

EARTHQUAKE 1989 - SAN LORENZO VALLEY / SUMMIT - REBUILDING SJM 10-20-92 1-B

Long dry spell isn't over

■ **Top story:** 28 mountain families have no water years after the quake.

BY PAUL ROGERS
Mercury News Staff Writer

While most of the Bay Area looked back on the anniversary of the Loma Prieta earthquake as a distant memory this weekend, one Santa Cruz Mountains community remained frustratingly high and dry.

Three years after the quake, the 28 families who live along Brush Road near the Lexington Reservoir still have no permanent water supply.

Residents in this remote neighborhood, which follows a steep, winding road just off Big Moody Curve on Highway 17, pay up to \$400 a month to have water trucked in — exactly the way they did immediately after the quake.

No landscaping

"I take showers at our health club in Los Gatos," said Jim Hench, 33. "Nobody here has any landscaping. And we don't even think of washing our cars."

In both Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties, small water systems that serve 25 other rural mountain communities are rebuilt, up and running.

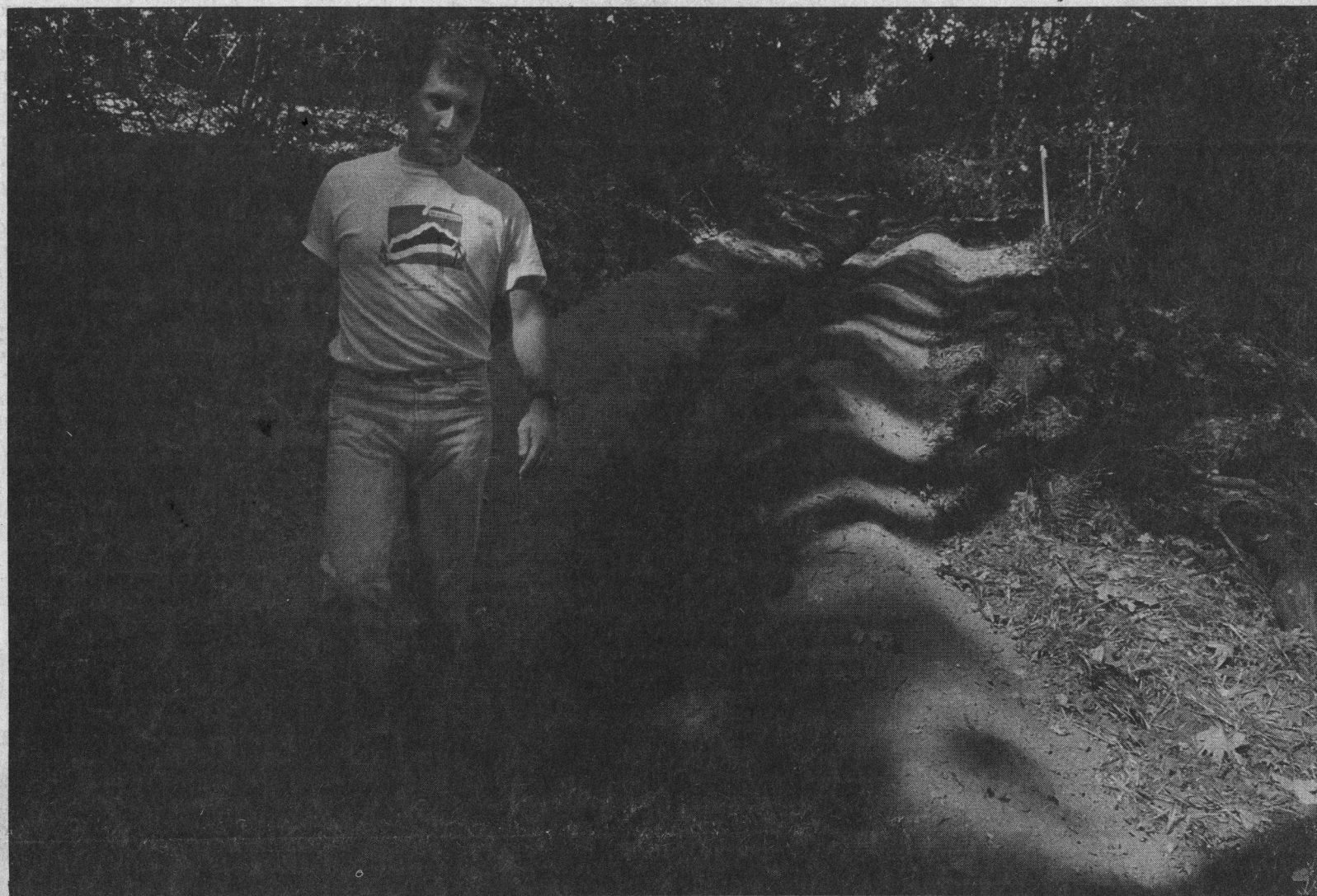
But because of a combination of bad luck and bureaucratic delays, Brush Road is the last in line. To make matters worse, a new fight with the Red Cross over emergency relief funding has added further uncertainty.

Wells not practical

Until the quake, residents along Brush Road and nearby Old Well Road drew their water from wells.

Quake damage to the underground aquifers that supplied those wells changed everything, however. Geologists have told residents it probably would be futile now to spend the \$10,000 or more to drill for new water; most holes would come up dry.

Instead, Hench, a sales representative for a medical supply



JASON M. GROW — MERCURY NEWS

Jim Hench on Monday walks along a ditch dug for the installation of water pipes along Brush Road in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

company, and his neighbors decided to form a small water company. They hoped to lay plastic pipes two miles from a small reservoir on Summit Road down the hill to their community, store the water in a holding tank and hook up all 28 houses.

Total cost: \$730,000.

When they applied for disaster relief through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, they were turned down. Government officials at the state Office of Emergency Services ruled they hadn't had a formal water association before the quake and therefore were ineligible for money to start a new one.

They appealed and were

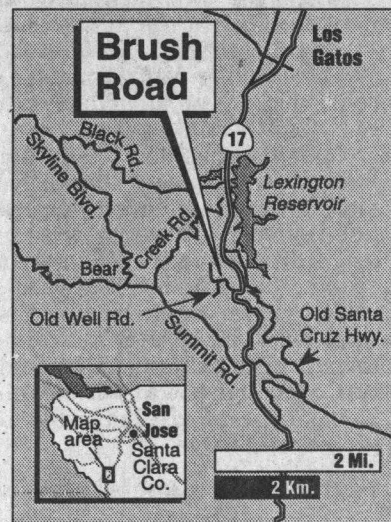
turned down again.

They looked next to the Red Cross.

A year ago, the Santa Clara Valley Chapter of the Red Cross signed a contract to provide \$400,000. Checks for half the amount were given to the Brush Road project. Officials also said that up to another \$200,000 might become available, for a total of \$600,000.

To cover the remaining costs, the families each paid \$14,600. Some have refinanced their homes or cut into their pensions. Many expected to get some money back as more Red Cross fund-

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MERCURY NEWS

"I take showers at our health club in Los Gatos. . . . And we don't even think of washing our cars."

— Jim Hench, founder of Brush Road water company

Long dry spell still plagues Brush Road

■ WATER

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ing became available.

After months of delays and \$32,000 in county permit fees, construction started in September. Now only six weeks away from completion, the project has hit another glitch.

On Oct. 9, Hench received a letter from Red Cross projects manager James Burgard noting: "The Red Cross Water Restoration Project is closed . . . please do not submit requests for additional funding."

With only \$200,000 of Red Cross money in hand for a \$730,000 bill, Hench calls the letter "the knockout punch" that could shut the project down, uncompleted.

"I couldn't sleep for two days when I heard," he said.

Monday, Red Cross officials promised he will get at least another \$200,000.

Scott Render, the agency's chief executive officer for Santa Clara Valley, said the letter only referred to future commitments.

"We've always met our obligations," said Render. "We've been there. We've come through."

A meeting between the two sides is scheduled for Monday.

That still leaves the final \$200,000, which was given to two other small mountain water companies, Villa Del Monte and Big Redwood Park.

Both companies have been promised FEMA funding. They say they will return the money to the Red Cross when FEMA pays them, which still hasn't happened.

Hench has hired an attorney. Other Brush Road residents are worried about fires and their tanks running empty on days when the water trucks don't deliver.