

The Main-Danube Canal

The groundbreaking ceremony in 1960 kicked off one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects of the post-war period. A true mammoth project, the Main-Danube Canal crosses through Europe and connects the North Sea to the Black Sea.

The unique opportunities Bavaria offers for European shipping are obvious. Nowhere else are the great European river systems of Rhine, Main, and Danube as close as here. Bavaria was therefore the predestined location for connecting the waterways in order to create a continuous shipping lane through Europe.

This had been known for a fact long before 1960. Emperor Charlemagne had already given orders to build the first canal, the Fossa Carolina, in the 8th century. It remains disputed to this day whether the project was a success. Remnants of it can still be seen near Treuchtlingen.

The canal building project of King Ludwig the First of Bavaria in the mid-19th century was at any rate more successful. The Ludwig Canal served as a waterway for over one hundred years. With the advances in infrastructure technologies, however, the old canal soon proved increasingly inadequate. New thoughts and plans were suggested. According to plans dating back to before World War Two, a new canal was to be wider, deeper, and more efficient than its predecessor. The outbreak of the war, however, put a complete hold on these plans.

The construction of today's Main-Danube Canal did not begin before June 1960. Like Ludwig's old canal, this new one also had to cross the major European watershed. Thanks to modern technology, though, only 16 locks, compared to formerly 100, were needed to overcome the altitude difference of more than 67 meters downstream. Over long stretches, the canal uses the riverbeds of the Pegnitz in the north and the Altmühl in the south along its course.

The new canal was officially inaugurated and put into operation along its entire length after 32 years of construction in September 1992. It now crosses Bavaria over a length of 170 km, allowing even large cargo and cruise ships to pass through the Free State to their destinations on the Lower Rhine or in the Balkans. Unlike several other canals, it blends in well with the landscape in many places. For one, it runs in the ancient stream valley of the Danube, and for another, land restoration measures were already integrated into construction planning.

A popular recreational area for locals and vacationers complete with trails for biking and hiking has meanwhile developed around the canal.