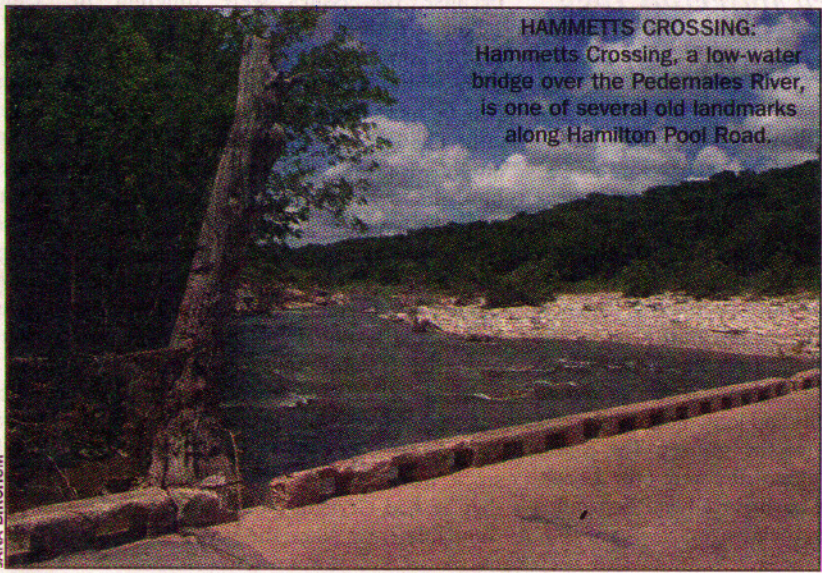


JANA BIRCHUM



HAMMETTS CROSSING:
Hammetts Crossing, a low-water bridge over the Pedernales River, is one of several old landmarks along Hamilton Pool Road.

WEST CYPRESS HILLS

(OR "THE BIG MUD SLIDE AT LICK-NO-MORE CREEK")

This is a disaster that's no longer waiting to happen - it already has. Developer Russell Parker is in defensive mode after discharge from a dam that he built to accompany a storm water detention pond turned the clear waters of Lick Creek into a dark, murky mess farther downstream, en route to the Pedernales River. "The pristine water is gone," environmental lawyer Phillip Poplin said. The contrast "is incredibly stark when you go from Lick Creek to the other creeks in the area." Poplin, one of the attorneys representing residents who traced the creek's demise directly to the development, described the dam as a massive engineering affront to nature, looming about 25 feet tall. "Good God, it's like putting a dam in a lake," he said. "They're the ones who started this mess, and they're the ones who need to clean it up." The development will include 435 lots squeezed onto 250 acres - a risky prospect given the rugged terrain; environmentalists monitoring the increasing number of construction projects in this fragile area view this particular case as a poster child for an often repeated argument: "Water quality control" measures have very high failure rates. Additionally, they point to a lack of enforcement from the LCRA, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and the county, which, even though it approves the plats for these developments, has few environmental regulations on the books even to pretend to enforce.