

# Corinth Canal

## Names (also known as)

Corinthian Canal.

## Location/Description



Corinth Canal (Greek: *Dhioryga tis Korinthou*) is a canal that connects the Gulf of Corinth with the Saronic Gulf in the Aegean Sea. It cuts through the narrow Isthmus of Corinth and separates the Peloponnese from the Greek mainland, arguably making the peninsula an island.

## Scriptural references

None, but Paul would have certainly travelled over this isthmus on his way from Athens to Corinth.

## Brief history

Several rulers of antiquity dreamed of digging a canal through the isthmus. The first to propose such an undertaking was the tyrant Periander in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BC. The project was abandoned and instead a simpler and cheaper overland portage road, named the Diolkos or stone carriageway was built. Ships could be towed from one side of the isthmus to the other. Remnants of the Diolkos can still be seen next to the modern canal

The philosopher Apollonius of Tyana prophesied that anyone who proposed to dig a Corinthian canal would be met with illness.

Three Roman rulers considered the idea but all suffered violent deaths.

Historian Suetonius wrote that Julius Caesar planned to dig a canal through the isthmus but was assassinated before he could begin the project. Caligula commissioned a study in 40 AD from Egyptian experts who claimed incorrectly that the Corinthian Gulf was higher than the Saronic Gulf. Caligula was also assassinated before making any progress.

Nero was the first to actually attempt to construct the canal. He personally dug and removed the first basket-load of soil in 67 AD. The project was again abandoned when he died shortly afterwards. Nero's workforce consisted of 6,000 Jewish prisoners of war. They dug a distance of 700 metres (a tenth of the total distance across the isthmus).

The Venetians also considered it in 1687 after their conquest of the Peloponnese but likewise did not initiate a project.

Interest was raised with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. After several projects ended in bankruptcy, a contract was awarded to the *Soci t  Internationale du Canal Maritime de Corinthe* in 1881 to construct the canal and operate it for the next 99 years. Work began the next year and was finally completed 11 years later in 1893.



The Corinth Canal seen from the air

## Dimensions

The canal is a single channel 8 metres deep, excavated at sea level (thus requiring no locks), measuring 6,343 metres long by 24.6 metres wide at the top and 21.3 metres wide at the

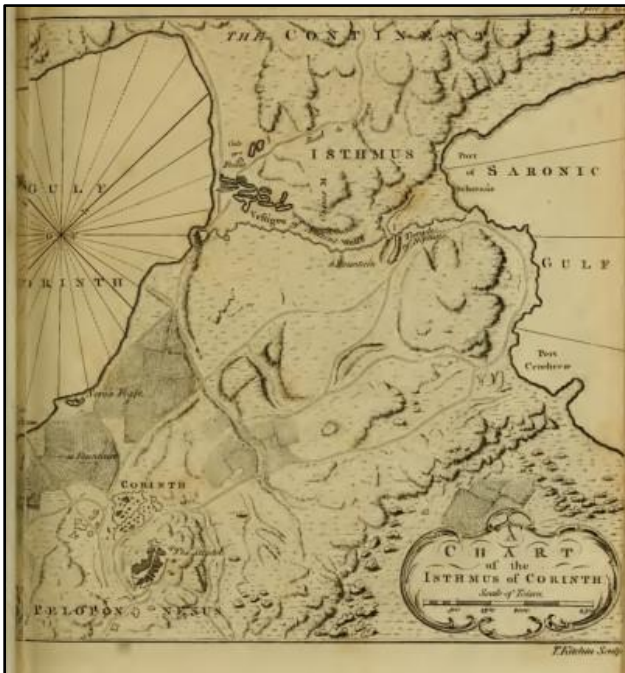
bottom. The rock walls, which rise 90 metres above sea level, are near-vertical 80° angle.

In 1988 submersible bridges were installed at each end of the canal for vehicle traffic.



The inauguration of the Corinth Canal (1893)

Although the canal saves the 700 km journey around the Peloponnese, it is too narrow for modern ocean freighters. Ships can only pass through the canal one convoy at a time on a one-way system. Larger ships have to be towed by tugs. Around 11,000 ships per year use the canal.



Venetian map of the Isthmus of 1697 AD



Sector A, once identified with the “diolkos” with beach rock



(Compilers – John and Cyndy Tierney)