



International Boundary Study

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France – Italy Boundary

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FRANCE - ITALY BOUNDARY

I. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Since the second century B.C. the north - south chain of the high Alps between the Mt. Blanc area and the Mediterranean have served as a "natural frontier." In ancient times this physical barrier was considered as nearly impassable. Even in modern times accessibility to remote cul de sac type of high valleys may be critical if not in conformity with the international boundary between France and Italy.

Although the crest of the Alps was generally accepted as a boundary, many problems continued to arise in response to the placement and dominance of military installations; to human occupation of the habitable land; and to routes across (or through) the mountain barrier or to remote settlements within it. Treaties have all revolved around a boundary alignment which would withstand the pressures from east and west, advantage falling to the side with the greatest strength or most recent military victory. At times sovereignty of large blocs of territory was shifted across the Alps, in which cases the crest of the Alps was of less political importance, separating lower order administrative divisions rather than national entities.

II. TREATIES

Treaties instrumental in determining the present alignment of the France - Italy boundary go back to the Treaty of Turin in 1860 which ceded Savoy and Nice to France. The final rectification of major import followed World War II when France received several territorial concessions of note in the Italian Peace Treaty of 1947. Boundary changes taking place during the past century are presented chronologically:

A. 1860 - 61. Treaty of Turin

Under the terms of the Treaty of Turin (March 24, 1860) a mixed commission was charged with the establishment of a boundary between France and Italy which would be "fair" and "take into account the configuration of the Mountains and the requirements of defence." However, the subsequent convention of delimitation signed at Turin, March 7, 1861, created a boundary which in detail departed from the one originally projected. Some rectifications were made which favored Italy, the line having been shifted westward in places to follow artificial rather than natural features. As a result France was deprived of the heads of valleys in several places, as between the Col de Lunga and the Cime du Duable in what is now the northeastern part of the Department of Alpes-Maritimes.

B. 1861 to World War II

Only small rectifications in favor of France were made during this period, most significant of which were two at points where railroads crossed the boundary:

1. In 1874 in the Mont-Cenis tunnel near Modane
2. In 1930 on the Coni - Vintimille line (tracks destroyed during World War II)

Other rectifications were proposed by France, largely reverting to the line originally projected in the treaty of 1860, but they never materialized.

C. Italian Peace Treaty of 1947

At the conclusion of World War II France took the opportunity to modify the boundary with Italy in such a way that it would generally coincide with the watershed. The Italian Peace Treaty of 1947 afforded the occasion to incorporate the changes long desired by the French. Accordingly, there was a total of five areas, amounting to 267.7 square miles (693.2 square kilometers), transferred from Italy to France:

1. Little St. Bernard Pass, or Little St. Bernard
French: L'hospice du Petit Saint-Bernard
Area: 12 square miles (31 square kilometers)
Geographical Significance: New boundary follows watershed and leaves the hospice in French territory.
2. Mont Cenis Plateau, or Mt. Cenis
French: Plateau de Mont Cenis
Area: 31.8 square miles (82.4 square kilometers)
Geographical Significance: Inclusion in French territory of the Mt. Cenis Monastery and Little Mont Cenis Pass.
3. Mt. Thabor
French: Mont Thabor
Geographical Significance: France wished to obtain the small community of Bardonneche near the southern entrance of the Mont Cenis tunnel, but was awarded only the Mt. Thabor area and a small valley to the southeast.
4. Chaberton
French: Chaberton
Area: 6.6 square miles (17.1 square kilometers)
Geographical Significance: France wished to obtain the rail point of Oulx but was limited to a small area just north of the Mt. Genève Pass.
5. Tenda-Briga, or the Upper Valleys of the Tinée, Vésubie, and Roya
French: Tende-Brique, or Les Vallées supérieures de la Tinée, de la Vésubie, et de la Roya
Area: 209.9 square miles (543.6 square kilometers)
Geographical Significance: Gave to France the upper valleys of a number of south-flowing streams, also the towns of Tenda and Briga, associated with the

important Tenda Pass and tunnel on the Coni - Vintimille route.

D. 1948 - 19--

Following the Peace Treaty of 1947 France and Italy agreed to make several rectifications of the boundary for economic reasons, such as to restore pastures to a village or avoid separating a ski lift from a ski run. The resulting accord, however, was never ratified. The only change which actually transpired was in November 1948, amounting to a boundary shift of 200 meters to place in France a botanical institute and several historical monuments, including a Column of Jupiter, in the immediate area of Little St. Bernard Pass.

Since 1948 there have been no changes, and presumably there are no active disputes along the border, nor are there problems of international significance.

III. SEAWARD TERMINUS OF BOUNDARY

The map on the final page of this report shows the French - Italy boundary running north from the Mediterranean, giving the precise location of its seaward terminus. The illustration is taken from an Army Map Service reproduction of an Italian topographic sheet; Mòrtola Inferiore, Sheet 102 III NW, scale: 1:25,000.

For highway travel along the coast the customs are at the boundary. For rail travel, Vintimille, in Italy, serves as the junction of the French and Italian railroad systems.

IV. PEACE TREATY TEXT AND MAPS

The Italian Peace Treaty of 1947 includes a relatively detailed description of the France - Italy boundary. The following excerpt serves as an example:

The new frontier follows a line which leaves the present frontier at Cima de la Planette and, proceeding southwards, follows the ridge through points 2970, 3178, Rca. Bernaude (3228), points 2842, 2780, 2877, Pso. della Gallina (2671), points 2720, 2806, and Pta. Quattro Sorelle (2700).

Also in the document is an appendix of nineteen map sheets at a scale of 1:20,000 covering all of the boundary modifications involved in the 1947 peace treaty. Fifteen of the sheets are taken from the work of the Institut Géographique National in Paris, and four sheets from Italian sources: Identification of the individual sheets are as follows:

Briançon, Nos. 3 - 4
Lanslebourg, Nos. 5 - 6
" Nos. 7 - 8

Les Trois Ponts, Nos. 5 - 6
 Menton, Nos. 3 - 4
 Mont d'Ambin, Nos. 1 - 2
 Nevache, Nos. 1 - 2
 " Nos. 5 - 6
 " Nos. 7 - 8
 Pointe de Lugo, Nos. 1 - 2
 " " " Nos. 5 - 6
 St. Etienne-de-Tinée, Nos. 3 - 4
 " " " " Nos. 7 - 8
 Ste. Foy Tarentaise, Nos. 1 - 2
 San Remo, Nos. 1 - 2
 Fo. 91 della Carta d'Italia: Certosa di Pesio
 " " " " " Tenda
 " " " " " Colle di Tenda
 " 90 " " " Madonna delle Finestre

NOTE: A set of these charts is held in the Office of the Geographer.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared in the Office of the Geographer, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16, Exhibit D.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Office of the Geographer, Room 7334, State Department Building, Department of State, Washington 25, D.C. (telephone: Code 182, extension 4276). Unfolded copies of map enclosures may be obtained from the Map Library, Code 182, extension 3322.