



Through the Panama Canal, Atlantic to Pacific

The Panama Canal is essential to the United States. About 12,000 ships a year pass through the canal, 70 percent of them going to or from U.S. ports.

A ship bound from New York to San Francisco, for example, enters the canal from the Caribbean Sea. The ship remains at sea level for the first few miles. Then it comes to a steplike series of three chambers called locks—the Gatun Locks. Each falls with water after the vessel enters, raising it about 28 feet. The three locks lift the ship to the level of Gatun Lake, formed by Gatun Dam. (It takes 26 million gallons of water from Gatun Lake to fill each lock. The lake does not run dry, however,

because the region receives substantial rainfall and Madden Lake.)

The ship crosses Gatun Lake and goes through the Gaillard Cut, a narrow passage cut through the hills. Then the ship is taken into the Pedro Miguel Locks and is lowered about 31 feet to Miraflores Lake. At the other side of the lake, the ship enters the two Miraflores Locks. As the water is released for each, the ship is lowered an additional 27 feet. At sea level again, the ship passes to the Bay of Panama just a few miles away. The eight-hour passage through the Panama Canal has saved nearly 8,000 miles of travel.

Geography of the Panama Canal

GEOGRAPHY APPLICATION: PLACE

Directions: Read the paragraphs below and study the map carefully. Then answer the questions that follow.

Name _____

Date _____