

RUBBLE ROUSER

For those who dig it, a quarry is a blast. But they have to make sure there's not a whole lot of shaking going on.

Photography by Scott Stiles

Quarrys rock. Where else do you find trucks the size of small houses carrying 100,000 pounds of stone per load? Or machines that pound boulders into pea-sized pebbles? And explosives experts who can bring down a wall of granite with the precision of a surgeon — well, maybe one with a very large scalpel — without shaking the gizzards out of people living nearby?

There are more than 200 crushed-stone quarries in the state, according to Frederick Allen, executive director of the Raleigh-based North Carolina Aggregates Association. They produced 75.7 million tons of rock worth \$589 million last year, most of it used for road work

and in construction projects. Few industries, Allen says, confront the contradictions this one faces. Foremost is a phenomenon he calls the paradox of the quarry: "The more you grow, the more population you have and the higher the demand is, but the more difficult it is to find a place for the quarry."

That puts operators between a rock and a hard place. Stone is heavy, expensive to transport — about 15 cents a ton per mile — and, as commodities go, dirt cheap. Hence quarries must be near the growth that doesn't want them around. "Our biggest concern today is community acceptance. Twenty years ago, it might have been the environment."