

The Arizona Desert Pipes

Contributed by Silverfish News Service
Sunday, 01 February 2009
Last Updated Tuesday, 03 February 2009

A few years ago, Silverfish Longboarding ran a series of articles by the OG Longboarder, Jeff Tatum, describing the giant waterpipes in San Diego County that were known to a few as "Nukeland"; in the late 1970's. Perhaps even more well known, if only because of greater coverage in Skateboarder Mag, were the truly legendary Desert Pipes in Arizona. Skater and historian "Ping" skated those pipes and maintains an online homage to them. Here's a taste of what he's got;

By Steve Pingleton (aka: Ping!) Five Reasons Why America is Great.

I was very fortunate as a young skateboarder to grow up in Phoenix, AZ back in the seventies and eighties, even tho' I didn't really know it at the time. We had an abundance of empty swimming pools, and the cops were usually pretty cool about "trespassing" and skateboarding back then. But from about 1977 to 1980, we found much bigger game, the Legendary Desert Pipes!

Everyone at school used to party in the desert out by Lake Pleasant, at a place we called "the flumes", a downhill canal with waterfalls and a bridge. Tubing, boating, and swimming in the desert -- a 4x4 party paradise! Well, they built a pipe factory nearby to dig a pipeline for the C.A.P. (Central Arizona Project) under the Agua Fria river. Once we had discovered that, it was on...

All photos take by skaters, for skaters...

It took us awhile to make the transition from pools to pipes, we used to carve in the downhills, until the pro's from California came out and we learned to kickturn in the sections. Once we learned to fakie and throw our weight to work the pipes higher, we were hooked.

I remember we wrote the company that makes the pipes called "Ameron", and told them we were writing a paper for school about the C.A.P. and asked for some maps. They sent us a big envelope full of maps, brochures, and even stickers! Over the years, we followed the progress of the C.A.P. as it was built, everywhere the canals hit a river (but rivers in AZ are usually dry!?!), they built the "siphons", huge underground pipelines. They built the pipe factories onsite, made the pipe sections, and even had a huge "Pipemobile" to move the sections to the downhill pipelines.

The Ameron Pipemobile.

In all, we skated about 5-6 different project sites between 1977 and 1980. There were a lot of amazing AZ locals, too many to mention here, plus lots of pro's visiting from California. It was pretty unreal for us to drive way out into the desert, only to arrive and find our idols from the early Skateboard magazines already skating.

The sessions I remember the most were the downhills. They were SO scary, mainly because of the 2-4 inch cracks between the sections. You had to hit the cracks on the walls when you were weightless, or die! I recall my friend Larry ripped the core out of a wheel once on a pipe crack. You went so fast and so high, you almost had to hold back, or fly out into space.

I remember one downhill sesh with Salba, Blackhart, and so many others, where Doug Schnieder was going so high, like 11 o'clock, and bailing no problem, with his wrist in a cast! Scary...

I remember another sesh, where we were on our way to L.A., stopped to skate the pipes, arrived at the downhill right about sunset. We started skating, it was getting dark, and one of my friends found a spotlight on one of the pipe machines inside the pipe, and turned it on! We kept skating until after dark, drinking beer, getting ready to camp. Up pulls a security guard.

Turns out, the guy's name was Jesse, he was cool (and bored), and invited us back to his guard shack for beers! He let us camp in the pipe, and said if the sheriff drives by, tell them we were his cousins...

Lots of cat and mouse games with security guards (few were cool, most were not) and local sheriffs. Too many stories, not enough time. For more old pipe skating war stories, see my website: <http://www.desertpipes.com> I've also got a DVD you can order with original footage of the big pipes, back in the day.

{youtube}EbPw5B5vjIA{/youtube}Check it out!

I live in Seattle, now. I moved up here 14 years ago, so I'm kind of a Pac NW local. I still skate 2-3 times a week or more, we have some incredible skateparks up here in the Pacific NW. I have two 18' ft. pipes within about 45 min. of my house now (Arlington and Kent, WA), so I can still get my past vert fix every week or so.

Last year, my friends in AZ took me downhill in Fountain Hills. I am a mainly a vert skater, and I have not done any "real" downhills in probably 30 years, but I am really hooked now! I just got a 44" longboard for Christmas, and I am totally loving it...

Old Skaters never die, they just get longer...

Skateboarding will take you places you never imagined going, having adventures you will never forget. Always remember your roots and style, much respect...

--Ping!

We are stoked to be able to bring you Ping's photos, stoke and story. Click on his link for more photos and to see information on his DVD. We've got a copy, and will review it in the coming weeks. Want to comment? Use the Desert Pipes Thread in the forums! Did this whet your appetite for more old-school fun? Ping's also got a new Video about the 1991 Love Bowls that you can jump to by clicking that. --'Fish