



Alberta's First Gas Discovery: Langevin Siding 1883

At our September 20th luncheon, Micky Gulless gave an illustrated talk about Alberta's first natural gas discovery and PanCanadian Petroleum's project to find it. It was common knowledge that the Canadian Pacific Railway discovered gas while drilling a water well at Langevin Siding in 1883, but the exact location was unknown.

Robert W. Campbell, Chairman and CEO of PanCanadian Petroleum, initiated this project in 1977. He asked Bill Webb to find Alberta's first gas discovery as a way of commemorating the C.P.R.'s centennial in 1981. Bill brought Micky in on the project.

Her research found quite a few records of this well. There were three articles in *The Calgary Herald Mining and Range Advocate and General Advertiser*. The gas discovery was reported on December 12, 1883:

PHENOMENON. -- At Langevin, 4th siding west of Medicine Hat, a rather singular phenomenon has presented itself. The well-borers have reached a depth of 1,120 feet without finding water, but a gas which rushes out of the tube, which on taking fire emits a flame sufficient to light up the surrounding country. They still purpose going deeper for the water, but have given up working at night, not considering it safe.

Then on January 16, 1884:

ACCIDENT. -- On Tuesday of last week, an accident occurred at Langevin, fourth siding west of Medicine Hat, by the taking fire of the gas escaping from the bore of the artesian well at that place. The frame building surrounding the engine was in a few moments destroyed, and the men at work were in eminent (sic) peril of their lives. A man named Haines, had his leg severely fractured, and another whose name we did not learn, was badly burnt about the face and arms. Dr.

Henderson left on Thursday morning to attend the injured men.

The Glenbow Archives had a paper called *On Certain Borings in Manitoba and the Northwest Territory*, which Dr. George M. Dawson, of the Geological Society of Canada, presented to the Royal Society of Canada on May 26, 1886. This paper provided much information about the gas discovery and the second well drilled in 1884 to utilize the gas. It included a sample description of the discovery

Doodlebugs: The Video!

Your society's November lunch will feature guest speaker Sharon Stevens, who will show her video *Doodlebugs: the Video*.

In her intro, Ms. Stevens will describe her adventures getting this project off the ground, and her experiences growing up as a doodlebug's daughter.

Date: Tuesday, November 14
Time: 11:30 am
Place: Palliser Hotel
Cost: \$18 for members, \$20 for non-members
To register: Bill McLellan, 286-2191

well, and some prophetic comments:

... The wells at this place did not yield any sufficient quantity of good water, though small flows were met with at several levels. They have, however, demonstrated the very important fact that a large supply of natural combustible gas exists in this district, at depths of 900 feet and over, in the sandy layers of the "Lower Dark shales." In consequence of the generally horizontal position and widespread uniformity in the character of the rocks, it is probable that a similar supply will be met with over a great area of this part of the Northwest, and that it may become in the near future a factor of economic importance.

When it became obvious that more research was not going to yield the exact location, PanCanadian tried a high resolution resistivity survey, a soil sampling survey, and

finally an archaeological dig. In October 1979, an archaeological crew from John Brumley and Associates dug up the discovery well. Robert Campbell and John Taylor, President of PanCanadian, visited the site with Micky and Bill Webb to view Alberta's first gas discovery.

To make a permanent memorial to the C.P.R. centennial, PanCanadian asked Alberta Culture to make the site a Provincial Historic Resource, and erected a cairn at the site. PanCanadian published the story of the wells in the booklet called *Alberta's First Natural Gas Discovery*, and used an illustration depicting the discovery on their 1980 Annual Report.

Micky thanked PanCanadian for their investment in this valuable contribution to petroleum history in Alberta, and for their help with her presentation.

Oil and cattle business share frontier spirit

There's more than a little of the oil business tied up in Dave Foat's cattle operation northwest of Calgary. He kickstarted his cattle ranch with dollars earned working in the oil patch.

That's somewhat typical of the crossing of paths throughout the history of those industries, says Foat. This year, the organization he heads up, the Western Stock Growers' Association begins its centennial celebration. Entwined in many of the stories and industry developments of the cattle business are similar stories and developments in oil.

The unsettled west held harsh beginnings for the cattle and oil industries. These difficult births were indicators of the personalities involved in the businesses, both then and now.

"Both began in frontier areas and the original people were pioneers in their fields," say Foat. "There's a similarity of philosophies between the two. Ranching always began in undeveloped country carved out of the wilderness and spearheaded by entrepreneurial spirit, and oil was much the same way."

"The ranching family that was willing to step out into the frontier would have had the same focus as the wildcat in the oil business. They'd both be thinking, 'there are no guarantees, but let's give it a try'."

The similarities go beyond industry births. Aside from the obvious business similarities (both require large capital investments, both are very much affected by government policy, and each industry is cyclical), Foat believes a similar lifestyle exists.

"The oil and cattle business go hand in hand. You often find farm boys and cowboys who went into the oil business when time were tough in the cattle business," and I believe they've become ranchers at heart," he explains, citing the Harvie family of Alberta as one such example.

The oil and cattle industries have come a long way since their ground-breaking beginnings. Today each industry has its own set of well-educated and well-equipped people. This is due to the greater levels of expertise required in finance and money management, and also, Foat believes, to the fact that both are very visible industries, and as such have been exposed to much public pressure and scrutiny.

"At one time the oil business was welcomed with open arms because it was a revenue generator. But this is not necessarily so anymore, as many people feel the oil industry is going to impact their lives as well as the environment," he says. The same mood is prevalent about the ranching and cattle business.

"We all have more information and a greater understanding of the environmental issues," he says. "The oil industry has had as many problems with environmental damage as the cattle business, but we're both changing and are ultimately responsible industries."

Foat believes that the people that hold these views are mostly urban and far removed from the primary industries that they criticize. "They don't realize how empty their lives would be without them."

What are perceived to be 'industry' issues are in reality 'managerial' issues, independent of the industry as a whole.

“Wintering a herd of cattle next to a stream is really a managerial problem not an industry problem. It’s the same in the oil business. You can drill a hole and blow oil all over the ground, or you can use proper equipment and proper techniques to contain the oil and leave minimal environmental damages. The two industries fully realize the jeopardy the industries are in if these practices were kept up.

“That’s why the industries are changing. It’s a common sense reaction that we all know should be followed. Your decisions have to be made long term. You cannot ranch with short sightedness, and the oil business is much the same.

And this is, to some extent, where Foat believes the two industries diverge.

“The oil industry is simply an exploitation of a natural resource. The oil is found, the site is developed and they

more on. The cattle business, on the other hand, can go on for generations or centuries.”

Being realistic, there are some areas where ranchers and the oil business are at loggerheads, says Foat. “But we have to realize that most farming or ranching people have benefited in some way by the oil business, either directly in surface leases or through employment opportunities. It seems they are on separate paths, but there is lots going on between them.”

Sign up for historical cattle drive

Application forms for the Western Stock Growers’ historic “Drive for ’96” Cattle Drive to be held July, 1996 and more material about the historic developments of western ranching can be obtained by contacting the Western Stock Growers’ Association, Suite 101, 2116 - 27th Avenue N.E. Calgary, Alberta T2E 7A6, Phone (403) 250-9121, Fax (403) 250-9122.

No credit to WSGA.

Milestones in oil and cattle industries

1881 -First herd of 3,000 mixed cattle driven in from Montana to Cochrane Ranche

1883 -Natural gas discovered near Medicine Hat

1896 -Western Stock Growers’ Association established

1909 -Bow Island gas field discovered

1914 -Oil strike at Turner Valley

1919 -Cattlemen’s Protective Association of Western Canada founded to, among other reasons, treat mange problem

1947 -Leduc oil field discovered

1995 -July, Re-enactment of the signing of the WSGA Charter at Fort MacLeod

1995 -December, WSGA Centennial Convention

1996 -July, WSGA historic “Drive for ’96” Centennial Cattle Drive to be held near Medicine Hat.

Letter

To Clint Tippett, director in charge of awards program.

Dear Mr Tippett:

We wish to express our thanks to you and the selection committee, the executive and members of the Petroleum History Society for choosing to recognize PanCanadian's archives program. This is a meaningful award and especially encouraging in our endeavours to preserve and provide internal access to the records which depict our western Canadian heritage and over one hundred years of corporate development.

We have a fine facility with environmental controls, special lighting and other conservation features to protect a wealth of historical material. I would be pleased to provide a tour of the Archives for members of the society, and to discuss some of the work that we are undertaking.

Thank you again for this prestigious award, which we proudly display on our front counter.

Bonnie Mech,
Archivist and records analyst.

Table 1

Initial established reserves of Alberta's 15 largest light/medium crude oil fields.

Field	Millions of cubic metres
Pembina	279.5
Swan Hills	148.2
Redwater	131.6
Rainbow	116.8
Bonnie Glen	82.2
Judy Creek	78.8
Swan Hills South	67.5
Mitsue	61.4
Leduc Woodbend	61.3
Nipisi	59.5
Wizard Lake	57.9
Fenn-Big Valley	52.8
Virginia Hills	35.5
Golden Spike	31.7
Sturgeon Lake South	29.5
Total	1294.2

Table 2

Alberta's 15 largest light medium crude oil fields.

Year	Field	Initial Reserves	% deleted
1947	Leduc Woodbend	61.3	99
1948	Redwater	131.6	98
1949	Golden Spike	31.7	93
1950	Fenn-Big Valley	52.8	98
1951	Wizard Lake	57.9	92
1952	Bonnie Glen	82.2	99
1953	Pembina	279.5	79
	Sturgeon Lake South	29.5	88
1957	Swan Hills	148.2	80
	Virginia Hills	35.5	80
1959	Judy Creek	78.8	86
1964	Nitsue	61.4	87
1965	Swan Hills South	67.5	86
	Rainbow	116.8	79
	Nipisi	59.5	85
	Total	1294.2	87

Table 1

Alberta has 420 defined fields for light-medium crude oil which have initial established reserves of 2,118.5 10^6m^3 . The 15 largest fields 1,294.2 10^6m^3 , or 61% of the total. The next 25 fields have an additional 440.0 10^6m^3 or 21%. Thus the 40 largest fields (or about 10%) account for 1,734.2 10^6m^3 or 82% of initial established reserves.

Table 2

Each of the 15 largest fields were discovered by 1965. For the 25 other large fields only two were discovered after 1965. In total 1,710.3 10^6m^3 initial established reserves of the 40 largest fields were discovered by 1965 - or 81%. As indicated in Table 2 many of the fields are very nearly depleted. As a group the 15 fields are 87% depleted. The ratio for the other 25 fields is somewhat better - 81%.

Research and Commentary by Vern Millard