

# ***The Oilfinders: A Collection of Stories about Exploration***

Collected and edited by **Allan G. Hatley, Jr.**, ISBN 0-89181-816-2.; American Association of Petroleum Geologists, Tulsa, OK, 1992; 134 pages, 18.00.

## Review by **Christopher G. Kendall**

This exuberant book recalls the personal experiences of a number of geologists in their quest for hydrocarbons. This is not just another textbook, but is instead a record of high adventure, chronicling the adventures of the various authors in their far from humdrum lives. The book is exciting, written with entertainment in mind - a pleasure to read, representing a bedtime book or something for that rainy afternoon or the weekend. It also offers some insight to the young geologist as to the potential the oil industry can provide in terms of an interesting life at the edge.

There's no doubt that the people who wrote these articles were doers and thinkers, who took great pleasure in their actions, rather than sitting still. These are the frontiersman who enter the exploration area first and tend to have a completely different character to the conservatives who eventually take over in the exploitive phase of exploration.

Many of the articles are travelogues. For example, Dave Kingston describes how he worked with the Rover Boys from Standard Oil traipsing his way through Africa, the Middle East, North Africa and the East Indies looking at frontier basins. The article is written in the style of an adventure story and is fun to read.

Next, there is an article by Dunn that describes how Phillips initiated the negotiation with the Norwegians to acquire acreage in Norwegian waters and how they finally drilled the initial exploration wells. It explains how in 1969, they were able to drill a well in the Ekofisk prospect and found a reservoir in limestone and chalk with over 600 feet of section and a net pay of nearly 400 feet. This article is written in a fairly dry style, but does focus more on the human aspects of the discovery, and contains some details of the hows and whys of this discovery.

The Phillips saga is followed by an article by Don Todd on how he wrote an exploration contract in recently independent Indonesia. Todd writes a clear narrative, as he traces protracted contract negotiations with the Indonesian government, his experience with housing and living in Indonesia, and the difficulty of dealing with the U.S. and Indonesian governments while working with an extraordinarily small team. Other articles include Hatler's experiences on the Phillipines, and John Kinard's on hydrocarbon discoveries in the south of England, (despite BP's denigration of the area). Martini and Pane write about their experiences in Khartoum, and how Chevron negotiated and acquired acreage and finally drilled discovery wells in the Sudan.

Herb Young describes the first oil found in the Sind of Pakistan revealing the concepts that drove the exploration. Fairchild's description of the hunt for oil in the Yemen is equally interesting and exciting. Masters' article on Elmwork is probably the most interesting story from a contemporary geological standpoint. It shows how important it is to believe in yourself and follow through despite of the scoffers that may confront you; particularly those in government agencies and large oil companies who have a vested interest in not 'rocking the boat'.

The book's most important lesson, which I picked up from Masters, is that to be successful,

you should: 1) keep up with latest technology and surround yourself with a cadre of practitioners of this technology, and 2) avail yourself of all the public domain data that you can. Many national governments like those of Canada, Norway, and Australia provide these data sources. Clearly, Masters has exploited a specific opportunity, which once harvested, ended. But, his philosophy with respect to current technology will always pay off.

All of these articles have photographs of the main characters in the story, human interest pictures and a few maps. Many of the articles have a mix of technical, financial and personal detail.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book and recommend it to you. I would guess that it's the pipe dream of many of those connected with the oil business and geology to lead the varied and exciting life that was enjoyed by the people that wrote the articles. Many of us have had similar experiences, both in and outside the oil industry, and probably many of us are associated with geology because of our interest in the opportunity to travel, meet different people, and live on the edge.

Maybe, I'm a Victorian adventurer at heart, but I prefer the cut and thrust of the frontier to the mind-numbing experiences of the inner echelons of larger, bureaucratic organizations. One may ask whether there are still frontiers to be visited in this world, and as Masters has shown us, the answer is yes, there are many; but, they will be different than those of the past. Oil is a commodity and commodities all have their ups and downs, as the market and technology change. So, my conclusion is that we can hope to continue to enjoy similar experiences to those of the writers of these articles. I loved the book and hope more like it follow. It is a really great advertisement for the oil industry.

While there are other stories to be written, I guess the sad thing is that some of the larger oil companies are still putting up barriers to some of their personnel writing of their personal experiences. Perhaps, they were afraid that we may realize that the 'big secret' is that there is 'no secret' and that technologies that worked in the past don't necessarily work now. Oil finding is fun, but it appears that some of the bean counters of this world want it to be a solemn and sad experience, instead of like the joyful times described in this text.