

# Prediction of P-y Curves from Dilatometer Tests Case Histories and Results

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**ABSTRACT:** The p-y method made popular by Reese (1983) has become the de facto method for the analysis of deep foundation systems under lateral loading. This approach has been implemented in computer programs such as FB-MultiPier and LPILE. Both codes include typical p-y curves based on soil parameters, but also allow the input of custom user defined curves. Based on original work by Robertson et al. (1989), p-y curves were generated based on dilatometer soundings at sites where lateral load tests were performed. The sites and tests include:

- 1) Roosevelt Bridge - Stuart, Florida: single pile and pile group load tests
- 2) US17 Bypass - Wilmington, North Carolina: single pile and pile/drilled shaft group load tests
- 3) Rio Puerto Nuevo - San Juan, Puerto Rico: steel pipe pile load tests
- 4) Salt Lake City International Airport – Utah: single pile and pile group load tests
- 5) East Pascagoula River Bridge - Mississippi: pile/drilled shaft group load test
- 6) Auburn NGES - Opelika Alabama: multiple drilled shaft and pile group load tests

The p-y curves were implemented in the program FB-MultiPier to predict the results of a lateral load test at each site. The paper documents the dilatometer sounding data and associated p-y curves. For each load test, the general geometry is presented and the actual load test data is plotted with the dilatometer based predictions.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The p-y method, made popular by Reese (1983), is commonly used in the analysis of deep foundations (piles or drilled shafts) under lateral load. The computer programs LPILE (Ensoft, 2005) and FB-MultiPier (Florida BSI, 2005), the standard tools for lateral substructure analysis, include the p-y method. While normalized p-y curves developed from limited research sites are included both programs, it is most useful to develop custom p-y curves derived from insitu soil tests at the project site.

The dilatometer test (DMT) was developed by Marchetti (1980). The DMT is conducted by pushing a flat blade with a laterally inflatable disc to a test depth, then inflating the disc into the soil using

gas pressure. The disc moves 1.1 mm laterally, thereby performing an insitu small strain “lateral load test” (figure 1). Thus, logically, the results of the DMT test have been used to develop p-y curves for soil, including those by Robertson et al. (1989) and Gabr and Borden (1988).

Validating of p-y curves generated from any method is accomplished by simulating a full pile or drilled shaft load test using software such as LPILE or FB-MultPier. In this paper, six load tests are examined where DMT tests were performed prior to foundation installation. In the following discussion, each case history is detailed with The DMT sounding data, pile load tests details, derived p-y curves, and comparison of load test and computer based simulation.

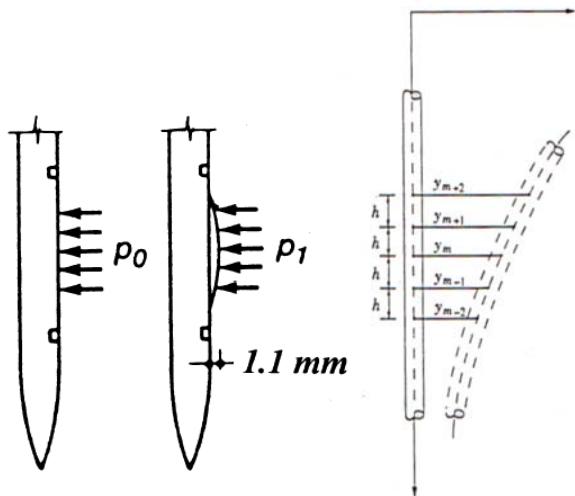


Figure 1 DMT Inflation versus Pile Lateral Loading.

## 2 SOIL STRUCTURE INTERACTION WITH P-Y CURVES

As previously mentioned, the dilatometer test produces one millimeter of lateral deformation; therefore, there are no increments of pressure with which to develop a load-deformation curve. Therefore, a "hybrid method" using the properties determined from the dilatometer indices are used in conjunction with a parabolic function to develop p-y curves. For this case history, curves determined from dilatometer tests were developed based on the method presented by Robertson et al. (1989).

For cohesive soils a cubic parabolic p-y curve was suggested:

$$\frac{P}{P_u} = 0.5 \left( \frac{y}{y_c} \right)^{0.33} \quad (1)$$

$$y_c = \frac{23.67 S_u D^{0.5}}{F_c E_D} \quad (2)$$

where  $y_c$  is the reference deflection,  $S_u$  is the undrained strength of the soil,  $D$  is the pile diameter,  $F_c$  is a factor  $\approx 10$ , and  $E_D$  is the dilatometer modulus. The evaluation of the ultimate lateral resistance  $P_u$  is given as:

$$P_u = N_p S_u D \quad (3)$$

At considerable depths  $N_p \approx 9$ , but near the surface it reduces to a range of 2 - 4; accordingly,

$$N_p = 3 + \frac{\sigma_{v0}'}{S_u} + \left( J \frac{x}{D} \right) < 9.0 \quad (4)$$

and  $x$  = depth,  $\sigma_{v0}'$  = effective stress at depth  $x$ , and  $J = 0.5$  (soft clay) to 0.25 (stiff clay).

For cohesionless soils, the same cubic parabola, equation (1) is used, where  $P_u$  is from Reese et al. (1974) and Murchison and O'Neill (1984) and is the lesser of:

$$P_u = \sigma_{v0}' [D(K_p - K_a) + xK_p \tan \phi' \tan \beta] \quad (5)$$

$$P_u = \sigma_{v0}' D [K_p^3 + 2K_a K_p^2 \tan \phi' - \tan \phi' - K_a] \quad (6)$$

and

$$\beta \text{ is } 45^\circ + \frac{\phi'}{2} \quad (7)$$

And  $y_c$  is:

$$y_c = \frac{4.17 \sin \phi' \sigma_{v0}'}{E_D F_\phi (1 - \sin \phi')} D \quad (8)$$

where  $F_\phi$  is an empirical factor equal to 1 for cohesionless soil.

Data from a dilatometer soundings at the each test site was reduced using the computer program "Dilly" (GPE Inc., 1993) to get values for  $\phi$  or  $S_u$  and  $E_D$  for the p-y curves.

## 3 CASE HISTORIES

In this section, each case history will be briefly introduced. It is the intent of the authors to provide enough information on the case history that the reader may be able to generate p-y curves and perform his or her own analysis. Therefore, the complete DMT sounding, p-y curves generated, pile properties, load test geometry, and the results of the simulation by the author are included at the end of the paper.

### 3.1 Roosevelt Bridge - Stuart, Florida

A submerged 4 by 4 free-head pile group of 760 mm prestressed concrete piles was laterally loaded as part of a test program for the construction of a new bridge over the St. Lucie River by the Florida Department of Transportation. An additional load test on pile 9, one of the piles from the group, was performed by pushing the pile in the opposite direction from the group load test. (Ruesta, and Townsend, 1997).

The soil profile at Roosevelt consisted of layers of loose sand over cemented sand, both with shell fragments.

### 3.2 US 17 Bypass – Wilmington North Carolina

The test program was funded by the NCDOT and NCHRP for a new US 17 bridge over the NE Cape Fear River near Wilmington, NC. At Test Area 2, a 915mm diameter concrete cylinder pile with a wall thickness of 152mm and embedded length of 26.4m was laterally loaded against a 762mm square prestressed concrete pile embedded 27.6 m.

The soil profile at the Wilmington Bypass site was comprised of two zones of sand: a loose alluvial fine sand layer over a dense fine sand known as the Pee Dee formation.

### 3.3 Rio Puerto Nuevo, San Juan, Puerto Rico

The test program consisted of pushing apart two 1219mm with a 19mm thick wall open ended steel pipe piles separated by approximately 7.6m as part of a test program for a cantilever wall system by the US Army Corps of Engineers – Jacksonville District. One pile was driven to elevation -13.1m (short pile), while the other to elevation -19.7m (long pile). Two static load tests were performed on the piles. The first “pre-excavation” test was performed with the ground surface at elevation +0.7m. Subsequently, a cofferdam was installed and the soil excavated to elevation – 5m, “post-excavation”, to simulate planned dredging in front of the wall. The post excavation load test was considered in this study.

The subsurface profile at Puerto Nuevo was predominantly clay with some trace fine sands.

### 3.4 Salt Lake City International Airport - Utah

The project consisted of four lateral load tests; two static tests and two StatNAMIC. One of the static tests was performed upon a single pile and the other upon a free-head pile group. According to Peterson (1996), the single pile test, analyzes in this discussion, was performed to obtain the row-multipliers in order to normalize the pile group results. A sheet pile wall was used as reaction.

The soil profile at this site consists of interbedded layers of sand and clay, however, the predominant soil type in the critical depth for lateral analysis was clay.

### 3.5 East Pascagoula River Bridge - Mississippi

The test program consisted of a submerged group of two 2100mm drilled shafts spaced at 3 diameters, which reacted against a group of 6 762mm prestressed concrete piles. Both groups were embedded into 2.4-m thick concrete caps and subjected to static and StatNAMIC lateral loadings (Anderson and Townsend, 1999). For this analysis of the drilled shafts p-y multipliers of 0.8 (leading) and 0.4 (trailing) and for the piles (Ruesta and Townsend, 1997) were used.

Soils at Pascagoula were interbedded layers of sand and clay.

### 3.6 Auburn NGES - Opelika, Alabama

Six 915mm drilled shafts were laterally loaded as part of a static and Statnamic test program for Alabama DOT and FHWA project at Auburn University. Shaft 2 in the SW was analyzed for this study (Anderson et al., 1999) (Brown and Vinson, 1998).

The soil at the Auburn site is characteristic of the Piedmont geological province of the southeastern United States. These soils are derived from weathering of metamorphic rocks, predominantly gneisses and schists and are composed of micaceous sandy silts.

## 4 DISCUSSION

Each of the load tests were simulated using FB-Pier, the earlier generation of the program that is currently distributed at FB-MultiPier. The structural details of each pile or drilled shaft were collected including the shape, reinforcing details, strength, and modulus. FB-MultiPier includes a full non-linear structural model that accounts for cracked and yielding sections. As the structural models are well developed, the focus of this discussion will attribute quality of fit to soil parameters.

The load tests can be separated into several categories. The prominent groups to consider are piles and drilled shafts and cohesionless and cohesive soils. Of the six tests, two are on drilled shafts (Pascagoula and Auburn) and the remaining four are piles (Roosevelt, Wilmington, Puerto Nuevo, and Salt Lake City). The soils represented, three are predominantly cohesionless (Roosevelt, Wilmington, and Auburn), and three have significant cohesive soils (Pascagoula, Puerto Nuevo, and Salt Lake City).

When comparing the load test simulations between drilled shafts and piles, it does not appear that DMT p-y curves work better for drilled shafts or piles.

Considering the difference between cohesive and cohesionless soils, the data suggest that predictions in cohesionless materials are better than those in cohesive materials.

Within the piles, two were prestressed concrete and two were pipe piles. Predictions among the piles may show slightly better prediction for concrete piles versus steel pipe. However, this may be affected by the cohesionless versus cohesive behavior discussed previously.

## 5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Six deep foundation load tests were simulated using p-y curves generated from DMT tests. The six tests represent foundation types including drilled shafts, concrete piles, and steel pipe piles. In addition, half

of the tests were performed in cohesionless soil and the remainder in cohesive soils. From these analyses, the following conclusions are drawn:

- 1) DMT generated p-y curves provide a better model for cohesionless soils than cohesive
- 2) There is little difference between the goodness of predictions for DMT p-y curves for piles and drilled shafts.
- 3) DMT p-y curves may better suited for concrete piles over pipe piles.

It should be noted that these conclusions have been drawn from limited case histories. The author continues to collect case studies of lateral load tests with DMT and other insitu tests for verification of these methods.

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 Kyle Rollins – Brigham Young University  
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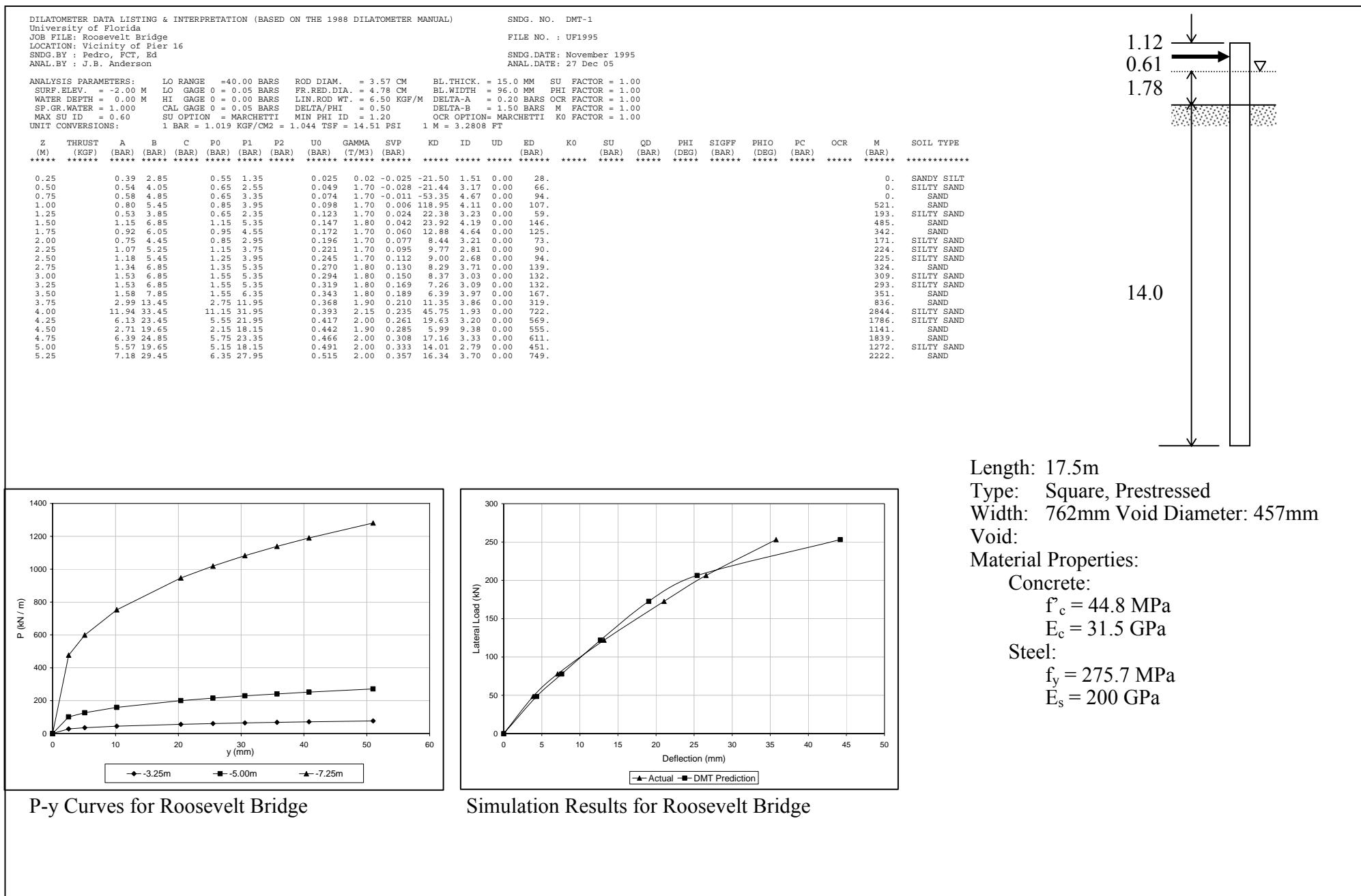


Figure 1 Roosevelt Bridge Load Test



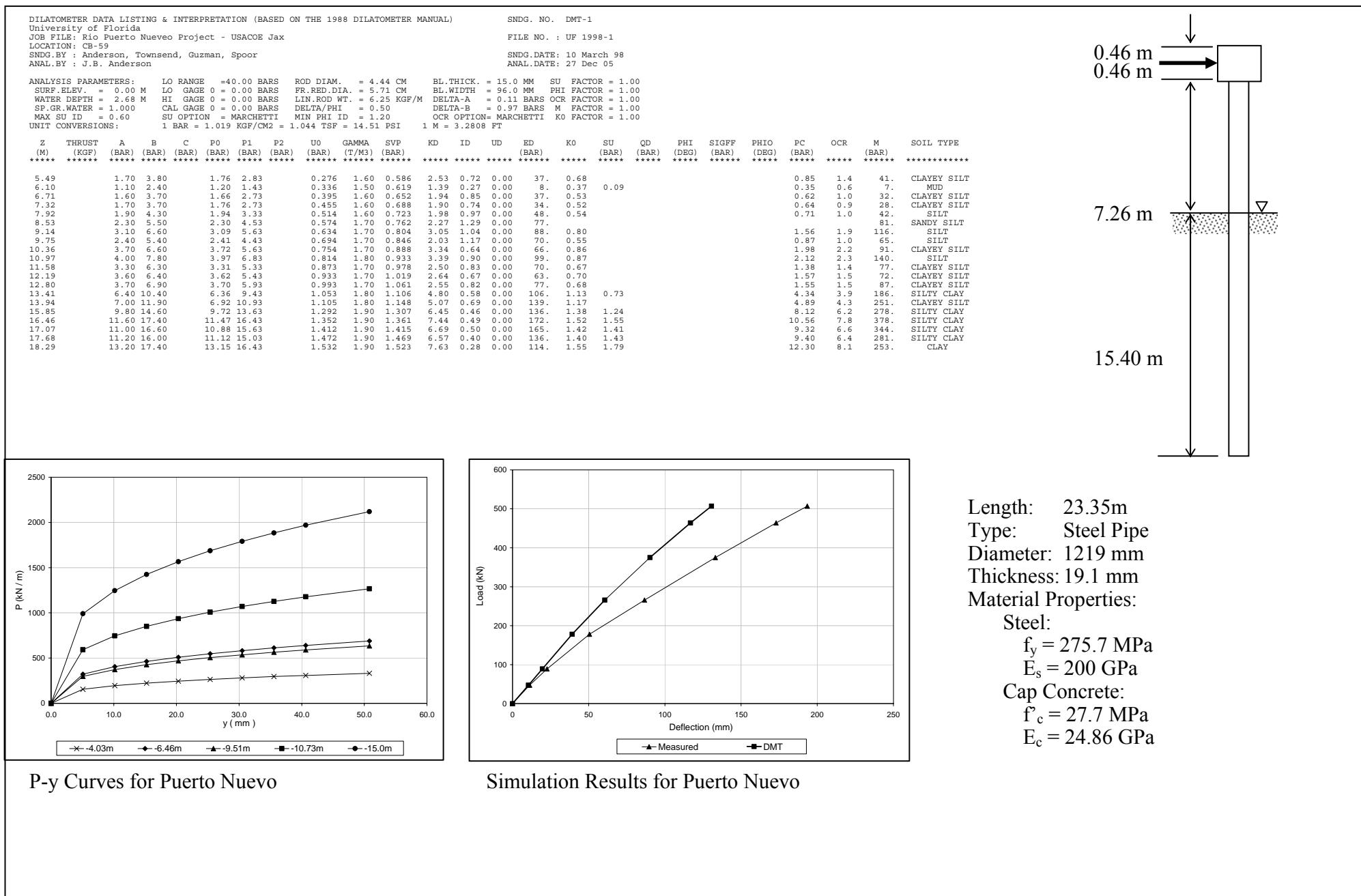


Figure 3 Puerto Nuevo Load Test

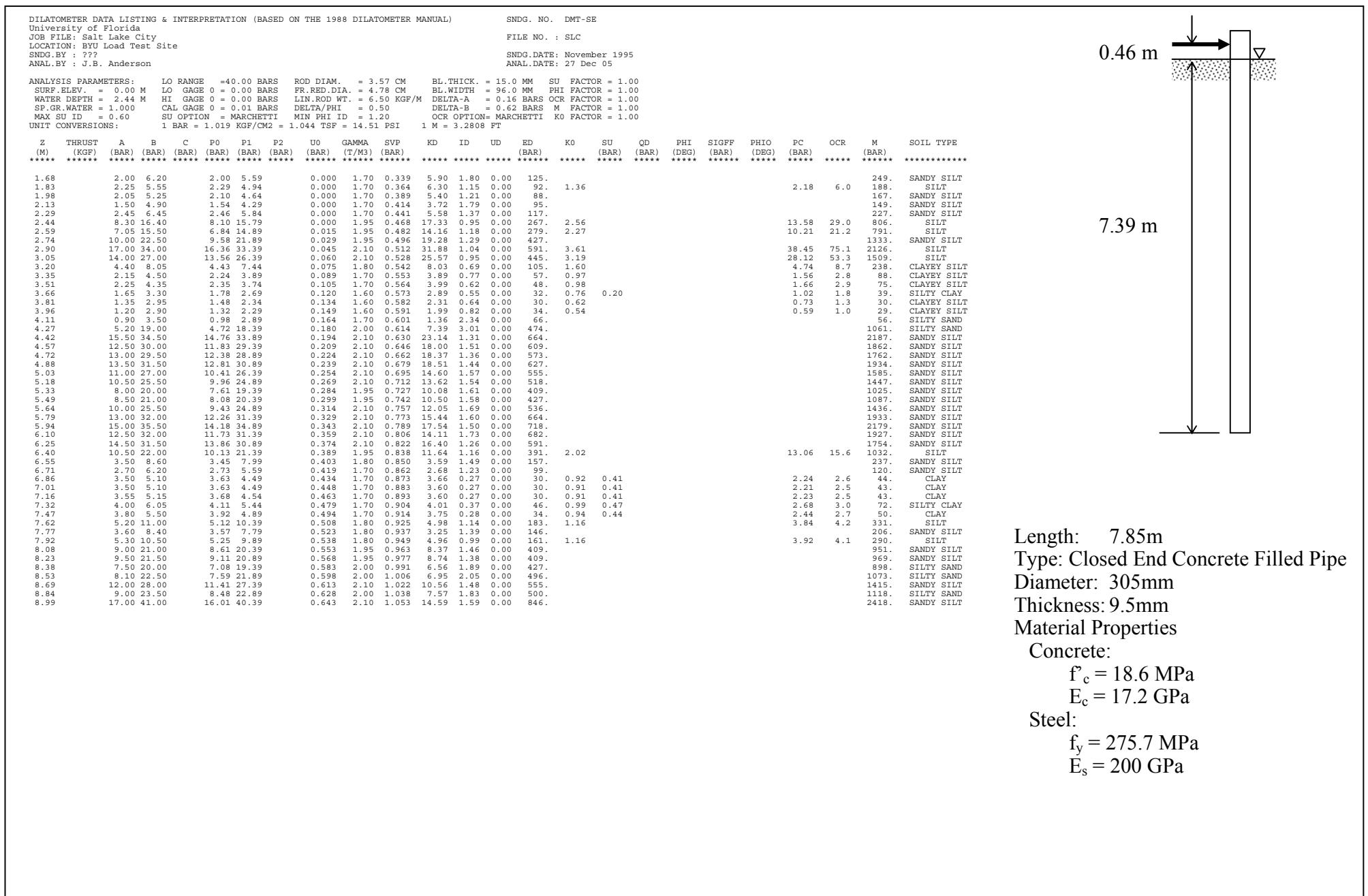
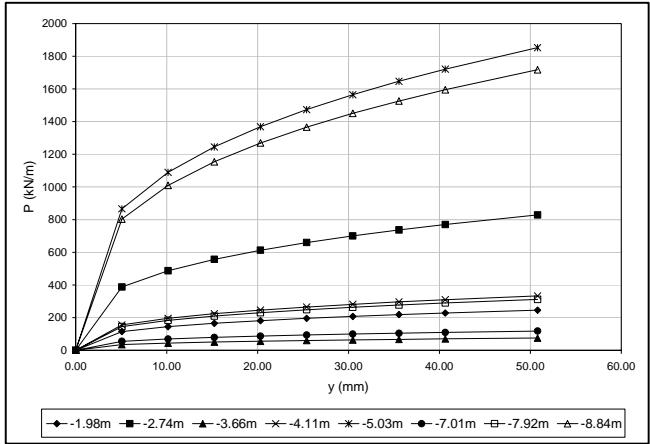
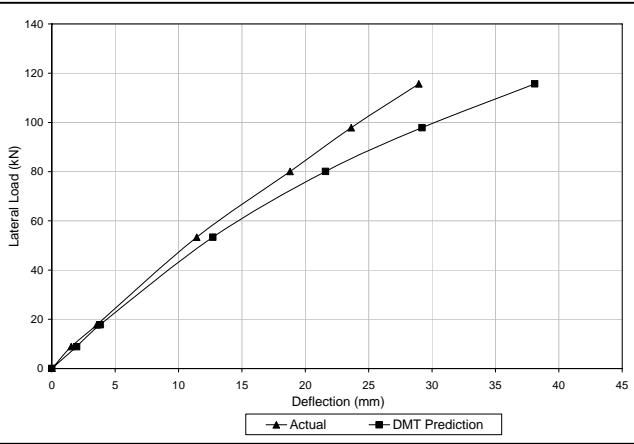


Figure 4a Salt Lake City Load Test

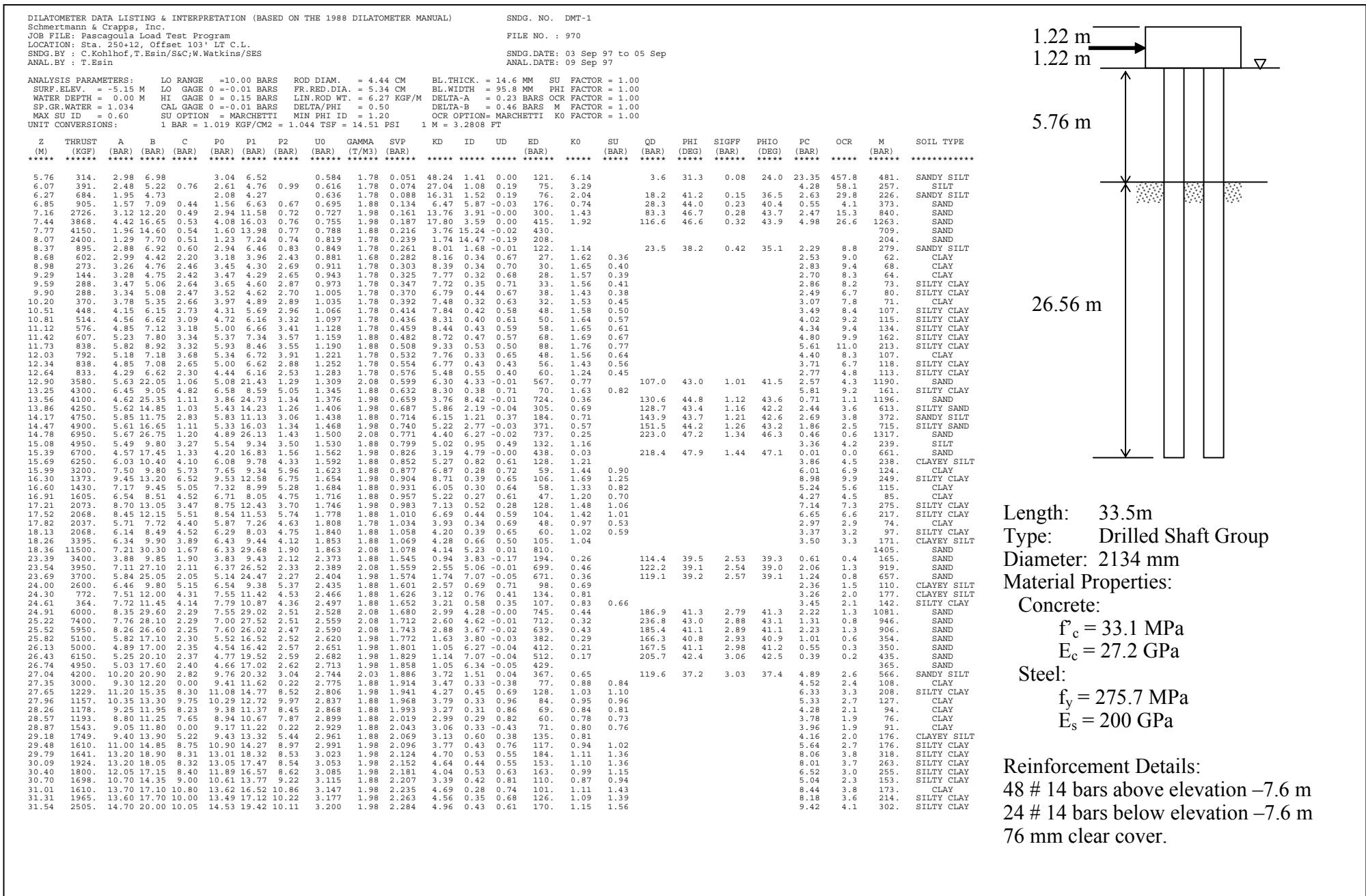


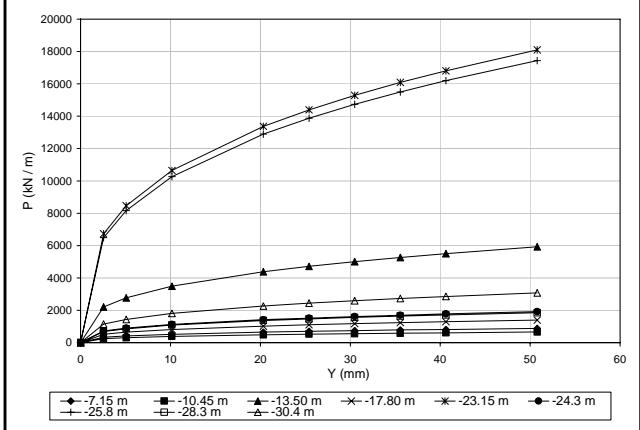
P-y Curves for Salt Lake City



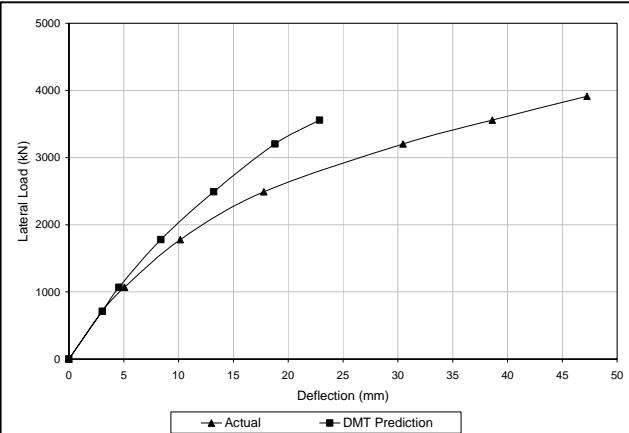
Simulation Results for Salt Lake City

Figure 4b Salt Lake City Load Test continued





P-y Curves for Pascagoula



Simulation Results for Pascagoula

Figure 5b Pascagoula Load Test Continued

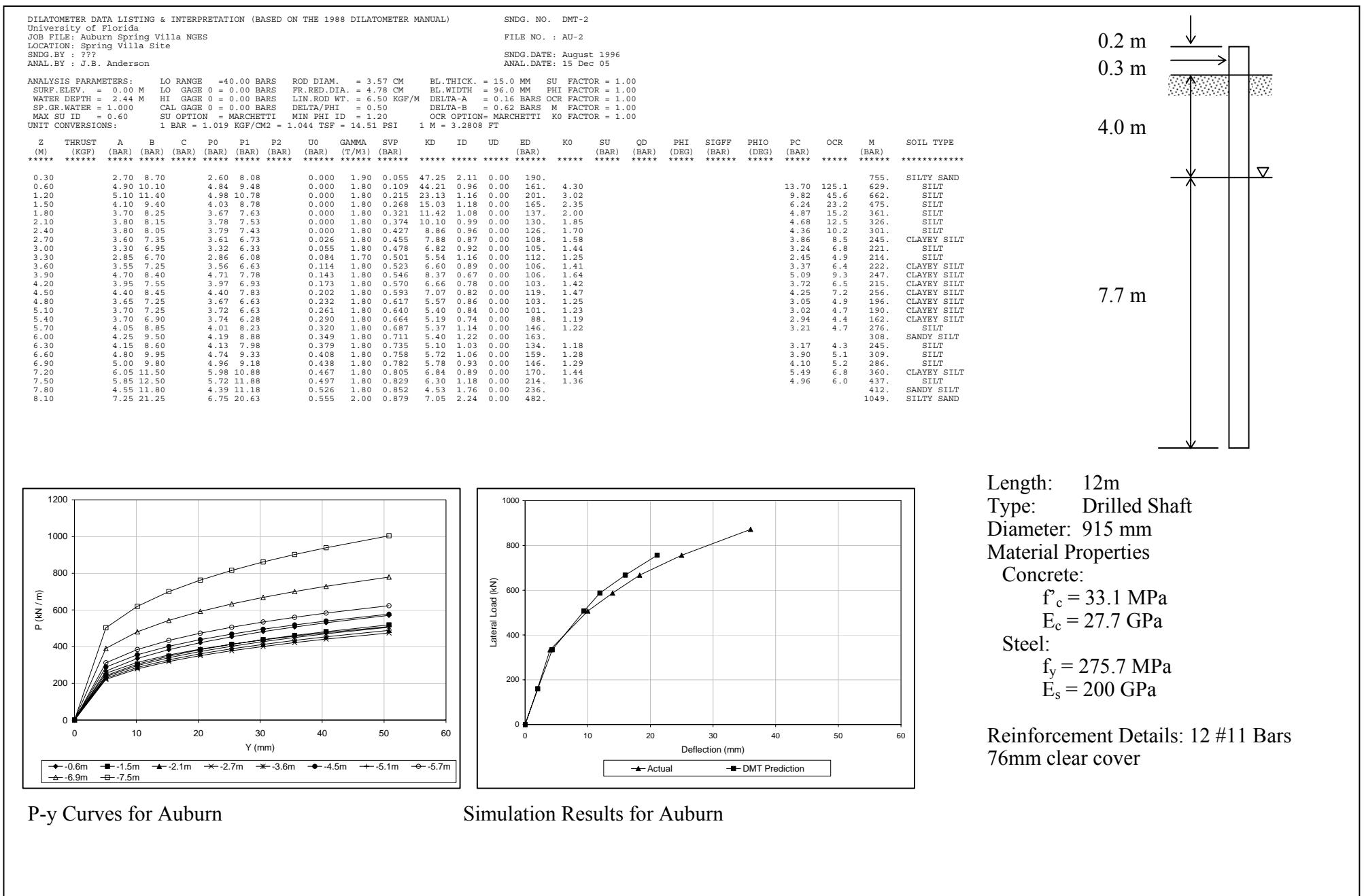


Figure 6 Auburn Load Test