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For more recent information about Area 51, see the new [Area 51 Research Center](#) maintained by Don Emory.

## Coming Fri 7/18: Titan Missile Launch from Vandenberg

From: Brian Webb <102670.1206@compuserve.com> (by way of tonydinkel@clubnet.net)  
Date: Thu, 17 Jul 1997 17:18:18 -0800

ASTRONOMY/SPACE ALERT FOR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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1997 July 16 (Wednesday) 21:00 PDT

### Impressive Launch Still Set For Friday Night?

A Titan IV booster is scheduled for launch from Vandenberg AFB this weekend. The vehicle and its classified payload is scheduled to leave SLC-4E at south Vandenberg sometime between 22:00 PDT Friday and 02:00 PDT Saturday. The Titan IV will leave the pad, climb vertically, and begin turning southward. A short time later it will place its reconnaissance payload into a polar orbit.

But late this afternoon, a nitrogen tetroxide leak was discovered at the vehicle. At 16:15 I was told that the leak may or may not delay the launch. As of 21:00 PDT, the launch appears to be on schedule.

The Titan IV is the U.S.'s largest unmanned launch vehicle. It stands 204 feet tall, weighs 1.9 million pounds, and produces 3.5 million pounds of thrust at launch.

Daytime Titan IV launches from Vandenberg have been seen as far away as Victorville. This weekend's night launch should be impressive and visible for a distance of at least 180 miles.

For those in coastal areas, summer nights are usually accompanied by late night low clouds. If you live within 15 miles of the coast, try to find a vantage point that's as high as possible so you'll be above any low clouds.

There are several possible viewing sights in the region. Here are a few:

Santa Ynez Peak: This site is actually a small parking area in the road about 1/4 mile west of the peak. It's only 40 miles from the pad and 4,000 feet above sea level. It's probably the best off-base vantage point. But be careful - the road is in fairly good condition, but there are steep drops and no guard rails. This road is a potential killer; one mistake and you're dead. Be very careful driving up and down the mountain. And be very careful if you back up your car in order to turn around. It's easy to back up too far and accidentally go over the side.

To get to Santa Ynez Peak, take the 101 to Refugio State Beach. Exit on Refugio Road and head north. Several miles later there's a T-shaped intersection with a sign for La Sherpa Convention Center. There's a road off to the side with a sign that reads "This road is not maintained by Santa Barbara County. Take this road uphill several miles. The site is between the observatory and Santa Ynez Peak, which is covered with radio antennas.

East Camino Cielo: This is also a good location. It's a concrete water cistern in the mountains above Santa Barbara. The top of the tank is solid concrete and makes a good camera platform. To get to this site, go to the intersection of highway 154 and East Camino Cielo. Turn on to East Camino Cielo. You'll pass a ranger station and general store. Keep going up hill. Several miles later you should see the cement water cistern on your left. Be careful while driving on this road.

West Portrero Valley: Take the 101 to Newbury Park. Exit on Wendy Road and head south. After a few miles you'll reach an intersection. On the right will be a sign pointing to Point Mugu and the state hospital. Take this road west until it suddenly makes a right turn. Then park.

Del Cerro Park: Go to south Torrance and take Crenshaw Blvd all of the way to the top of the penninsula.

The following table gives the exact position of each site, its distance (range) from SLC-4E, and the direction (azimuth) to the launch pad (in degrees from true north).

| Site   | Latitude<br>(deg min sec) | Longitude<br>(deg min sec) | Elev.<br>(ft) | Range<br>(mi) | Azimuth<br>(deg) |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| Santa Ynez Peak,<br>Santa Barbara County                     | 34 31 42 N                | 119 58 58 W                | 3,900         | 40.0          | 292.7            |
| Water Cistern,<br>East Camino Cielo,<br>Santa Barbara County | 34 30 57 N                | 119 46 43 W                | 3,000         | 51.2          | 288.7            |
| West Portrero Valley,<br>Ventura County                      | 34 09 24 N                | 118 59 24 W                | 879           | 102.2         | 294.1            |
| Del Cerro Park,<br>Rancho Palos Verdes                       | 33 45 40 N                | 118 22 30 W                | 1,500         | 146.0         | 298.5            |

The actual launch time is classified, but the Air Force will probably release it late Friday afternoon or evening. If I have enough advance notice, I'll post it on my web page. You might also begin calling the Vandenberg Launch Update Line (805-734-8232 ext. 61857) early Friday evening to see if the exact launch time has been released.

Beginning Friday evening, an attempt will be made to pass the exact launch time and countdown status via amateur radio. If you own a scanner, or if you're a ham, monitor the following repeaters for information:

| Repeater             | Location                 | Frequency (MHz) | PL (Hz)              |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Mount Disappointment | Near Mount Wilson        | 145.300         | None                 |
| Oat Mountain         | North Los Angeles County | 147.705         | 114.8<br>or<br>141.3 |
| Sulphur Mountain     | Near Ojai                | 146.880         | 127.3                |
| Broadcast Peak       | Santa Barbara            | 147.000         | 131.8                |

Several hams are planning to drive to Santa Ynez Peak on Friday night. The talk-in frequency will be the 147.000 MHz Broadcast Peak repeater. The 146.520 MHz simplex calling channel will be the back-up frequency.

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PO Box 30303, Las Vegas, NV 89173 Glenn Campbell, Webmaster & Moderator

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