

Orange County's Great Park On Target

It may be the largest concrete demolition project in the U.S. in 2008

By Loren Faulkner -- California Builder and Engineer, 2/4/2008

A giant helium-filled orange balloon carrying 30 passengers 400 feet aloft at the old El Toro Marine Air Base, in Irvine, California, can be seen for miles from the flat Orange County landscape, in Southern California. On Thursdays through Sundays it gives visitors a bird's-eye view of work in progress on a 1,347-acre park that will rival New York's Central Park, according to Great Park planners.

In July, 2005, Lennar/Heritage Fields, a development firm, bought the 4,700-acre decommissioned El Toro base from the U.S. Navy for \$649.5 million. Lennar/Heritage then deeded the center 1,347 acres to the city of Irvine for the Great Park. Plans call for construction of three mixed-use developments surrounding the park, including housing. The Great Park is open to the general public and when finished will include extensive natural habitat areas and much open space, as well as recreational and cultural sites. So far, the schedule is on target.

The View

From 400 feet up, visitors will see in the next few years:

- Recycled Materials Company (RMC, based in Arvada, Colo.) performing concrete demolition of nearly 10 miles of runways and taxiways. Runway depths are from 1.5 feet from the WWII era to nearly 4 feet for the jet age fleets. All will be crushed on site into useable base-sized aggregates for Great Park roadways, and for use to aid in run-off water percolation. Some 3.5 million tons of concrete and steel from the former Air Station will be recycled and used at Orange County's Great Park. It will also be considered the largest concrete demolition project in the U.S. in 2008, according to Great Park planners.
- Some 1,300 remedial clean-up sites are on the property, according to Pat Fuscoe, president of Fuscoe Engineering, overseeing the entire project. Most are fairly benign — landfills, tires, wood, trash. Although there is a jet fuel plume under the property, it is solvable. The local water district is pumping it out, filtering that water and placing it back into the ground. The U.S. Navy is paying for this remediation.
- Excavation of a 30-foot to 60-foot deep, 2.5-mile-long canyon — with footbridges being constructed.
- Tierra Verde Industries (based in Irvine, Calif.) demolishing numerous base buildings and recycling tons of wood, glass and steel from barracks and hangers — reducing some 300,000 tons of wood into mulch to be used on-site.

- Several miles of asphalt and concrete being crushed and recycled into Lennar Development's new streets and sidewalks.
- Construction of the many other facets of the Great Park that are listed below ...

Demolition may take three years, while the Great Park may be completed some years past that.

The Plans

(Source: www.ocgp.org)

Great Canyon. The Great Canyon is major space in the Great Park. Over 2 miles long with 60 feet of elevation change, the Great Canyon is intended as an oasis where visitors can stroll along paths and trails bordered by native palms, woodlands and Mediterranean ornamentals. A perennial stream with a string of small pools will run the length of the Canyon.

Wildlife Corridor. The Great Park Wildlife Corridor will establish a wildlife movement and open space connection between the habitat preserves in the Limestone-Whiting Wilderness Park to the north and the Laguna Coast Wilderness and Crystal Cove State Parks to the south.

Sports Park. The 165-acre Sports Park will feature a variety of sports facilities and programs to accommodate the county's varying athletic interests. Some of the proposed amenities include soccer fields, baseball fields, a skateboard complex, a rock climbing wall, and a field house.

Veterans Memorial. For over 50 years, MCAS El Toro served the country as a training facility in peacetime and a staging area for support of overseas military missions in times of conflict. The history of El Toro will be memorialized at the Great Park Air Museum where vintage aircraft will be displayed on remnants of the former runways.

Cultural Terrace. The Cultural Terrace is a 100-foot-wide Jacaranda tree-lined urban terrace that will serve as a key pedestrian and social space linking the major cultural features of the Great Park. Located nearby will be a 10,000-seat amphitheater with views to the Lake and the Canyon.

Water. The creation of wetlands, including a 20-plus-acre lake, enhanced riparian habitat and natural treatment systems will help conserve and protect the area's water supply while providing additional habitat opportunities for wildlife.

Botanic Garden. The Botanic Garden is the heart of the Great Park. Visitors will be able to observe Southern California's plants in habitats close up and in detail. They will be able to experience, in a totally new way, the relationships between people and plants, food and health, society and setting.

The Orange County Great Park, which is almost twice the size of Central Park, will be a major metropolitan park and the focal point of redevelopment of the 4,700-acre former Marine Corps Air Station at El Toro.

Twenty-seven teams from throughout the world competed to lead the design of the OC Great Park. Ken Smith, Landscape Architect of New York, and his team won the master design title. The team is now called the Great Park Design Studio.