

Indian relics could hinder mine

By Steve Kemme • skemme@enquirer.com • August 8, 2010

ANDERSON TWP. - The Little Miami Valley's rich American Indian roots might complicate the efforts of Martin Marietta Materials Inc. to build an underground limestone mine at Round Bottom and Broadwell roads.

As one of the requirements for obtaining federal permits for the controversial mine, the company will have to hire consultants to conduct a historic survey of the mine site and its surrounding area. The purpose is to identify any historic resources above and below the ground that could be affected by the mine.

The above-ground survey probably will reveal few, if any, historic buildings in that area, said Margo Warminski, preservation director of the Cincinnati Preservation Association.

But the underground survey might reveal Indian relics, she said.

"There may be significant archeological resources under the ground," Warminski said. "Areas close to rivers are often very rich archeologically."

The historic survey is one of several hurdles Martin Marietta must clear before establishing the limestone mine, which would involve blasting 400 to 800 feet underground.

Mine foes say it would be a major nuisance to the area because of dust, noise, traffic and underground vibrations it would generate. Martin Marietta says the mine would be a benefit to the area, not a problem.

One of the biggest potential obstacles is the lawsuit filed in June in Hamilton County Common Pleas Court by the mine's opponents. The lawsuit asks the court to overturn the Anderson Board of Zoning Appeals' approval of the project after nearly two years of public hearings.

Another obstacle is the Hamilton County commissioners' opposition to allowing Martin Marietta to build two important underground tunnels below county-owned Broadwell Road. The tunnels would connect the underground mine south of Broadwell with the above-ground part of the operation on the north side of the road.

The borders of the area that will undergo the historic survey haven't been determined. There is no timetable yet for the survey.

Tim Mara, attorney for the anti-mine group called CABOOM (Citizens Against Blasting On Our Miami), said if enough Indian relics or remains are found underground, it could delay or stop the mine. He said his group will keep close watch for the study results.

"This is part of our ongoing effort to identify forums where we might take steps to stop the project," Mara said. "We intend to be hot on their trail."

Martin Marietta officials did not return phone calls seeking comment.

Over the past 150 years, an enormous amount of Indian relics already have been removed from the Little Miami Valley from Mariemont to Newtown and Anderson Township. Harvard University and the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History conducted major excavations.

As recently as 1981, workers discovered the skeletons of Woodland Indians while digging for the construction of a firehouse hose tower in Newtown.

But Sandy Russell, who wrote a history of Newtown for its bicentennial celebration in 1992, said there might not be many Indian artifacts left, particularly in the area around the planned underground mine site. Surface mining has been going on in that area for decades.

"I would be surprised if there was anything there that had not already been compromised - delighted, but surprised," Russell said.

"The artifacts might have been compromised by all the mining that already has gone on in the area. Even the farming in the valley could have destroyed many of the artifacts before mining became an issue."