

A CHUNK OF CARLSBAD HISTORY

**HOW A PIECE OF THE SKATEPARK MADE IT
INTO THE SMITHSONIAN.**

WRITTEN BY KEN KEBOW



It was just a chunk of concrete but the “wheels that rode over it” made it a piece of history.

On March 13, 1976, the Carlsbad Skatepark opened. Located at the east end of the Carlsbad Raceway just north of Palomar Airport Road and about five miles from Interstate 5, the Skatepark was rumored to be the first in the country, if not the world. Even the World Skateboard Championships were held there on April 10, 1977.

However, by 1979, three years after being built, the Carlsbad Skatepark was closed as the popularity of skateboarding began to fade. For the next 20 years, the Skatepark was invisible, covered under mounds of dirt.

One morning Mike Palm, lead singer and guitarist of the punk surf band Agent Orange and an avid skater, was driving by. He noticed fresh dirt had been moved around.

“Even though I had an appointment somewhere, I pulled off and I spent about 15 minutes down there digging around,” Palm says. “I found some small pieces and then I found another piece that had a flat spot on it. Just one piece. OK... I think that’s the one right there.”

Palm added, “Who knows whose wheels rolled across that little spot? I love it.”

He reached out to John O’Malley, one of the original designers of the Carlsbad Skatepark with Jack Graham, on Facebook.

Mike contacted me through Facebook years ago,” O’Malley recalls. “And he said, ‘Do you have any chunks of the Skatepark?’ I’m like, ‘No, nobody does.’ And he goes, ‘I do. After I heard they tore it up, I went down there and I took some chunks.’”

Thus began the incredible journey of a piece of O’Malley and Graham’s original Skatepark back into the hands of one of its creators. “That chunk of concrete was hand-carried across the United States by a punk rock band and delivered to me,” O’Malley says.

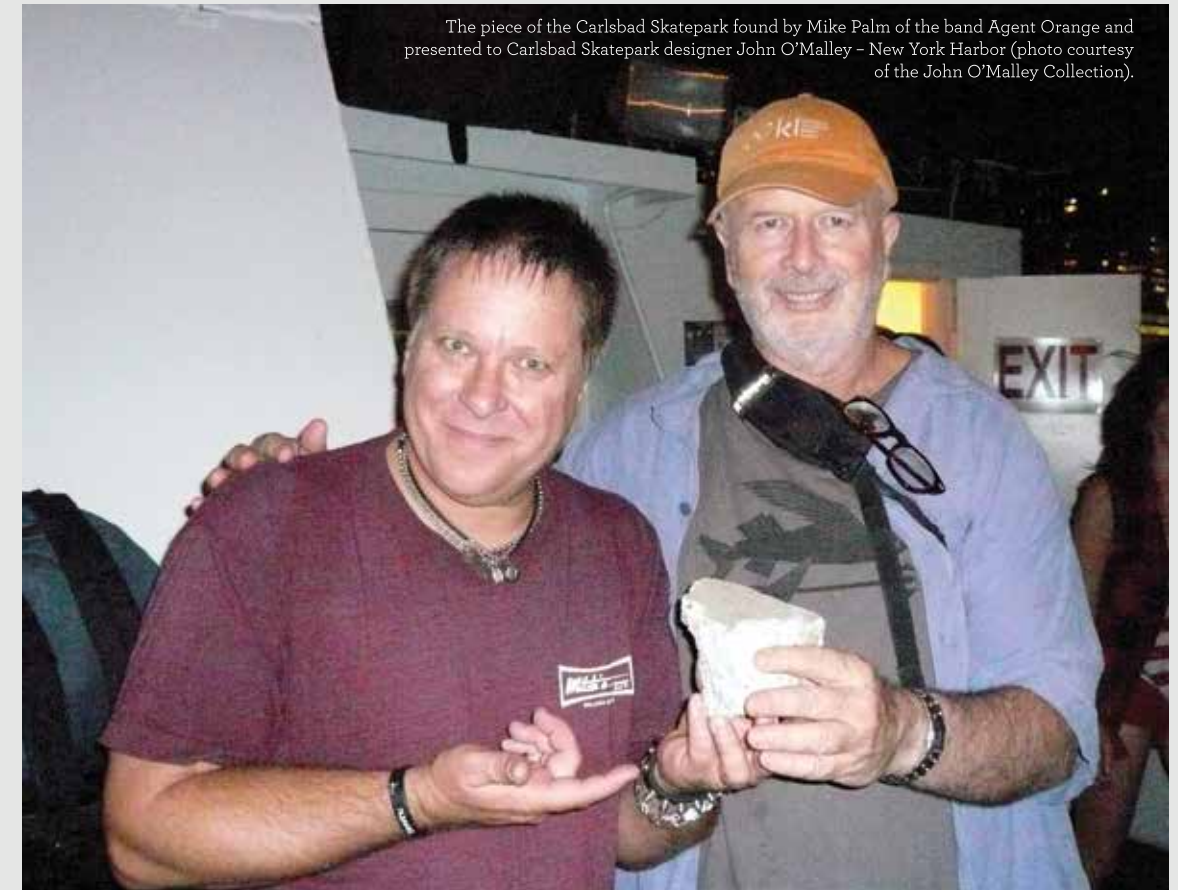
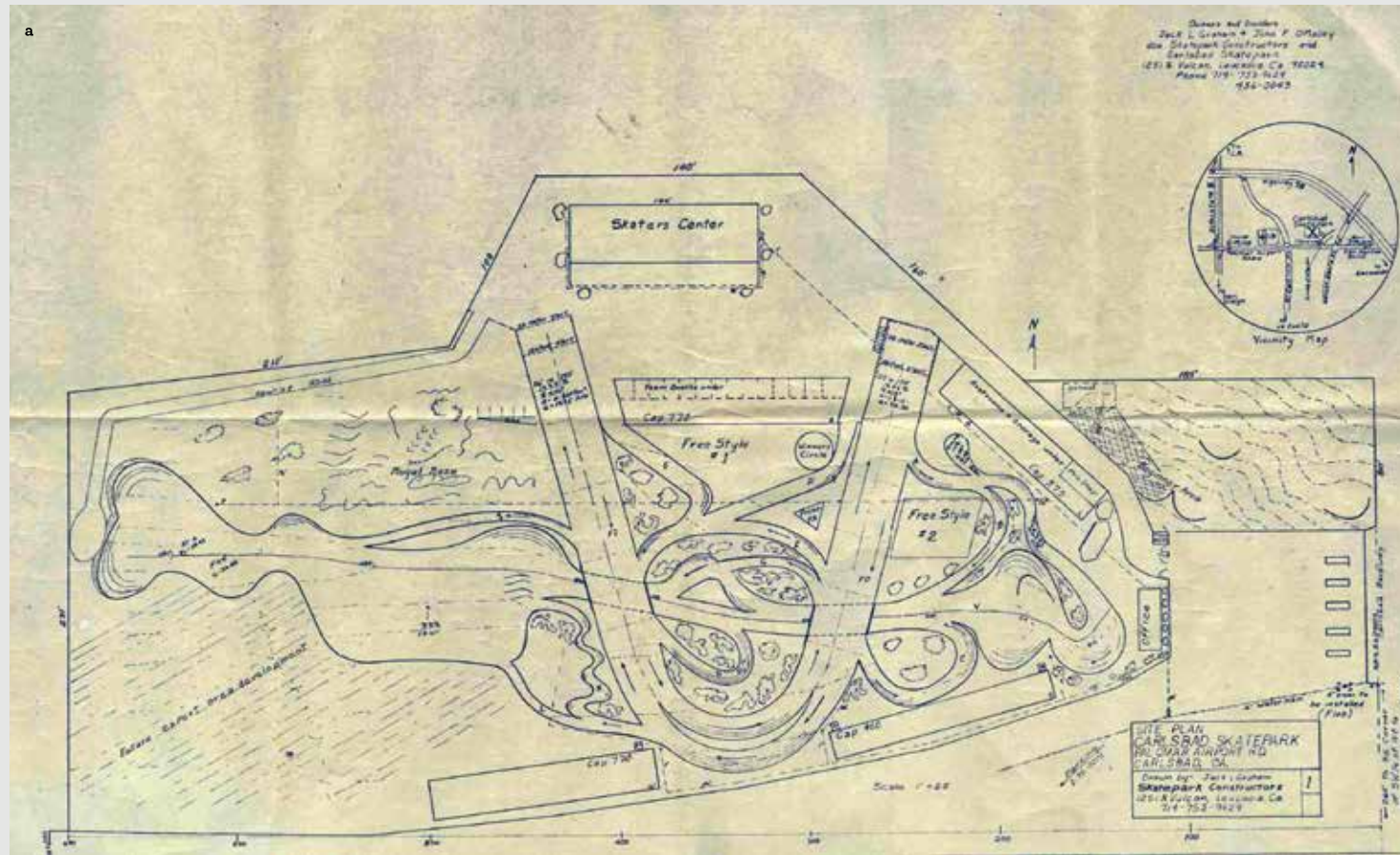
Palm and Agent Orange were playing a gig on a boat in New York and he reached out to O’Malley, who was living in Manhattan at the time.

“I invited him and his wife to come out to the show and I wrapped the thing up in some rags and bubble wrap and stuck it in a box,” Palm recalls. “And when I got to New York, I pulled the thing out and brought it out on the boat and gave it to John.”

O’Malley knew, thanks to Palm, that he had a piece



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The piece of the Carlsbad Skatepark found by Mike Palm of the band Agent Orange and presented to Carlsbad Skatepark designer John O'Malley - New York Harbor (photo courtesy of the John O'Malley Collection).

of history in his hands. That's when he heard from the Smithsonian. "I had artifacts that they wanted to collect and they reached out," O'Malley says. "They said [the concrete chunk] was something they'd like to have. And I'm like, yeah, totally!"

Jane Rogers, curator with the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History Sports Collection, was the one who reached out to O'Malley.

"We have decks, we have shoes, we have all sorts of equipment associated with skateboarding, but

we don't have anything concrete, if you will, documenting a skatepark," Rogers says. "So when John came up with this freaking concrete chunk from skateboarding, I was like, we have to have that! It's just really kind of spectacular. It's so cool."

And now a chunk of Carlsbad history sits proudly in The Smithsonian Archives. The Skatepark may be gone, but the sweet memories remain for those of us who skated its legendary surfaces.

a) Original design blueprints of the Carlsbad Skatepark. **b)** From front to back: Lance Smith, Kingfish and John O'Malley. **c)** Skating the Carlsbad Skatepark (photos courtesy of the John O'Malley Collection).