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(54) **VEHICLE MOUNTABLE ARM FOR VALVE OPERATING MACHINE**

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This patent is subject to a terminal disclaimer.

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137/351, 368; 251/291, 292, 293; 248/647,
248/282.1; 173/39, 42, 185

See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A valve operating device includes a mounting for attachment to a vehicle and an elongate arm, the free end of which is only moveable across the underlying ground. The joints of the arm pivot around vertical axes and the arm is locked into a desired orientation by a brake at each joint. A valve turning machine is at the free end of the arm. The brakes are engaged and released by a control on the valve turning machine.

14 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets

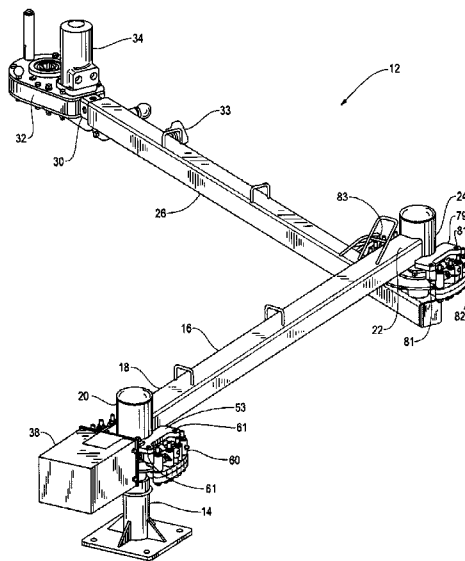


Fig. 1

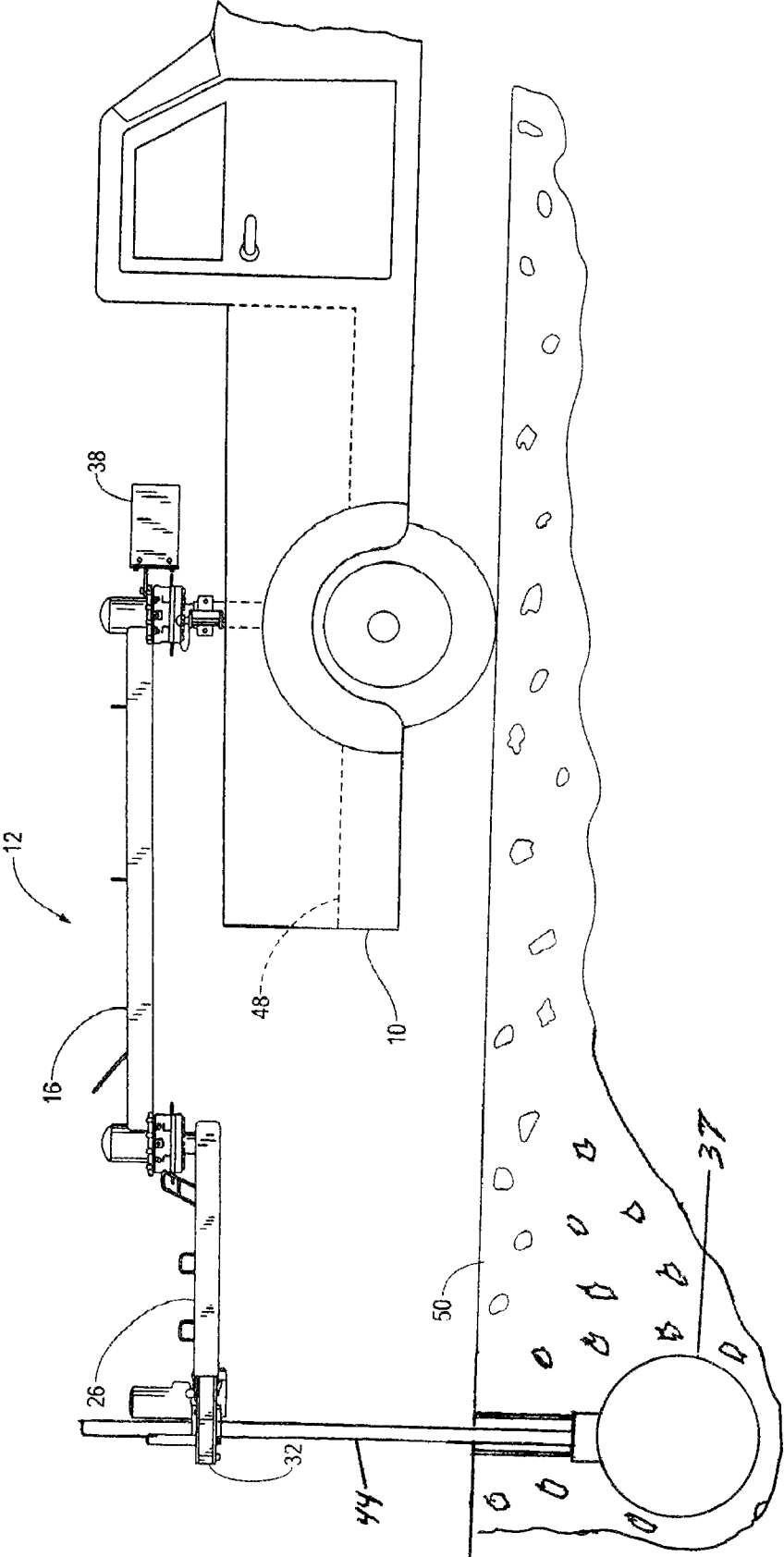


Fig. 2

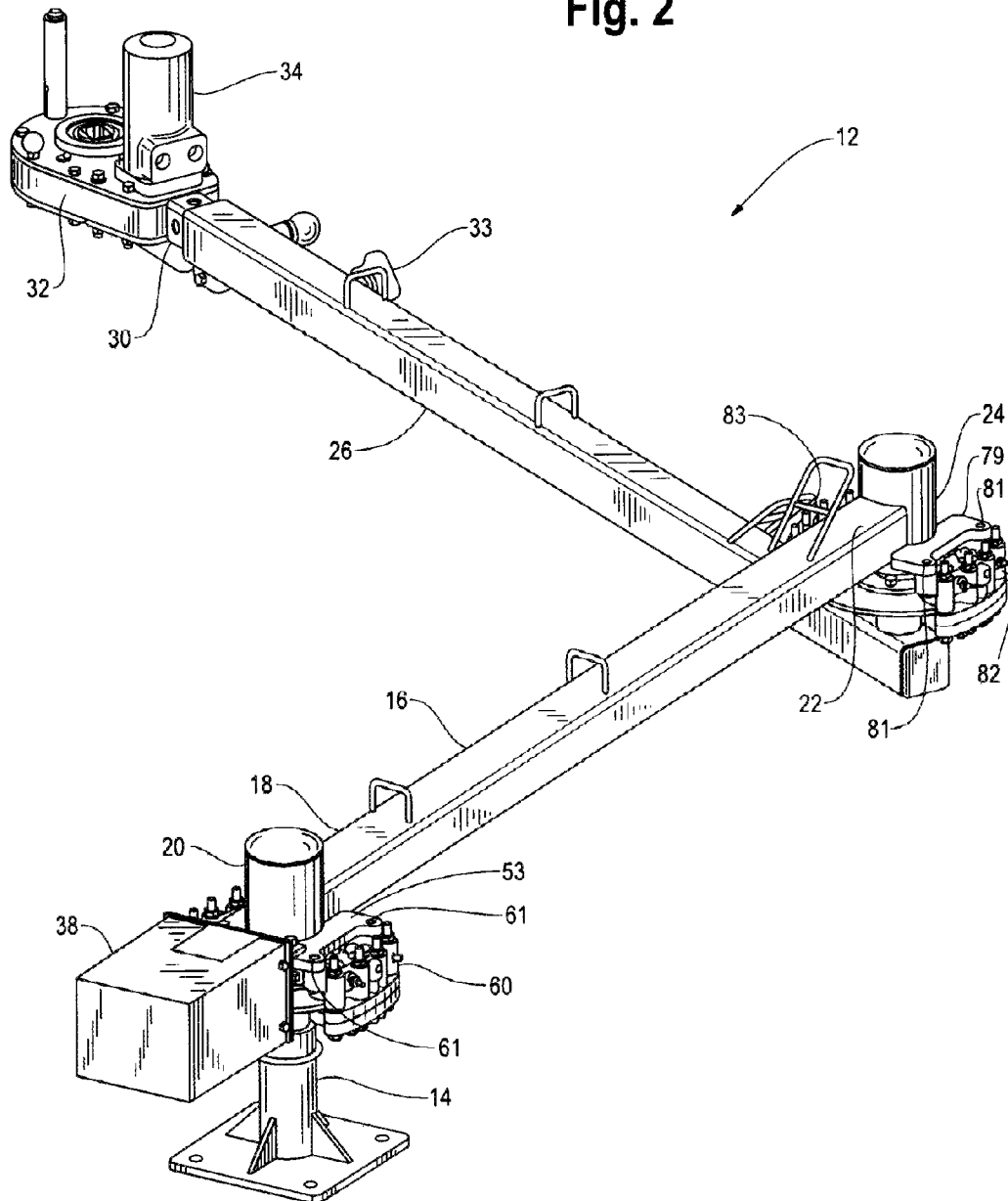
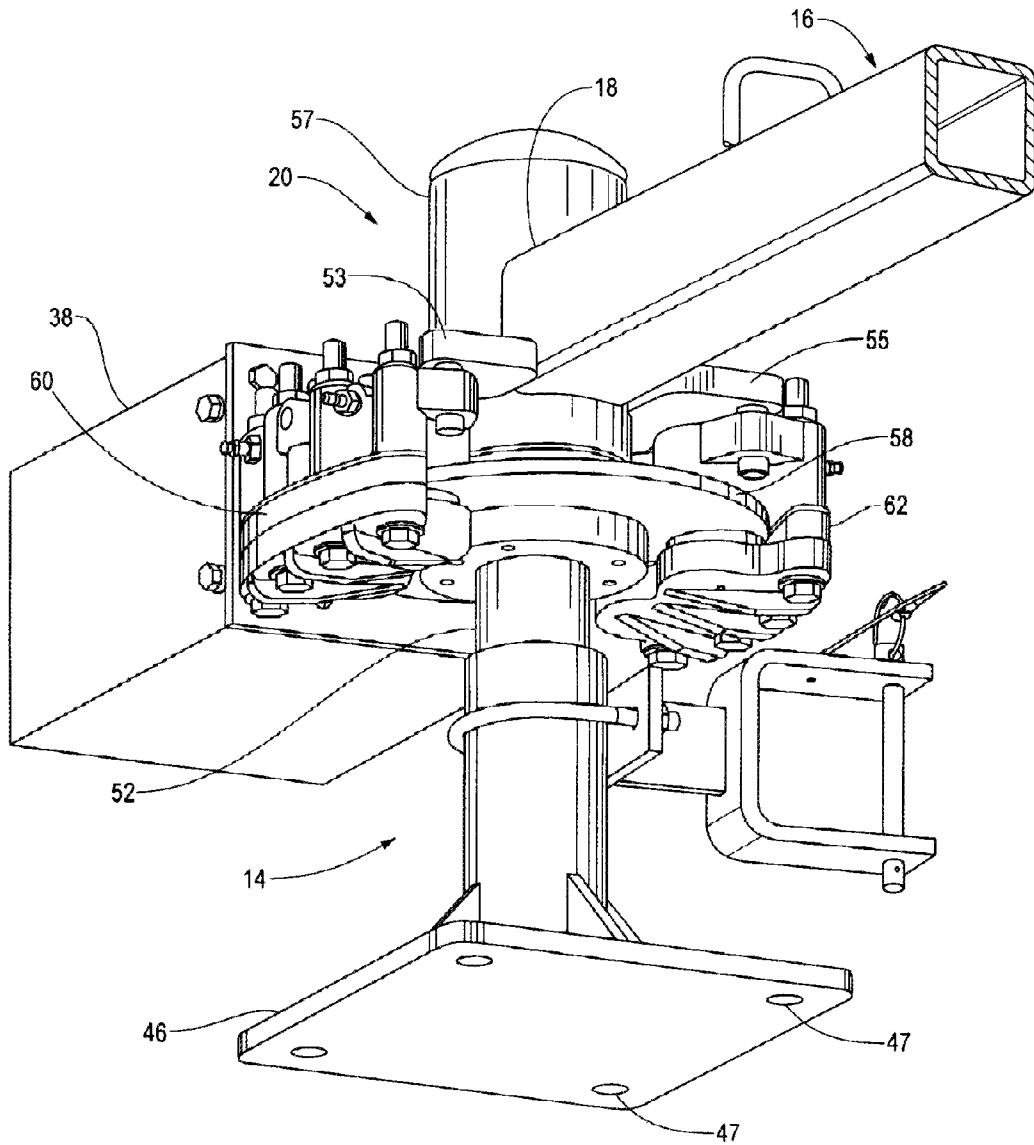
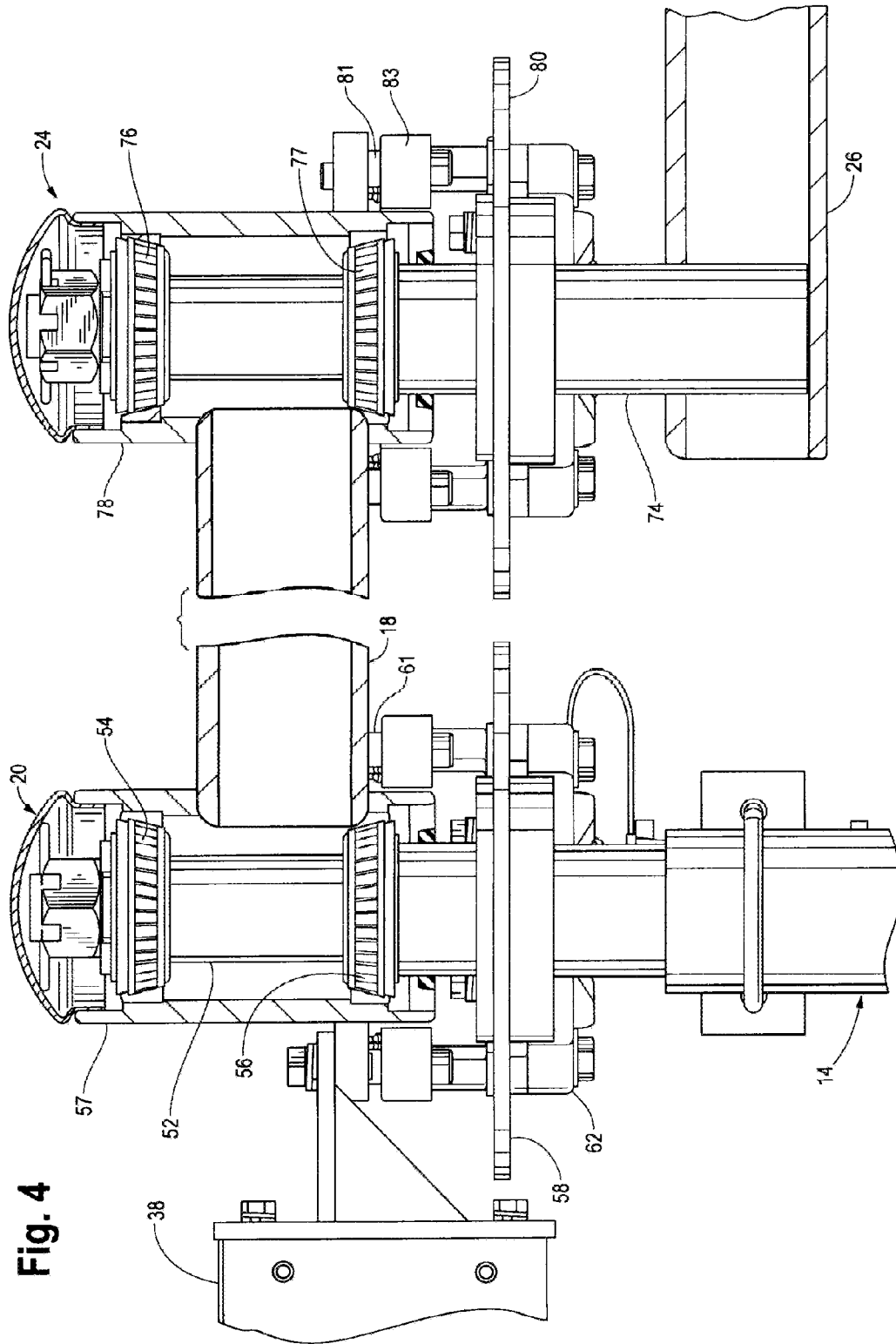


Fig. 3





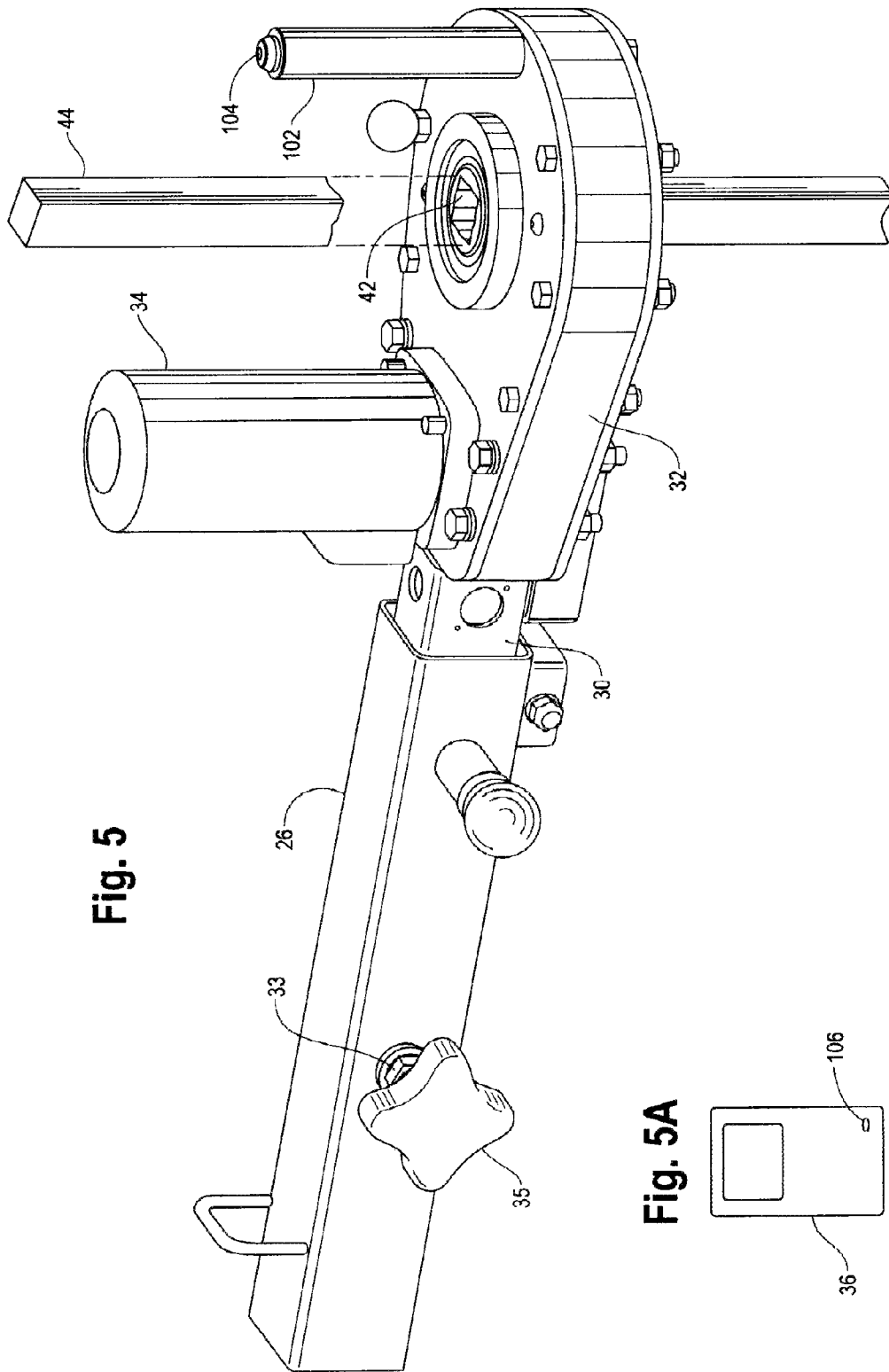
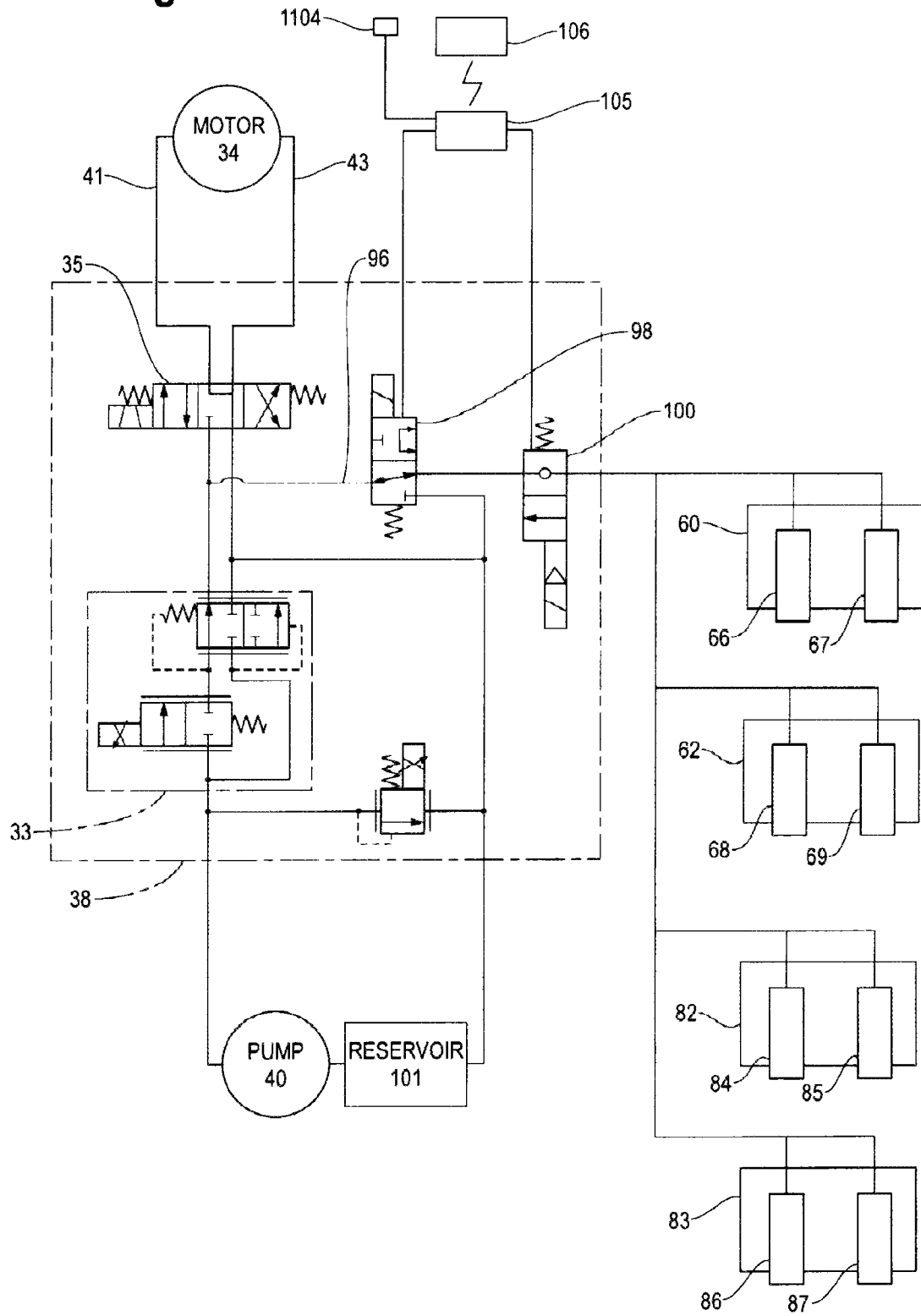


Fig. 5

Fig. 5A

Fig. 6



VEHICLE MOUNTABLE ARM FOR VALVE OPERATING MACHINE

This is a continuation of my application filed Apr. 29, 2008 and assigned Ser. No. 12/111,423. The present invention relates to valve operating machines and in particular to an adjustable arm attachable to a vehicle for supporting a valve operating machine while it is exercising a valve.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Municipalities and the like have extensive networks of piping to control the flow of water from storage and pumping stations to users. The network of piping includes numerous valves such that portions of the network can be closed off as needed for service while the remainder of the network remains in operation. The piping required for such networks can range in size from as small as three or four inches in diameter to as large as three feet in diameter. Also, the valves of the system typically remain in an open condition or in a closed condition for very long periods of time. The valves of a municipal water system are located below ground with an access shaft extending from the valve stem to the surface through which an elongate key is extended to turn the stem. Such valves typically include a screw that is rotatable through one hundred turns or more to fully open or fully close the valve. Also, underground valves undergo a certain degree of deterioration over time and it is common for valves to become frozen or locked into their current position as a result of contamination on the surface of the screw or deterioration of the parts. As a result, the large amount of torque needed to open and close such valves is provided by a motorized valve operating machine. Such machines are heavy and awkward and when operated apply a great amount of torque to the key that extends down a shaft to the valve stem for rotating the valve. Accordingly, to aid in the operation of such valve turning machines it is common to mount such valve turning machines on an arm attached to a truck.

One such mounting device shown in U.S. Pat. No. 6,009,905 to Arnemann is to mount the valve turning machine on a horizontal slide that allows the machine to move horizontally from a first position over the truck bed to a second position spaced from the side of the truck. Such slideable mounting provides rigid support to the valve turning machine while it exercises a valve. The longitudinally slideable structure, however, has limited mobility with respect to the vehicle. Where valves are positioned between various obstacles such as buildings, curbs, boulders, trees and the like, it may not be possible for the truck to reach a position where the valve operating machine may be positioned directly over the shaft leading to the valve.

Efforts have been made to attach a valve operating machine to a manipulating arm connected to a truck. One such device is sold under the trademark SPIN DOCTOR by Hurco Technologies, Inc. and disclosed in Hurley, U.S. Pat. No. 7,334,606 B1. The Hurley device includes a multi-hinged arm configured as a backhoe with the inner end of the arm connected to a vehicle and the outer end to a valve turning machine. The arm is pivotable about a horizontal axis generally giving the device a hundred and eighty degree range of rotation with the hinged elbow of the backhoe arm permitting the free end of the arm to move eight to twelve feet radially outward of the vehicle. The hinged elbow includes one or more spring loaded compensating structures to apply a vertically upward force to the free end of the arm to compensate for the weight of the valve turning machine. By virtue of the spring loaded com-

pensating devices, the free end of the arm can be manipulated to a position directly over an otherwise difficult to reach shaft to a valve.

It has been found that a valve turning machine mounted on the Hurco arm is attached by a key to a valve and with torque applied to the key by the machine, the machine will shake and toss violently as the valve is exercised. The shaking and tossing is a result of the uneven torque applied to the key as the turning screw encounters areas of contamination by foreign materials and deterioration of the moving parts. The shaking and tossing of the machine includes vertical components of force which cause the key to be pulled free of the valve stem thereby interrupting the valve turning operation and perhaps causing damage to either the machine or the valve. To retain the machine and the key in their desired orientation with respect to the valve stem, the operator is required to grasp the machine with his arms and use his body weight to hold the machine in the desired orientation as the valve is exercised. Since the shaking and tossing of the machine is caused by contamination and deterioration below ground and not visible to the operator, the movement of the machine is unpredictable and can also cause injury to the operator. Accordingly, there is a need for providing an extendable arm for supporting a valve operating machine over a valve stem positioned remotely from a vehicle that will retain the machine against all the forces applied to the end of the arm as a consequence of frequent and sudden changes in torque applied to the valve.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Briefly, the present invention is embodied in a valve operating device that has a mounting attachable to a vehicle and an arm having a first end pivotally attached to the mounting and a valve operating machine rigidly attached to the second end of the arm. The pivot at the first end of the arm permits rotation of the arm only about a vertical axis such that the free end of the arm is moveable through a plane parallel to the underlying ground below the vehicle to which the mounting is attached. The arm is made with sufficient strength and rigidity that the free end will provide support to the valve operating machine at the second end against the vertical forces applied by gravity and resulting from torque applied by the valve operating machine to turn a valve stem.

The arm includes a lock for selectively locking and unlocking the pivot between the mounting member and the first end of the arm. In the preferred embodiment, the lock is in the form of a hydraulically operating disc brake. The lock includes a control for selectively engaging and disengaging the lock, and the control is operated from a location at the second end of the arm. Accordingly, an operator can use his hand to grasp a handle at the second end of the arm and use the thumb of that hand to operate the control to disengage the lock. The operator can then manually manipulate the second end of the arm until the valve operating machine is over a shaft leading to a valve stem. Once the machine is properly positioned, the operator can release the thumb operated control to engage the lock thereby retaining the arm in a rigid position over the shaft to the valve.

In another embodiment of the device, a second arm is provided between the second end of the first arm and the valve operating machine. In this embodiment, a second pivot is provided between the second end of the first arm and the first end of the second arm with the second pivot also rotatable only about a vertical axis such that the free end of the second arm is only moveable through a plane parallel to the underlying ground. The second arm is also made with sufficient strength and rigidity such that the second end of the second

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arm will retain the valve turning machine against the forces of gravity and the forces generated from the machine when it applies torque to the valve stem.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A better and more complete understanding of the invention will be had after a reading of the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a side elevational view of a valve turning machine mounted on a vehicle in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an enlarged isometric view of the arm and valve operating machine mounted on the truck shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a further enlarged fragmentary isomeric view of the arm shown in FIG. 2 depicting the arm mounting and the first pivot thereof;

FIG. 4 is a fragmentary cross-sectional view of the arm shown in FIG. 2 showing the inner parts of the two pivots;

FIG. 5 is an isometric view of the second end of the second arm showing the valve operating machine and its controls; and

FIG. 6 is a schematic drawing of the hydraulics for operating the arm shown in FIG. 2.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring to FIGS. 1, 2, 5, and 6, a vehicle 10 is fitted with an elongate valve operating device 12. The valve operating device 12 has a mounting portion 14 and an arm. The arm consists of a first arm portion 16 having a first end 18 pivotally attached to the mounting portion 14 by a first pivot 20 and a second end 22 attached by a second pivot 24 to a first end of a first section 26 of a second arm portion. The second arm portion is telescopically extendable and therefore the first section 26 thereof is a generally hollow tubular member with a rectangular cross-section, the first end of which is attached to the second pivot 24 and the second end of which telescopically receives the first end of a second section 30. The second section 30 has a generally rectangular cross-section with outer dimensions a little smaller than the inner dimensions of the first section 26 such that the second section 30 will not rotate axially with respect to the first section 26. Rigidly attached to the distal end of the second section 30 is a valve turning machine 32. An adjustable screw 33 with an enlarged head 35 in the shape of a handle is threaded into a complementarily threaded hole, not numbered, in the wall of the first end section 26 and against the surface of the second section 30. When the screw 33 is tightened against the second section 30, the first and second sections 26, 30 are longitudinally locked to one another and when the screw 33 is loosened, the second section 30 is longitudinally moveable with respect to the first section 26.

The valve turning machine 32 includes a hydraulic motor 34 and an electronic controller 36 which may be detachable from the body of the machine 32 but communicate with the machine either through a wire, not shown, or by wireless technology. The controller 36 includes a microprocessor having a memory for storing information about the valve 37 to be controlled such as the rotational direction for opening the valve 37, the number of turns to move the valve from fully closed to fully open position, the maximum torque that can be applied to the stem, the current position, open or closed, of the valve, and the date on which it was last exercised. Using information in the memory plus input from an operator, the controller operates a sequence of valves 33, 35 in a manifold

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38 to direct hydraulic fluid from a pump 40 (shown only schematically in FIG. 6) through a plurality of hoses 41, 43 (also shown only in FIG. 6) to operate the motor 34 in either a clockwise or counterclockwise direction. The motor 34 drives a rectangular sleeve 42 on the machine 32 into which is inserted an elongate key 44, the lower end of which fits over a polygon shaped stem, not shown, of a valve for rotating the valve. The valve turning machine 32 is the type known in the art and such a machine is described in further detail in U.S. Pat. No. 5,381,996, which is incorporated herein by reference.

Referring to FIGS. 2, 3, 4, and 6, the mounting portion 14 includes a mounting plate 46 with a plurality of mounting holes 47 therein for attachment to a stable part of a vehicle 10, such as the truck bed 48, which remains generally parallel to the level of the underlying ground 50. The mounting portion 14 also includes a pedestal 52 extending vertically from the mounting plate 46, the upper end of which defines a vertical axis around which the first pivot 20 rotates. The first pivot 20 includes a pair of bearings 54, 56, the inner races of which are fitted tightly around the upper end of the pedestal 46 and the outer races of which are rigidly retained in tubular mounting cup 57 at the first end 18 of the first arm. The second end of the first arm portion 16 will therefore rotate through a plane that is perpendicular to the pedestal 52 and parallel to the bed 48 of the vehicle 10 and parallel to the underlying ground 50.

Positioned below the bearing assemblies 54, 56 and surrounding a central portion of the pedestal 52 is a generally planar horizontal first brake disc 58. Attached to the first end 18 of the first arm portion 16 by a pair of brackets 53, 55, each of which has a pair of downwardly extending slide pins 61-61 attached thereto, is a first pair of hydraulically operated brake calipers 60, 62 that float with respect to the brake disc 58 on slide pins 61-61. Each of the brake calipers 60, 62 includes first and second parallel operated pistons, 66, 67, 68, 69, moveable within piston housings, portions of two of which, numbered 63, 64, are visible in FIG. 3. The pistons are connected by rods, not visible, to a pair of upper pads, also not visible, that rest on the upper surface of the brake disc 58. The calipers 60, 62 also support a pair of lower pads positioned against the lower surface of brake disc 58. Portions of two of the lower pads, numbered 70, 72 can be seen in FIG. 3. Upon operation of the calipers 60, 62, the pistons 66-69 in the housing 63, 64 are extended thereby pressing the upper pads against the upper surface of the brake disc 58 and simultaneously drawing the lower pads 70, 72 against the lower surface thereof to lock the first arm portion 16 in a fixed orientation with respect to the mounting portion 14 and the vehicle 10.

Extending vertically upward from the first end 26 of the second arm portion 26, 30 and perpendicular to the length of the second arm portion 26, 30 is a second pedestal 74, the upper end of which serves as the axis of rotation for the second pivot 24. The inner races of a second pair of bearings 76, 77 is fitted around the second pedestal 74 and the outer race is received within a tubular mounting cup 78 welded to the second end 22 of the first arm portion 16. The mounting cup 78 retains the axis of rotation of the second bearing 76, 77 around the second pedestal 74 parallel to the axis of rotation of the first set of bearings 54, 56 around the first pedestal 52. Accordingly, the second arm portion 26, 30 will rotate about an axis defined by the second pedestal 74 with the length thereof parallel to the bed 48 such that with the outer end thereof moving in a plane parallel to the bed 48 of the vehicle 10 and parallel to the underlying ground 50. It should be appreciated that the distal end of the second arm always moves within the same plane regardless of whether the move-

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ment occurs as a result of rotation of the first pivot **20**, the second pivot **24**, or the longitudinal extension or retraction of the second arm portion **26**, **30** by telescopically sliding the outer portion **30** into or out of the first portion **26**. Fitted around the circumference of the second pedestal **74** is a second brake disc **80** and attached to the first end of the second arm portion **26** is a second pair of calipers **82**.

Extending downwardly from a second pair of brackets welded to the second end **22** of the first arm portion **16** (one bracket **79** is visible in FIG. 2) are a pair of slide pins **81-81**. Slideably mounted on each pair of slide pins **81-81**, so as to float above the brake disc **80**, is a second pair of calipers **82**, **83**. The second pair of calipers **82**, **83** are structurally identical to the first pair of calipers **60**, **62** and each encloses a pair of pistons **84**, **85**, **86**, **87** with each piston connected by a rod to an upper pad positioned against the upper surface of the second disc brake **80**. The second calipers **82**, **83** also include first and second lower pads positioned to be compressed against the lower surface of the second brake disc **80**, one opposite each of the upper pads. Upon actuation of the second pair of calipers **82**, **83** the pistons **84-87** will compress the upper pads against the upper surface of the disc brake **80** and draw the lower pads against the lower surface thereby locking the second arm portion **26**, **30** in a fixed orientation with respect to the first arm portion **16**.

The two sets of bearings **54**, **56** and **76**, **77** ensure that the distal end of the second arm portion **30** is only moveable within a plane parallel to the underlying ground **50**, and allow the arm to be manipulated by an operator using only one hand while the two brake assemblies **58**, **80** are disengaged.

Referring to FIGS. 5 and 6, the pistons **66-69**, **84-87** of the first and second pairs of calipers **60**, **61**, **82**, **83** are all hydraulically operated by the application of hydraulic fluid from the pump **40** through a hydraulic supply line **96** connected to a control valve **98**. A release valve **100** retains or releases hydraulic pressure from the pistons. When the control valve **98** is opened, hydraulic pressure generated by the pump **40** will actuate the pistons **66-69**, **84-87** in both calipers **60**, **82** thereby locking the first arm portion **16** in a fixed orientation with the vehicle **10** and the underlying ground **50** and locking the second arm portion **26**, **30** in a fixed orientation with respect to the first arm portion **16**. When the pressure is released by the release valve **100**, the pads of the calipers **60**, **61**, **82**, **83** will relax and the first arm portion **16** will be free to rotate about the first pedestal **52** and the second arm portion will be free to rotate about the second pedestal **74**.

An important feature of the invention is the provision of a handle **102** positioned at the outer end of the valve turning machine **32** where it is easily grasped by an operator. At the distal end of the handle **102** is a control button **104** for a valve control **105**. When the button **104** on the handle **102** is depressed, the valve control **105** operates the valve **98** and the release valve **100** to release hydraulic pressure from the two sets of calipers **68**, **82** thereby releasing the brakes. Conversely, when the button **104** is not depressed, the control valve **98** and release valve **100** are configured to apply hydraulic pressure to the calipers **60**, **61**, **82**, **83** to thereby lock the first and second arm portions **16**, **26** in their desired orientation.

Although the control button **104** is described as being at the end of the handle **102**, it should be appreciated that the intent is to have the actuation device located where it is convenient to the operator as he manipulates the arms **16**, **26**, **30**. It is therefore within the spirit of the invention to provide an actuator **106** for operating the control **105** on the electronic control **36**. The device **106** may be in addition to the button **104** on the handle **102**, or in substitution therefore.

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Another important feature of the invention is that the mounting portion **14**, the first and second arm portion **16**, **26**, and the first and second pivots **20**, **24** are all made with sufficient strength and rigidity to hold the valve turning machine **32** within a plane of movement defined by the second arm portion **26**. Specifically, the elongate parts are made sufficiently strong and the bearings of the pivots are sufficiently large and rigid enough to hold the valve turning machine **32** at a fixed elevation in opposition to the forces of gravity applied by virtue of the weight of the valve operating machine **32** and in opposition to the vertical forces incurred as the machine **32** applies torque to a valve stem. Accordingly, an operator will not be required to use his own body to retain the machine **32** against the forces that shake and throw the machine when torque is applied to a valve.

An operator using a truck **10** fitted with a valve operating device **12** in accordance with the present invention, will drive the vehicle **10** to a position near an underlying valve **37**. Once the vehicle **10** is properly positioned, the operator can grasp the handle **102** with one hand, compress the button **104** with the thumb of that hand, and using the same hand manipulate the distal end of the second arm portion **26** until it is positioned immediately above the valve **37** to be exercised.

When the arm is properly positioned above the valve stem, the operator can release his grip on the button **104** thereby causing the control valve **98** and release valve **100** to allow hydraulic pressure to be applied to the calipers **60**, **61**, **82**, **83** and lock the first and second arm portions **6**, **26**, **30** in their present orientation. With the arms so locked, the operator can position the key **44** in the sleeve **42** of the valve turning machine **32** with distal end thereof fitted over the stem of the valve. Once the key **44** is attached to the valve the operator can then use the hand held electronic controller **36** to operate the valve turning machine **32** to exercise the underlying valve without requiring the operator to touch the machine **32** while it is operating. The operator, therefore, does not have to use his body weight to retain the machine **32** against the forces generated as torque is applied to the valve as is the case with machines mounted on prior art manipulating arms.

After the valve has been fully exercised, the operator can remove the key **44** from the valve stem and the sleeve **42** thereby disconnecting the valve operating machine from the valve. The operator can then again grasp the handle **102** and depress the button **104** causing the control valve **98** and release valve **100** to release hydraulic pressure to the calipers **60**, **82** and allow the operator to easily manipulate the arm **12** and fold it against the side of the vehicle **10** for transporting to another site.

While the present invention has been described with respect to a single embodiment, it will be appreciated that many modifications and variations may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. It is therefore the intent of the appended claims to cover all such modifications and variations that fall within the spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed:

1. A valve operating device for operating a valve positioned below underlying ground, said device comprising
 - a vehicle,
 - a mounting for retaining said device to said vehicle,
 - an arm having a first end and a second end,
 - a valve operating machine attached to said second end of said arm,
 - said first end of said arm attached to said mounting, and
 - only moveable with respect to said mounting by a pivot rotatable about a vertical axis wherein said valve oper-

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ating machine at said second end of said arm is retained above underlying ground and moveable across said underlying ground,

a brake at said pivot for selectively locking and unlocking said arm into a fixed angular orientation with respect to said mounting,

a control for controlling the application and the release of said brake wherein said valve operating machine is rigidly retained above said valve while said lock is applied and is manually moveable across said underlying ground while said lock is released,

said control positioned remote from said brake and remote from said vehicle, and

said brake hydraulically operated.

2. The valve operating device of claim 1 wherein said brake is a hydraulically operated disc brake.

3. The valve operating device of claim 1 wherein said arm is telescopically extendable.

4. The valve operating device of claim 1 and further comprising

a second arm between said second end of said arm and said valve operating machine,

said second arm having a first end attached to said second end of said arm by a second pivot,

said second pivot rotatable about a vertical axis wherein said valve operating machine at said second end of said second arm is retained above said underlying ground and moveable across said underlying ground,

a second brake at said second pivot wherein said valve turning machine is rigidly retained above said valve when said first and second brakes are applied and moveable across said underlying ground when said first and second brakes are released,

said second brake being hydraulically operable,

a control for controlling the application and release of said second brake, and said control and said second control positioned remote from said second brake and remote from said vehicle.

5. The valve operating machine of claim 4 wherein one of said arm and said second arm is longitudinally extendable.

6. The device of claim 1 wherein said attachment between said valve operating machine and said second end of said arm is non-rotatable about a longitudinal axis of said arm, and said arm is manually moveable without opposing the force of gravity while said lock is released.

7. The device of claim 1 wherein said arm is manually moveable without opposing the force of gravity while said lock is released.

8. A valve operating device for operating a valve positioned below underlying ground, said device comprising

a mounting for retaining said device to a vehicle,

a first arm having a first end and a second end,

a first pivot rotatably attaching said first end of said first arm to said mounting,

said first pivot rotatable only about a vertical axis,

a second arm having a first end and a second end,

a valve operating machine attached at said second end of said second arm,

a second pivot attaching said second end of said first arm to said first end of said second arm,

said second pivot rotatable only about a vertical axis, wherein said valve operating machine at said second end of said second arm is moveable above said underlying ground and moveable across said underlying ground,

a first lock at said first pivot for selectively locking and unlocking said first arm in a fixed orientation with respect to said mounting,

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a second lock at said second pivot for selectively locking and unlocking said second arm in a fixed orientation with respect to said first arm,

at least one control for controlling the application and release of said first and second locks wherein said valve operating machine is rigidly retained at affixed location above said valve while said first and second locks are applied, and manually moveable across said underlying ground without opposing the force of gravity while said locks are released, and

said first and second locks being hydraulically operable brakes.

9. The valve operating device of claim 8 wherein said at least one control is positioned at said second end of said second arm.

10. The valve operating device of claim 8 wherein one of said first arm and said second arm is telescopically extendable.

11. The device of claim 8 wherein

said attachment between said second end of said second arm and said valve operating machine being non-rotatable about a longitudinal axis of said arm.

12. The valve operating device of claim 8 wherein said at least one control is on a hand held unit detached from said vehicle and said arm.

13. A valve operating device for operating a valve positioned below underlying ground, said device comprising

a mounting for retaining said device to a vehicle,

an arm having a first end and a second end,

said first end attached to said mounting,

a valve operating machine attached to said second end of said arm,

said arm including at least one pivot about a vertical axis, each said at least one pivot having a lock for selectively locking and unlocking said at least one pivot into a fixed angular orientation wherein said arm is manually moveable across underlying ground to a position over said valve without opposing the force of gravity while each of said locks is unlocked and said valve operating machine is retained over said valve while each said lock is locked,

a control for controlling the application and release of said lock of said each said at least one pivot, and

said control remote from said vehicle and from each said at least one pivot, wherein said lock is hydraulically operable.

14. A valve operating device for operating a valve positioned below underlying ground, said device comprising

a mounting for retaining said device to a vehicle,

an arm having a first end and a second end,

said first end attached to said mounting,

a valve operating machine attached to said second end of said arm,

said arm including at least one pivot about a vertical axis, each said at least one pivot having a lock for selectively locking and unlocking said at least one pivot into a fixed angular orientation wherein said arm is manually moveable across underlying ground to a position over said valve without opposing the force of gravity while each of said locks is unlocked and said valve operating machine is retained over said valve while each said lock is locked,

a control for controlling the application and release of said lock of said each said at least one pivot, and

said control remote from said vehicle and from each said at least one pivot, wherein said control is on a hand held unit detached from said vehicle and said arm.

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