

## Cooper RV Park

If you have seen the concrete picnic tables and RV pads alongside Sugar Creek on the west edge of the soccer fields across from Cooper School, you may have wondered why those are there. Cooper Communities built a campground there as part of their amenities right after John Cooper Sr. opened the Bella Vista Village retirement community fifty years ago in 1965. The Benton County Democrat of October 7, 1965, noted, "Already completed are 130 camping sites along Sugar Creek. There is a picnic table for each four sites and a water outlet for every two sites. Three wash house-toilets have been built." Not far north of the Lake Bella Vista dam, this was an attractive location for campers.

The June 1966 issue of the Village Vista included a picture of the camping grounds with the caption, "Charcoal grills, picnic tables, and sparkling Sugar Creek greet campers in Bella Vista Park. Electric power, pure hydrant water, and bath houses are also welcome facilities in the camping area."

However, as time went by, the campground was repeatedly flooded. Stories in the Weekly Vista tell the tale. On April 17, 1979: "...campers were moved out of the (RV) area after a rainfall of nearly three inches in four hours on April 11 caused Little Sugar Creek to rise out of its banks." The July 7, 1981 issue reported that five inches fell in some parts of the village the previous week. On January 9, 1985: "Sugar Creek was out of its banks....During the night of heavy rainfall, at least one camper sought high ground..." The issue of April 16, 1986, reported nearly six inches of rain in six hours on April 7. Two vans, a boat and trailer, a 22 foot camper trailer, and two cars were swept away.

As a result of all the flooding problems and then the decision by Benton County to build a new bridge across Sugar Creek to replace the one-lane roadway across the Bella Vista dam, the campsite was moved to Blowing Springs, where it became the POA RV Park. Cooper Communities deeded that property to the POA on Oct. 13, 1995. (Three years later, in November, 1998, the new bridge was opened across what was then named Dartmoor Road, now Mercy Way, and auto traffic across the Lake Bella Vista dam was permanently banned for the first time in 83 years.)

The Weekly Vista on May 10, 1995 reported that the new RV park was scheduled to open on May 15. Today, the POA website advertises the RV Park as being "tucked away in Blowing Springs Park. The scenic park features 64 spaces. The park offers picnic areas, a secure restroom and shower facility with a laundry area and a lounge, wireless Internet service, plenty of scenery, the Blowing Springs Trails and a short driving distance to the Veterans Wall of Honor, a movie theater, a grocery store and restaurants." Twenty years ago there were few if any of these in existence, and certainly no wireless Internet service. Much has changed in only 20 years!

Picture 1: Cover from an early Cooper Communities brochure. Courtesy of Bella Vista Historical Museum.



Picture 2: The first Cooper campground was located along Sugar Creek, west of the present day soccer fields, as illustrated in this Cooper brochure. Courtesy Bella Vista Historical Museum.



Picture 3: Old concrete picnic tables and RV pads still stand at the former RV park along Sugar Creek. Courtesy Xyta Lucas.

