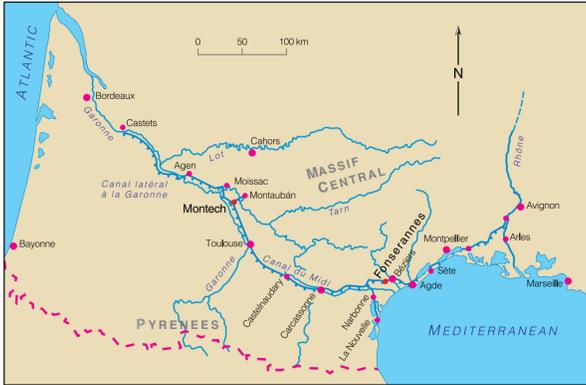


CANAL DU MIDI



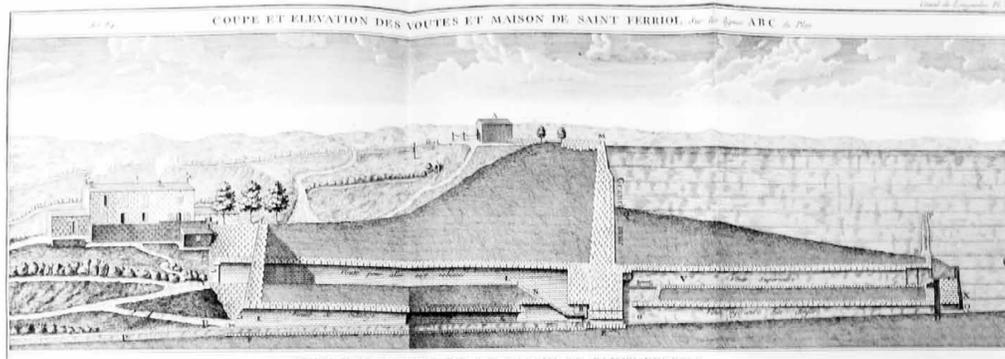
The Canal du Midi is one of the most important engineering achievements of the modern age, bringing together the technology that led to the Industrial Revolution. It represents a significant period in European history, when water transport and hydraulic civil engineering was established. It combines technological innovation with a concern for high aesthetic architectural and landscape design that has few parallels.

Investigation into canals joining the major rivers began in the early 16th century, when François I brought Leonardo da



The reservoir at St Ferrol was the first such structure on a canal and is an important landmark in their development. By freeing canals from seasonal water supply variations, such reservoirs made the development of canals possible in places where water supply was restricted. Almost all English canals rely entirely upon reservoirs for their water.

Below: There was an extensive system of channels to feed water from the St Ferrol reservoir to the summit of the canal.



Above: The l'Orbiel aqueduct was built by the famous French engineer, Vauban, circa 1686. The Duke of Bridgewater visited the canal in 1752, and Barton Aqueduct on his canal is probably based on those on the Canal du Midi.

Vinci with him on his return to France. One of their projects envisaged linking the Garonne and the Aude rivers, and thus the Mediterranean with the Atlantic.

The canal age began with the Canal de Briare, joining the Loire and the Seine, which was completed in 1642. Its success renewed interest in the Mediterranean-Atlantic link and a number of projects were put forward. It became a reality thanks to a very favourable political climate in France at the time, and also to Pierre-Paul Riquet, who began work on the project in 1654. He considered a number of possible routes to link the Garonne with the Aude and to surmount the watershed between the two rivers at Naurouze. They presented problems for water supply, so he enlisted the aid of local experts: Pierre Campmas, responsible for the water supply of Revel, at the foot of the Montagne-Noire massif, Francois Andreossy, a civil engineer specializing in hydraulic projects, and Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who was tireless in his efforts to encourage the creation of industries in France.

Colbert quickly realized the importance of the proposed canal, and he gave his full support to Riquet's project. A Royal Edict for the construction of the canal was issued in October 1666 and letters-patent were granted to Riquet; however, this authorized him to construct only the western section, between

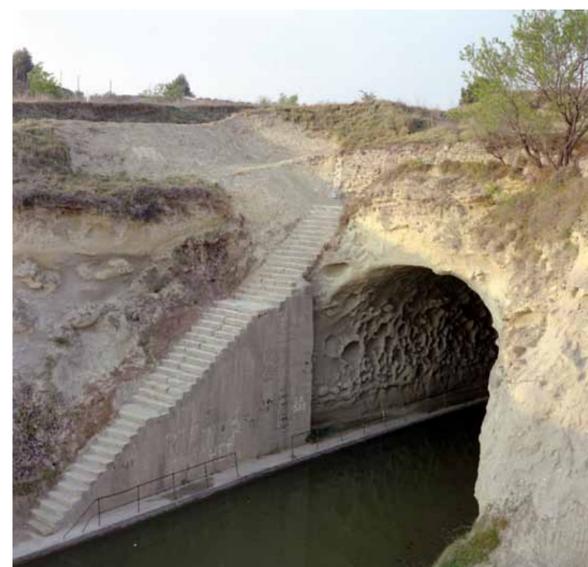
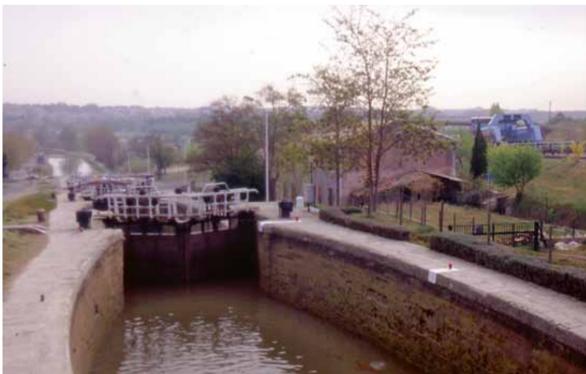


the Garonne at Toulouse and the Aude at Trèbes. He was authorized to construct the second section, between Trèbes and Sète on the Mediterranean coast, in 1669.

The project was largely completed by the time Riquet died in 1681. Following complaints about the flooding of agricultural land, the military architect Vauban was called in; as a result of his report a number of aqueducts were built and the Saint-Ferréol dam was raised in height. The final elements of the entire system were completed in 1694.

The waterway is 360 km long, running from Toulouse to the Étang de Thau on the Mediterranean coast at Marseillan; there is a branch between Moussan and Port-la-Nouvelle, incorporating part of the earlier Canal de la Robine. The waters of the Montagne-Noire are brought to the canal through two channels that join together and flow into the Canal at Naurouze. The Canal de Saint-Pierre is the link between the main canal and the Garonne at Toulouse. Finally, there is a short section joining the Hérault River to the round lock at Agde. There are 328 structures - locks, aqueducts, bridges, spillways, tunnels, etc. Its most noteworthy feature is the Saint-Ferréol dam on the Laudot River in the Montagne-Noire region. This was the greatest civil engineering work of its time.

Riquet was conscious that he was creating a symbol of the power of 17th-century France as well as a functional waterway. The bridges, the locks and their associated structures, and the tunnel entrances were therefore designed with monumental dignity and simplicity. He was also very conscious of the impact of his work on the landscape, and took great pains to ensure that it was suitably framed by trees and plantations that harmonized with the landscape through which it passed.



Above: The tunnel at Malpas was another first on the canal, and was the forerunner of the many built later. France and England were the main locations for canal tunnels.



Left top: The eight-rise locks at Béziers were bypassed by an incline, on the right of the photo. Left lower: The locks survive intact, with some having water mills alongside.

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