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SUMMARY

An improved design of the buffalo gun, incorporating hole drilling and shooting into one operation with almost total blast containment, provided nearly 50 percent more recordable seismic signal than the traditional buffalo gun. The 'auger gun' is designed to optimize field efficiency, source couple, and safety. The auger gun consists of three main parts: power source, auger/screw, and modified buffalo gun. Amplitude spectra indicate the auger gun delivers approximately 20 percent more total energy and 50 percent more reflection energy with no noticeable increase in recorded ground roll at a test site in Lawrence, Kansas. Subtle changes in source environment, such as a 15 cm gap between the detonation point and the base of the hole or inclusion of water as opposed to air at the detonation point, have a significant effect on the quality of the recorded data. The auger gun should increase field efficiency by over 50 percent on most shallow surveys, while improving the signal-to-noise ratio and total energy in comparison to the buffalo gun.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing environmental and engineering applications of reflection seismology have spurred research and development of shallow high-resolution reflection techniques and equipment. Resolution on the order of a meter is necessary to detect ultrashallow targets—generally the goal of most environmental and engineering studies (Steeple and Miller, 1990). Resolution can be increased by boosting the recorded frequency and the signal-to-noise ratio of reflection wavelets. Recent advances in engineering seismographs have made possible cost-effective acquisition of 15-bit or greater floating point data. Generating a high-frequency seismic source pulse has been accomplished in a multitude of different ways in the past (Miller et al., 1986).

The most commonly used seismic sources on shallow engineering surveys have fallen under two main categories: explosives or weight drops. The explosive category includes both high explosives and 'guns'. Weight-drop sources include everything from mechanically assisted vertical mass impacts (usually >20 kg mass) to human-assisted vertical mass impacts (sledge hammers, mallets, and thors). Recent advances in high-frequency engineering sources have come predominantly under the 'gun' classification. Development of a downhole shotgun capable of generating a consistently high frequency source wavelet with only minimal increase in expense and effort over hammers, spurred the shallow seismic-reflection industry. Downhole shotgun sources possess significantly more energy in

the 200 to 600 Hz range in comparison to hammer sources (Pullan and MacAulay, 1987).

DESIGN AND TECHNIQUE

The auger gun is designed to optimize field efficiency, source couple, and safety. A measure of success with the downhole shotgun source (as with any downhole explosive source) can be related to efficiency in generation of broad-band, high-frequency energy. Improved energy transfer is obtained when downhole placement of the shotgun shell includes a water stem and restricted recoil (Miller et al. 1989). Containment of the air-coupled wave has been at least partially accomplished for downhole projectile sources with a steel containment plate (Steeple et al., 1987). To obtain proper downhole placement of existing gun sources, a minimal diameter pilot hole (generally 6 cm, or so) approximately 80 cm deep must be bored. The auger gun described here incorporates all the previous operations and configurations into a single pass source.

The auger gun consists of three main parts: power source (skid-steer loader), auger/screw, and modified buffalo gun (Figure 1). The power source for testing described here is a 25 hp, 4-wheel drive, 1.2 m wide, hydraulic loader. The auger/screw is a modified hydraulic auger that receives its hydraulic drive power from the loader. The buffalo gun used for these tests was elongated to slightly over 2 m in length, is designed for bottom loading (as opposed to the standard screw-on head), solenoid firing, time break from a downhole sensor. The firing pin has an automatic (spring-loaded) safety. These components when assembled represent approximately 1500 kg and are transportable in the bed of a standard pick-up truck.

Operation of the auger gun is a three-step process: (1) screwing the auger flight into the ground, (2) loading and firing the gun, and (3) unscrewing the auger flight from the ground. Once the 4-wheel-drive loader is in place, the containment plate is lowered to the ground surface with the weight of the loader placed on the plate. The hollow-stem auger flight is then screwed into the ground using a gaging device designed to ensure the flight is screwed into the ground at a fixed rate and no material is removed from the hole. Screwing the auger flight into the ground accomplishes both exceptional blast containment and minimal residual borehole. After the auger flight is securely screwed into the ground 80+ cm, the modified buffalo gun is loaded (by sliding the gun over a shotgun shell), lowered down the center of the hydraulic drive head, through the hollow stem auger flighting, and seated into a sleeve at the base of the auger flight. Water can be poured through the hollow stem auger prior to downhole

placement of the buffalo gun to improve source couple. Once positioned, the gun can be fired by either a hammer impact on the top of the firing pin or with an electric solenoid.

Safety must be of the utmost concern in any operation involving seismic sources. Designed into the auger gun are several critical safety improvements over the traditional buffalo gun. First, is the improved loading design that does not require the operator's hand to come any closer than a meter from the shell either during loading or while the live shell is in the firing chamber. Another improvement is related to containment of the entire gun mechanism in its downhole position throughout the firing operation. Finally, the firing-pin lock or safety is spring-loaded and does not require operator intervention prior to firing. The entire design and operation of the auger gun revolves around maximizing the recorded reflection energy without compromising the safety of the operator or bystanders.

The auger gun incorporates several key characteristics designed and previously shown to enhance high-frequency seismic signal at the expense of air-coupled wave and ground roll while maximizing mobility, operator safety, field efficiency, and ground coupling. Containment of the explosion is optimized by screwing the auger into the ground and positioning most of the loader weight on the gun. Field efficiency is maximized by incorporating the borehole preparation with the gun placement and detonation. The massive nature of the design and improved shell-loading procedure minimizes risk to the operator. Mobility is only restricted by the 1.2 m wide, 4-wheel-drive loader. Environmental impact is minimal with remnants of the operation restricted to a nominal 4 cm corkscrew hole approximately 80 cm deep.

RESULTS

Data acquired for this test were recorded on an Input/Output DHR-2400 seismograph with no analog low-cut filtering. The sampling interval was 1/2 ms and record length was 500 ms. The receivers were three L-28E Mark Products 40-Hz geophones wired in series and arranged in a 1 m in-line array. The source-to-closest-receiver was 20 m with a geophone station interval of 4 m. The shells used for this test were 8 gauge, 400 grain black powder blanks. The recording environment was consistent throughout the comparison.

Auger gun and buffalo gun field files acquired under identical conditions allows for comparison of several key source characteristics (Figure 2). The amplitude of the data is noticeably higher with the auger gun with very little difference in the dominant frequency on either field file. Reflection information is not directly interpretable on these shot gathers. A 150 Hz digital low-cut filter reveals a strong reflection present on both files at approximately 80 ms (Figure 3). The low-cut filter does a good job of removing the ringy refraction arrival clearly dominating the upper 120 ms of the unfiltered files. Some subtle indications of 50 Hz

ground roll are still present on filtered files. The general characteristics of the 80 ms reflection seem to be consistent for both sources.

Amplitude spectra suggest the auger gun produces more useable seismic energy per grain of explosive than the traditional buffalo gun (Figure 4). Almost 25 percent more energy is present on the auger gun spectra in the 30- to 70-Hz range than the equivalent buffalo gun spectrum. Little or no observable increase in the amount of recorded ground roll can be observed on spectra of unfiltered data. Peaks in the spectra around 90 Hz represent reflection energy at this site. The auger gun delivers almost double the recordable high-frequency reflection energy of the buffalo gun.

Subtle changes in source environment make considerable difference in the amplitude spectrum of auger gun data. Leaving a 15-cm air-filled space between the base of a shell loaded in the auger gun and the bottom of the screw hole reduced total recorded reflection energy almost an order of magnitude. A water column placed in the hollow stem auger flight just prior to loading the shell tight against the base of the screw hole increased recorded reflection energy by over 50 percent. Significant variability in frequency and amplitude of the recorded energy resulted from slight changes in the downhole environment. These subtle changes and their resulting effect on the seismic data are indicative of how the near surface acoustically responds to gun powder explosions.

CONCLUSION

The auger gun should represent a 50 percent improvement in acquisition rates and recorded reflection energy at most sites when compared to the traditional buffalo gun. The auger gun is a modification of the original buffalo gun design (Pullan and MacAulay, 1987), and at some sites will represent an improvement. As with all seismic equipment and techniques, site characteristics dictate relative effectiveness. One characteristic of the auger gun that is not site-dependent and does represent an improvement over the buffalo gun is overall safety. The massive nature of the auger gun should allow detonation of series charges totally as much as 1000 grains of black powder. Preliminary testing indicates that at some sites it may be possible to acquire over 500 shotpoints a day when station spacings are 5 m or less.

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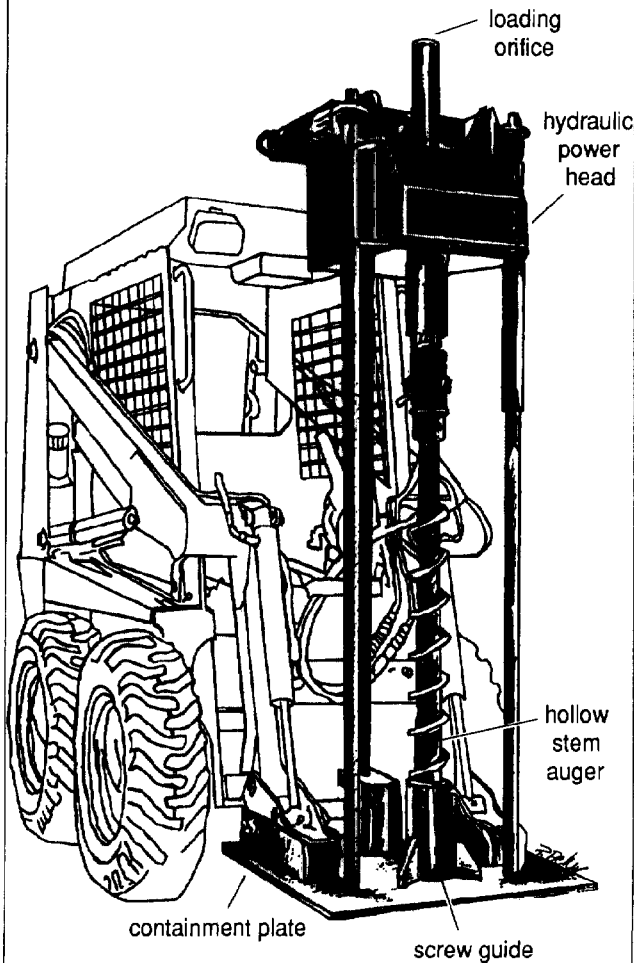


Fig. 1 Diagram represents the auger gun in above-ground position. Modified buffalo-gun portion of the auger gun is not shown, but is conceptually the same as previously documented (Pullan and MacAulay, 1987).

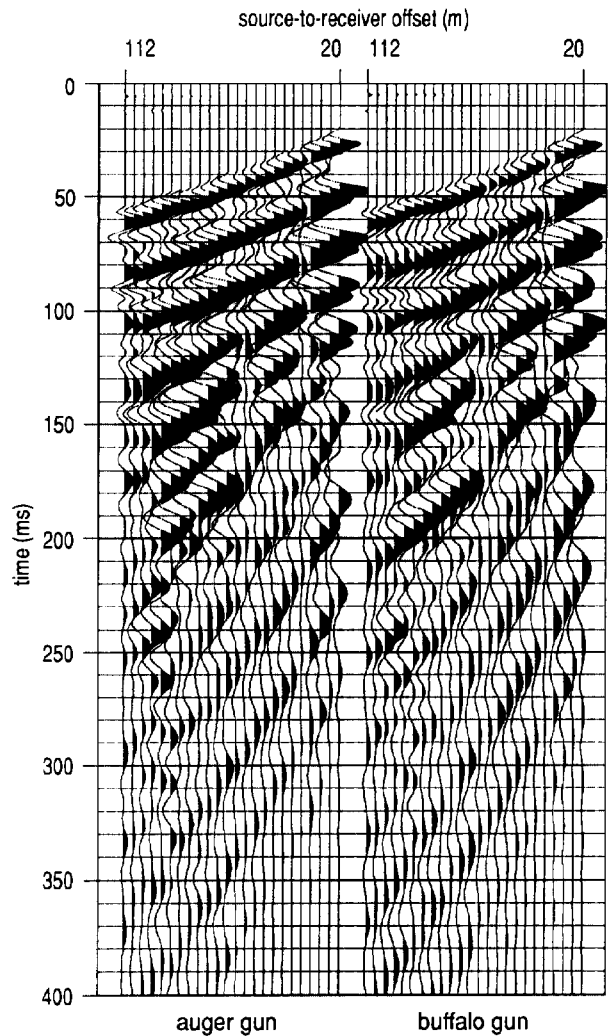


Fig. 2 Auger gun field file (left) compared to the buffalo gun (right).

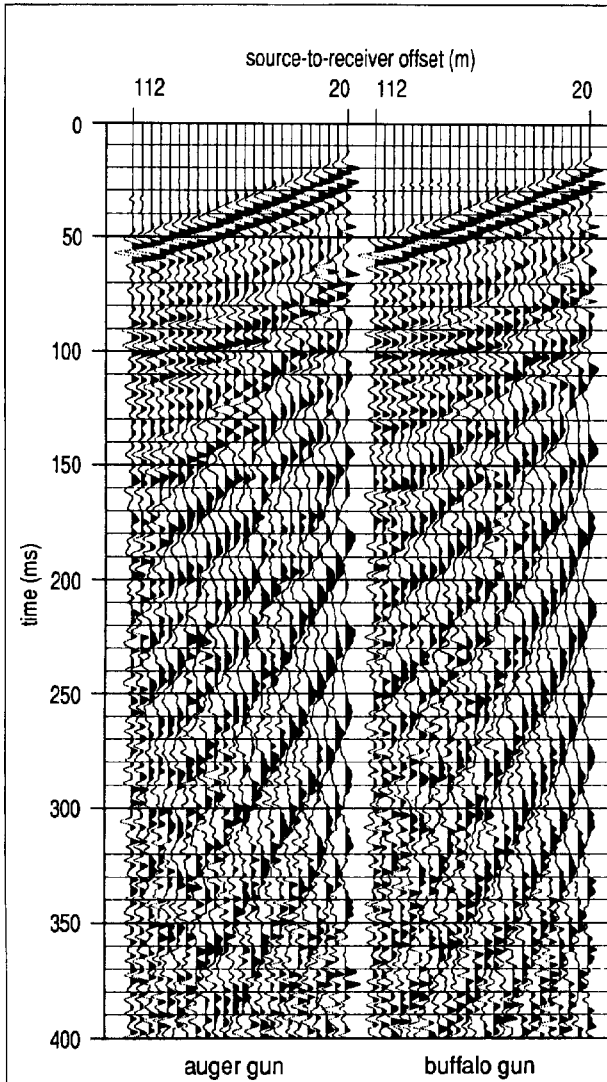


Fig. 3 A 150 Hz digital low-cut filter enhanced the 80 ms reflection event on both the auger (left) and buffalo (right) guns.

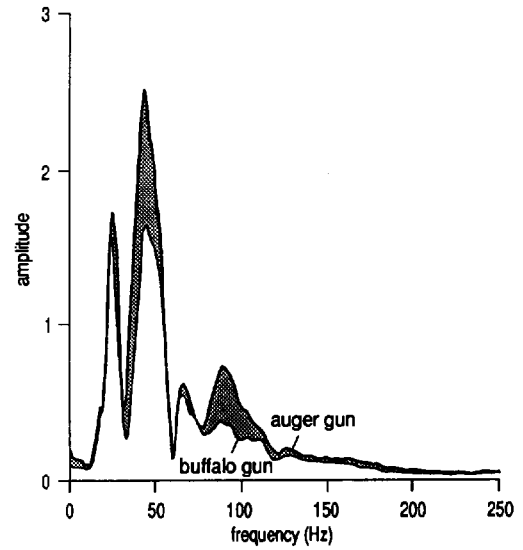


Fig. 4 The darkened area represents the difference between the lower curve (buffalo gun) and the upper curve (auger gun).