

Melbourne Observer Travellers' Good Buys

with David Ellis



Corinth Canal short cut took a little time

■ Hoodwinking those whose support they need to keep them in power has been around since the politicians first breathed air.

Way back in 67AD when Emperor Nero sensed wealthy traders and ship-owners were getting a bit toey, he made a grand promise with a flair of showmanship that would leave polities of today floundering.

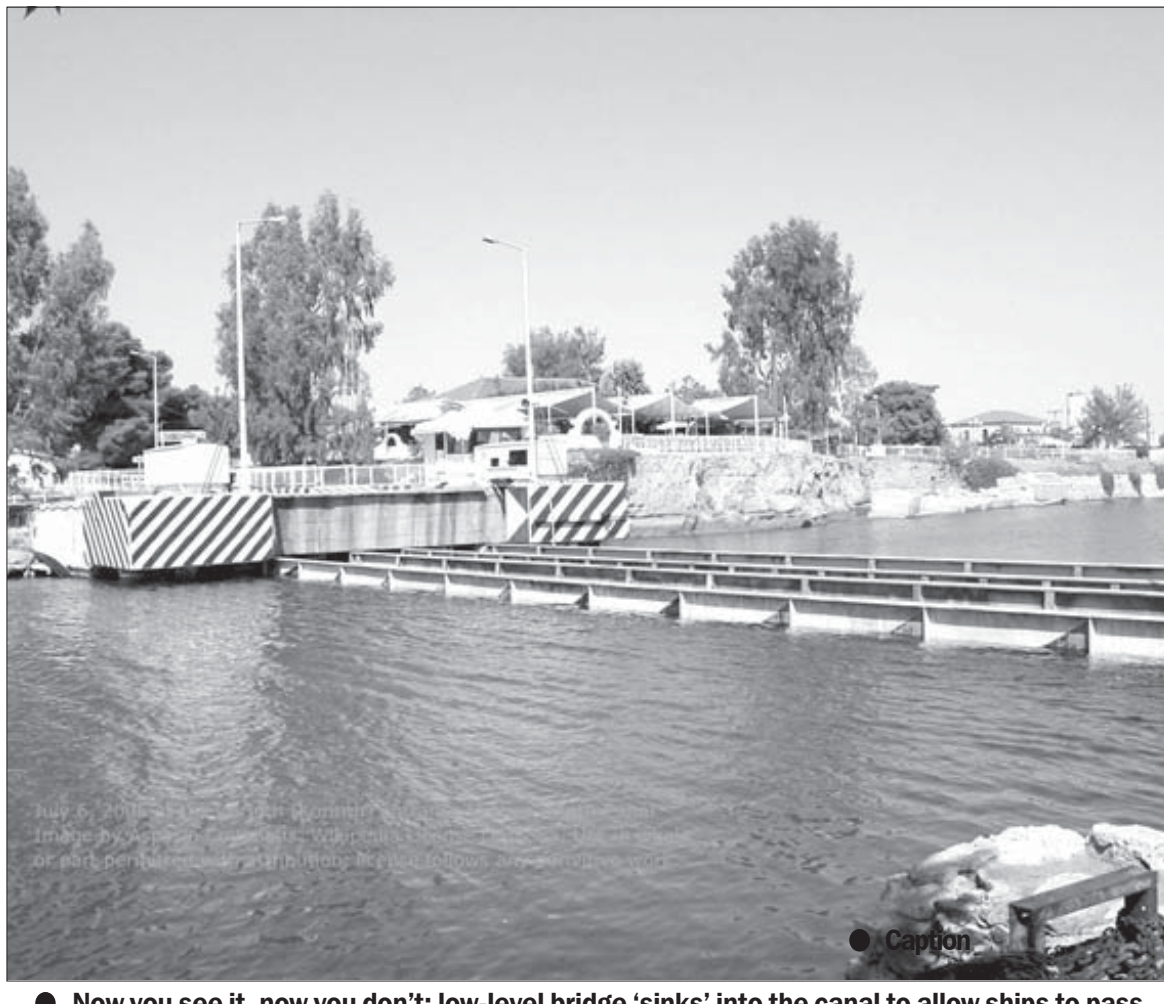
The fact that fulfilment of that promise would not come about until hundreds of years later – in 1893 – was neither here nor there.

From as early as 700BC, Mediterranean traders cursed an area of Greece known as the Peloponnese, a peninsula in the south of the country's mainland that divided the Adriatic Sea from the Aegean.

For while the 16,000 square kilometre peninsula was one of the country's richest and most valuable agricultural areas, it added 300kms – and often days sailing around the infamously unpredictable Cape Maleas – to the lucrative trade routes between the two Seas.

Many early rulers thought about digging a canal across the peninsula, but none was quite game enough to try it, for two reasons: they believed that Poseidon, the God of the Sea, opposed the joining of the two Seas, and if they dug the canal, Poseidon would allow the "higher" Adriatic to rush through like water down a plug-hole, and flood the "lower" Aegean.

Periander, the Tyrant of Corinth, in 602BC temporarily got around the



● Now you see it, now you don't: low-level bridge 'sinks' into the canal to allow ships to pass

problem with a stone roadway, having ships hauled out of the Adriatic or Aegean, placed on wheeled carts and pulled by horses and slaves across the 6km- wide peninsula.

Because of their weight, cargoes were removed and carried separately, and the ships re-loaded and re-launched into the sea on the other side of the Peloponnese. It ended-up as time-consuming and costly as sailing around the Peninsula.

So in 67AD Emperor Nero, with those traders and shipowners making clamouring sounds about his leadership, decided on a grand canal across the Peloponnese Peninsula.

But he didn't announce it with just a simple court statement and the equivalent of today's Press Release. Rather he waited for the approaching Isthmian Games when he knew he would have an audience of thousands – including his business protagonists.

The Games were held both in the year before and the year after the Olympics, and with a massive audience Nero not only declared that he would have a canal cut across the Peloponnese Peninsula – with great ceremony he produced a golden spade, led his noblemen and business moguls to the site of his would-be canal, and dug the first sods of soil himself.

And not content with that, he then loaded this spoil into wicker baskets which he carried on his back and dumped with equal ceremony before no less than 6000 slaves he'd recruited to dig the canal.

But that was as far as it got: although his plans were for a canal 6.3km long, 25m wide and with an 8m depth of water, it also meant first creating a cutting up to 80m deep just to get down to the water-level of what would be his actual canal.

And to complicate matters, three-months later Nero – whose increasingly-odd behaviour included giving three-hour performances on his lyre to audiences in theatres whose doors were locked so no-one could leave before he'd finished – committed suicide. What little work was done on the canal was abandoned.

It took centuries for the Greek government to get serious again, and finally in 1890 construction began on a canal at a place called the Isthmus of Corinth.

It took three years, including building two road bridges and a rail bridge across the canal, and remarkably at each end, roads on pontoons that "sank" into trenches dug a further several metres into the bed of the canal to allow ships to pass over them.

Today the narrow and shallow Corinth Canal is still a vital link for smaller cargo vessels, boutique-sized cruise ships and pleasure boats seeking a short-cut between the Adriatic and Aegean Seas.

The Peloponnese Peninsula is a taste of true Greece, with aqua-blue waters lapping sunny beaches, patchworks of olive groves, vineyards and citrus orchards, ancient towns, monasteries, palaces, ruined castles and forts.

For information about holidaying on the Peloponnese phone Travel Creations 1300 550 727... they know all about it as the owner's family hails from there!

- David Ellis

Melbourne Observer Wines & Liqueurs

with David Ellis



Owners bucket their own wine

■ The Adelaide Hills' Longview Vineyard has come a long way since its first vintage when the owner's realised the only thing they had to store the fruit from that initial crop, was some old red buckets from the property's earlier dairy farm days.

But it proved a good omen and ever since they've named their best premium wines Red Bucket, a label that today has earned itself a reputation for quality, reliability and, at \$15.99, certainly value for money.

A just-released Longview Red Bucket Semillon Sauvignon Blanc 2009 is a crisp, clean and refreshing wine, and a perfect match with seafoods; and interestingly owners Mark and Peter Saturno have plenty of other makers both in and outside the Adelaide Hills knocking on their door for a share of their premium fruit.

■ FOOTNOTE: QANTAS has named its latest A330-200 aircraft The Clare Valley after the South Australian region that produces just 1.5% of Australia's wine, but an amazing 20% of our Rieslings. "Its great recognition for the Valley, and what can justifiably claim to be Australia's 'Riesling capital'," said Chairman of Clare Valley Winemakers Incorporated, Peter Barry.



One For Lunch

■ NSW's Hilltops Region near Canberra has fast-gained a reputation for really excellent wines, and for Barwang Wines it's their favoured region for sourcing fruit for their premium reds.

A high-altitude region with a slightly warmer climate than Canberra, it has almost consistently text-book growing conditions and mineral-rich soils. Barwang's 2008 Hilltops Shiraz (\$19.99) reflects all the best of the region with lovely rhubarb and black cherry flavours coupled with varietal Shiraz spice; enjoy with beef medallions and buttery mashed potatoes.

Pictured

■ Buckets of flavour for enjoy with seafoods

■ Ideal partner with beef medallions and buttery mashed potatoes

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