

Splashy new life for an old quarry

The latest county park carves out its own niche

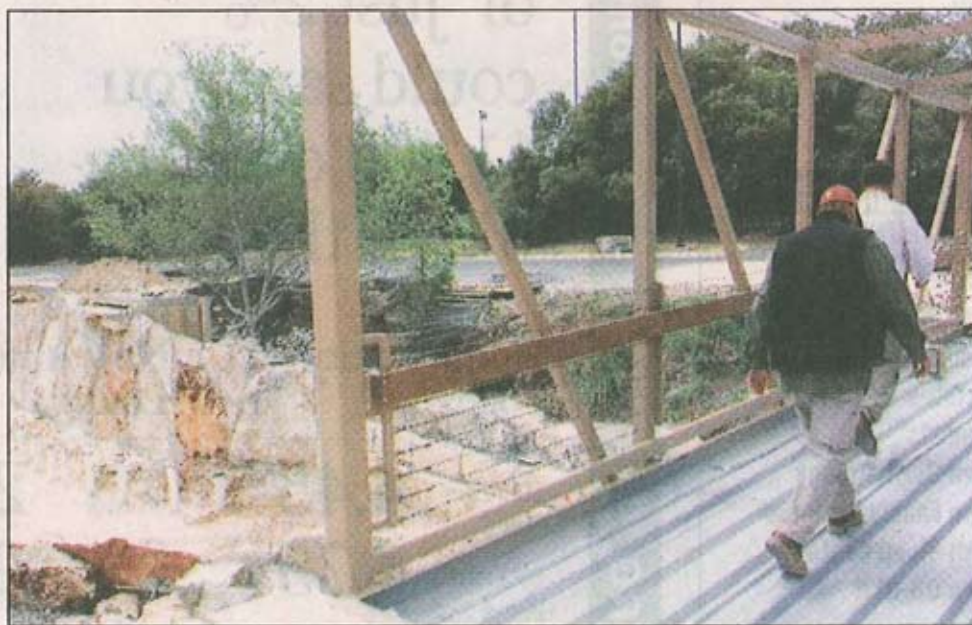
By ANDREW McLEMORE

Williamson County officials hope to ignite the imagination of children with a watery, rocky playground set to open by the end of spring.

The Quarry Splash Pad in Southwest Regional Park will feature water cannons, a waterfall, streambeds, and motion-activated water sprays embedded in the rough rock that surrounds the play area.

Unlike similar splash pads, a term for water parks without a pool, the county's \$1.8 million play area is being built in the middle of a rock quarry that park designers and WilCo officials say will provide a stimulating and possibly unique setting for children and families looking to cool off.

"Once you're down into it, it's kind of this wonderland of splash,"



Andrew McLemore

County officials this week led a tour of the Quarry Splash Pad in Southwest Regional Park, an \$1.8 million play area built into a former rock quarry.

said Chris Lalich, who designed the play area with landscape company RVi. "We wanted everything to be kind of hidden and more geologic. It

looks like you're kind of immersed in something else."

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QUARRY

Park planners create 'outdoor adventure'

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The plan for a water area at Southwest Regional Park began back in 2006 as part of a \$250 million bond package for roads and parks approved by voters.

With roughly 80 percent of construction now completed, area residents can expect to visit the park addition as early as mid-May, Director of WilCo Park and Recreation Jim Rodgers said.

"They're going to have so much here," Mr. Rodgers said of children who visit the park. "We tried to do it like it's an outdoor adventure, something that will spur their imagination."

Officials expected the Quarry Splash Pad to open sooner, but a setback with the foundation for the restroom has slowed down the construction process, Mr. Rodgers said.



Andrew McLemore

Jim Rodgers, a county parks official, points out features of the Quarry Splash Pad in Southwest Regional Park, which will feature water cannons, a waterfall, streambeds, and motion-activated water sprays embedded in the rough rock that surrounds the play area.

It would have been easier to build the play area on another flatter piece of land in the 800-acre park, but the quarry is also what will make it so appealing, he said.

"When we built that park, it had a lot of the athletic endeavors," Mr. Rodgers said. "This was something to turn it into a family operation."

Commissioner Cynthia

Long said the commissioners court moved toward the idea of building a splash pad instead of a swimming area to avoid lifeguards, whose salaries would raise the county's maintenance costs.

It was also important to try and appeal to a wider age group, Ms. Long said.

"It's that group mom is still not comfortable leaving

at home, but you still want to entertain the older ones, too," she said. "We're trying to do things that hopefully kids up through age 12 can enjoy."

A bridge serves as an entranceway to the water park, and sidewalks curve down and back around to a large semi-circular wall of rough-hewn quarry boulders that will spout water from holes and cracks in the surface. At one place, children will be able to stand behind a waterfall that spills off the top of a nine-foot wall.

Children can spray one another with water cannons built into the ground and climb on walls underneath the bridge.

Miles Smith, the project superintendent for Kraftsman Playgrounds and Water Parks, said after seven years of building splash pads, he has never seen one like this.

"The terrain makes it an unusual place for a splash park," Mr. Smith said. "But it's going to be a really good place for a splash park, too."

county@wilcosun.com