



Bruce Trail
CONSERVANCY
NIAGARA CLUB

Some Interesting Welland Canals Background Information

Before the canals were built, the major obstacle to transport goods was Niagara Falls and the rapids of the Niagara River. Goods had to be portaged from Queenston to Chippawa Creek.

First Welland Canal 1824-1845

- began on Nov. 30, 1824 in Allanburg
- William Hamilton Merritt was the businessman who organized the funding and began construction
- took 5 years to build
- tried to use natural waterways as much as possible
- ships entered the canal at Port Dalhousie
- first terminated at Port Robinson, then ships followed the Welland River to Chippawa, then along the upper Niagara River to Lake Erie
- when completed in 1833, canal was 44 km long
- 40 wooden locks: 33.5m long, 6.7m wide, 2.4 m deep
- very labour intensives because horses and oxen were used to tow the ships to the next lock
- total cost of canal: 8 million dollars
- 1841: because it was costly to repair the wooden locks, and the tolls were insufficient, the Government of Upper Canada bought Merritt's company
- not much remains of the first canal

Second Welland Canal: 1845-1915

- basically the same route as the 1st canal
- 27 locks, made of masonry, not wood

- locks were 45.7m long, 8.1m wide, 2.7m deep
- much of the 2nd canal can be seen along the Merritt Trail

Third Welland Canal: 1881-1932

- followed the same route from Port Colborne to 5 km above the escarpment, then followed a fairly straight line to Port Dalhousie
- 26 locks of stone: 82.3 m long, 13.7m wide, 4.3m deep
- partially opened in 1881, fully opened in 1887 (when depth was consistent)
- 1889: 2000 ships went through
- special ships called **canalers** were built for the canal: machinery at the stern and pilot bridge at the bow
- locks 13-16 can be seen along the trail near the golf course at Woodend

Fourth Welland Canal: 1932 -present

- began in 1913 but was interrupted by WW1, restarted in 1919
- canal took a more direct route
- Port Weller became the start point
- opened Aug 6, 1932
- length of canal: 43.4km
- 8 locks: 261.8 m long, 24.4m wide, 8.2m deep
- lock takes 11 minutes to fill
- canal can accommodate 32 vessels/day
- economic impact of Niagara Region is \$222million/yr
- one of biggest employers in Niagara Region