**Gravel Is Valuable**

For years the great gravel beds of Crow creek, extending north and south alongside Crowley’s Ridge, say life, for an occasional vagabond excavated at irregular intervals. But with the extensive road building program in eastern Arkansas, the realization that the beds were of inestimable value that pits caused by excavations filled quickly after rains, that because of the proximity of the gravel to construction work, expense of shipping would be materially lessened, and almost over night, the plant sprang up.

Into a calm countryside, spottering cranes broke the quietness, puffing engines blackened sky-blue, railroad tracks laid low weeds and wild plants — the industry was begun. Abundant piles came from these sand and gravel deposits in the bed of Crow creek, a steep stream, which suddenly turns into turbulent torrent after heavy rains. Beginning above New Castle, Crow creek extends for about eight miles, entering into the St. Francis river below Magazine.

While only a two-mile stretch of the creek bed is being excavated at present, the industry is one of the most important in St. Francis county, as it furnishes employment for 75 to 100 men, besides supplying sand and gravel for major construction projects.

As many as 24 cranes are shipped in a single day, although the plant has a shipping capacity of 20 or 40 cars per day by loading from the stock pile. With crews working day and night, between 15 and 20 cars a day are excavated, washed and graded.

All sand and gravel used on Highway No. 70 from West Memphis to Wheatley comes from the Crow creek pit, as old sand and gravel needed for paving the bridge construction from West Memphis to Newport, and for the $1,000,000 bridge at Clarendon.

Dugline machines are used to excavate the gravel, which is then loaded on dump cars and transported to the gravel plant over an industrial narrow-gauge railroad. At the plant, a gigantic framework fastening skyward, the gravel is hoisted to a horizontal plane atop the structure. It then passes through various screens of various sizes, is washed, and separated into three bins. In one bin is placed gravel from three inches to an inch and a half in diameter; in another, gravel from one and one-half to three-fourths inch; and in a third, gravel ranging from three-fourths to one-fourth inch. Gravel smaller than one-fourth an inch in diameter is graded as sand. Mud and silt which have been washed out, passes off as waste. The clean sand is stored separately, and the gravel is placed into three bins, depending on its size. Gravel is mixed according to specifications of the order when it is loaded.

A Diesel engine with 129 horsepower operates the plant. A well, 400 feet deep, furnishes water to wash the gravel at the rate of 400 gallons per minute. Three locomotive cranes are used for handling sand and gravel in the stock piles.

Two switch cars from the plant to the railroad mainline, a standard-gauge locomotive with several miles of track is used. Other equipment includes two narrow-gauge gasoline locomotives and one narrow-gauge steam locomotive to transport material from the creek bed to the plant.

Sometimes the gravel is under the top soil, although for the most part, the gravel lies on the surface. A total of 168 acres is owned or leased by the plant. The larger rocks are crushed into gravel.

All sort of queer things are found in the gravel. Dog up among one excavation, a E. J. Summerfield found a large three-cent penny, weighted several tons. A petrified log was discovered as well as a large number of fossils. Many pieces have been found which are in the process of petrifying. Petrified teeth, bird bills, and worm stones that can’t be identified are among some of the fossils. Rebuilding a bungalow, one of the petrified articles has a center stem showing a distinct difference in composition of the outer layer.

Bones, undoubtedly belonging to a prehistoric mastodon, have been found in the creek bed and are now in the possession of Dr. J. J. Russel. These include a femur, weighing 19 pounds; fibula, 29 pounds; a shoulder blade and several vertebrae. Teeths have also been found, but all trace of them has been lost.