

R.K. Bob Merritt
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Calgary, AB
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June 26, 2001.

Interviewer: Tina Crossfield

*When I arrived at Bob Merritt's home on Tuesday, June 26th, at his invitation, he had already decided that he was not well enough to be taped, or to be photographed.

I took these rough notes instead. David suggested that I include them, and submit an invoice anyway. I left the opportunity open with Mr. Merritt to call me when he felt better, and I would return. It would be worthwhile to contact him again. However, I really do not expect to hear from him.

I graduated from UNB with a BSc with a general background in physics and math.
Took courses in geophysics and geology.
Worked summers for International Nickel in Sudbury. Summer of '51
In 1952, went to work for Shell Oil – went to Houston in 1953, assigned to Party # 4
Joined the seismic operators

Also had a summer job in the Yukon while still at university

Have 1 sister

My father worked in heavy construction – he was killed when I was 5 years old

I worked underground – in various jobs – pay was good

Copper Cliff – company was refining the ore – sulphur killed much of the vegetation around the mine – desolate, very black. Like Sudbury.

I prefer the Latin way of life

Worked in refraction – broadside refraction – from Waterton Lakes to Sundry – had an office in Cochrane – refraction work was in 1953 – broadside refraction – all instrumental Mapping gas fields – at Jumping Pound gas field – supplied City of Calgary with gas. Cochrane really changed – whole area has changed.

Stayed in Calgary until 1955 – Shell had a recruiting campaign

Went to Brazil – for work and to train the Brazilian nationals – me and about 100 guys from Calgary

My first real company job was with Shell – went to a 6 month training program in Houston – it was a U.S. introduction to the work.

Math/physics – it was quite an easy transition from hard rock mining
Nuclear physics was the big thing

Prefer Rio de Janeiro – Headquarters for Petrobras

I was just a trainee then.

After university, it takes about 5 years before you can do anything useful.

In Shell training program.

We were landed immigrants there – had just gotten married before going to Brazil.

Had a Bank of Montreal loan – but the pay was good – expenses were tremendous – we starting having babies.

1963 Doctors said I have to leave the tropics – I got the parasite Bellartia, or Shistosomiasis. It's a stagnant water parasite. I finally stopped having fevers when I got back to Canada. (My condition was diagnosed in England)

In Brazil, went with the seismic crews to the field

Jeeps often caught underwater – we had to swim to shore

Was all over the country – 1st 4 years spent at head office at Rio.

We moved to oil producing region in Salvadore (1500 miles N of Rio)

Promoted to Chief Geophysicist – I had several seismic crews to look after

Things have changed so much – instrument wise, techniques – evolving and still evolving

Learned a bastard French – rudimentary Portuguese – at that time, there was little English spoken – you have to learn the language or do without – I liked the language.

(Head) Party manager was from the States

1 or 2 technical people (from the States or Canada)

1 or 2 drilling people – they shot the holes

4 or 5 non-Brazilians on seismic crews

We had large crews in the Amazon – 400-500 men on a crew. They cut trail, labourers, hand-carried the instruments – made camp, supplied food, medicine

As chief, I was responsible for whole thing – a thankless job – made the geophysical reports, organized wages, lots of paperwork – I had lots of energy then.

Had 3 children in Brazil

Moved to England, we had 2 more kids

In 1963, Worked for a subsidiary of Std Oil of Indiana when I first went to Europe (now AMOCO)

Went to Canada April 1, 1968, joined Pan Arctic Oils

Coldest I ever was in my life was south of London, very damp - then in Utrecht in Holland. Terrible shock to the system – one year the canals froze over in Utrecht.

Arctic was something else – fit for polar bears and Eskimos.
Nothing there but a weather station.
Seismic/drilling – 19 million 1st year.
Did lots of work – we drilled so many wells
A friend Gray Alexander stayed with Pan Arctic – now lives in Cayley
2 main guys – had to plan ahead – where to build airstrips, amount of daylight, placement
of seismic crews
1st 2years – worked up to April 2nd
Had a crew NW of Mellville Island – Marie Bay – just starting operations there
Working in the winter was much smarter and cheaper
The ice melts, breaks up – vehicles fall through
I was an operator, more or less.

I kept a journal for each year.

This is all written down – constant daylight had an adverse effect on me – I couldn't sleep. Only got 6 hours sleep every 2-3 days – just got rid of that problem after my first stroke, through acupuncture – now I can sleep – but for years I couldn't sleep.
Sure, this happened to other people too.

Pan Arctic kept hiring guys. I left in 1976 – spent extra few years researching permafrost – looking at seismic for other things that were missed

Stopped in 1978 – they hired a much younger guy over me, so I quit.

Did consulting work in Portugal – reviewing files – some seismic for small companies out of London. Lived in Portugal for 2 years straight – came back once a month.
1970, I remarried – 2nd wife.

4 years ago I had my first stroke – no feeling in my leg, can't drive a car anymore
Oldest son is in Edmonton – interested in music in England – violin, piano. Took a course in Edmonton in graphics work.
I have 2 children in Calgary – not in contact with them much anymore. Wife left me 4 years ago.

Still doing some work for the Geological Survey – consulting.

Best of times was my first few years in Brazil with the babies – work was exciting – now there's a major oil producer there – good staff at Petrobras compared with other oil companies.
If I'd spent another year in Brazil I would have had a pension for life.
North Sea was exciting too....

The interview was terminated at this point as Mr. Merritt began to feel unwell.
He is great collector of artefacts, and has kept journals for many years.