

American Canal Society Canal Index

CANAL Nicaragua Canal	STATUS Abandoned Unfinished	ACS HAER																															
STATE/PROVINCE: Nicaragua, Central America	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th rowspan="2" style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">ENLARGEMENTS</th> <th rowspan="2">DATES IN USE</th> <th colspan="2">LENGTH</th> <th rowspan="2">LIFT LOCKS No./ SIZE</th> </tr> <tr> <th>CANAL</th> <th>SLACKWATER TOTAL</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>None</td> <td>56</td> <td>126</td> <td>181</td> <td>20/</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		ENLARGEMENTS	DATES IN USE	LENGTH		LIFT LOCKS No./ SIZE	CANAL	SLACKWATER TOTAL	1	None	56	126	181	20/	2						3						4					
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1	None	56	126	181	20/																												
2																																	
3																																	
4																																	
COUNTIES:																																	
LOCATION (Endpoints of Canal): Mouth of San Juan on the Atlantic Brito (?) on the Pacific																																	
TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS: National Ocean Survey (US) Tactical Pilotage Chart K-25 C																																	
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: <p>Alexander von Humbolt's preferred canal route across Central America, based on information available by 1811, was a Nicaraguan Canal similar to Telford's Caledonian Canal, with Lake Nicaragua as the summit water supply. Ever since that time (1811) the Nicaraguan route has been a serious prospect, and was for many years advocated as the "American Canal" route in contrast to the "French Canal" route across Panama. As envisioned in the 1870's, the canal was to consist of 70 miles of lock and dam navigation up the San Juan River from the Atlantic; then a 40 mile canal with 10 locks up to Lake Nicaragua; 56 miles of lake navigation; then a 16-mile canal with 10 locks down to the Pacific. In 1890, by the time work had ceased on the French Canal (1881-1889) an American company, the Maritime Canal Co. (with the Nicaragua Canal Construction Co.) actually began dredging at both ends of the route. However, the company was under-funded and collapsed with the stock market in 1893. McCullough mentions on p. 263 that before the company went bankrupt it "had built a magnificent scale model of its canal, complete with running water and tiny locks that actually worked, and this had been exhibited in Washington and a dozen other cities." This model would be worth tracking down!</p> <p>The "American Route" was at first preferred by Roosevelt when it came time for the U.S. to begin its own national project, but at length the Panama route won, in part because its proponents "proved" that the Nicaragua Canal would be plagued by volcanoes because Nicaraguan stamps tended to feature them; each Senator about to vote on the issue was sent a stamp (apparently the 1900 1c, Scott #121) showing Mt. Momotombo erupting. It was not mentioned that the nearest volcano which had been at all active since the arrival of the Spanish, was at least 13 miles from the canal line! Earthquakes will, however, be a factor to consider in the design of the Nicaragua Canal; the issue is not dead yet.</p> <p>Do any signs remain of this unfinished project?</p>																																	
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NAMES & ADDRESSES OF GROUPS CONCERNED WITH CANALS PRESERVATION/RESTORATION:																																	
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: <p><u>The Path Between the Seas</u> by David McCullough (Simon & Schuster, 1977) For details see <u>The Inter-Oceanic Canal of Nicaragua</u> by the Nicaragua Canal Construction Co., N.Y. Printing Co., N.Y., 1892. UCLA # TC/784/N51i</p>																																	
UNPUBLISHED RECORDS, PHOTOS, DRAWINGS (CEHR, HAER, HABS, Local or Regional Historical Societies, Libraries, etc.):																																	
EXISTING OR RECOMMENDED LANDMARK STATUS (CEHR, National Register, etc.):																																	
REPORTER'S NAME & ADDRESS: W.E. Trout, III, 1932 Cinco Robles Drive, Duarte, CA 91010		DATE: 20 Sept 81																															
RETURN TO: CANAL INDEX COMMITTEE, c/o P.H. STOTT, HAINES ROAD, MOUNT KISCO, NY 10549																																	