



A full-scale model of Canada's famous Avro CF-105 Arrow was unveiled October 8 at the Toronto Aerospace Museum.

Dreaming in Nobel at twice the speed of sound

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Beyond the “No Trespassing” and “Danger Explosives” signs; beyond the broken and decaying fences; beyond the ATV trails; history is slowly fading into the landscape.

A deer passes leaving its hoof-prints in the sand, a heron rises out of the swamp, and chickadees and other small birds flit from tree to tree.

Moss has grown over pavement and wall foundations, and trees are growing through the remnants of the few structures that remain at the former Orenda Test Establishment northwest of the village of Nobel.

Tire tracks of ATVs are the most recent evidence of man in an area where 200 people once worked testing engine parts for what was planned to be the fastest aircraft in the world – the Avro Arrow fighter jet.

All else is slowly being obliterated, as was the will of the political powers of 1959 which halted the Avro Arrow project and the Iroquois engine project – and managed to almost completely destroy any evidence that either project had ever existed.

The construction of the body and engine of the Avro Arrow project took place in Malton, Ontario, near Toronto, during the 1950s, but the testing of the engine which was to power the Avro Arrow to

new speeds far beyond the speed of sound took place in Nobel. Many important decisions regarding the design of the engine were made here.

The first Avro Arrow flew in October, 1957, before the Iroquois gas turbine engine was ready to be installed. With the new Iroquois engine under development by Orenda, Mach 2 – a technical term meaning twice the speed of sound – was expected to be easily within its speed capability.

To mark the 49th anniversary of that first flight, the Toronto Aerospace Museum unveiled a life-size replica of the Avro Arrow on October 8, 2006. That display will remain in its permanent collection and is available for public viewing during regular museum hours.

In the area of Parry Sound, Nobel and McKellar, there are over a dozen people remaining who worked at the Orenda Test Establishment during what many say were the best years of their lives – the 1950s. These are the fitter-testers, the engineering assistants, the detail draftsmen, the clerks, the carpenters, the drivers and others, who assisted in fine-tuning and enhancing the development of the Iroquois engine that was to power the Avro Arrow to twice the speed of sound and beyond. They are still here – bright, intelligent people who remember a part of Canada's history, and the making and breaking of a legend.

The site was formerly used as a Defence Industries Limited munitions explosive plant, and was chosen as a site for the engine testing because it was available and suitable for the job.

Across the road, Canadian Industries Limited, working in explosives, continued to operate as it had for many years.

Subsequently, the majority of people living in Nobel received their income from Canadian Industries Limited or the Orenda Test Establishment. Life in Nobel during those times was one of great community spirit, punctuated with some challenges from living so close to these operations. Howard Dewar of Parry Sound, a fitter-tester at the Orenda Test Establishment, says steam ejectors were used to simulate atmospheric conditions at 30,000 or 35,000 feet altitude. Steam escaping from the ejectors in winter would coat the area in ice for miles around, he says. Noise and occasional vibrations added to the challenges of living nearby the Orenda Test Establishment. But any complaints to the chief engineer from the residents were met with a suggestion that if wives didn't like the conditions, they should get their husbands to find jobs elsewhere, Mr. Dewar recalls.

Canadian Industries Limited and Orenda Test Establishment were booming in a good way too, says Ken Dunk of Parry Sound, a combustion lab technician at the time.