

**Volume 18**

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**Suez Canal - I**

**Lead: In 1869 French engineers and Egyptian laborers completed work eliminating one of the world's two great blocks to navigation. They opened the canal at Suez.**

**Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Until the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there were two significant places in the world where the passage of oceangoing commerce and transportation were impeded by relatively short land bridges. The Isthmus of Panama fell before the assaults of U.S. doctors and engineers**

**in 1914. Creating a passage between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea was much longer in coming. It had attracted the attention of rulers such as Ramesses II of the 12<sup>th</sup> Egyptian dynasty in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BCE and Persian conqueror Darius I. They built narrow canals from the Nile to the Red Sea but these soon fell into disuse.**

**Not until the arrival of the forces of Napoleon Bonaparte in his ill-fated Egyptian campaign in the late 1700s did world attention once again begin focusing on eliminating this impediment to commerce. Napoleon's engineers envisioned a north-south sea-level canal connecting the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.**

**Unfortunately, using imprecise readings, they miscalculated that the Red Sea was 10 meters or 33 feet higher in elevation than the Mediterranean. This fatal conclusion doomed any attempt to build a canal for several decades. In 1830 British Captain Francis Rawdon Chesney, on an inspection tour of Egypt, discovered that the French had reached the wrong conclusion and that, in fact, the two bodies of water were at precisely the same elevation. His report to his superiors in London went exactly nowhere. Next time: Enter the Great Entrepreneur.**

**At the University of Richmond's School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I'm Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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