees to give Panama control of the canal in 1999

Why was it so important to build a canal?

- It is 1904. Theodore Roosevelt is president, and the United States is fast becoming one of the most powerful nations in the world. Such recent inventions as the telephone and the automobile make the 3,000 mile wide country seem a lot smaller.

What if a canal were built where the land between North America and South America is narrowest-across Panama? That could shorten the trip by nearly 8,000 miles!



That's just what President Roosevelt is determined to do. He wants to build a canal across Panama to help families like yours expand their trade. He knows that the canal will also help the United States defend itself. With the canal, the United States could quickly move its warships from one ocean to the other if they were needed to protect United States interests.



Image Courtesy of: <http://www.britannica.com/nobel/art/orooseh001p1.jpg>

What are locks?

A lock is a part of a canal with gates at each end where boats are raised or lowered to different water levels.



Here is how the Panama Canal works

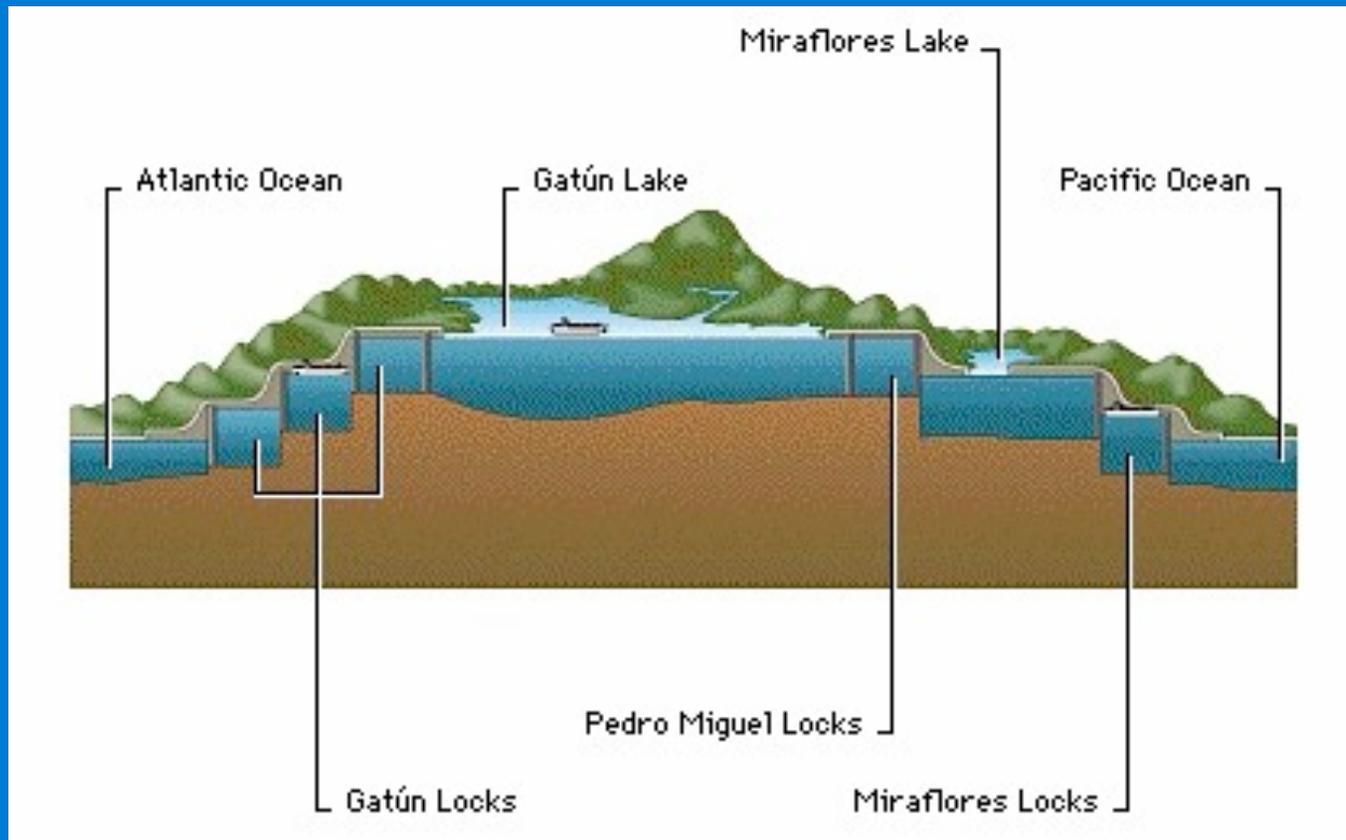


Image Courtesy of: <http://www.panamacanal-cruises.com/panama-canal-pictures/crosssections.jpg>

How do locks work?

The ship goes through a set of gates into a lock chamber. The water in the chamber is still at sea level. Then more water comes pouring into the chamber through valves.

The ship rises like a toy boat in a bathtub filling with water. When the water rises high enough, the ship passes through a second set of gates and enters a small lake. It goes to the next lock and the water is raised again.

Click this link to see how a lock works



- How a lock works

- <http://www.pancanal.com/eng/general/howitworks/index.html>

Here are the giant locks



Courtesy of: <http://www.canalmuseum.com/photos/panamacanalphoto026.htm>

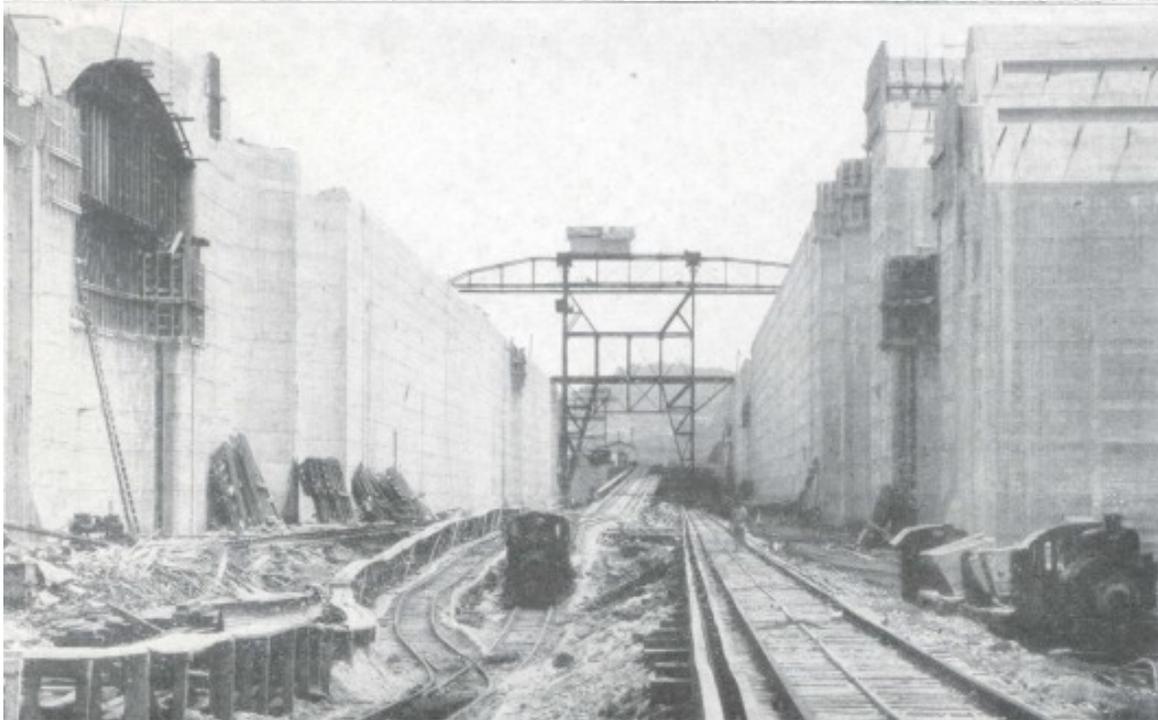
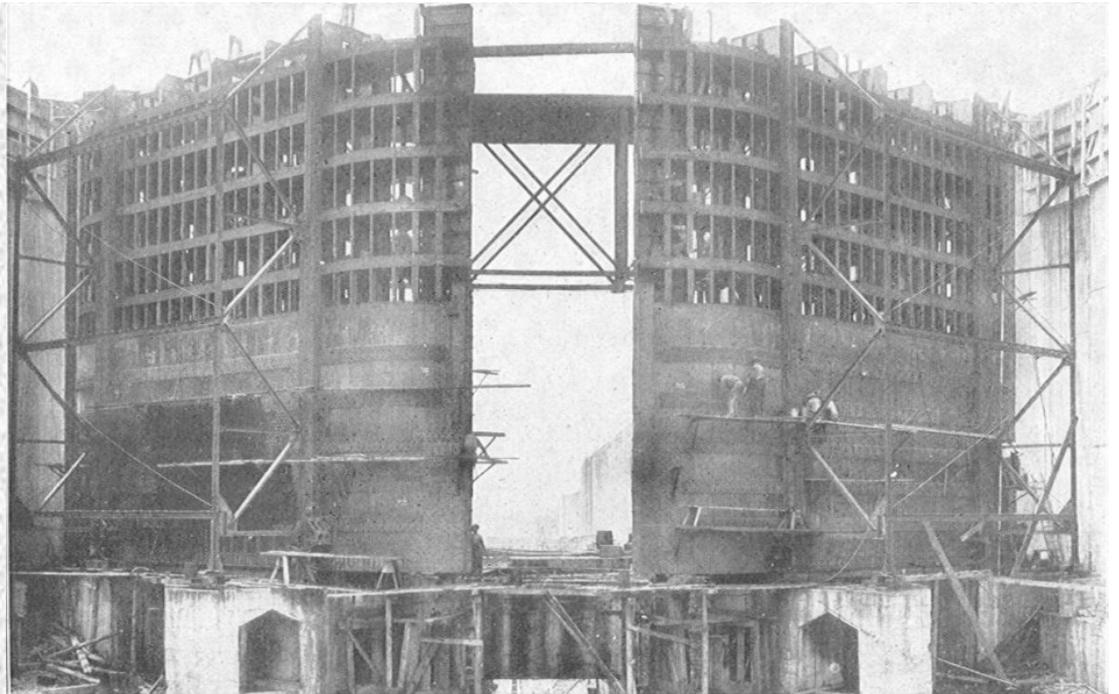
Here are the giant locks being built



33½-X-23, Pedro Miguel Locks. Final test of west emergency dam. Dam swung across
the locks. Photo taken by the author, April 17, 1913

Photo from the Canal Zone Brats www.czbrats.com

Here are the
giant locks
being built



Photos Courtesy of
www.panamacanal.com

Challenges of Building the canal

Just like when the French had tried to build the canal, the builders of the canal had to figure out how to cut a 51 mile path through a tropical jungle and an area of mountains!



Image Courtesy of:

<http://www.astrosurf.org/lombry/Documents/terre-panama-canal-panama-srtm.jpg>

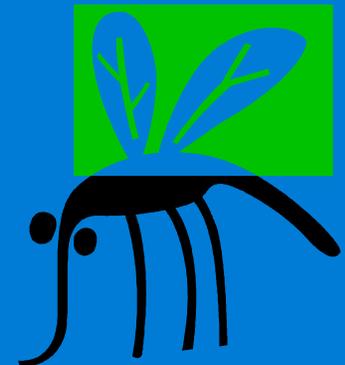
Working Conditions

Imagine working on the Panama Canal. By noon the temperature is about 100 degrees. It's humid-so humid that after it rains steam rises from the ground and your clothes become soaking wet. There is no shade, no air-conditioning, and no place to get cool.



Working Conditions

The average yearly rainfall is about 80 inches. Flooding makes the ground like pudding, and you can sink up to your knees in mud. Tropical diseases, such as yellow fever and malaria are spread easily by mosquitoes.



Working Conditions

A tropical jungle may be a fascinating place for scientists to work, but for workers trying to build a canal it's a nightmare. Imagine trying to dig out tons of dirt in a jungle like this. And there was no insect repellent to keep the bugs from biting.

Working conditions

As one worker said, "There was no shelter from the sun or the rain. There were no trees, and when the sun shines, you get it. When the rain falls you get it."

The building of the canal



Photo courtesy of:
www.canalmuseum.com

The building of the canal



Photo courtesy of:
www.canalmuseum.com

1914 The Canal Opens



Image Courtesy of:
<http://www.canalmuseum.com/photos/panamacanalphoto042.htm>

The Panama Canal Today

Today the canal is a busy place. Ships get stuck in traffic jams because there are so many of them and often have to wait up to 20 hours to go through the canal. Then the trip through the canal takes another eight hours.

The Panama Canal is an important landmark and is considered by some to be the 8th Wonder of the World.



Photo from the Canal Zone Brats www.czbrats.com