

Digging away at water needs

By Gus Thomson, *Auburn Journal*, Auburn, CA
Thursday, August 19, 2004 10:00 PM PDT

Journal Staff Writer

Drilling has started on an all-important tunnel that will help pump and pipe American River water to rapidly growing western Placer County.

The work is being done by an Auburn tunnel-drilling contractor that has branched off into the wine industry, digging mammoth wine caves for Napa Valley vintners while keeping its hand in more standard boring work like the one it is now doing in the American River canyon near Auburn.

Magorian Mine Service of Auburn is using a 52-ton Austrian-made drill rig with a mace-like cutting head that uses dozens of spike-like, steel tips to carve through the hard rock.

Heavy equipment operator Andy Buelna of Forbestown operates the rig as it rips into the rock face. He'll create an entrance and a 104-foot-by-18-foot chamber to hold water before finishing the job within the next week. The chamber will allow a pool of water five feet deep.

The drill equipment originally saw service in a coal mine. The cutting head continually revolves to remove the rock.

"I call it an overgrown grinder," Buelna said.

Mine engineer **Don Magorian** has made a name for his business by building quality caves for wine storage, Buelna said. It's not uncommon to tunnel out caves as big as 20,000 to 30,000 square feet for wine storage, he said.

A Colorado contractor will follow Magorian with specialized equipment to dig a smaller tunnel that will climb to a permanent pumping station to be built above the river's shoreline.

The American River is now being diverted past the project through a tunnel two-thirds of a mile long. It will be re-channeled to flow naturally as part of a second stage of the project. The diverted river will pass by the tunnel, allowing water to flow into the excavation.

When the Bureau of Reclamation completes the work and infrastructure to support the water's move off the American River, flows will be pumped up through the new tunnel into the Auburn Tunnel. The mile-long tunnel was built in the 1970s under Auburn to ferry American River water the Placer County Water Agency has rights to into western Placer County. Costly, temporary pumps have been installed yearly by the U.S. Bureau of

Reclamation as part of a contract with the Water Agency. The pact stems from removal of the local water purveyor's pumping plant three decades ago during Auburn dam construction.

The \$17 million first phase of the pump station and river restoration work started last year and is now slated to be completed by late summer or fall 2005. David Jones, bureau spokesman, said the contract specifications for the second stage of work — which includes restoration of the river — are being revised and should be ready to be re-bid next spring.

“We notified contractors this week that we would be canceling the process and would re-submit it next spring for proposals,” Jones said. “We’re using the interim time to make design modifications that should realize significant cost savings to taxpayers as well as the Water Agency.”

Jones added that the bureau expects funding to be available for the second phase once it goes out again for bids. Estimated cost for the total project is about \$30 million.