



## CAMPBELL MURRAY HUNTER

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### EARTH SCIENTIST/ENTREPRENEUR

By Aubrey Kerr

Hidden away in the Proceedings of the First World Petroleum Congress 1933 is a learned treatise: "The Oil Prospects of Western Canada". And the most important aspect of this paper lies in the fact that Hunter's prescient comments on Alberta's potential and current wells are still relevant 67 years later.

Who was this insightful entrepreneur? Born in 1877 in Edinburgh, educated at Eton and Trinity College (honours degree in mechanical sciences) he served his apprenticeship in Europe. In 1898 (age 21) he was appointed English engineer to Baku. Six years later he transferred to Peru where in 1904 he reorganized the operations of "London and Pacific" "with conspicuous success". He subsequently consulted to Herbert Hoover.

Why would this world-wide expert with such impeccable credentials even consider our West as a potential area? The answer rests in his statement: "When the oil industry is suffering from over-production, it may at first sight appear inopportune to call attention to a great almost virgin oil region. But past experience teaches that periods of over-production do not last indefinitely so it behooves petroleum technology to be always looking ahead..."

The purpose of this paper was "to broadly outline its salient geological features...and to attempt to draw aside the curtain which hides fortunes".... "The occurrence of oil in so many formations implies of necessity the existence of several source rocks"...Hunter is also the first recorded earth scientist to have identified Middle Devonian as a source rock, albeit to the north in the Great Slave Lake area.

Hunter's article ties directly to the 1933 World Petroleum Congress and his spudding in of a Foothills wildcat. So who better to deliver a paper on Western Canada? Hunter covers the geology of the Foothills in a logical sequence. "Strike and block faulting is prevalent and great care has to be exercised in locating wellsites if fault planes

are to be avoided". Hunter is very honest with himself when he "finds himself unable to accept that the Turner Valley field is underlain by a low-angle sole fault." He would much later be disproved by Bill Gallup. "The complex nature of the Foothills calls for nothing more than a clear understanding of the effects of intense folding brought about by the forward eastward thrust of the Rocky Mountains massif."

Hunter's conclusion is most insightful: "the vast area merits most thorough and systematic exploration". "Test by all usual criteria, such as the assistance of innumerable oil and gas seepages...favourable oil genetic conditions are present in formations ranging from Upper Cretaceous to Middle Devonian (a reef that would not be discovered for 10 years after Leduc)...the area gives promise of discovering many important oil fields, the discovery of which can only be a matter of time".

What foresight! This paper could have pushed many other entrepreneurs into exploration and may have even found Leduc before 1947!

Not content to merely discuss geological theories, Campbell Hunter had already busied himself by financing a Foothills wildcat. This play had started in 1928 when another geologist found a structure 65 miles west of Olds... "I had seen nothing approaching it in magnitude..."

Our hero, who was in Calgary at the time, chanced to hear about this structure and remarked: "How the devil did you stumble on to this?"

Hunter first set up shop in the Loughheed Building for the Hunter Valley Oil Company with Austin deB Winter and M. McKenzie as directors. He lost no time in sailing back to the U.K. to finance this new firm. His past experiences and successes opened doors for



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Eminent consulting engineer and petroleum technologist of London, England, president of Hunter Valley Oil Co., Ltd. The company, which has large holdings west of Olds, is financed largely by British capital.

him so that funding, despite the economic bad times, would enable him to drill for five years (1933-1938) in tough Foothills country to a TD of 8,282 by January 22, 1938.

Misleading information from the press showed up in an article in Calgary Herald's September 1, 1937 (first year after spudding)... "...excellent showings of naphtha and crude...drilling will be continued until a thorough test has been completed". (Never trust media reports!!!)

The well bore entered and faulted back to the Kootenay, never reaching its "granite hard Madison limestone" objective. Nor had the same article described the surface geology accurately.... "no disturbance and the thickness of the sands remains unaltered....unlike Turner Valley...much less complex...sands overlies each other in orderly layers..." Despite all these flowery words, faulting would throw the depth estimation off especially because of the steeply dipping beds. Total depth was reached "with some doubt as to the bottom formation". The hole had been started with cable tools to 5,135 feet, then converted to rotary for the remainder of the hole.

The corporation known as Hunter Valley Oils renewed and held on to the lease until September 1946. At that time the Alberta government's H.H. Somerville notified the company that he had cancelled the lease. Long before that, Hunter had returned to the U.K. and other plays. The company was then dissolved.