

The Pit



Staff photo by Guy Aceto

It has brush growing around it now, as shown above, but this concrete cross-shaped pit was a central element in the quest for Mach 1 at Muroc Army Air Field (now Edwards AFB) in the California desert. The Mach 1 research airplane—the Bell X-1—was air launched from the bomb bay of a modified B-29 to conserve rocket propellants for the actual high-speed flight at altitude. To attach the X-1 to the B-29, a tractor towed the X-1 and backed it down into the loading pit. Once the B-29 was towed to a point directly over the Bell aircraft, the X-1 was then hoisted by straps into position under the mother ship and secured with bomb shackles. On Oct. 14, 1947, the sound barrier was broken when a B-29 climbed to 20,000 feet and dropped the X-1 free; Chuck Yeager piloted it to Mach 1.06.

