

## **The PE Road Trip**

by Naomi Uhlenhake

Before starting any trip, one makes sure they have all the suitcases packed, the car has gas and there are plenty of snacks for the road. Well the PE examination is not any different. The first stage of preparing to take the PE is making sure one qualifies. After some in depth research on the internet, I discovered what I call the “Professional Engineering Exam”, or PE for short, is actually the Principles and Practice of Engineering examination. Good to know, I now have an official destination. I also discovered a very helpful flow chart for acquiring my PE in Wisconsin. I like to think of it more as a road map, to make sure I am heading in the right direction. Unfortunately, there are no GPS systems to help on this trip. The first box of the Wisconsin eligibility flow chart is “Did you graduate from an accredited program?” As a matter of fact, I did. I am a proud graduate of Biological Systems Engineering at UW-Madison. Great, we are on our way.

### **On the Road**

So, my road trip is underway, now that I qualify for the PE exam. According to the PE road map (the flow chart previously mentioned) one must have four years of experience. This is where my trip runs into some road construction. I started working full time at Resource Engineering Associates (REA) in January 2006. I am aspiring to take the PE this fall. Now, in the end of October 2009, I will have three years and 10 months of experience. I am hoping to be able to apply my summer internship, when I also worked for REA, towards my experience. So, this slides me over four years of qualified experience. The longest leg of my journey is nearly complete.

### **Pit Stop**

It seems inevitable, that right have you leave the house, some needs to stop right away. Be it because of a bathroom break, someone is hungry or, my favorite, Chinese fire drill. Well the PE journey again, has an almost immediate pit stop. According to the flow chart, one must have taken the Fundamentals of Engineering Exam. Check, I passed that in April, 2006. I definitely didn't enjoy the exam though, so I'm motivated to pass the PE the first time around.

### **On the Road...Again**

Ok, assuming I can combine my experience to achieve a total of four years of experience, I have met the qualifications to take the exam this upcoming October. Like any fun road trip it is nice to have some companions in the car. I've also signed up for a mentor through ASABE, my companion on the PE road trip. Stay tuned for the continued progress on this trip.

## **PE Road Trip, Part II**

As a child, I remember taking many road trips with my parents to Florida to visit my grandparents. One year, we stopped at Mammoth Caves, and since I was probably 10, this didn't peak my interest much when my parents first told us about it. But since they

were driving, they had the final say on where we would stop for “amusement”. Much to my surprise, I LOVED the caves, and it sparked my interest in the earth that I didn’t know existed. This is similar to my experience with the PE Webinar Series available from ASABE. I wasn’t really looking forward to spending two hours every week or so studying for the exam. But, after the first two sessions, I am really enjoying digging back into the things I learned in college, and solving the example problems that are given to us. So far, the PE Webinar Series has been a great stop for amusement, and I will definitely keep attending the sessions!

So I don’t get sucked into any tourist traps, my PE mentor Amy Schmidt, has been a fantastic navigator. She has definitely been a wealth of knowledge for me, giving me advice on how to steer around the twists and turns of the road to the exam. It is definitely helpful having a co-pilot who has made the trip before.

It seems that on any road trip I take, there is always a detour due to construction. For me, this has been the application process to take the exam. In part 1 of my road trip I mentioned that I may be squeaking by with 4 years of experience, and only by counting my internships. I’ve been working on filling out the application, rounding up my 5 required PE references, and listing my experiences. I do hope that once the Wisconsin Licensing Board reviews my application they decide that I can make it through the road construction and that my bridge isn’t out due to lack of experience.

### **PE Road Trip – The Final Leg**

Sadly (or joyously, depending on the experience) every road trip must come to an end. For my PE Road Trip, my final destination is exam day. In my last travel log, I had encountered some road construction, and was unsure if I was going to make it to the PE exam due to lack of experience. I received a letter from the Wisconsin Board of Licensing stating I was approved to take the exam in August, making it through the road construction, and I took off at full speed, diving into my studying.

The PE exam includes seven subject emphases, and I considered each to be a stop along the way, spending some time reviewing each area. I work in the areas of Soil & Water, as well as Structures & Environment, so I spent more time at those “locations”, reviewing the material more in depth. I also thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Power & Machinery stop, which was completely unexpected since I didn’t take any machinery classes in college.

As I prepared to reach my final destination, the exam, I realized I had collected an entire suitcase of souvenirs. So into the exam I went, hauling in a rolling suitcase, full of 7 reference books, 4 binders, my calculator, two rulers, my slippers, snacks and a water bottle. After 8 hours of intense test taking, I can say I successfully reached my destination and did the best I could. While my journey towards my PE has been a great experience, I hope it is a trip I don’t have to take again next year.