

Nukeland: the Ameron Pipes

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Another piece of coverage in the ongoing series of articles by Jeff "JT" Tatum. This time he sends us a scene report covering massive, legendary pipes that were skated by only a few and known at the time as "The Amerons" or, even better: "Nukeland Pipes". Take yourself back to the Cold War, to the second heyday of skateboarding... Some of these photos are being published for the very first time.

NUKELAND:The Ameron Pipes

In late 1978, on the way to Mission Viejo indoor skate park, Sonny Miller, Art (Rat) Mingeaud and I saw the Nukeland Pipes located just off the 5 Freeway, for the first time. We soon became locals of those pipes, located on the camp Pendleton Marine base. My dad was a retired Jarhead and I had a military ID which would get us onto the base. Then we would drive down a dirt road, cross a small creek and stash the car in some bushes, before sneaking up to the pipes.

The pipes were made by a pipe company called Ameron somewhere up in northern California. That's why they were called the "Amerons". They were located across from the San Onofre Nuclear power plant. This was on top secret government land which was highly illegal to trespass on. The area was guarded by jeep-driving jarheads, toting loaded M-16s.

We were chased around a few times, but hid in between the pipes and got away. We also got caught a few times and taken to the brig, where they would grill us for a few hours, scare the crap out of us then let us go. Not only was this the Cold War era, but also the time when anti-nuclear protestors were getting in trouble. We were just kids with skateboards so it all worked out. The area the pipes were kept became called "Nukeland" because of the San Onofre nuclear power plant they sat near. These pipes were built to run under the ocean from the power plant, in two rows. One row brought cold water into the plant and the other would send out the nuclear heated warm water. That's where they lay today: under water beneath a great surfing spot.

Before they came to be submerged, there were four rows of about 30 pipes, right next to each other with gaps from 10" to 10" between them. We would jump over these gaps from pipe to pipe, which we called "pipe transfers". We would do backside and frontside no-hand and grab-rail transfers from one end of these rows and back again, or just pick out one big ass gap and jump it over and over.

The Amerons were 24" in diameter and perfectly smooth inside. They were like riding perfect big waves and when you skated them it would make a trippy sound that would echo down the row of tubes. You could go oververt in these tubes... about 11:30 on a clock face. This was way hairy because, when you did, you'd catch a bit of air on the way down. Your wheels had to leave the surface 'til they found undervert again (it was death defying)!!

Only a few lucky skaters got to ride these pipes, because of the difficult access issues, but skaters like Dave Hackett and Tony Alva were known to have skated there. The original Down South Boys, Sunny Miller Art "Rat" Mingeaud and I were the most frequent locals at Nukeland. We must have skated those pipes 25 to 30 times! The pipes disappeared into the ocean on big pipe-mover trucks, one by one, over about a year and were all gone by late 1979. Never since, has there been a skate spot that slightly compares to the Nukeland pipes and there probably never will be. Film and photos of the Amerons are very rare and most valuable. Some of the best photos to exist of the Ameron Pipes are of me taken by photogs like Lance Smith, Sunny Miller, and Crazy Joel Broida. These are in my personal collection, and I'm posting them on Silverfish Longboarding for you to check out. One well known, killer pipe transfer photo at Nukeland appeared on a cover of Concrete Wave magazine, featuring Dave Hackett flying high across a sizeable gap. That's a great shot of a pipe transfer.

The Amerons were an experience I will never forget and put the last touches on my skate style and ability. I rode the Amerons on a homemade 41" deck and a few times on a 37" JT Flight Deck

In the coming weeks, Silverfish Longboarding.com will feature an exclusive gallery of JT's photographs, in larger sizes (and watermarked to keep what's his, his), including even more from Nukeland.

