

# testing - from the Pacific to Nevada

## The legacies of nuclear testing in the Pacific

From the very beginning of the nuclear age, the peoples of the Pacific have borne the brunt of the testing of nuclear weapons. From 1946, the United States conducted 67 atomic and hydrogen bomb tests at Bikini and Enewetak Atolls in the Marshall Islands, with 25 further tests at Christmas Island and nine more at Johnston Atoll. Britain tested nuclear weapons in the 1950's, with 13 tests at Maralinga, Monte Bello and Emu Field in Australia, and nine tests at Christmas Island and Malden Island in the central Pacific. For over 30 years, from 1966 to 1996, France conducted 193 atmospheric and underground tests at Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls in French Polynesia.

The deserts, atolls and oceans of our region were chosen because they seemed to be vast empty spaces. But the nuclear powers showed little concern for the health and well-being of nearby island communities, and those civilian and military personnel who staffed the test sites.

In the Pacific, the nuclear era has threatened the land, waters and culture of the Pacific. The pollution of our waters, the ocean that unites us, has long been of concern.

Although nuclear testing in the Pacific has ended, there are still other nuclear threats to the region (such as the shipment of plutonium and high level nuclear wastes across the ocean; proposals to dump nuclear waste on isolated atolls, and uranium mining on indigenous people's land in Australia, Canada and the US). Most importantly, there remains a responsibility of the nuclear powers for the health and environmental impacts of past nuclear testing, even after the end of most nuclear testing.

**excerpt from the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre Briefing Paper — March 2000**

*"The Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (PCRC) Briefing Paper — the legacies of nuclear testing in the Pacific"* outlines the results of studies done on Moruroa, Fangataufa, the Marshall Islands, and the Christmas Islands, giving excellent background information and further actions required for the Pacific. More information is available from the PCRC website: [www.pcrc.org.fj](http://www.pcrc.org.fj)

## The Shundahai story of Nevada

The Nevada Test Site (NTS) is a Rhode Island-sized testing ground northwest of Las Vegas where the US conducted the majority of its nuclear weapons tests during the Cold War. It was created by President Harry Truman on January 11, 1951, and the first atomic test, Operation Ranger, was conducted on January 27, 1951. In order for the test site to be created nearly 100 traditional Shoshone family camps had to be relocated — these families were then forced on to reservations. Initially the NTS, originally called the Nevada Proving Grounds, consisted of 680 square miles, about half its present size. Additional land was added in 1958, 1961, 1964, and 1967.

In 1863 the US government recognized Western Shoshone sovereign territory when it signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship at Ruby Valley, Nevada. Newe Sogobia (the Western Shoshone Nation) includes most of Nevada, and extends into Idaho, Utah and Southern California.

In 1948, Western Shoshone lands were seized to create the Nevada Test Site, forcing over 100 families to abandon seasonal or permanent family camps. No compensation was ever offered.

In the 1950's, atomic tests were conducted above ground and resulted in devastating health effects to the "Downwinders" northeast of the site in Nevada and Utah. Since then, tests were conducted only underground, resulting in a pockmarked "lunar" landscape. From its founding in 1951 until the final Divider test on September 23, 1992, 99 above ground tests and over 800 below ground nuclear tests were detonated in this desert. There have been over 1000 nuclear tests conducted by the United States. Of these, 24 tests were done jointly with the United Kingdom, and over 900 tests were conducted at the NTS.

The NTS is operated by the Department of Energy, and is bounded on three sides by the Nellis Air Force Range. Today, the test site is under consideration for various storage and processing projects for dangerous materials, non-nuclear and subcritical nuclear tests are still conducted there.

Shundahai Network formed at the Nevada Test Site (NTS) in October 1994 around the concept that the peace and disarmament movement must embrace human rights and environmental justice in order to create long-term, sustainable change. "Shundahai" is a Newe (Western Shoshone) word meaning "peace and harmony with all creation". Our first office was in Washington, DC. At the end of 1996 we moved to Las Vegas to focus more closely on closing the NTS as a central link in the US nuclear weapons and nuclear waste programs. In 2000, we moved our office to Pahrump, NV, in order to work more closely with this directly affected community.

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More information about the Shundahai Network is available on:  
[www.shundahai.org](http://www.shundahai.org)