

Not Much Fun

By Pete Clark

I had had my Driver's License for a couple of months when the company I worked for told me to drive a water truck to Richfield, Utah, following the driller driving his rig. I had little knowledge of the two-speed-axle. I had driven fifty miles before beginning to pick up the double-clutching routine of that type of transmission setup. Not long after that I began the ascent of South Pass, along the rim of Red Canyon and successful gear shifting was an absolute must. After South Pass the rest of the trip to Richfield was a breeze and at the end of a long day we arrived at our destination in Utah.

We were in Utah to plug two illegal artesian wells, using Cal-seal mixed with concrete so the cement would set in spite of the presence of lots of water. The water flowed to the surface by way of old seismograph shot-points. These shot-points had provided a bit of the data required to map an anticline that was under Utah's Sevier River Valley. I have never returned to Richfield and do not know if the area became a petroleum producer.

The morning after we arrived, we went to the first work site. I guided the driller while he backed the truck into position over the portable mud-pit, placed where we had to dig. The driller raised the mast and checked to see that I had properly connected the large waterline from the water truck to the drill's intake valve. We began drilling with a rotary rock bit. The bottom of the hole was about four hundred fifty feet down, so we would have to add a lot of lengths of drill-stem to get there. The second afternoon we pumped the cement containing Cal-seal down the hole and the first job was finished.

The other artesian well was a quarter of a mile away. We moved the trucks to it the next day. It took us ten days to plug that well. We began drilling with a rotary rock bit and struck pea gravel that jammed the rotary bit. We installed a drag bit and began to make hole again. About quitting time, we lost circulation. We began to pump mud down the hole to coat its wall and prevent the water, which carried drill cuttings to the surface, from leaking into the substrata around the hole.

The supply of drilling mud we had brought from Wyoming was soon depleted, so I drove the water truck to Price, Utah to pick up more mud. I had to cross a lower part of the Wasatch Mountains. Approaching the pass, I came up behind a carload of people out for a leisurely drive. I rolled up behind them and leaned on the horn. They looked back. They could only see the cowcatcher on the front of the truck and they burned rubber. After crossing single lane bridges with no warning signs, I made it to Price and back to Richfield. Several frustrating days later we had the second well plugged and left Utah.