

Once upon a time 250m above the Colorado River



“We had to respond to a client who had a now obsolete Videologger 2000 surface system causing some distress. It was being used for geotechnical ground investigation for the then upcoming Hoover Dam Bypass project.

CASE STUDY



The problem was that the entire system was mounted on a frame to be transported by helicopter to inaccessible locations, and as the Videologger system was not functioning properly his entire crew and the helicopter were effectively grounded. Within 48hrs from client contact and armed with some spares I suspected might be at fault, plus a spare Videologger system just in case, I arrived at Las Vegas.

We arrived early on site and I must admit I was becoming slightly concerned as to what the precise nature of the location of the equipment was. We followed a trail uphill for a short while and when we got to the top, the view of the Colorado River was breath-taking!

I could see the location of the logging system. It was uncomfortably close (it seemed to me) to the edge of a cliff which was apparently around 250m (800ft) above the Colorado River. With an increasingly dry throat, and a dizzy feeling I began work on the system with a rope around my waist more for comfort than anything else. It was quite a complicated piece of equipment to dismantle.

Staying focussed was a bit of a challenge for me under the circumstances. However, after a couple of hours of diagnostics the fault was found. A faulty printer interface was dragging one of the voltage lines down which was crashing the system. Everyone was pleased but not entirely convinced. It was suggested I reassemble the Videologger and leave the unit on soak test while we went for a late breakfast. Just to let the sun do its work for a bit.

We were delayed for nearly two hours on our way back across the Hoover Dam as the US Army Security were thoroughly searching each vehicle that was crossing. Jokingly, we resigned ourselves to the fact that there was nothing we could do about the situation, and when we returned to the unit we would be met with a puddle of blue molten plastic.

To our relief the unit was still working. Very much hot to the touch. But still working.

There was a borehole ready for logging at a location very close by which still required the helicopter to relocate the logging unit. As preparations were made for the lift the helicopter approached. I noticed the power cables not far overhead. The skill of the pilot was awe inspiring. He must have been less than twenty feet below the power cables during the lift!

We setup to log on the next hole and all seemed well. I felt so relieved that all was going well, until someone got my heart racing when by shouting “It’s done it again!”. Thank goodness it turned out he was just playing a trick on me.

This was one of my first commissioning/trips. The memories of which will stay with me forever.”

Ralph Whiteley, Senior Logging Engineer

