



# Analyzing Core from Two Emerging Tight Oil Plays in Utah: The Uteland Butte Member of the Green River Formation in the Uinta Basin and the Cane Creek Shale within the Paradox Formation in the Paradox Basin

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**B** Bill Barrett Corporation *Core and data provided by Bill Barrett Corporation*

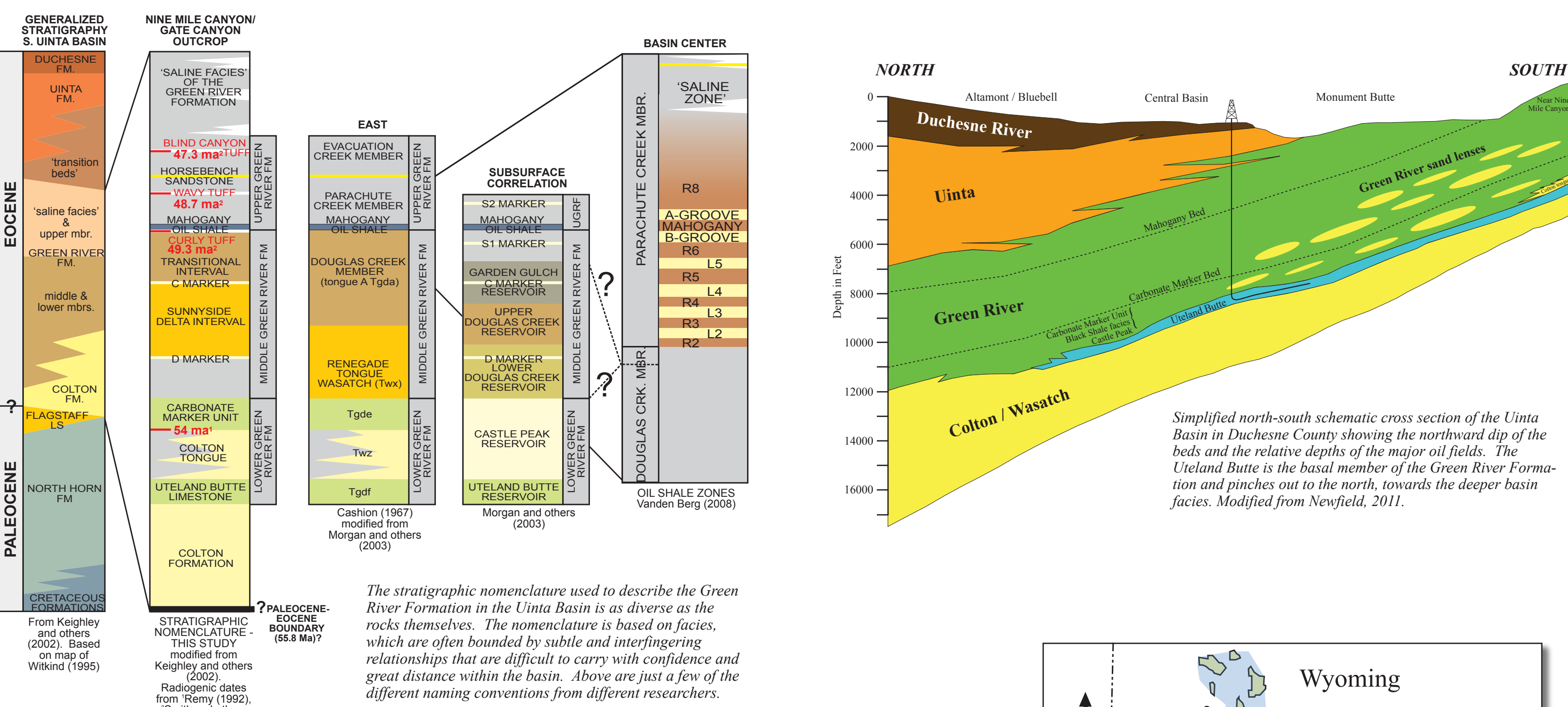
## BACKGROUND

### Uinta Basin Geology and Green River Formation

The Uinta Basin is a topographic and structural trough encompassing an area of more than 9300 square miles (14,900 km<sup>2</sup>) in northeast Utah. The basin is sharply asymmetric, with a steep north flank bounded by the east-west trending Uinta Mountains and a gently dipping south flank.

The Uinta Basin formed in the Late Cretaceous Maastrichtian time, creating a large area of internal drainage that was filled by ancestral Lake Uinta during the Paleocene and Eocene. Deposition in and around Lake Uinta consisted of open-to marginal-lacustrine sediments that make up the Green River Formation (GRF). Alluvial red-bed deposits that are laterally equivalent to the GRF make up the Colton (Wasatch) Formation. The southern shore of Lake Uinta was often very broad and flat, which allowed large transgressive and regressive shifts in the shoreline in response to climatic and tectonic-induced rise and fall of the lake. The cyclic nature of the GRF deposition in the southwest Uinta Basin resulted in numerous stacked deltaic deposits. Distributary-mouth bars, distributary channels, and nearshore bars are the primary producing sandstone reservoirs in the area. Recently, companies have targeted the thinner carbonate layers, such as the Uteland Butte Member, as horizontal drilling targets.

#### Uinta Basin Stratigraphy



### Uteland Butte Member

The Uteland Butte reservoir is the first major transgression of ancient Lake Uinta after deposition of the fluvial Colton (Wasatch) Formation. The Uteland Butte ranges in thickness from less than 60 feet to more than 200 feet in the southwest Uinta Basin. The Uteland Butte is equivalent to the first lacustrine phase of Bradley (1931), black shale facies of Picard (1955), lower black shale facies of Abbott (1957), basal limestone facies of Little (1988) and Colburn and others (1985), the Uteland Butte limestone of Osmond (1992), and the basal limestone member of Crouch and others (2000).

The Uteland Butte consists of limestone, dolostone, calcareous mudstone and siltstone, and rare sandstone. Most of the limestone beds are ostraoidal grain-supported or mud-supported grainstone, packstone, or wackestone. Grainstone is more common near the shallow shoreline of the lake, whereas deeper distal deposits are commonly argillaceous limestone. A cryptocrystalline, dolomitized, compacted wackestone with ostracods has been found near the top of the Uteland Butte in some core. The dolomite often has more than 20 percent porosity, but is so finely crystalline that the permeability is low (single millidarcy or less).

The Uteland Butte reservoir was deposited during a rapid and extensive lake-level rise. The Uteland Butte is distinctive in the abundance of carbonate and the lack of sandstone, which could have been caused by one or both of the following situations: (1) the rapid lake-level rise caused siliclastic sediments to be deposited in the proximal alluvial channels, or (2) the main inflow into the lake was far from the southwest Uinta Basin area, perhaps flowing into the southern arm of the lake south and west of the San Rafael uplift.

The Uteland Butte reservoir is oil productive throughout most of the southwest Uinta Basin. The Uteland Butte was a secondary objective in most vertical wells and was usually perforated along with beds in the Castle Peak, lower Douglas Creek, and upper Douglas Creek reservoirs.

The cryptocrystalline dolomitic wackestone has only recently been extensively explored. This bed, widely distributed throughout the central and southern Uinta Basin, has become a recent target for extensive horizontal drilling, with limited success in the southern part of the basin, but more success in the over-pressured central basin area.

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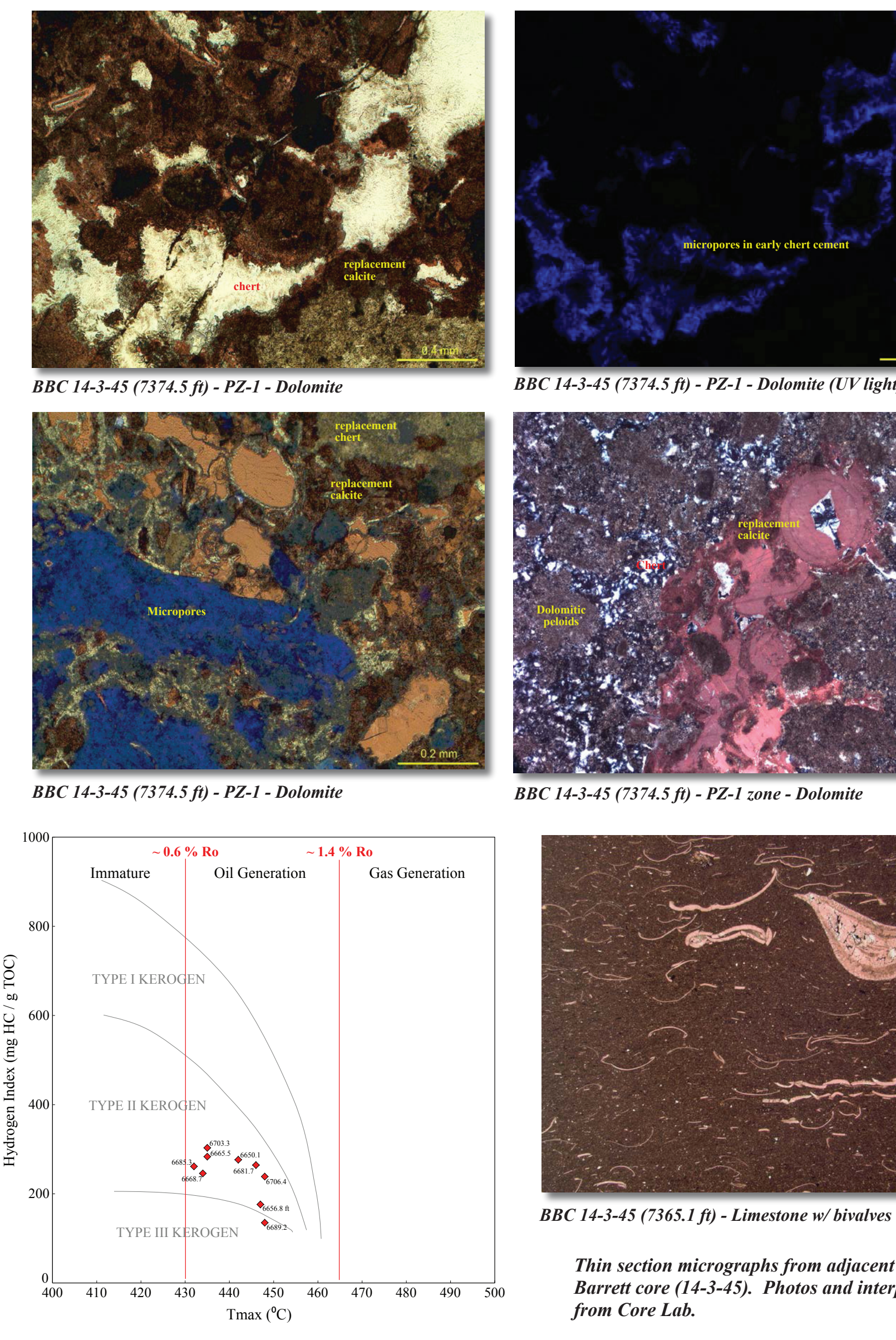
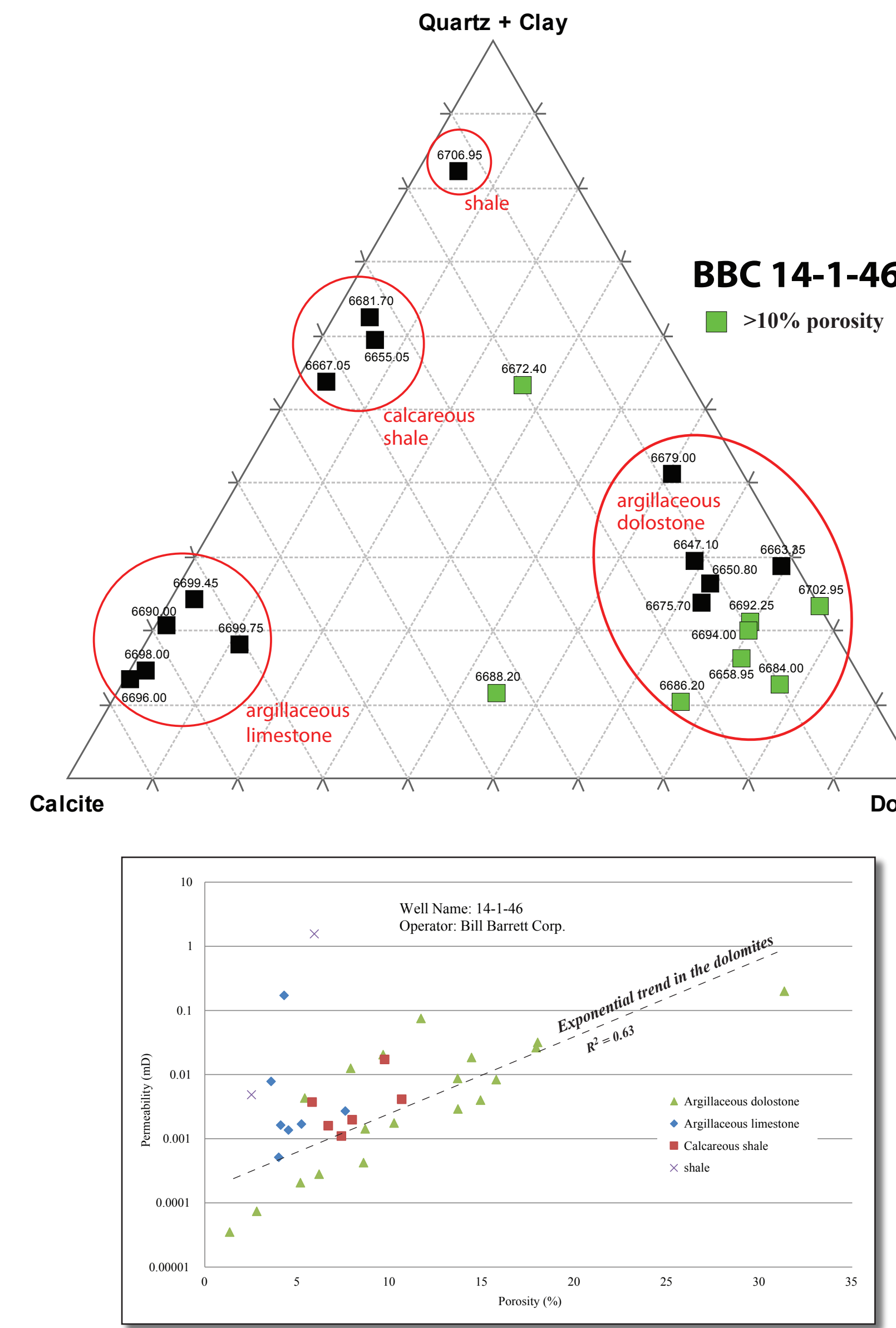
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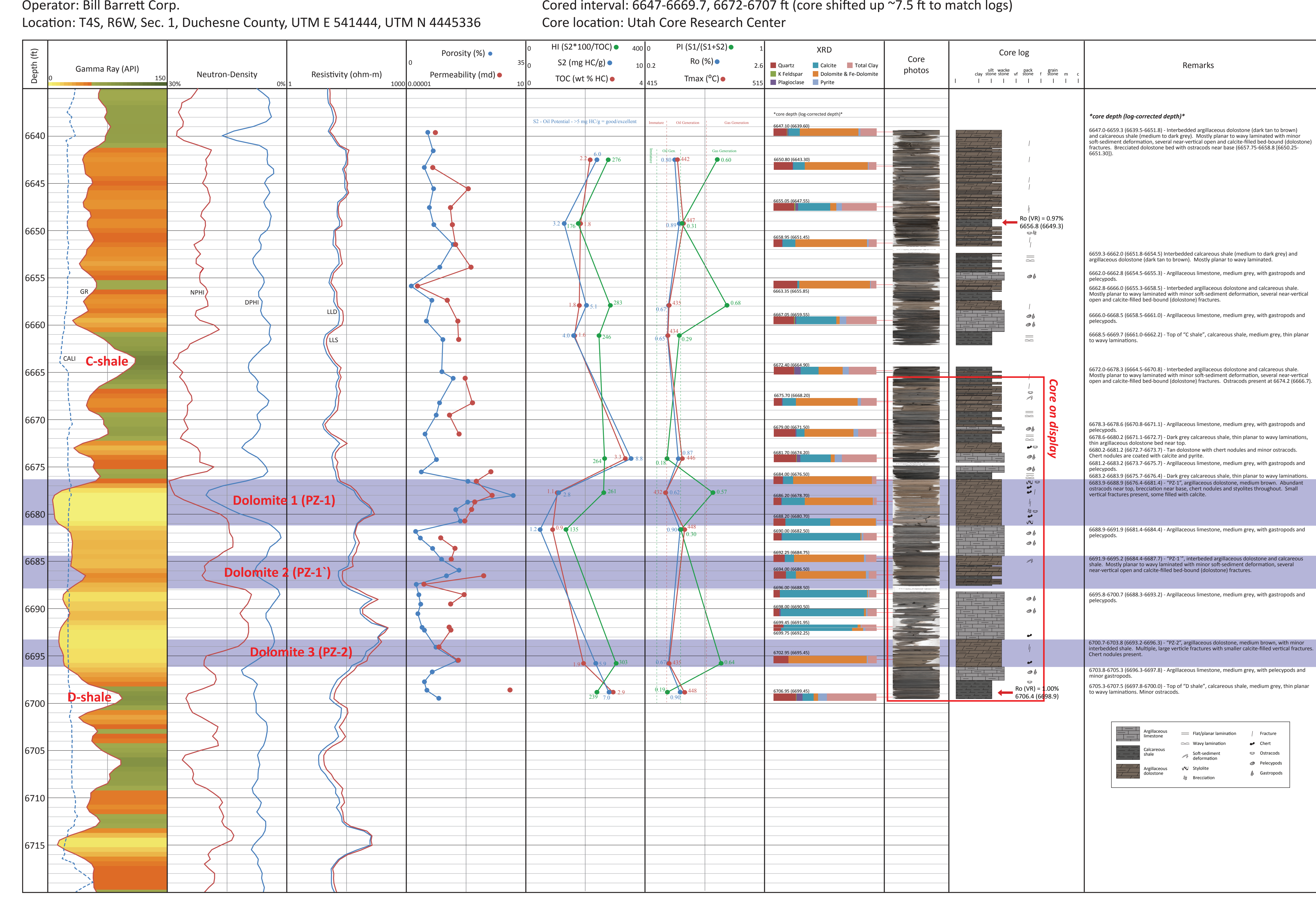
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## MINERALOGY AND GEOCHEMISTRY



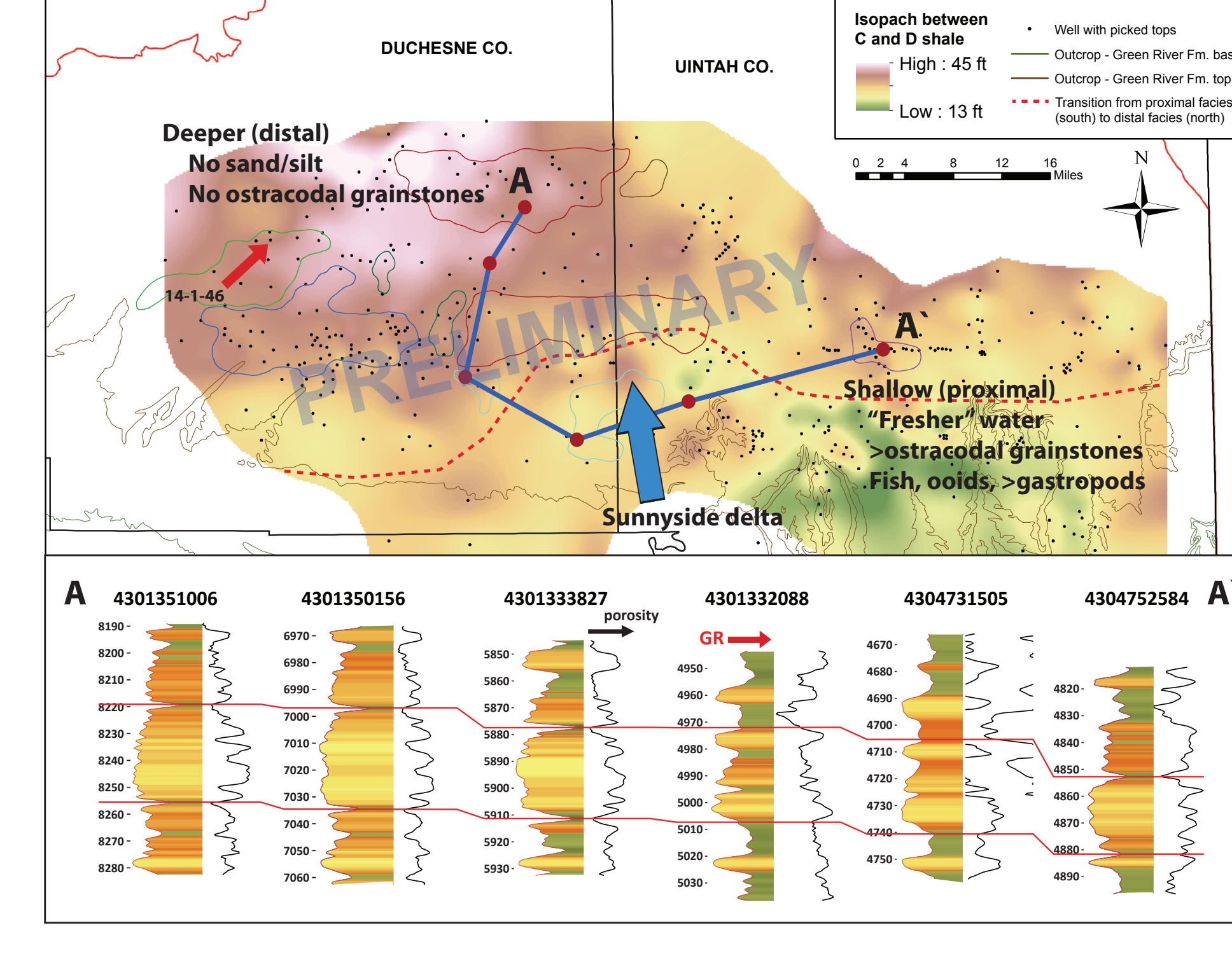
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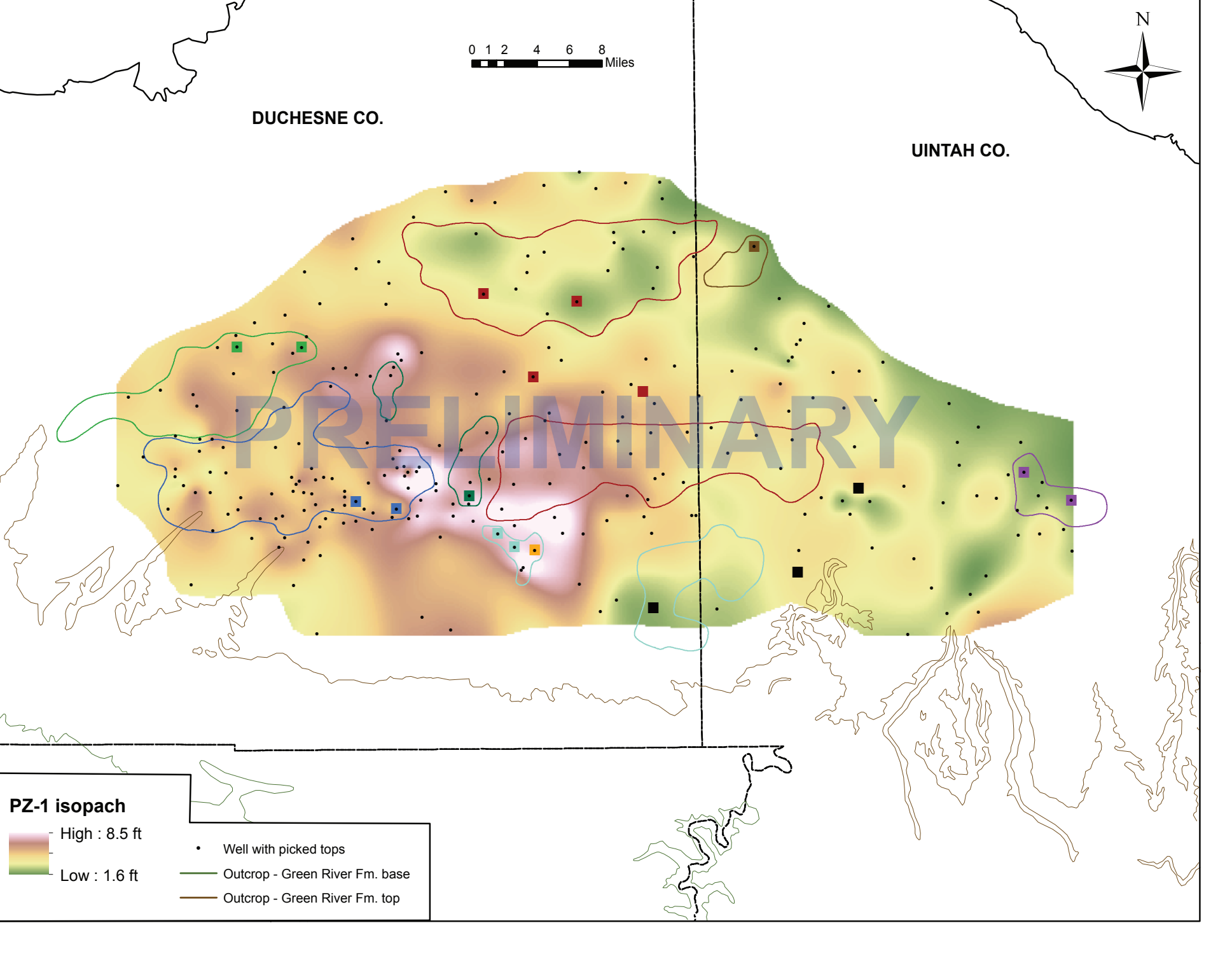
### GEOMECHANICS



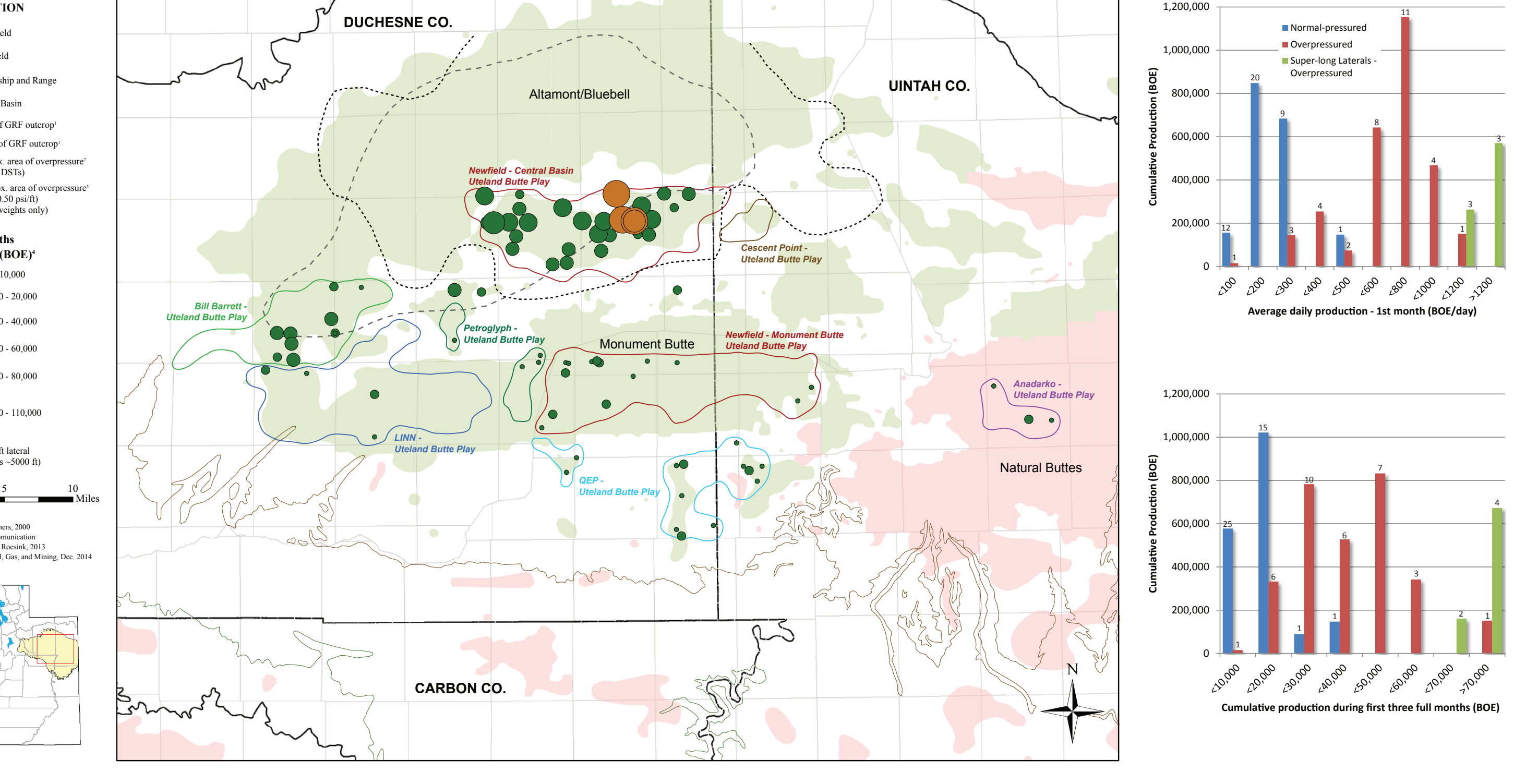
### UTELAND BUTTE - C-SHALE TO D-SHALE THICKNESS



### UTELAND BUTTE - PZ-1 THICKNESS



### UTELAND BUTTE PRODUCTION MAP



## ABSTRACT

Two emerging tight oil plays in Utah have gained significant traction in the past few years, renewing interest in two historically productive basins. The Utah Geological Survey is conducting a multi-year, U.S. Department of Energy-funded study of these two distinct tight oil plays, utilizing newly acquired core and associated data.

The lacustrine Uteland Butte Member of the Green River Formation records the first major transgression of ancestral Lake Uinta after the deposition of the alluvial Colton Formation in the Uinta Basin. The main horizontal drilling objective, as analyzed in several cores, is a 2- to 7-foot-thick interval of fractured dolomite, with porosities between 14 and 30%, interbedded with organic-rich limestone and shale. TOC values in the adjacent rocks range between 2 and 5%, while Ro values range between 0.7 and 1.1%, indicating the reservoir is most likely self-sourcing.

The Cane Creek shale is a transgressive-regressive marine sequence in the lower portion of the Pennsylvanian Paradox Formation, Paradox Basin. The Cane Creek is tens of feet to nearly 200 feet thick, over- and underlain by beds of salt, and divided into A, B, and C intervals (in descending order). The B interval is the primary hydrocarbon source rock and productive zone, consisting of black organic-rich shale, dolomite, dolomitic siltstone, very fine sandstone, and some anhydrite. Significant porosity (up to 15%) is found in the dolomitic siltstone and sandstone, but permeability is generally low (roughly 0.1 mD); naturally occurring fractures are necessary for economic production. The A and C intervals, mostly dolomite and anhydrite, are the seals for the B interval, helping prevent fracture communication with the adjacent salt beds.

A refined geological and reservoir characterization study of these two tight oil plays, using newly acquired core and geophysical logs, is currently underway to help delineate play boundaries, guide resource estimates, and inform recovery methods.

Project funded by: U.S. Department of Energy - National Energy Technology Laboratory and Utah Geological Survey

Project website: <http://geology.utah.gov/resources/energy/oil-gas/shale-oil>







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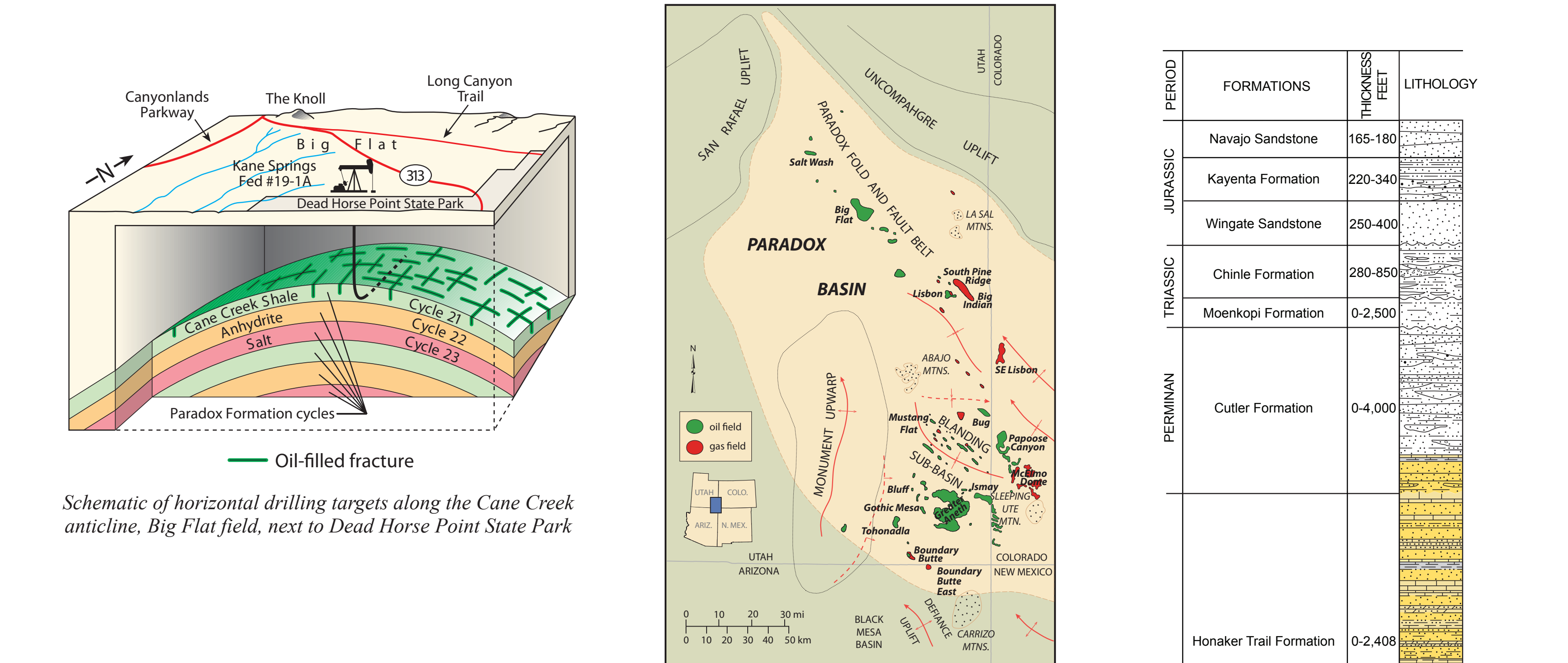
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## BACKGROUND

### Paradox Basin Geology and Paradox Formation

The Moab area is part of the Pennsylvanian-aged Paradox Basin. About 307 million years ago, the region was a highly restricted marine bay. Sea level rose and fell during global greenhouse (interglacial) and icehouse (glacial) periods, respectively. Low sea level resulted in evaporation of sea water and extensive, thick deposits of halite as well as minor amounts of potassium and magnesium salts. High sea level resulted in deposition of carbonates and silstones interbedded with thin, organic-rich shales (collectively referred to as shale) such as the Cane Creek shale. A shale and overlying thick salt bed is considered a depositional cycle. In the Moab area there are as many as 29 cycles in the Paradox Formation; the Cane Creek shale is cycle 21, with the cycles numbered from the top of the Paradox down. The thin, organic-rich shale beds in the Cane Creek are the source of the oil produced from the unit's adjacent fractured siltstones and carbonates.



### Cane Creek Shale Drilling History

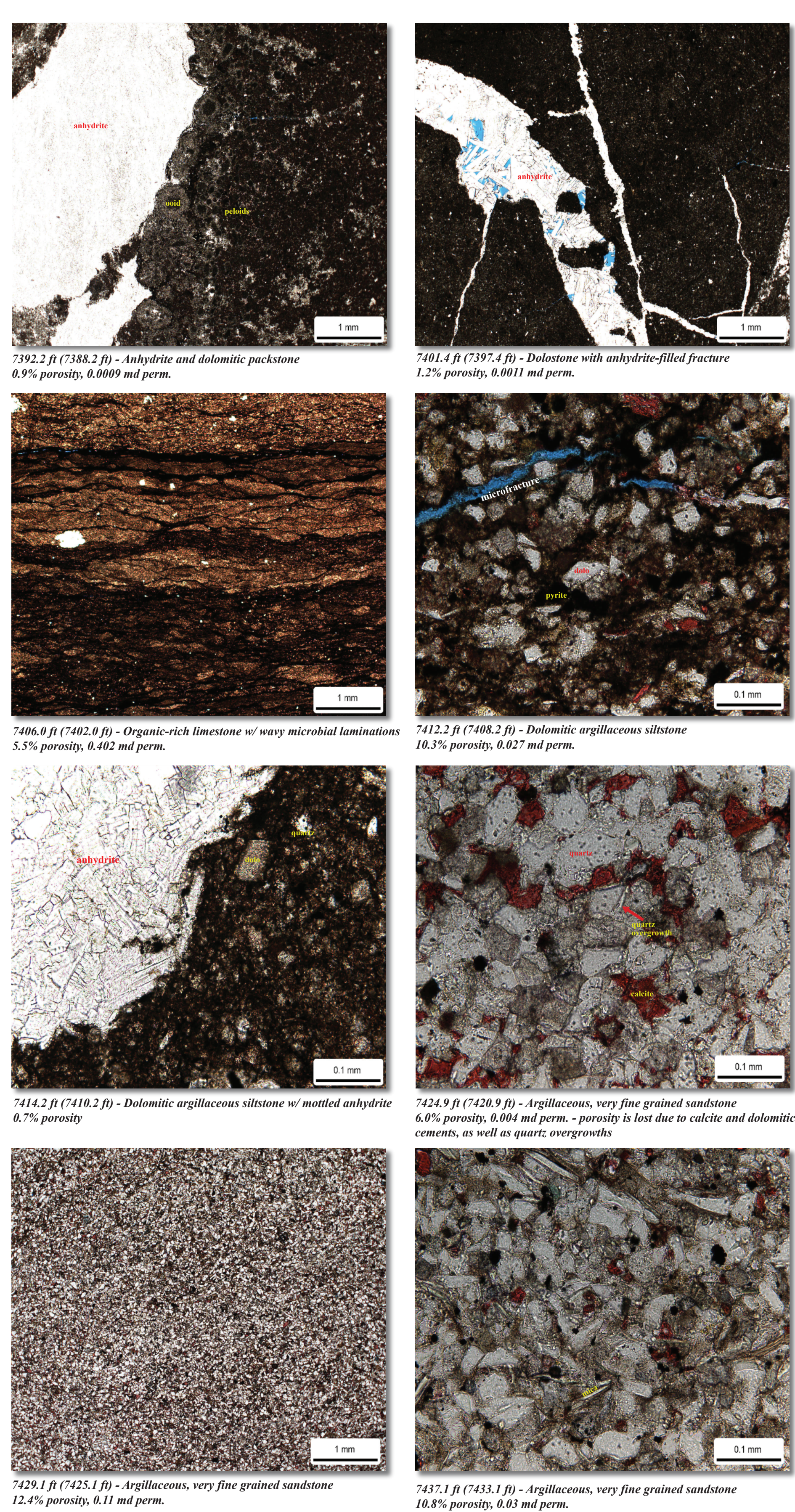
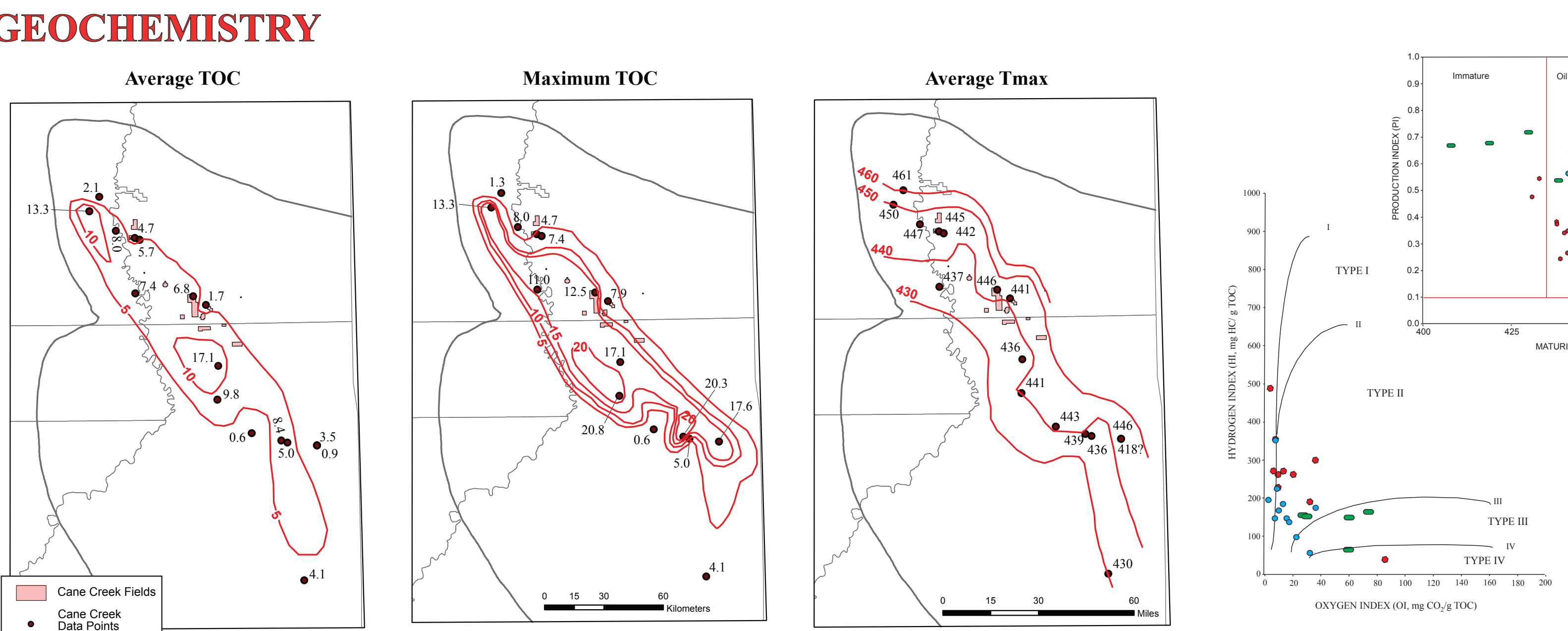
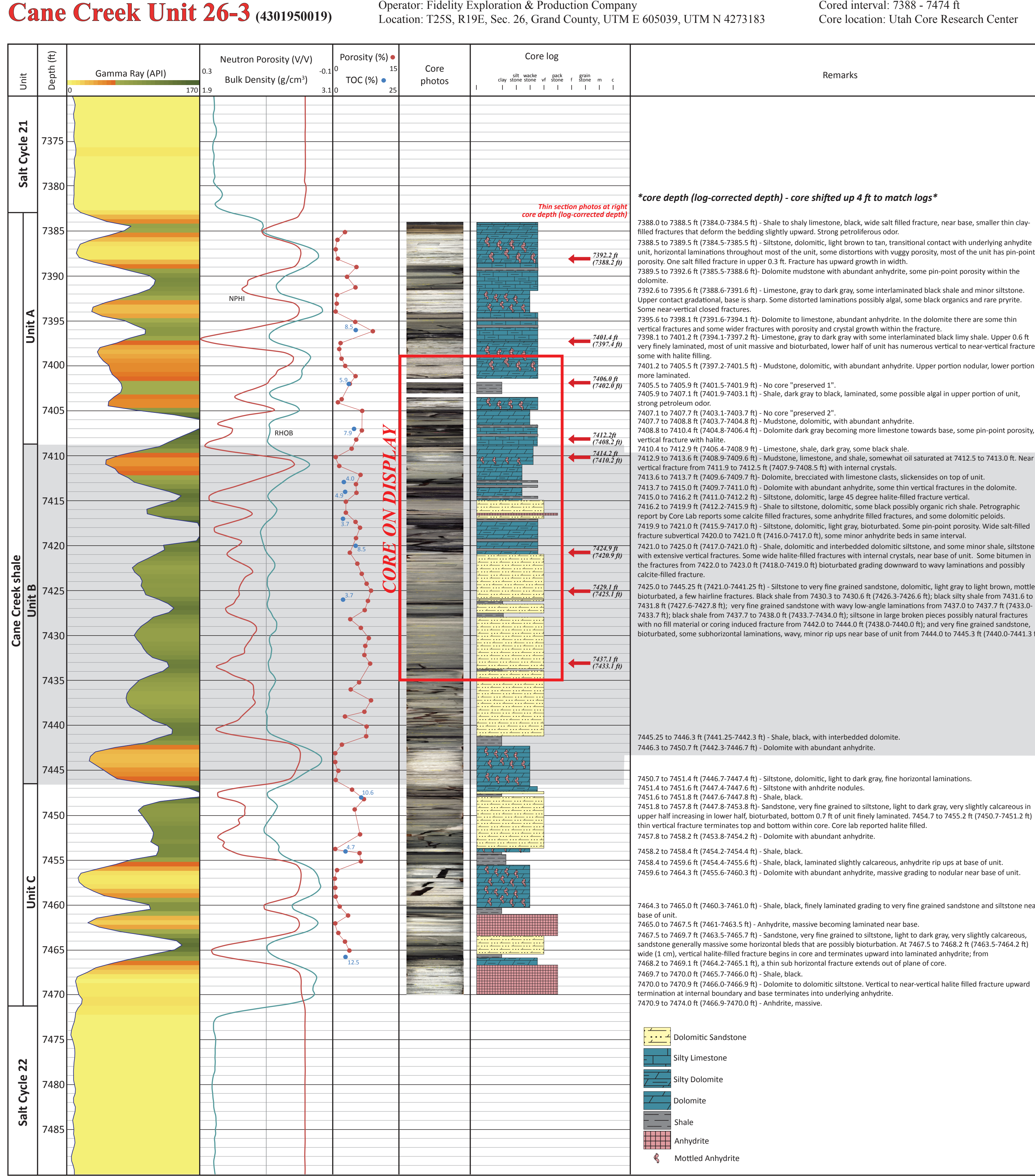
Over the past decade, the Moab area of the Paradox Basin has seen a large increase in drilling and subsequent oil production. The first oil discovery in the area occurred in the 1920s from the 300-million-year-old (Pennsylvanian-age) Paradox Formation. Drilling equipment and building materials were loaded onto barges and floated down the Colorado River to where the first discovery was drilled on the axis of the Cane Creek anticline near the current site of the Moab potash mine. While drilling, the well first blew out at a depth of 2028 feet and the rig was destroyed by the resulting fire. Several additional wells were drilled on the anticline but only a minor amount of oil was produced. Later, the equipment was floated farther down the river to Shafer dome, where drilling resulted in a dry hole.

In 1957, drilling at Big Flat, near present-day Dead Horse Point State Park, resulted in the discovery of oil in the Mississippian Redwall Limestone. This was the first discovery of oil from Mississippian-aged rocks in Utah. Ultimately, three oil wells and four dry holes were drilled in the Big Flat field, which was abandoned in 1971 after producing more than 83,000 barrels of oil (BO).

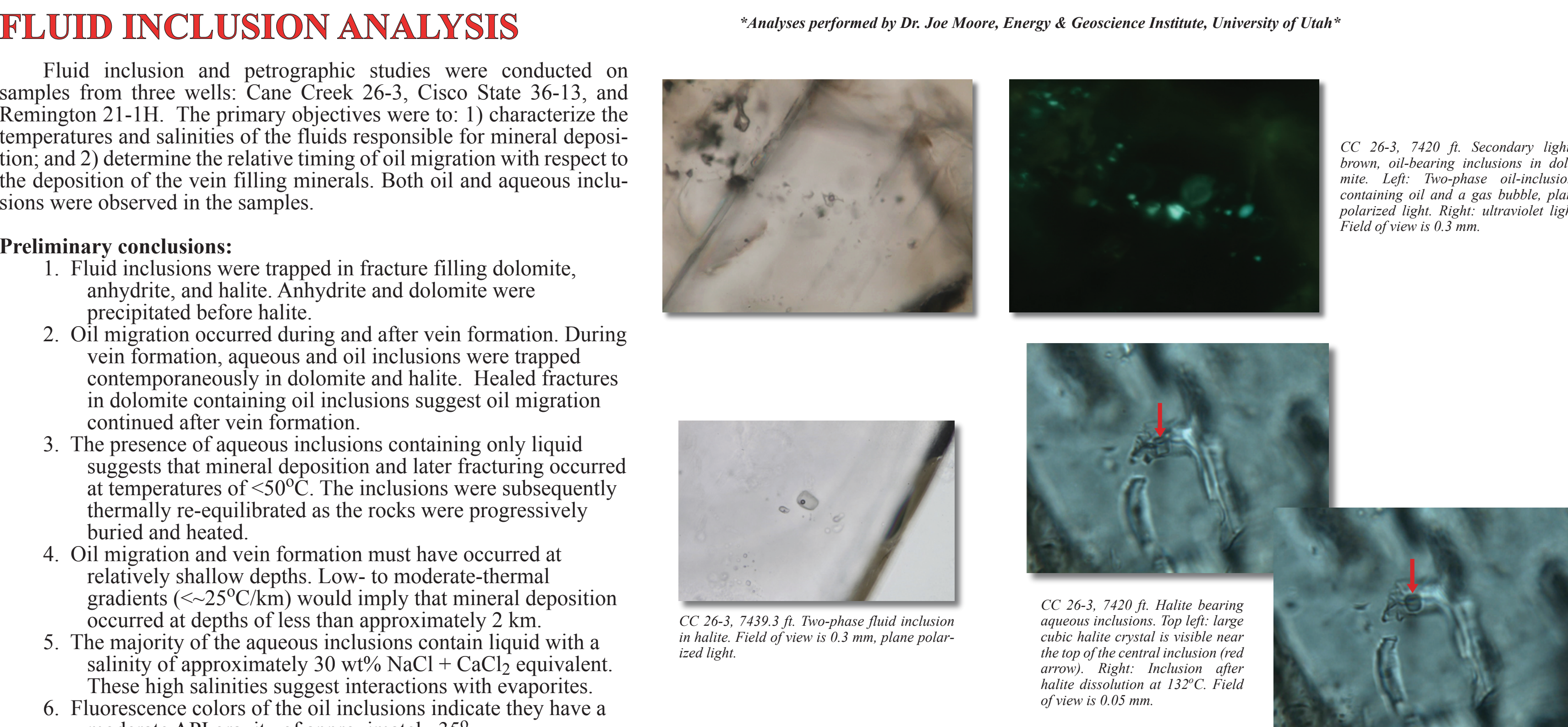
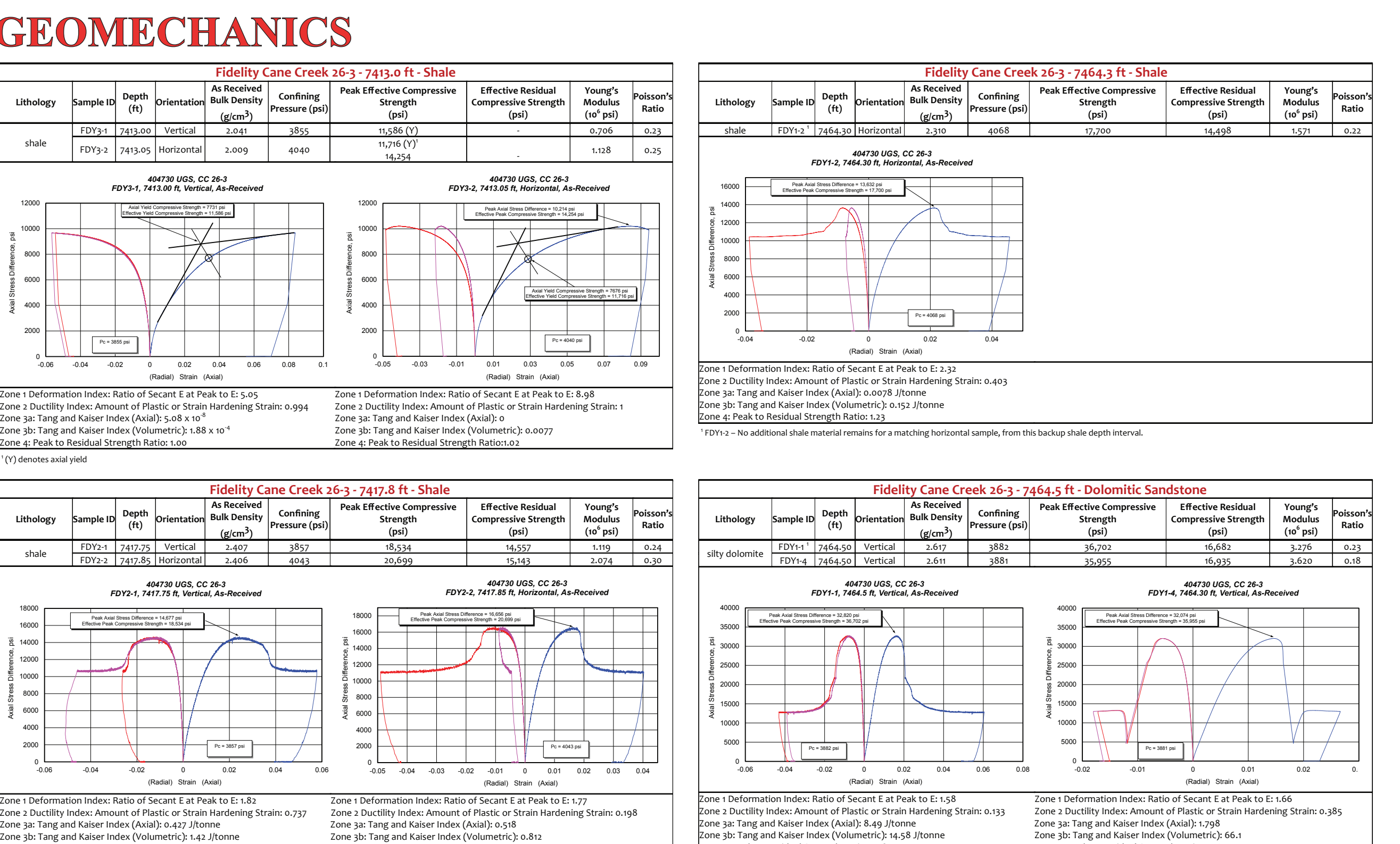
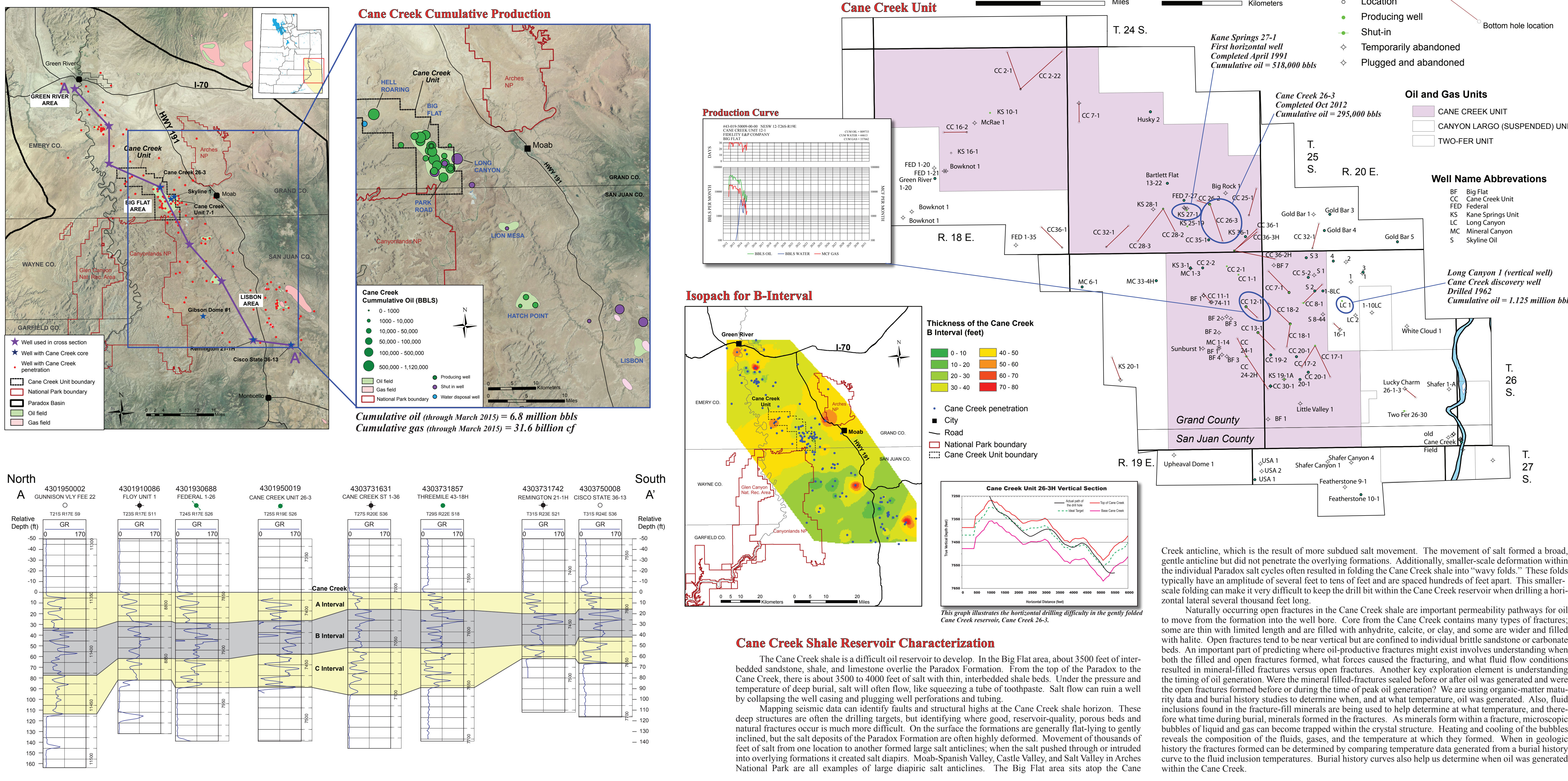
In the early 1960s, the Shafer Canyon, Bartlett Flat, and Long Canyon fields were discovered. The Shafer Canyon field consisted of two wells, one on each side of Dead Horse Point State Park, which produced from the Cane Creek shale. The wells were plugged and abandoned in 1969 after producing over 67,000 BO, mostly from one well. Bartlett Flat (Big Flat 5 well) and Long Canyon (Long Canyon 1 well) fields (both one-well fields) also produced from the Cane Creek shale. The casing collapsed in the Big Flat 5 well and the field was abandoned after producing 39,000 BO. The Long Canyon well is the most successful well in the area drilled during the 1960s. The well has produced more than 1 million BO and is still producing. Lion Mesa field was discovered in 1980, but has only produced a minor amount of oil from the Cane Creek shale.

Exploration continued in the Moab area, but significant success did not occur until Columbia Gas Development Corporation formed the Cane Creek Federal unit in 1991 and drilled a horizontal well (1-127) in the Cane Creek shale in the abandoned Bartlett Flat field. This was the first long-reach horizontal well drilled in Utah. Drilling horizontally in the Cane Creek shale allows wells to penetrate 1000+ feet of reservoir rock, versus 10 to 30 feet in a vertical well, and greatly increases the probability of encountering natural fractures essential to economic production. Columbia drilled six horizontal wells that are still producing and are now operated by Fidelity Exploration & Production Company. The six wells drilled by Columbia have produced more than 1.4 million BO.

Fidelity Exploration & Production Company took ownership of the Cane Creek unit in 2007 and began drilling additional wells. Fidelity has drilled 17 horizontal wells in the unit, many of which have horizontal legs exceeding 5000 feet in length. Total production from the Cane Creek unit as of September 1, 2014 exceeds 2.9 million BO, with 91,836 BO produced during the month of August 2014. Many of the wells have multiple horizontal laterals and some drill pads contain two wells, which reduces the surface footprint of development. Drilling and completion costs are typically \$8 to \$14 million per well and the best wells are expected to ultimately produce about 1.7 million BO.



## CANE CREEK PRODUCTION AND CHARACTERIZATION



Project funded by: U.S. Department of Energy - National Energy Technology Laboratory and Utah Geological Survey

Project website: <http://geology.utah.gov/resources/energy/oil-gas/shale-oil>

