



Conversation is limited to sign language when high pressure steam is released from its underground store.

Lorsque la vapeur à haute pression sort de sa prison souterraine il n'est pas question de communiquer autrement que par gestes.

It was being cased in concrete and steel to serve as a production hole — a well up which superheated water can rise, to flash to steam when its pressure is reduced, and thus drive the turbine blades of a generator.

“So far,” said Boyd, “nothing has gone wrong. We might have twisted pipes, or veered off line, or hit pockets of gas, but we’ve been graced with good luck.”

If the good luck continues, Boyd will supervise the drilling of a second production hole this winter; for the first time exploration will continue year round at Mount Meager. Hot water which flows up one well can then be reinjected down the second, while engineers gauge the energy potential of the underground reservoir and plan its exploitation. If the first two wells give encouraging results, the plan over the next two years will be to drill and test further wells in the same area. Should a sufficient quantity of steam be found, construction of a 55 MW pilot plant could begin as early as 1984.

By means of this practical experiment, B.C. Hydro will find out just how the cost of geothermal power in Canada compares with that of power from more conventional sources. The expectation is that, as experience elsewhere shows, it competes with medium-sized hydro, and is more cost-effective than fossil- and nuclear-fuelled power plants. It is also expected that geothermal power compares favorably with its rivals in terms of environmental impact. The most common pollutants from geothermal plants, hydrogen sulfide gas and hot salty water, can be controlled without great difficulty or expense; the gas can be “scrubbed” and the hot water re-injected underground.

Boyd told me of the pleasure he takes in hiking, with his family, to the wild, alpine meadows at the top of nearby Singing Pass. He told me, as well, about the hydroelectric dam he helped build before coming to Mount Meager. “We had to flood 20 ha, but that wasn’t a bad environmental price to pay for 800 MW of power,” he said. “I don’t like flooding extensive tracts of land. Nuclear, like other power sources, has its problems. Personally, I’m all for geothermal energy. It’s hard to find bad things to say about it.” □

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(B.C. Hydro)