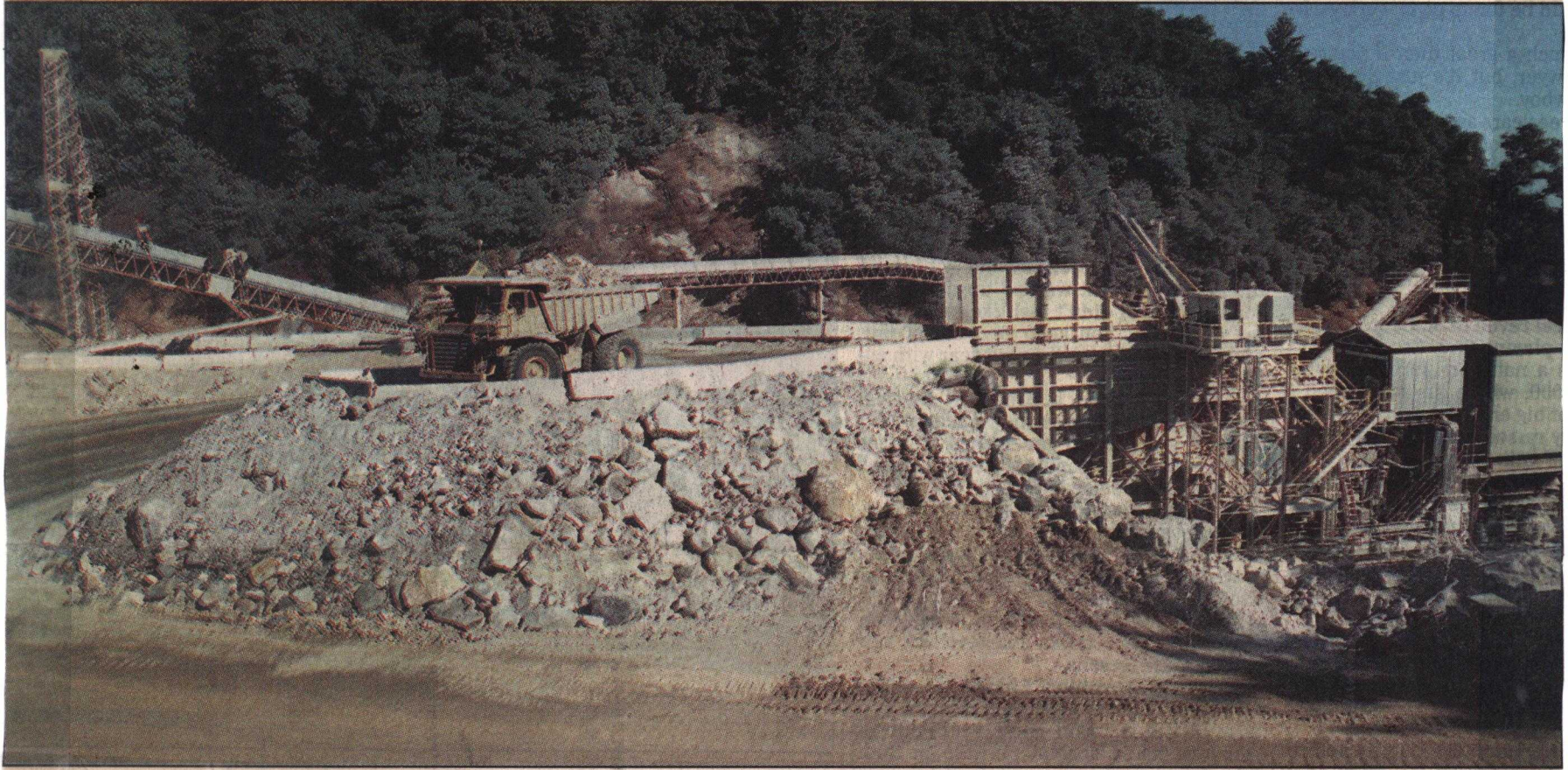


A rock and a hard spot



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

RMC Lonestar will expand its operations following the acquisition of some surrounding property in Bonny Doon.

RMC growth creeps closer to Bonny Doon residents

By DAN WHITE
Sentinel staff writer

BONNY DOON — Residents here are uneasy neighbors of a hole in the ground — a local quarry that feeds limestone to the RMC Lonestar cement plant up Highway 1 in Davenport.

For three decades, they have been accepting, if unenthusiastic, about the operation. Then, earlier this year, RMC applied to dig up 25 more acres of its property.

Now the company appears to be expanding further, drilling test bores for limestone on several recently acquired residential properties along Smith Grade.

The drilling quickly struck a bedrock of neighborhood anger.

The new RMC properties are zoned residential and are not part of the company's current mining plan. They also contain hills and trees Bonny Doon residents view as sound barriers between themselves and the noisy quarry operation.

"Limestone is the lifeblood of their huge dragon of a plant in Davenport," reads a recent issue of The Highlander, a community newsletter. "To feed this voracious dragon, they must pursue this limestone relentlessly, ever deeper into Bonny Doon ..."

Illustrating the article is a picture of the company's star logo — with a demonic face, fangs and a hard hat.

RMC officials reject that portrayal of their company — but they acknowledge that without expansion, the quarry will



Workers load rock for a trip to the grinder, then to the cement plant on Wednesday afternoon at the RMC Lonestar quarry.

be exhausted in 15 to 20 years, which would also cripple the cement plant.

Company Vice President Satish Sheth said RMC hasn't completed its analysis of the Smith Grade samples.

"We don't even know what's there," Sheth said. He said he is taking community concerns seriously, but added there is no way of predicting whether RMC will ever mine the residential parcels.

It's likely that most of the roughly 3,500 residents of Bonny Doon would say RMC has been a considerate neighbor. But many are worried about the future.

"Overall, the relationship has been pretty cordial," said resident Fred Bryck. "But there's no provision in the general plan allowing expansion into residential properties."

In the past, most of the complaints

about quarry noise, dust and tremors came from the immediate neighbors on Smith Grade.

Some of those neighbors are gone now because RMC bought them out. But 100 residents from throughout this quiet rural settlement have taken over where the Smith Grade residents left off, making this the most heated Bonny Doon land-use debate in years.

These members of the 40-year-old Rural Bonny Doon Association, which publishes the Highlander, have drawn up a petition to the county Board of Supervisors, calling for "absolutely no expansion" of quarry areas and the mineral extraction zone.

"This is a major issue, like the nuclear power plant in Davenport," said Ted Benhari, chairman of the association, in reference to a defeated proposal for a North Coast nuclear plant in the mid '60s. "I hope we have the same success here, but it's going to be a long battle. We don't want them to close the quarry. We just don't want them to expand beyond areas it's zoned for."

The association's approval of the quarry and rejection of expansion presents the paradox at the heart of this conflict. According to the very nature of mineral extraction, a quarry can exist only as long as there is something to extract. With current supplies projected to last only 20 years, RMC's survival in Bonny Doon means long-term growth.

RMC insists the limestone must come

Continued from Page A1

from local sources to make logistical and economic sense.

The company's county application to mine about 25 acres of land that fall well within its mining area would not require a zoning change.

But residents fear the mining will mean removing trees that conceal the quarry from the neighborhood.

The controversial test bores are not part of that application. They fall beyond the "white line" of the mining zone. To date, RMC has not applied for permission to mine anywhere outside areas already designated for mining.

Sheth said that if any mining were to happen in those residential parcels, it would go on only after the quarry's resources are used up in about two decades.

"This isn't something that's going to happen tomorrow or even next year," he said. "We don't even have

a mining plan. If we go beyond the point of (test drilling) there are a lot of permitting steps to be taken and public scrutiny."

During a packed meeting of the Rural Bonny Doon Association this week, Sheth insisted that nothing would happen without Bonny Doon residents getting a chance to review it.

Resident Bill Cunningham said he couldn't fault the company for applying to mine within the limits of property that is already zoned for mineral extraction.

"I don't want to shoot down something that was approved in 1968," he said. "I moved here after that."

But he said expanding into the residential-zoned properties would mean "Lonestar would be coming into our established community."

Smith Grade resident Dina Hoffman said she worried about the disruption of Bonny Doon with blasting and flying rocks, large and loud machines and trucks, dust,

and groundwater problems from blasting materials.

Other residents say that even opening up the possibility of an expansion could dig into property values.

The controversy comes at a time when the quarry has been on the minds of local residents more than usual.

Existing problems at the quarry, including seasonal runoff into nearby Liddell Stream, and a notorious "mystery noise" attributed to part of the RMC operation, are only adding to worries about the future.

The stream is part of the city of Santa Cruz's water supply.

Sheth said he is listening to concerns, while also indicating that the company plans to stick around.

Sticking around means new and local sources.

"The company has been here since 1965," he said. "And we'd like to be here for a long time."

Please see DRILLING — BACK PAGE