A preliminary interpretation of the gas composition of the CP IV sector wells of the Cerro Prieto field, Mexico

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Abstract

In order to increase the electric generation capacity of the Cerro Prieto geothermal field from 620 MW to 720 MW, the Cerro Prieto IV (CP IV) sector of the Cerro Prieto geothermal field was developed. This is located at the NE portion of the exploited field, where fourteen new wells were drilled since 2000 to date. The wells in CP IV zone produce two-phase fluids at wellhead with heterogeneous characteristics regarding steam fraction: at the central zone and towards the NW, the wells are liquid-dominated while those towards the E and S produce a relatively high steam fraction. In this work a study of the gas composition of the produced fluids was developed to obtain reservoir parameters such as temperature and steam fraction to identify the presence of different type of fluids at reservoir. A method based on the Fischer Tropsch reaction and H_2S equilibria with pyrite-pyrrhotite as mineral buffer (FT-HSH3) was used. The results for the "natural state" showed the presence of fluids with reservoir temperature from 275 to 310° C and excess steam values from -1 to 50%. Data are aligned in a FT-HSH3 trend suggesting that the well discharges are constituted of a mixture in different proportions of two end members. One of them seems to be a liquid with a temperature of more than 300° C and a negative or negligible excess steam while the other seems to be a two-phase fluid with a temperature of about 275° C and an excess steam fraction of about 0.5. According to the data for single wells, depending on the production conditions of the wells, mixtures in different proportions of liquid and steam reservoir fluids could occur. Data for 2005 that included wells drilled after 2000, suggested the presence of steam phase at reservoir. This steam could be generated by boiling of deep reservoir fluid due to pressure drop. The mixing trend obtained for the natural state was also seen for 2005 data but lower temperatures (from 265 to 295° C) compared to those for natural conditions were obtained. The entry of lower temperature fluids descending through the H Fault to the reservoir was also inferred, since results for the wells affected by this process (located at the center of CP IV area), showed small or negative excess steam values and slightly lower temperatures (265-270° C).

Keywords: Cerro Prieto, geothermal fluids, gas composition, chemical equilibrium

Interpretación preliminar de la composición gaseosa de pozos del sector CP IV del campo geotérmico de Cerro Prieto, México

Resumen

Con el propósito de aumentar la capacidad de generación de energía eléctrica de 620 a 720 MW en el campo geotérmico de Cerro Prieto, a partir de 2000 se inició el desarrollo del sector CP IV. Esta zona se localiza en el NE del campo, donde se perforaron catorce pozos nuevos. Actualmente se han realizado estudios detallados de CP IV con el propósito de investigar su estado natural así como los fenómenos y procesos principales debidos a la explotación. En este trabajo se estudió la composición gaseosa de los fluidos producidos para tratar de distinguir diferentes aportes de fluidos a los pozos mediante la estimación de su temperatura de yacimiento y del exceso de vapor. Se utilizó un método de equilibrio gaseoso que considera el equilibrio de la reacción de Fischer Tropsch y el equilibrio combinado pirita-pirrotita (FT-HSH3). Los resultados obtenidos indican que en el estado inicial en el yacimiento existen fluidos que muestran heterogeneidad en los valores de temperatura de yacimiento (entre 275 y 310° C) así como en exceso de vapor de yacimiento (-1 y 50%). Es interesante notar que en el estudio de los pozos de manera individual, los resultados muestran que a través del tiempo los fluidos que alimentan a los pozos consisten de mezcla bifásica de diferente proporción líquido/vapor de yacimiento. Los resultados se alinean en una tendencia aproximada de mezcla que sugiere que además de la fase líquida del yacimiento puede existir una fase de vapor en CP IV que, dependiendo de las condiciones de operación de los pozos, puede añadirse al fluido de alimentación. El origen de esta fase vapor puede ser la ebullición del líquido debido a disminución de presión y puede estar asociada con el ascenso de gases magmáticos, cuya localización podría estar cerca de CP IV. Por otra parte, según datos de 2005 en pozos localizados en la parte central de CP IV, puede distinguirse que el fluido de alimentación consiste de una fase líquida de relativamente menor temperatura (270° C) que se relaciona con el escurrimiento de aguas más superficiales hacia el yacimiento a través de la Falla H. El estudio realizado según datos de 2005 que incluye pozos perforados después del 2000, indica el mismo patrón de mezcla hallado en condiciones iniciales, aunque los valores de exceso de vapor de yacimiento en los pozos no afectados por el ingreso de fluidos de menor temperatura se han incrementado con respecto a los valores obtenidos para las condiciones iniciales. Al mismo tiempo, la temperatura de yacimiento según datos de 2005 se ha estimado entre 265 y 290° C. Los resultados obtenidos de la interpretación de los datos de composición gaseosa complementaron los estudios previos realizados y permitieron obtener estimaciones de la saturación de líquido en la formación.

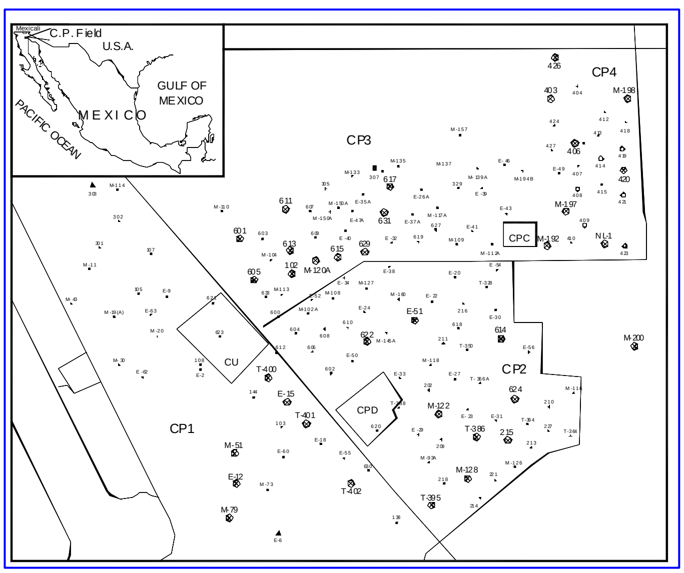

Fig. 1. Location of Cerro Prieto and the CP IV sector

Palabras clave: Cerro Prieto, fluidos geotérmicos, composición gaseosa, equilibrio químico

1. Introduction

In order to increase the electric generation capacity of the Cerro Prieto geothermal field from 620 MW to 720 MW, the Cerro Prieto IV (CP IV) sector (Figure 1) was developed (Quijano-León y Gutiérrez-Negrín, 2001). This is located at the NE portion of the exploited field, where fourteen new wells were drilled since 2000 to date. Detailed reservoir studies have been developed for CP IV area (Portugal *et al.*, 2006) to estimate the "natural state" characteristics of the reservoir and also to investigate the changes due to exploitation.

The wells in the CP IV zone produce two-phase fluids at wellhead with heterogeneous characteristics regarding steam fraction: at the central zone and towards the NW, the wells are liquid-dominated while those towards the E and S produce a relatively high steam fraction. This is seen in Figure 2 where the distribution of production enthalpy of the wells for data previous to year 2000 is shown. According to the "natural state" geochemical characteristics, the discharged fluids showed almost the same pattern of chemical composition but dilution effects are seen in some wells and different pH values (ranging from 5 to 8) were found. This dilution was attributed to the presence of condensate in wells where important boiling occurs and also to the entry of shallower lower temperature fluids in wells located at the center of CP IV (Portugal *et al.*, 2006). Chemical geothermometeres (TCCG, TNa-K-Ca) indicated temperatures between 280-310° C. Although most of the fluids exhibited total equilibrium in a triangular Na-K-Mg diagram, few of them showed partial equilibrium. The chemical characteristics of single wells also varied with time depending on the production conditions of the wells.

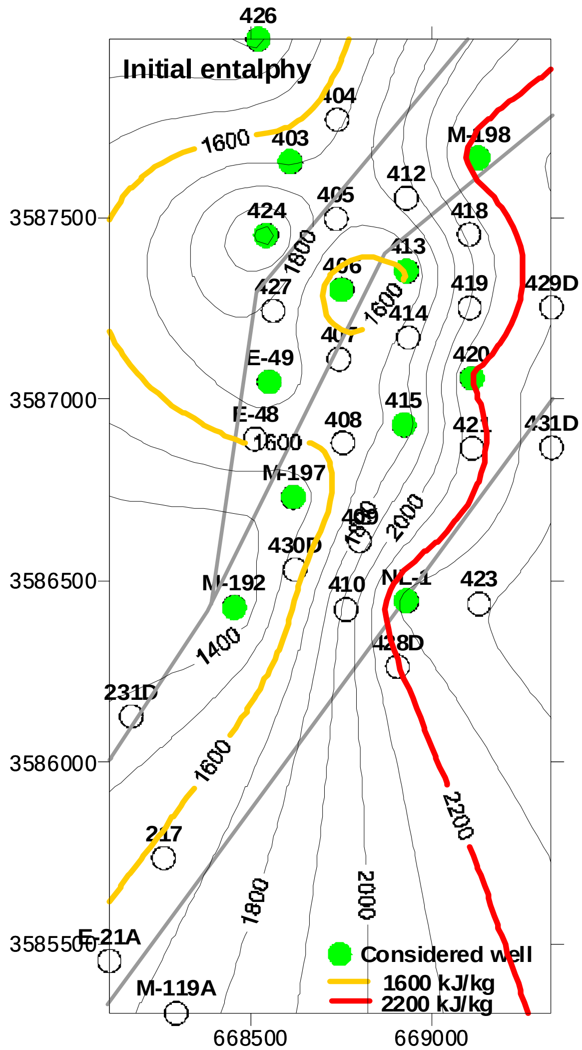

Fig. 2. Initial enthalpy values distribution of CP IV wells.

As there is a high enthalpy zone in CP IV and hence production of two-phase fluids with a relatively high steam fraction located to the East, the study of the gas phase becomes important to obtain reservoir parameters. Thus the objective of this work is to identify different fluids feeding the wells by obtaining reservoir parameters (temperature and steam fraction) in the Cerro Prieto IV sector. The FT-HSH3 method based on gas composition using the Fischer Tropsch reaction and H_2S equilibria with pyrite-pyrrhotite as mineral buffer (Siega *et al.*, 1999) were used.

2. Methodology

Gas equilibria considering the Fischer-Tropsch (FT) ($CH_4 + 2H_2O = 4H_2 + CO_2$) reaction together with the pyrite-pyrrhotite (HSH3) ($FeS_2 + H_2 = FeS + H_2S$) (Siega *et al.*, 1999) combined reactions were used. This mineral buffer seems to control the H_2S in the fluids at CP IV. The presence of the proposed mineral buffer at reservoir and the fact that reservoir temperatures estimated by the FT-HSH3 diagram compare well with results from geothermometers based on liquid phase composition, were the basis to select the FT-HSH3 method. The FT-HSH method was used before to obtain reservoir temperature and excess steam for Cerro Prieto data (D'Amore and Truesdell, 1985), but for CP IV wells rather low temperatures compared with results from FT-HSH3 method were obtained.

Another approach (FT-HSH2) (D'Amore, 1998; Barragán *et al.*, 2006) that considers more oxidizing conditions at reservoir, which implies high H_2S but low H_2 concentrations, was considered not suitable for the CP IV data since relatively high H_2 concentrations were found. The reservoir temperature and the reservoir excess steam (*y*) are provided as results in a graphical form and the trends observed for the data on the grids were interpreted.

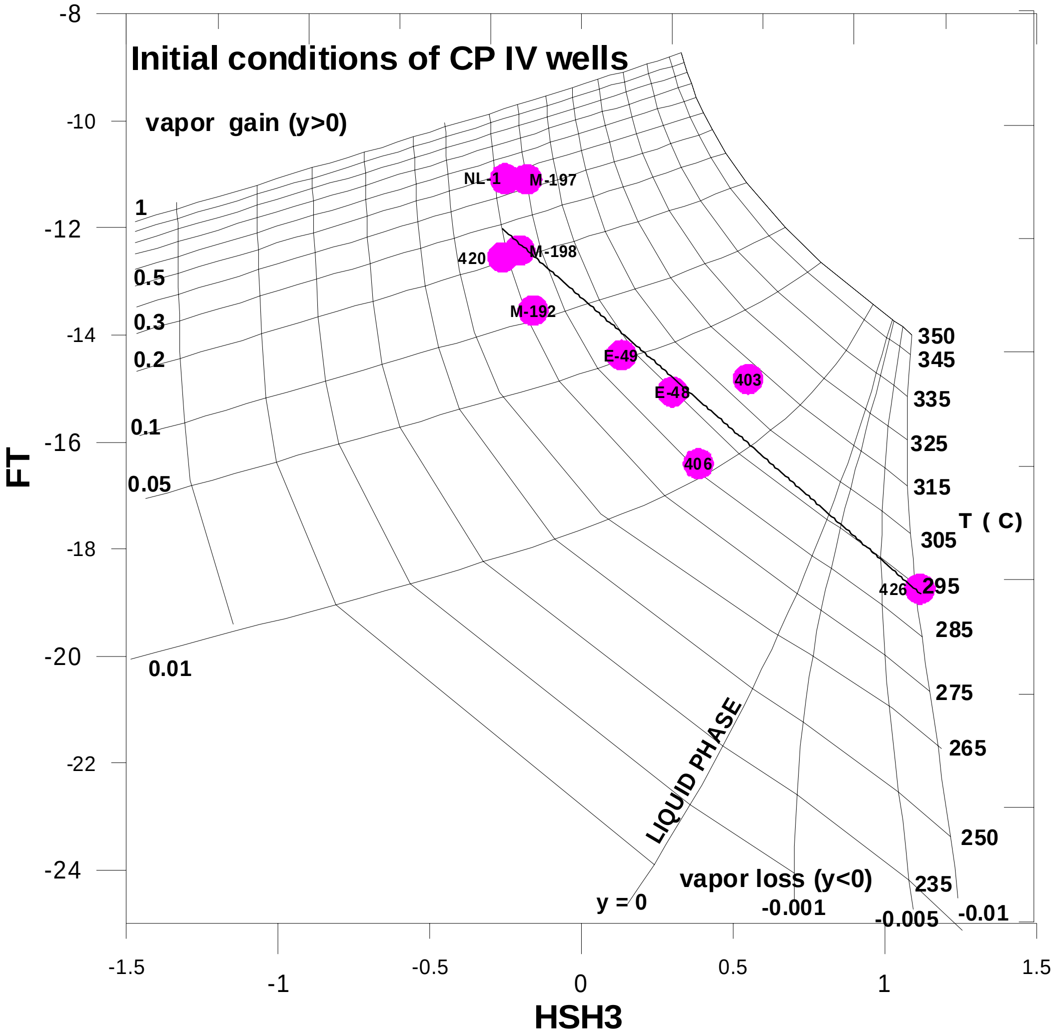

Fig. 3. FT-HSH3 diagram for data of CP IV wells for initial operating conditions.

3. Results

3.1 Initial conditions

Figure 3 shows the results obtained for the wells at initial conditions (up to year 2000) in a FT-HSH3 diagram. The location of the data points suggests that different fluids enter the wells at CP IV following an approximate lineal trend indicating possible mixing of fluids. Data of Figure 3 were fitted in order to find the main characteristics of the two hypothetical end members corresponding to the fluids entering the wells.

The regression had a significant correlation coefficient (0.93) suggesting that the wells produce mixtures in different proportions of two main components. The end members basically are as follows: a liquid phase of about 310° C characterized by the fluid produced by well 426, and a two-phase fluid with a reservoir steam fraction of almost 0.5 and a temperature of about 275° C, characterized by the well NL-1. These FT-HSH3 results suggested the presence of a steam phase at Cerro Prieto IV that could be originated by boiling of deep liquid. Then, if phase segregation occurs, preferential flow of steam to the wells will produce high values of excess steam (Truesdell *et al.*, 1992). By means of gas data, Nieva *et al.* (1982) also evidenced the pre-existence of steam at Cerro Prieto I, and among other studies that indicated the occurrence of two-phase fluids at reservoir, the mixing of fluids with steam was found at Cerro Prieto by Stallard *et al.* (1987).

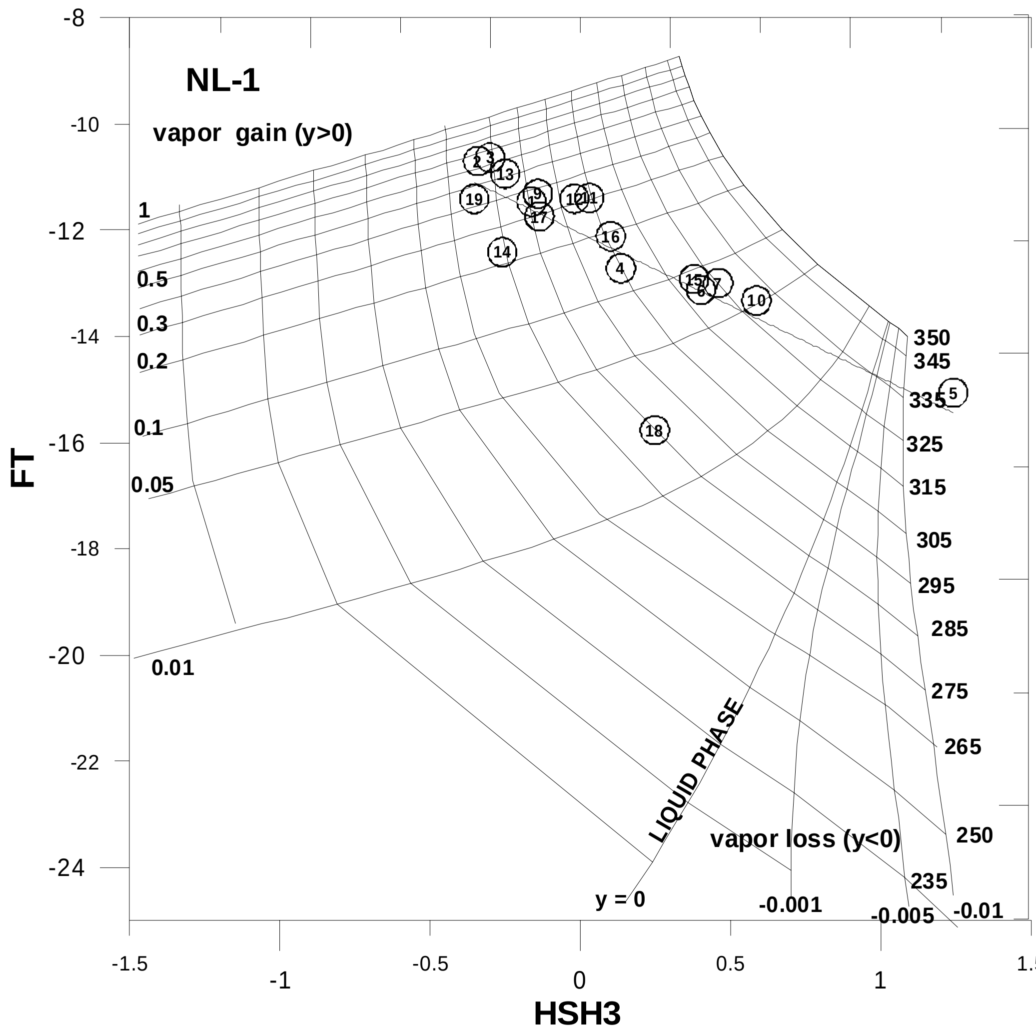

Fig. 4. FT-HSH3 diagram for data of well NL-1 located at the high enthalpy area of CP IV.

3.2 Single wells behavior

The behavior of the CP IV gas data for single wells in the FT-HSH3 diagrams also shows the mixing pattern seen previously. As an example, in Figure 4 the FT-HSH3 diagram for the well NL-1 is given. This well is located toward the relatively high enthalpy area, its enthalpy for initial conditions was 2300 kJ/kg (see Figure 2). Data are aligned indicating the well produces mixtures in different proportions of liquid and steam end member fluids occurring at the reservoir. According to the FT-HSH3 method, a very high temperature (335° C) liquid (with a deficit of reservoir steam) entered the well in point number 5 and was produced in 1997 when the well registered a production enthalpy of 1900 kJ/kg. In contrast, the other extreme of the mixing line represents a fluid with a lower temperature, of about 275° C, and a reservoir steam of about 70%. This fluid was produced in 1995-1996.

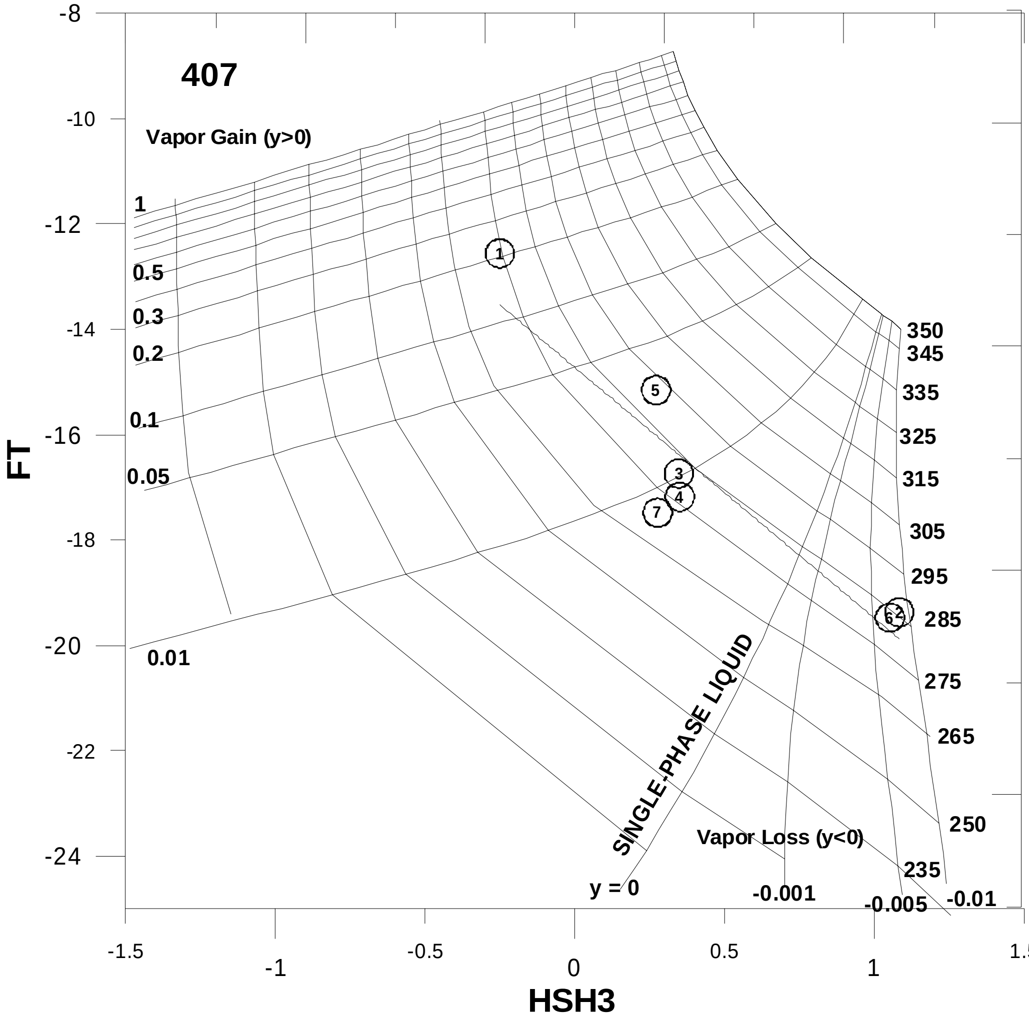

Fig. 5. FT-HSH3 diagram for data of well 407 located at the lower enthalpy area of CP IV.

Other example is given for well 407 which is located at the center of the CP IV area in a low enthalpy zone (see Figure 2), where influence of the H Fault is evident because of the production of liquid dominated fluids. Figure 5 shows the FT-HSH3 diagram for well 407. The data points are almost aligned showing that the well produces a mixture of steam dominated two phase fluid and a liquid phase (with a deficit of reservoir steam). At the beginning (point number 1) the well produced a 275° C fluid with a reservoir steam 20% but at other times (points number 2 and 6) the well produced liquid phase at about 285° C. The last point (number 7) indicates production of a fluid of about 270° C and a negligible excess reservoir steam (1%). The lower temperature and the negligible reservoir steam obtained for the point number 7 agree with other evidences that indicate the input of shallower lower temperature waters to the reservoir through the H Fault.

The behavior shown by wells NL-1 and 407 is representative of practically all the other wells at CP IV and it was interpreted in terms of mixing of basically two end members. It seems that depending on the production conditions, pre-existent reservoir steam enters the wells in different proportions.

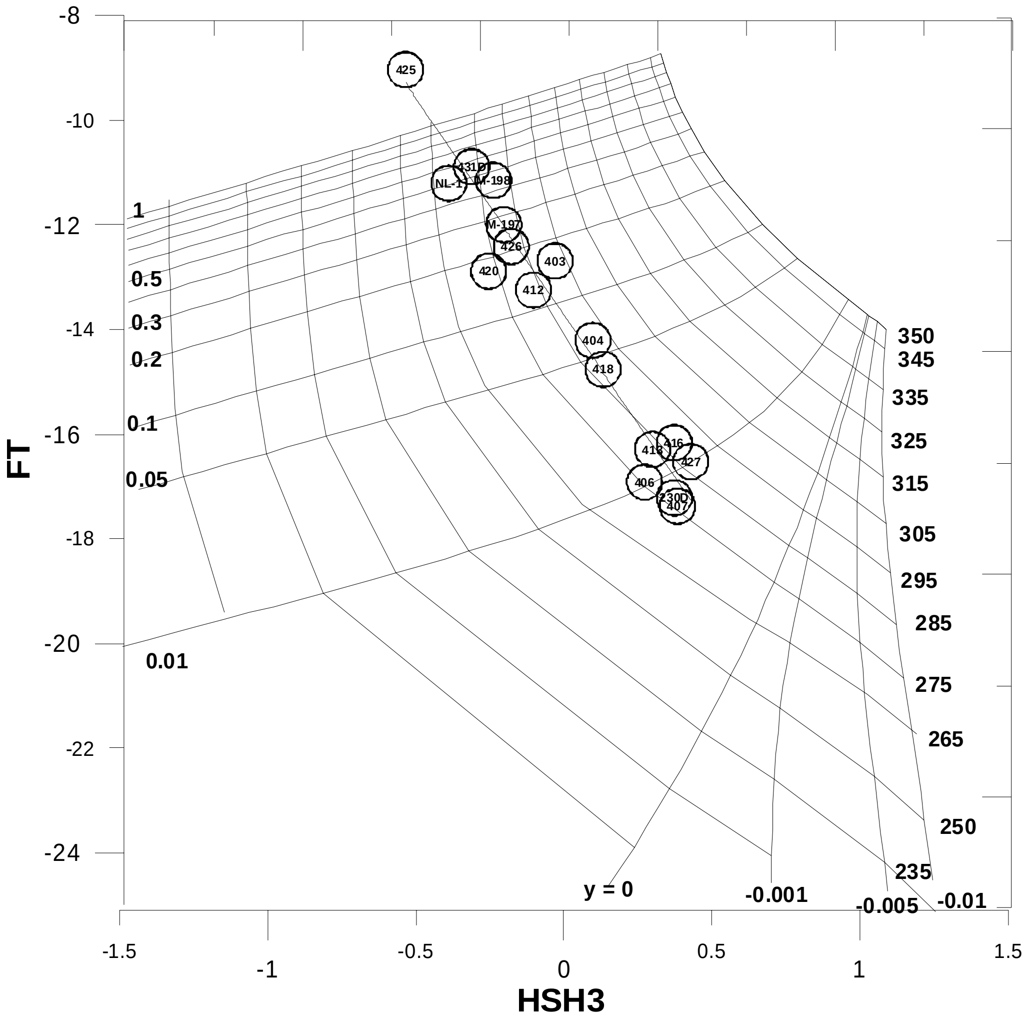

Fig. 6. FT-HSH3 diagram for CP IV gas data according to 2005 conditions.

3.3 Present conditions

The FT-HSH3 diagram for the wells according to 2005 gas data (September 2005) is shown in Figure 6 (point for the well NL-1 corresponds to November data). The trend observed indicates that the mixing process is important in the CP IV area since the points are aligned in a trend showing that the wells fluids consist of different proportions of the end member fluids identified before.

In Figure 6 the point of the well 425 which started operating in 2005, is interpreted as constituted by practically reservoir steam phase. In contrast, the fluid produced by the wells 406, 407, and 230D comes from a liquid phase with negligible reservoir steam (1%), with a temperature of about 275° C. As mentioned, according to detailed reservoir studies (Portugal *et al.*, 2006), this fluid is descending to the reservoir from a shallower aquifer through the H Fault, because of pressure drop due to exploitation.

In Figure 7 the deuterium-oxygen-18 composition of the fluids for 2005 data is given. As shown in Figure 7, the deuterium content of high enthalpy fluids is higher than that for low enthalpy fluids, which is due to the fact that deuterium is slightly partitioned to the steam phase at reservoir temperatures. The relatively light isotopic composition of the fluids from wells 406 and 407 compared to that of the other CP IV wells is probably due to the entry of such lower temperature water descending through Fault H to the production zone of the wells. In contrast, towards the East where high enthalpy wells are located, it seems that a steam phase originated by boiling of deep fluids is present. This steam contains a relatively high gas content which could be related to the up-flow of magmatic gases that according to Truesdell *et al.* (2003) occurs not far from CP IV.

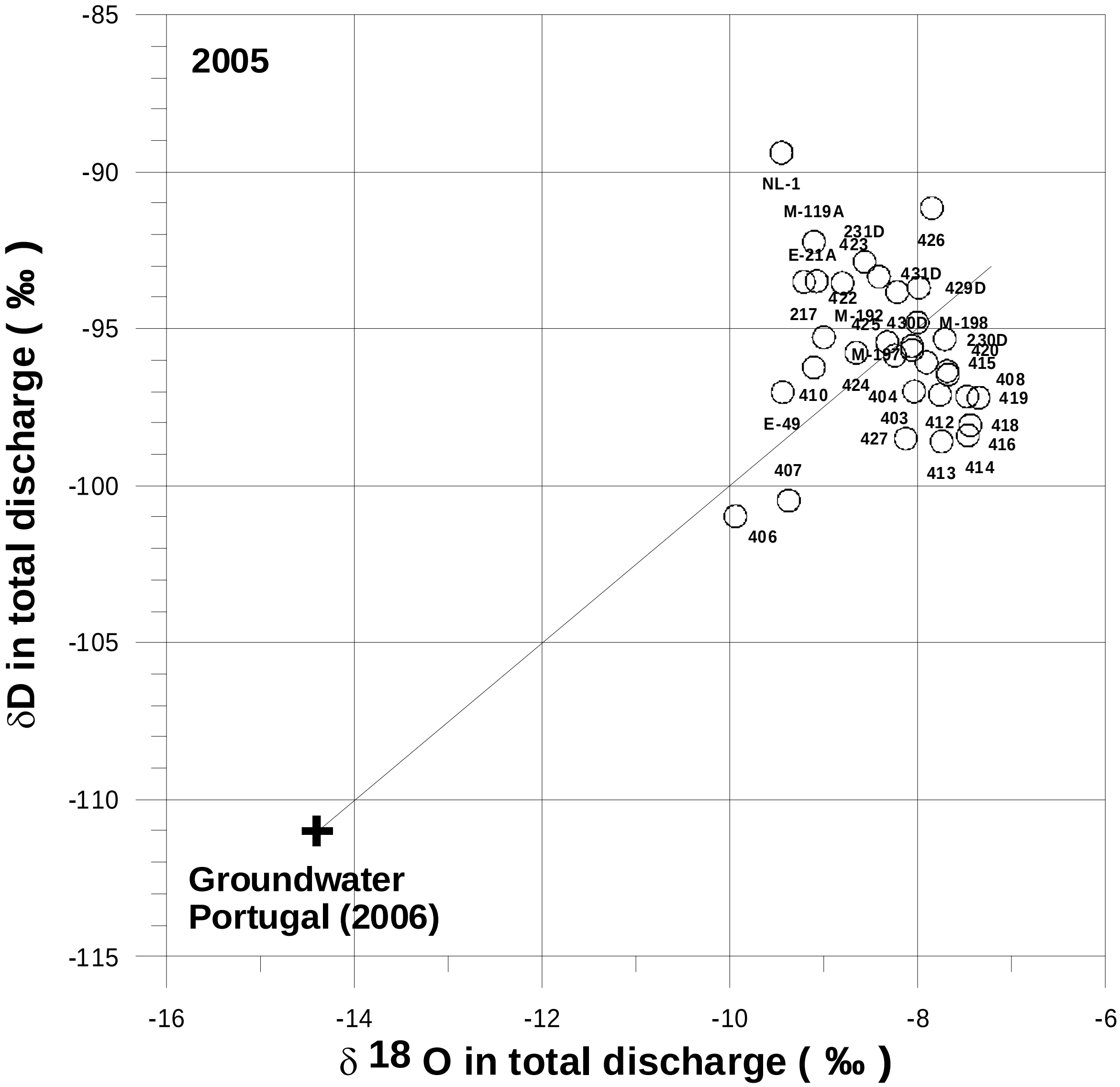

Fig. 7. δD vs δ^{18} O for fluids of CP IV area

4. Conclusions

Gas data from the CP IV zone of the Cerro Prieto geothermal field was studied by using the FT-HSH3 method, and a mixing process was inferred to occur in well discharges that implies the pre-existence of steam at reservoir. One end member consists of liquid phase with temperature higher than 300° C. The other consists of steam phase that was produced by boiling of deeper fluids at reservoir and could be enriched in gases since the gases up-flow probably occurs near to CP IV. Income of lower temperature fluids descending through the Fault H to the reservoir was also observed in the FT-HSH3 diagrams. This occurs mainly in wells located at the center of the CP IV sector, where the wells 406 and 407 are located.

Acknowledgments

CFE authorities are acknowledged for providing data and for allowing publication of this work. Results of this work are part of the project "Geoscientific studies of the Poligono Hidalgo (CP IV sector), Cerro Prieto Mexico wells" developed jointly by CFE-IIE in 2006.

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