

Leslie Atkinson, a geophysicist of many talents, is in the Spotlight this week. She is the Secretary on the ASEG Federal Executive and Principal Analyst at Energy Quest.

1. For how long have you been a geophysicist?

I have been a geophysicist for just over 30 years, working in oil and gas exploration. I have worked in a multitude of roles in Exploration and Development, in listed companies, private consultancy and government organisations. Although I am not currently working directly with geophysics, I use my analytical knowledge and background gained in my geophysical roles in my daily work, and try to keep up with the ever-changing industry.

2. What do you like most about being a geophysicist?

I love the opportunity to find solutions to the everyday problems that face explorationists on a daily basis. The thrill of a successful well or having an 'aha' moment when all the data falls into place is fantastic. We often work on projects for a long time, so that final success can be very uplifting. The colourful maps we get to make are just a bonus.



Leslie looking at home behind the wheel of a seismic vibrator truck. Photo: Leslie Atkinson

3. If you weren't a geophysicist what would you be?

Probably a Geneticist. In my third year at Uni I had to decide on my second major subject to finish my Maths Science degree. I couldn't decide between Geology and Genetics, so I chose to do both. I was very interested in Cytogenetics and Population Genetics. Fortunately, Geophysics won out in the end.

4. What is your best interview tip?

I find the best way to approach interviews is to just be yourself. I feel that too much effort to try to impress can often be seen as disingenuous and can be a negative. Show your real self and let them see the character they will potentially be hiring. And don't be afraid to give yourself time to think before responding to the question.

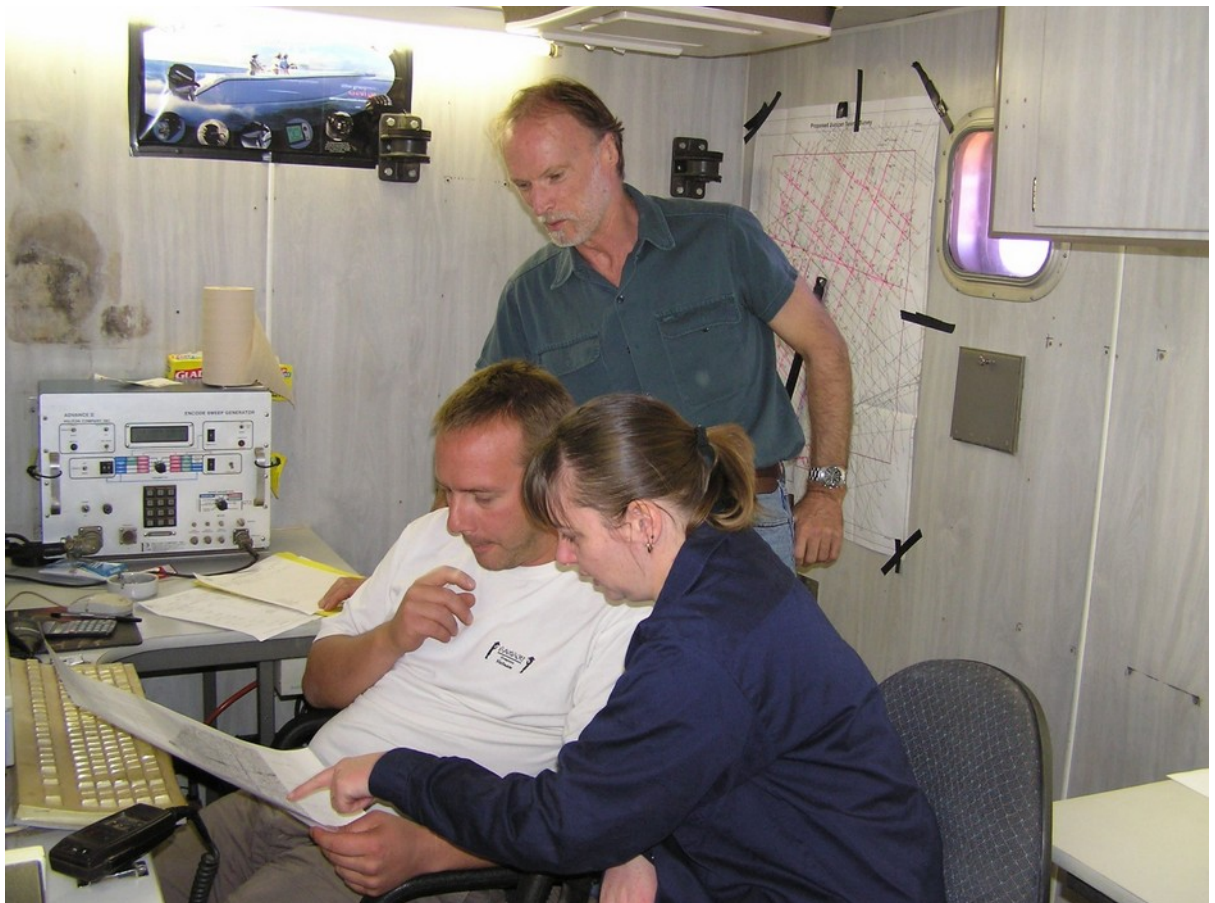
5. What's one thing that we wouldn't know about you?

I have 15 years' experience as a motorsport fire marshal and have officiated at 10 Grands Prix. I am still involved in motorsport as a trackside flag marshal.

6. What are you reading at the moment?

I love a good crime or detective suspense so currently I am reading Michael Connelly's "The Drop". A trusty Harry Bosch classic where he gets caught up in police force bureaucracy "high jinx", but in true Harry style, he won't compromise the truth to appease the powers that be.

I have also just finished a book by Hans Rosling called "Factfulness - Ten reasons we're wrong about the world, and why things are better than you think". An absolutely fantastic and thought provoking read that puts the world in a completely different perspective.



Leslie analysing seismic data with two of her colleagues. Photo: Leslie Atkinson

7. What made you decide to be a geophysicist?

I have always been fascinated with volcanoes and earthquakes. After doing a report on volcanoes at Uni, I was hooked. Geophysics was a way I could incorporate my maths background into the fascinating world of rocks, volcanoes and earthquakes.

8. What do you do in your spare time?

Apart from motorsport and reading, I enjoy troupe dance at a local dance school. I dance with a group of other dance mums and we have a ball doing tap, jazz and contemporary styles of dance. And yes, we do perform at the twice-yearly dance concert. I also like to restore old timber furniture and have a number of pieces I have brought back to life.

9. What reaction do you mostly get when you tell someone that you are a geophysicist?

Usually, a blank stare and then I get asked "What is a geowhatacist?" Or sometimes I get "Wow! You must be really smart". Generally, I just tell them that I am a like Geologist, but I use the physical properties of the rocks.

10. What is the best way that the ASEG could let the public know about geophysics and its benefit to the everyday life?

Somehow, we need to get through to the public that we are not just raping and pillaging the earth. It is not all about fossil fuels and CO2. There are some really useful things that geophysics can provide for us all. The understanding of what is happening in the earth, from the prediction of earthquakes and possible volcanic eruptions, through to the discovery of ancient civilisations and support in the solving of crimes. All these facets are part of the geophysical community that the general public has little knowledge of. Plus, the continued discovery of the minerals to build, and the gas to help support, renewable energies are still vital to our society.

11. Do you think AI will take over your job or will the human element remain vital to exploration successes?

I don't think AI will completely take over the human element in exploration. AI is becoming more and more important in exploration outcomes as projects become smaller, more complex and difficult to define. However, I believe the innovation of the human mind is still far superior to AI. AI may be used to do a

lot of the computational grunt work, but I still believe the human aspect is a vital component to good outcomes in exploration.



The New Zealand seismic crew, putting sun safety first. Who can spot Leslie?

Photo: Leslie Atkinson