

Canal Zone

Canal Zone, also called Panama Canal Zone,



Cargo ship on Gatun Lake, part of the Panama Canal, in the historic Canal Zone, Panama.

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historic administrative entity in Panama over which the United States exercised jurisdictional rights from 1903 to 1979. It was a strip of land 10 miles (16 km) wide along the Panama Canal, extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean and bisecting the Isthmus of Panama. It covered 553 square miles (1,432 square km), of which about one-third was water (principally Gatun Lake). The Canal Zone had two administrative subdivisions, the Balboa (Pacific) and Cristobal (Atlantic) districts. Balboa Heights was the administrative headquarters for both the Canal Zone government and the Panama Canal Company.

The Canal Zone came into being on May 4, 1904 (“Acquisition Day”), under the terms of the Hay–Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1903 by which Panama granted to the United States, in return for annual payments, the sole right to operate and control the canal and about 5 miles (8 km) of land on each side. The canal was constructed between 1904 and 1914. As reorganized in 1951, the administration of the canal and adjoining land was entrusted to two closely related U.S. agencies, the Panama Canal Company (responsible for operating the canal itself) and the Canal Zone government (responsible for civil rule in the zone). The governor of the Canal Zone, appointed by the president of the United States and supervised by the secretary of the army, was ex officio president and director of the Panama Canal Company.

The zone was abolished on Oct. 1, 1979, with the return to Panama of direct civil control under a treaty signed in 1977. A joint U.S.-Panamanian commission operated the canal until the end of 1999, when Panama assumed full control.

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<<https://www.britannica.com/place/Canal-Zone>>.

