

CANAL Grant's Canals and Bayou Navigations		STATUS Abandoned			ACSLA		
STATE/PROVINCE: Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi,		HAER					
COUNTIES: & Missouri		DATES IN USE			LENGTH CANAL SLACKWATER TOTAL	LIFT LOCKS No./ SIZE	
LOCATION (Endpoints of Canal): See text		ENLARGEMENTS	1	1862	1 1/2 mi.	0 mi.	Grant's C., Vicksbg.
TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS: See text			2	1863	1	140	" , L. Prov.
			3	1863	1/2?	c.50	Duckport C.
			4	1863	.02?	c.700	Yazoo Pass Levee

During the War of Northern Aggression, Grant's army made a number of attempts to bypass or outflank the guns at Vicksburg, "The Gibraltar of the Confederacy," which had succeeded in bottling up all river traffic. Some of these attempts involved canals, to cut across river bends or give access to the swampy bayous and streams on both sides of the Mississippi. Most were unsuccessful but kept the army busy.

The most famous of these was GRANT'S CANAL, an attempt to make a cut-off across De Soto Peninsula opposite Vicksburg, a bend 10 miles around but only 1 1/2 miles across. This was one of Lincoln's favorite projects, which would have allowed the Union gunboats and shipping to bypass Vicksburg, out of range of the guns. The canal was first attempted in 1862 by Gen. Thomas Williams and 1200 slaves who managed to dig a ditch 18' wide and 13' deep, but the river level kept going down and never entered the cut to scour out a proper channel. Six months later Grant took it up again, re-excavating the canal, but this time high water impeded the work by breaking through the coffer dams, and Confederate gunfire drove off the dredges.

Ironically, D.F. Bastian, in "Hydraulic Analysis of Grant's Canal" (THE MILITARY ENGINEER, July-August 1974), has calculated that if Grant had only removed the coffer dam at

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY:

From THE AMERICAN CANAL GUIDE Part 3, pp.3-4 (1979).
See VICKSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK, by W.C. Everhart, NPS booklet (USGPO # 0-487-145) and the Mississippi Book of Charts.
See also OF MEN AND RIVERS by Dr. Gary B. Mills (Vicksburg Dist.) and other references in the American Canal Guide.

UNPUBLISHED RECORDS, PHOTOS, DRAWINGS (CEHR, HAER, HABS, Local or Regional Historical Societies
With acknowledgements to John W. Anderson of the Vicksburg District, and Giles Evans, Jr., Canal Authority of the State of Florida.

EXISTING OR RECOMMENDED LANDMARK STATUS (CEHR, National Register, etc.):
Yazoo Pass Levee cut is on the Register;
Grant's Canal (Vicksburg) remains should be.

the lower end of the canal, the river would probably have scoured it out successfully. It is curious that only 13 years later in 1876 the river made its own cut through the peninsula a mile east of the canal. Known as the CENTENNIAL CUT, it put Vicksburg on a backwater now supplied by the Yazoo River through the YAZOO DIVERSION CANAL (1903). Some evidence of Grant's Canal still remains; it is crossed by US 80, 1 1/2 miles W of the Mississippi crossing. UTM: 15.694520.3577700, Vicksburg West MS-LA.

Another canal designed to bypass Vicksburg was the LAKE PROVIDENCE CANAL, 50 miles above Vicksburg at mile 487.3, between the river and Lake Providence in Arkansas. Constructed in 1863, it was intended to provide access to the Tensas River and Baxter Bayou so boats could make a 140-mile detour around Vicksburg, returning to the Mississippi near St. Joseph LA, or below. The canal was finished but before the rest of the route had been cleared for navigation, the project was abandoned. The last remnants of the canal were covered by the Mississippi River Levee in 1953 but there is a marker on US 80 in Lake Providence (Lake Providence LA-MS quad.).

The DUCKPORT CANAL was also designed to reach the Tensas River, to provide a shorter bypass around Vicksburg from mile 445.7 to a point about 20 miles below the city. It was actually completed, in 1863, and several boats navigated the entire route but the river began to fall leaving others stranded before the route was abandoned.

Another cut was through the YAZOO PASS LEVEE, 220 miles above Vicksburg at mile 658.0 opposite Helena, Arkansas. This 1863 attempt to take the Vicksburg defenses from the rear via the Coldwater, Tallahatchee and Yazoo rivers was eventually driven back by the Confederates. MS 1 crosses the pass at the site of Grant's cut, now on the National Register of Historic Places. UTM: 15.730500.3813470, Lula MS.

There were at least two other military canals across Mississippi river bends. The NAPOLEON CUT-OFF was more successful than Grant's Canal, cutting through a narrow peninsula near the mouth of the Arkansas River at what is now mile 584.5. Completed in 1863, the military objective of eliminating sniping from the neck was accomplished, but unfortunately the cut aimed the Mississippi at the town of Napoleon, Arkansas, which was gradually washed away and by 1882 was no longer shown on river maps. Mark Twain's story in Chapter 31 of LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI revolves around the unexpected fate of the town of Napoleon.

Another cut-off, across DONALDSON POINT, Missouri, at mile 904.5 was dug in 1862 to bypass Confederate fortifications on Island No. 10, but it was too shallow and narrow for navigation, and was completely blocked off when the Confederates scuttled one of their own steamers across the lower end.

It is not clear which, if any, of these canals was the "secret canal" mentioned by Harnett Kane in SPIES FOR THE BLUE AND GRAY. When a Yankee spy showed his superior a newspaper article describing the secret canal plans in detail, the project was dropped!

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