



# Hands Across History



A joint newsletter for the White Sands Historical Foundation and the White Sands Pioneer Group.

Volume V, Letter II

May 2009

## Fund Raising Campaign Will Have New DVD

The White Sands Historical Foundation has a new tool in its fund raising efforts. An informational DVD highlighting the missile range's history and the museum's part in telling that story has just been completed.

In their work to find potential museum sponsors and solicit donations, board members have found that many executives and decision makers are not very familiar with the missile range's fascinating history. For instance, they may know German V-2 rockets were fired at WSMR but they don't know how important these vehicles were in getting America into the Space Age. Some know a space shuttle landed once at White Sands but they don't know that the range's support of NASA dates back to Apollo and testing of the astronaut escape system. And most don't know that 800 years ago thousands of Native Americans may have called the same area home as they farmed the flats using water runoff from the surrounding mountains.

The board decided it was important to leave behind a short summary of some of that history so it could be looked at again and shared with others. Also, it could be mailed out to potential sponsors in advance to prepare them for a visit.

Producing a DVD seemed like the logical medium for the presentation especially since there are so many good photos of the range and excellent film clips of the activities. Also, it fits in with today's visually oriented culture where information is presented on screens of all sizes.

Normally a professional 10 to 15 minute video would probably cost tens of thousands of dollars, money the Foundation doesn't have for such a purpose. David Soules, Foundation vice president, came up with the idea of contacting local schools to see if they might be interested in some sort of cooperative effort.

His effort paid off. When Rebecca Kongs, head of the Digital Imaging and Design Technology Department at Dona Ana Community College, talked to David she jumped on it as an opportunity for her students to work in the real world.

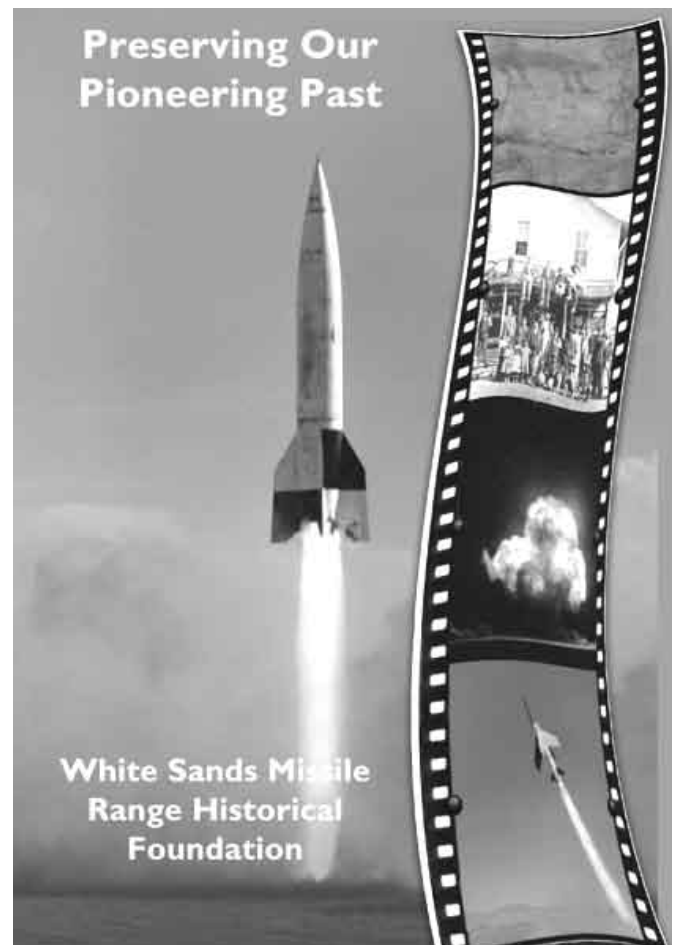
An agreement was quickly drawn up and the process started. Jim Eckles, from the Foundation board, wrote and narrated the script. Aron Hethcox, a student, acted as the school's producer and ended up doing all the editing.

Since it is a student production with the oversight of some retired guys, the video lacks that megamillion dollar Hollywood quality but it is a good solid product that will prove very informative to most viewers.

Once the DVD was complete, the board decided to make the video available to anyone who might want a copy, to show relatives, friends, clients, etc. It is for sale in the Museum gift shop for \$5.

According to David Soules the price is only \$5 because "we can't possibly sell enough to build a new Museum building and by keeping the price low anyone can afford a copy so more people will see it. Who knows, one of those people may be willing to donate."

The DVD, called "Preserving Our Pioneering Past," runs 15 minutes. Also appearing in the video are Maj. Gen. Niles Fulwyler (ret) and former astronaut Don Thomas.



Front cover for the case that will protect the Foundation's new DVD. The Museum gift shop sells copies for \$5.

# Prehistoric Site Found On Museum Grounds

By Darren Court, Director  
WSMR Museum

Recently, an archeological site was found on the grounds of the museum. The site is believed to contain at least one pit house and possibly a larger settlement.

It was discovered when the Public Affairs officer and range archeologist were looking for a place to put visitors for our upcoming NASA shot this fall. In their walk about they found, on the surface of the ground, numerous pieces of pottery and stone flakes.



This is exciting news. To have a prehistoric site right on our museum grounds doesn't get much better. If the decision is made to excavate, we will try to use it as a teaching tool to educate visitors on the prehistoric history of the range, what range archeologists do, and the importance the army places on preservation of artifacts and prehistoric sites.

As many of you know, artifacts "walked off" the range especially during the early years. It was a popular pastime during testing downtimes to go out and pick things up. We are beginning to receive some of the collections back and are looking forward to more coming in.

If you have artifacts collected during the early years of the range, please consider sending them home! As one of the more "unusual" museums in the army system, we are tasked with telling the entire history of the Tularosa Basin. That means we are reaching beyond the post-WWII military history (still our primary focus). The more artifacts we have, the better we can tell these other histories of the range.

Indeed, the head of army TRADOC museums visited last year and thought the non-military exhibits were fantas-

tic, as they not only provide a greater appreciation for our unique history, but they also provide those who might not be interested in rockets, missiles and technology something else to learn about.

We have something else coming up that is exciting, as this is our first year to hold a rocket camp! New museum registrar Callean Holly has put together two camps, in June and July, for our elementary and middle school kids here at WSMR. Each year Child and Youth Services holds a series of camps for the kids on post, and we are jumping in to get more involved with these.

Every year we get the kids from the Space Camp in Alamogordo. Typically one large group visits a few hours each week for about 6 weeks. This year we decided to hold our own so our kids will be learning about: rockets and missiles, science and technology, the history of WSMR, what museums do, as well as making their own rocket "artifacts" and creating an exhibit. There will also be arts and crafts projects, the making of various types of toy rockets, and, finally, the building and firing of small rockets at LC33. This is the first year the museum has offered this camp and we are hoping it's a resounding success so we can offer it annually.

As always, we are continuing to make changes at the museum. The exhibit of paintings by Bataan survivor Ben Steele has been a huge success and we want to do more about Bataan. Other exhibits continue to evolve and be written, and we continue to have more groups coming in for tours. Long-term planning continues and we are looking at how to create better traffic flow in the spaces we have so we can bring exhibit materials and artifacts together with better interpretation to tell your history in a way so that visitors will fully understand its importance.

And, as always, we ask that you don't throw it away, put it in storage, or keep it in the garage. All of those photos, documents, and "things" that you have hidden away are valuable additions that we would be happy to provide a home for, so please keep us in mind for permanent storage of your WSMR "stuff!"

## Statement of Purpose and Membership

The "Hands Across History" newsletter is published by the White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation and the White Sands Pioneer Group (WSPG). Both nonprofit organizations aim to preserve the accomplishments of White Sands Missile Range.

The newsletter is intended to keep members of both groups informed about current events and share information of common interest. The edi-

tor is Jim Eckles. He can be contacted by email at [nebraska1950@comcast.net](mailto:nebraska1950@comcast.net) or at either address below.

Membership to either organization is open to anyone who shares their goals. However, details of membership (dues, etc.) differ between the two groups. For more information, please contact the appropriate organization and we will send it via the Post Office or email.

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# Highway 70 Once ‘Ribbon Of Death’

By Jim Eckles

It took more than three years to complete, but when the construction was finished in 1959 to make U.S. Highway 70 a four-lane road, many White Sands employees breathed a sigh of relief. According to those who drove daily from Las Cruces to the missile range, the highway was known as the “ribbon of death.”

The main problem with the narrow highway from Las Cruces was San Augustin Pass, also known as Organ Pass in those days. In 1958 the missile range military police reported that 1,000 cars entered and left the post everyday through the Las Cruces gate during the rush hours. Inevitably, most of those cars ended up stacked behind each other going over the pass.

Old timers say semi-trucks used to crawl up the mountain at five to ten miles per hour and stymie normal traffic flow. They report it was a miserable drive.

In 1956 enough state and federal funds were rounded up to turn the narrow road into what would then be called a super highway. The construction was done in four steps or sections so detours were not continuous or spread over the entire length of the road.

The first section constructed was a six-mile stretch from the northeast city limits of Las Cruces at Madrid and Main to a point about one mile east of the Jornada Range Station road. Brown Contracting Co. of Albuquerque started the work in May 1956 and finished in November the same year. The price tag was \$684,223.

The second and shortest section of road was the 2.1 miles over San Augustin Pass from near Organ to just a

quarter of a mile east of the pass. Work was started in July 1956 by Armstrong and Armstrong of Roswell. According to state and contractor officials at the time, the lowering of the roadbed by 34 feet was the biggest earthmoving project ever undertaken in this area. When completed it was also the most expensive stretch of four-lane in the state.

In lowering the roadbed the contractor used 80,000 pounds of explosives to breakup the rock and earth. They drilled 20-foot deep holes in the granite and filled them with explosives using about 4,000 pounds for each blast. In moving all this rock the contractor foreman claimed his crews came across some very low-grade silver ore. He said it was there but not worth anyone’s trouble to mine.

When the pass was completed in July 1957, the road was shorter and two curves were eliminated. It opened with the speed limit set at 60 miles per hour.

Also in July 1957, work started to finish the road down the mountain east from the pass to the range access road. Henry Thygesen and Co. of Albuquerque received the \$966,698 contract. The 5.7 mile section followed the old right of way and was completed in April 1958.

Work on the last section, 8.75 miles, did not begin until February 1959. The million dollar stretch was completed later in the year.

As traffic has increased on the highway, the section through San Augustin Pass was widened again just a few years ago. It now has a third lane for slow traffic on the uphill sections.

Many drivers on Highway 70 still consider it a “ribbon of death” because of the huge increase in traffic and the higher speeds.



**U.S. Highway 70 over San Augustin Pass is now three lanes going up and two coming down. Traffic is rarely a problem.**

# Charlie Brink - Life In A Chicken Coop

By Jim Eckles

*Editor's Note: I wrote this story in 1994 for the Missile Ranger. I have updated it to reflect the fact that Mr. Brink is no longer alive.*

After Charles Brink was shown chicken houses as the only available apartments in two different New Mexico towns during World War II, he knew it was time to settle down. That moment came on Aug. 21, 1945 when he was assigned to the newly created White Sands Proving Ground.

It turned out to be a good move for Brink because he became a White Sands pioneer who had a very successful career highlighted by his creativity.

When World War II started Brink was working for the New Mexico Highway Dept. He had started in 1939 on a survey gang and quickly learned the profession. In Feb. 1942, because of the war, the state couldn't find materials to build roads so they laid off many employees, Brink included.

Brink and the rest of his gang were hired the next day to do survey work for the Army Corps of Engineers. New installations were springing up all over the sparsely populated Southwest and the Corps needed experienced surveyors



**Charlie Brink back in the days when the White Sands display V-2 was still mounted horizontally - before it was placed upright in the old Missile Park.**

to sight roads, runways, aprons, and buildings.

Typically, Brink would spend a few months at a site and then receive orders for a new place. On one assignment to Marfa, Tex. he met Ruth Black and married her on June 6, 1943.

In addition to meeting his wife in Marfa, he and everyone else worked very, very hard. He said they arrived on the Mitchell ranch in May 1942 and had four sections of ranch land to turn into an air base. In Feb. 1943, the base graduated 200 cadets to fly twin-engine airplanes.

While everyone worked hard the civilian employees like Brink often endured a stark existence. At first he said they were not allowed to eat at the bases they were building and the towns they were living in simply did not have the facilities or goods to take care of them. He remembered his suppers being peanuts or bacon and eggs, if he was lucky.

Housing was almost non-existent. Brink recalled going to look at one chicken house that had cardboard on the walls for wallpaper. There was no bathroom -- the outhouse was nearby -- and the only water in the coop was from a faucet in the middle of the floor. His wife was not amused when the owner suggested she get a washtub for bathing.

In 1944 Brink was assigned to the Alamogordo Army Air Field, now Holloman. Late in the year he was given a mysterious assignment. The reason for the work did not become clear until Aug. 1945.

He was told to go north through Mockingbird Gap and he would meet a group of engineers north of the pass. When Brink got there he did surveying work for roads, a few small structures, shelters and a tower that everyone thought would be a radio tower. Details were sketchy and no one knew exactly why they were doing the work.

After the work, the engineers were reassigned elsewhere. Brink went to Santa Fe to work on a hospital and then to Fort Wingate to work on outdoor storage facilities for ordnance.

One morning in July -- the 16th to be exact -- Brink and others in Gallup heard and felt the shockwave caused by some huge explosion. The personnel all thought a storage igloo at Wingate had exploded.

When the workers arrived that morning they asked the guard where the accident had taken place. They did not believe his response that there had been none so they drove around checking every igloo.

Later, of course, Brink learned of the first atomic bomb test at Trinity Site on the morning of July 16 and that he had helped survey the test site.

Brink moved to White Sands from Fort Wingate. He and his wife were glad to settle down in Las Cruces and in 1946 Brink transferred from the Corps to White Sands for a permanent job offered by Col. Turner with the old Technical Operations division.

**See Brink Remembers WSPG, page 5**

# Brink Remembers WSPG

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Brink missed being a native of the Southwest by less than a year. He was born Nov. 13, 1905 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His family moved to Tucson a year later when his father developed tuberculosis. His father died when Charlie was eight and his mother eventually remarried. The family ended up in Taos where they ran the Grandview Hotel. From Taos, Brink went to work for the highway department.

When Brink drove onto White Sands for the first time it wasn't much more than a camp. The access road left Highway 70 near the pass and wound around down past the Cox ranch. There were a few old wooden CCC barracks buildings, a number of tents and a missile hanger. The Army blockhouse was under construction and Brink worked laying out lines from water wells at Condron Field, power lines, the new main access road to Highway 70 and Nike Blvd.

He says it was a hot and dirty place and you had to be careful of the rattlesnakes. The mess hall was a tent with Italian prisoners of war doing the cooking. He remembers for a couple of days there was a rack of dead rattlesnakes at the entrance to the mess hall and you could pick your snake and have the cooks fry it for you.

Prisoners of war were also used elsewhere in the area. Brink distinctly remembers prisoners picking cotton in the Mesilla Valley.

Eventually, Brink's work took him uprange as a good road was needed for recovering rockets that impacted north of Highway 70. At first the plan was to run directly north out of Army Launch #1 (LC-33). Brink says two bulldozers sinking completely out of sight under the muck of Lake Lucero changed that idea. As far as he knows the machinery is still under the lakebed.

Initially Range Road 7 was a dirt road that made for miserable travel. The proving ground requested money to blacktop the road and the Pentagon sent a Col. Wilson out to look it over. Brink and Herb Karsch took Wilson all the

way to North Oscura Peak and then into Carrizozo for the night. Brink said Wilson, an Easterner, loved it. He couldn't believe how far he could see from the top of the Oscuras and he claimed the steakhouse in Carrizozo served the best steak he had ever eaten.

The money came through for the road.

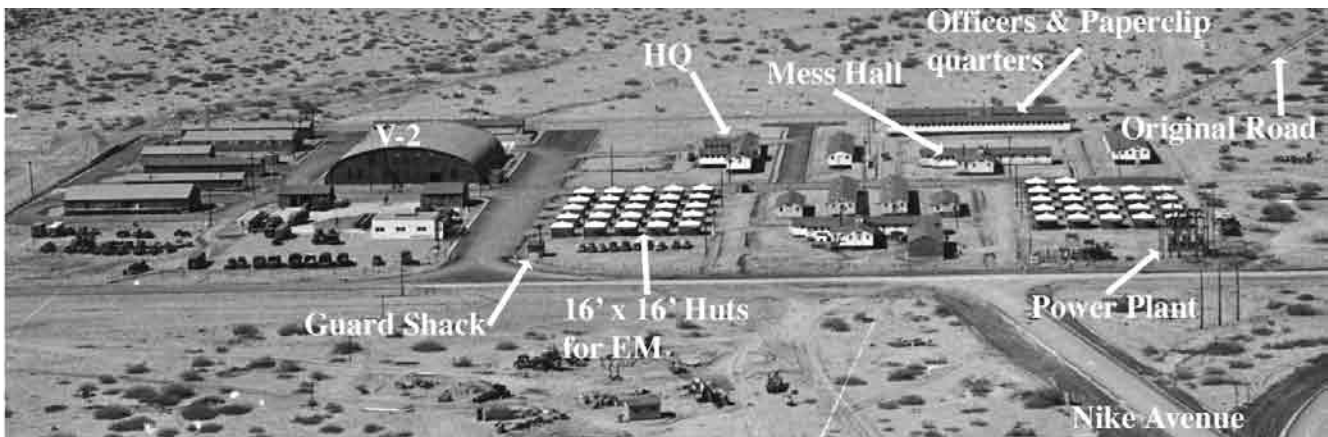
In addition to surveying and engineering facilities, Brink was an inventive employee. During early missile firings he and other technicians would haul heavy and expensive surveying instruments to observation areas. Their job was to watch for the smoke of the rocket hitting the ground and call in the azimuth angle (north is 0 degrees, east is 90 degrees, south is 180 degrees, etc.) so the impact point could be plotted on a map for the recovery crew.

Brink and two co-workers, Huffmeyer and Trujillo, devised a very simple and inexpensive sighting device that could be permanently mounted at each observation point. Anyone could go out and use the devices.

Later he showed his inventiveness again when he suggested a better way to plot the locations of submunitions when dispensed from a missile. Originally, the range built a grid on the ground using stakes and string. After every mission they had to go out and measure each projectile in relation to the grid. Brink says it was a time consuming and wasteful to rig the grid each time and do the measurements.

He suggested they put in a single survey point in the target area and simply survey the impact spots and plot them on maps later. This was adopted and is still used today.

Brink retired from White Sands in 1972. He said he enjoyed being known as one of the first employees at White Sands. He liked his work, made many friends and didn't have to live in a chicken coop. Brink and his wife lived in Las Cruces in the house they built in the early 1950s "out in a cotton field." Now it is part of an older and very shady, very comfortable neighborhood.



**This photo of the main post at White Sands was taken in May 1946 looking to the west. At the top right hand corner you can see the original road into the post as described by Charlie Brink. In this photo the main road we all know is in place. There are only two buildings in this photo still standing - the old V-2 assembly building toward the left and the mess hall. The mess hall eventually morphed into the Officers Club and the Public Affairs Office. It has been gutted and is scheduled for demolition.**

# White Sands Loses Five Former Dedicated Employees

By Frances F. Williams

White Sands Missile Range has lost five of its hard working, dedicated pioneers since the last newsletter.

**Minnie Paz**, who worked as a civilian personnel specialist in the Civilian Personnel Office was a responsive, kind and caring person, who always had a kind word for everyone who came to her for help.

**Robert Starman**, also a civilian personnel specialist, worked for many years within Civilian Personnel. Upon retirement from WSMR he unselfishly gave many volunteer hours to Munson Senior Center as their guru on health care benefits, retirement, social security, and other benefits for veterans and retirees.

**Fred Walters**, a top notch technician that I knew when we worked together in the Instrumentation Directorate was respected for his knowledge in the instrumentation field, as well as his commitment and dedication to his job. Upon retirement he worked as a volunteer for the WSMR museum giving many hours to identify, classify, record and preserve WSMR's historic records and equipment.

## Editor's Note:

## Funk Plane In Last Issue Is Probably Still Flying Today

By Jim Eckles  
HAH Editor

In the last issue of "Hands Across History" I ran a photo of the White Sands Flying Club's Funk plane on the "Back Page." The photo was taken in 1953.

Reader David Patterson wrote to say he did a little research on the plane and found it probably belongs to someone in Texas.

In the photo you can clearly see all of the plane's tail number except the last digit. You can just see the very top of

**Arthur Hope**, who was a technician at National Range Operations, was another committed, dedicated employee in range operations. He was dedicated to his church and was an artistic woodcarver, whose work has graced the WSMR museum as well as other locations in the West.

**Esther Montes** served as the Hispanic Employment Manager for WSMR. She rose through the ranks from secretary to this position and served in this capacity until her retirement. She was a wonderful role model and worked very hard to insure equal employment opportunity for all employees at WSMR and in the surrounding communities. She and her husband Gilbert were dedicated members of the Moose Lodge and were national officers in this organization.

These are just some of the employees who made WSMR a thriving, vibrant, and memorable place. Each contributed in their own way to the success of the range and its mission. May their memory be for a blessing.

Contributions in their names have been sent to the White Sands Museum Historical Foundation for the continuation of the work they started in making and preserving the history of White Sands Missile Range.

the last number and David guessed it was the number seven. He went on line and found that as late as 2007 the plane was still flying and belonged to someone in Georgetown, Texas.

At that point I looked at the original photo a little closer and determined the last number was indeed either a seven or a five. I went to the website David sent me via email and I looked up the other tail number - the one ending in five.

That Funk plane is still flying as well and belongs to someone in Garden City, Kan.

Our conclusion is that the White Sands Flying Club's old airplane is still operational after all these years.



## Puma Study Covered All Of WSMR

From 1985 to 1995 Linda Sweanor (left) and her husband Ken Logan studied mountain lions or pumas in the two mountain ranges on White Sands Missile Range. The study was paid for by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and was one of the most comprehensive studies ever conducted.

The study attracted a great deal of attention from the news media. I took this photo of Linda while I was escorting a National Geographic Magazine photographer. She is handling a mountain lion cub that is probably only about three weeks old. It is so young it was easy to capture all the cubs because they couldn't walk yet.

We walked in on the den when the mother lion was out hunting. During our short time with the cubs, Kenny and Linda: determined the sex of each one, weighed them and placed a coded tag in each cub's ear. She is wearing heavy gloves to keep from getting bitten but also to reduce the amount of her human scent from getting on the cub. Mom came back later and moved the cubs to another den in the same area.

by Jim Eckles

# New Batch Of V-2 Mementos Now On Sale At Museum

Foundation board member Jim Eckles has put together a new batch of V-2 mementos for sale at the WSMR Museum giftshop. These are from materials left over from the restoration of the White Sands V-2 back in 2003.

When the restoration was done the rocket's outer skin was removed and replaced. Also, a few sections of the alcohol and oxygen piping were removed so visitors can see the top of the engine and pumping system.

The old material was shipped back to the Museum along with the spruced-up V-2. The Museum has turned over some of these parts to the Foundation to be used in fund raising for the Museum.

Eckles cuts sections of pipe and chunks of skin to be mounted on blocks of hardwood. Each memento then has a brass plaque identifying what the component is. Each purchaser also receives a letter of authenticity which includes the history of the rocket.

To the right are a piece of alcohol pipe (left), oxygen pipe (foreground) and a large piece of skin. Eckles says the pieces of pipe are all pretty much the same size. However, he says he takes what the skin will give since much of it was mangled when it was removed. Most chunks of skin are rough rectangles but some, like the one at right, are oddly shaped and take more thought in mounting.

Also he says there are no fixed prices for the pieces. "The price is based on the size of the piece and its interest." For example, the piece of skin at right is the largest ever offered. With that and its unusual shape, the price has been set at \$400. Other pieces of skin are between \$100 and \$300.

The display area at the Museum is very limited so there are many more in the office if you don't see one you like.



## WHITE SANDS MISSILE RANGE MUSEUM SPONSORS

### PLATINUM

(\$50,000 +)

None

### GOLD

(\$25,000 - \$49,999)

Lockheed Martin

Citizen's Bank

El Paso Electric

In Memory Of Mary Bochmann

### SILVER

(\$5,000 - \$24,999)

CSC

Sunwest Bank

COL (R) Leonard Sugerman

TRAX International

NewTec

Raytheon

MG (R) Niles J. Fulwyler

Doyle Piland

Jon and Elvia Gibson

Linda Lovelady Epstein

Marion and COL (R) Robert Mills

Austin and Pamela Vick

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## **The Back Page**



**NASA has parked their full-scale mock up of the astronaut escape system for Orion at the WSMR Museum. It will be on display through the first test of the real system at LC-32 this fall. Photo by Jim Eckles.**