

Memorial unveiled to UAE's first oil well

Nearly fifty years after it was first drilled, the first exploratory oil well in the United Arab Emirates is now marked by a special memorial, to commemorate its place at the very beginning of the country's recent development.

The well, named Ras Sadr-1, is on the coast at Ras Sadr, around 40 km north east of Abu Dhabi. Spudded in on 15th February 1950, it was not completed until April 1951. Although it proved to be a dry hole, it reached a depth of 13,001 feet, and was, at the time, the deepest oil well ever drilled in the Middle East.

The drilling operation was very different from the highly sophisticated technology of today, while considerable difficulties were also created by the remote location of the well site. At the time, there was no port in Abu Dhabi, and all the supplies, both for the drilling rig and for its crew, had to be landed from barges at Ghanadha, a spot on the coast several kilometres away, these then being brought laboriously across country to the rig site.

The well was drilled by a consortium of international firms who, through the Iraq Petroleum Company and its local subsidiary, Petroleum Concessions (Trucial Coast), at the time held concessions for all of the sheikhdoms then known as the Trucial States, but which now comprise the United Arab Emirates. IPC, whose shareholders were BP, Shell, Total, Exxon, Mobil and Partex, had signed an exploration concession with the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in January 1939. Sixty years later, the same companies, through what became known as the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company, ADPC, still own 40 per cent of the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO, which operates the Emirate's onshore fields, with the remaining 60 per cent being owned by the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, ADNOC.

The Second World War delayed the beginning of

exploration in the Trucial States, and it was not until the late 1940s that geologists began the search to identify the site for the first well.

The Ras Sadr-1 well was followed by a number of other unsuccessful wells, and it was not until the late 1950s, with the Murban-3 well, that ADPC made its first commercially viable discovery, the giant Bab field. Today, Abu Dhabi has an installed capacity of over 2.5 million barrels a day, and the fourth largest proven oil reserves in the world. Ras Sadr-1, however, represents the real beginning of the UAE's oil industry, and to mark its importance, a special memorial has now been erected on the site by ADCO. The inauguration of the memorial, on 28th February, was attended by three UAE senior citizens who had themselves worked on the well, two of whom are still associated with the company.

ADCO is a corporate sponsor of the Emirates Natural History Group, and has provided extensive support to the Group since it was formed over twenty years ago, in particular funding a recent ENHG survey of Jebel Hafit.

It has also supported a number of other projects designed to study the country's natural history and heritage, including research by London's Natural History Museum into the palaeontology of the late Cretaceous and late Miocene periods and studies of seagrass, corals and algae in inshore waters of Abu Dhabi. It recently commissioned the first-ever survey for archaeological sites in the oilfields, carried out between November 1998 and January 1999, (see *Archaeology Review*), part of a continuing programme of support for the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey.

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Ras Sadr-1: the first oil well drilled in the UAE, the site of which has now been preserved by the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO, whose predecessor drilled it in 1950-1951. Seated are three UAE nationals who worked on the well, along with the ADCO General Manager.