

# K9YA Field Day

*Preparation, Execution, Learning, Camaraderie and Fun*

**Mike Dinelli, N9BOR**



John, AAØBP (L) and Steve, N9WAT (R)

It's 6:00 A.M. on Saturday morning. The car is packed and so begins my journey to Camp Lakota—65 miles northwest of downtown Chicago. In some ways, the ninety-minute drive seems a world apart. From high density city living to a slower paced, rambling, holiday weekend.

I plug my portable GPS into the cigarette lighter and nothing happens. There is no simple fix—SNAFU—not to worry; I have the travel directions

printed out. Steve, N9WAT, Chuck, NIØC, and John, AAØBP, will meet me there. This year, Art, WB9JKZ, is out of town, but he already delivered the tower and sleeping tent to the site. Philip, K9PL, is also unavailable, but supplied equipment, copied the CW Bulletin and transcribed it for bonus points.

Rain and thunderstorms are forecast for the weekend, but all is clear for now. It wouldn't be Field Day without storms.

I'm the first to arrive, so I check in with Quinn Ryan, the camp's ranger. "Oh, you guys are here this weekend?" Sensing a problem, I clutched the binder containing our confirmation e-mail—ready to pounce. However, Quinn wished us a good weekend and said he would stop by sometime to see how we were doing.

It wasn't long before the rest of Team K9YA arrived. We unpacked our cars and began setting up our shack, which is in a portable screen room. John pulls out an umbrella and everyone went silent—we're doomed! I suspect he also washed his car before leaving.

Prior to Field Day, our equipment list is passed around via e-mail. Each of us is responsible for the items on our final list. We test our gear before bringing it to the site. Our comprehensive list includes backup items, operating manuals, fuses, snap ferrites, tools, sleeping bags, Tylenol® and plenty of bug spray.

We work well together and split up the tasks to get ready for the 1:00 P.M. liftoff. The station and antenna go up as anticipated. I fill our Honda generator with gas and carry it about 75 feet away. We run the power cord, set the choke and pull the rope. Nothing. After a few pulls, I smell gas and realize fuel is leaking from somewhere and it's collecting under the generator.

I pull out a dime and unscrew the side panel. There's gas flowing through a clear plastic fuel line running from the carburetor float bowl to the bottom of the generator. In my haste, I deduce the float might be stuck, but Steve realizes he forgot to shut the float bowl drain. This is a nice feature for storing the generator, as you don't want old gas varnishing the carburetor. Steve pulls a small screwdriver out of his pocket, twists the valve and this problem is solved.

While Field Day is a planned event, it offers us experience in preparation for a real emergency. We learn to bring backup equipment, because things fail. We learn to test equipment and read manuals. We learn to rely on the expertise of our colleagues. The dog can't eat our homework because people count on us.

As 1:00 P.M. approaches, Chuck and I tune the bands to study propagation. We decide to start on 20-meters as there are plenty of signals. With the laptop computer and TR software keying the rig, we're calling CQ and establishing a great rate. Unfortunately, a storm arrives and we are forced to shut down for a couple of hours due to lightning. We disconnect

*"...plenty of bug spray."*

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the coax from our station and throw it toward the tower. This is a good time to rest and enjoy ham radio camaraderie.

When the lightning stops and we restart operation, we decide to forgo setting up the sleeping tent. It's getting dark, the ground is wet and we figure we can nap in our cars. A couple of years ago, I woke up in my sleeping bag, finding it sunk in a couple inches of water.

Even though HF propagation has been horrible, the volume of Field Day RF more than makes up for the low flux numbers. There are CW signals every few hertz and it's difficult to find a clear spot to call CQ. While one of us operates, a backup op second chairs to assist. It rains hard through the night with heavy winds. We have plastic tarps shielding us from the worst of it. A daddy longlegs likes the warmth of our laptop and keeps us company ambling about the keyboard.

Dawn on 80-meters, Chuck is calling CQ and gets an answer from KH7B. I was half asleep in the second chair thinking I was dreaming. I never worked HI on 80-meters before and here it is with a big signal.

By the end of the test, we've worked all 50-states and most sections. Our final tally is 1,130 QSOs, which is 105 short of last year's effort—K9YA's personal best. Not bad considering we lost two hours early in the event due to lightning.

Many Field Day goals were met. We introduced ham radio to scouts and public officials. We worked as a team to construct a portable station and exchanged simulated emergency traffic. However, it wouldn't be Field Day without the fun. For the next few weeks, we'll have plenty of stories to tell about our latest Field Day, while planning for our next one. ■



10. The *wise* at the realization that ragchewing is the most fulfilling pursuit—for now.

Your experience will of course differ. Each of us will migrate through various stages as experience and propensity draw us. And, as our ham DNA is not set in stone, there is nothing to keep us from regressing or advancing an age or two as our interests wax and wane.

The important thing is that before we end up “Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything,” that we are never sans amateur radio, nor our aspirations and enthusiasm for lifelong learning and involvement. ■

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We began.

It was QRP the hard way, his one-watt and my five seeking each other in the night. After several Wednesdays the escapade took on a flavor of hopelessness.

Then one night I heard his suffix, LOC. The sound came from nowhere. His frequency was too high and sounded more like an Irish penny whistle. Catching my breath, I listened with all the strength I could muster. Then I heard, KB7LOC, and issued him a signal report of 224. He sent me a 335. Then he was gone, vanishing into the night like a wisp of smoke.

Highlights of our second contact have escaped me. His QSL is the only proof that it occurred.

Our third time comes when the band was filled wall-to-wall with atmospheric noises. I'm reminded of a scene in the movie *Apocalypse Now*. Leo reports my signal as a perfect 599. But his is heterodyning with another. The echoes and ringing are reminiscent of a carrier fresh in from the polar region. I send him a 221.

Three contacts are our total for the winter of 2000. We should have tried harder for another series of QSOs. If we'd known what the future held we would have made another run for it in 2006.

In September 2007 Leo became a Silent Key and all chances of another marathon vanished.

His will left the HW-8 to me. It needs work. When I'm finished repairing it I'll be casting about for someone with good ears who is interested in doing QRP the hard way.

### Epilogue

On 5 April 2008 Leo's YL, Tweedy, went aboard a United States Coast Guard Cutter at Newport, Oregon and spread Leo's ashes on the Pacific Ocean. ■



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