K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club — Volume 3, Issue 5, May 2006

Don't Forget, It's Fun

Something Forgotten on the Path to Numbers

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

On the road to increasing Amateur Radio's numbers there's been many ideas. Some, like the 1951 introduction of the Novice Class license (see: *K9YA Telegraph*, February 2006, p. 1) were quite sound and others rather farfetched. Somewhere along the way, just before cell phones became cheap and plentiful, there was the short-lived family communications era: get an Amateur Radio license and you can call your family and friends. Why, it's almost like using a cell phone except it's (not quite) free. Now there's a group that sees the Amateur Radio spectrum as a fit medium to pass e-mail.

> *"There's nothing wrong with having a bit of fun…"*

Organizations and individuals in their fervor to increase our population seem to have forgotten the simplest and most excellent reason to earn a license—fun. For all the great public service Ham Radio has accomplished, and continues to accomplish, there remains the primary driving force that causes us to work the bands on a regular basis, and that's the range of fun pursuits inherent to Amateur Radio. Other hobbies have no qualms about promoting their fun factor: it's fun to ATV, motorcycle, sail, fly, water ski, collect stamps and coins, model railroad and a whole world of other avocations.

We're Special

Amateur Radio ranks a special distinction in its regulated nature, but so do a bunch of other pastimes including piloting aircraft, and they too, where appropriate, offer their services in time of need. But even a casual perusal of periodicals catering to these avocations emphasizes the fun factor. Yes, there's skills enhancement, business use (forbidden to us), even bragging rights, but above all, it's fun. There's nothing wrong with having a bit of fun—we pay our dues, too.

Perhaps we can best "sell" our favorite pursuit for its fun quotient. We can have fun with our friends, our families, our radio clubs and with Hams worldwide. Most of the time the fun is informal, like ragchewing, contesting and chasing DX. Other times it takes on a more formal nature in the form of disaster relief and passing traffic.

After all, there must be something so fun in Ham Radio that keeps so many of us glued to our favorite pastime for so many decades. How many other hobbies can boast of active adherents who have 40, 50, 60 or more years of experience?

Tempus Fugit

Here's a sobering thought: We're a group of enthusiasts who measure their lives in solar cycles.

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Bicycle Mobile

A New Dimension in Ham Radio

Byron Stoeser, W7SWC

View From Operating Position of W7SWC/BM

I am sure we can all remember our first CQ and contact on Ham Radio. Listening for your call letters from the first station that answered your CQ is always a highlight for a new Ham. For me, that was 53 years ago on 75-meters with a homebrew 6L6 rig on CW.

I found the thrill anew on January 16, 2004 while in California when my first bicycle mobile CQ on 17-meters was answered by an Idaho station. Next, a Washington station, then a call from an XE1 followed this contact. I was delighted and from that point on, hooked on this new dimension in Ham Radio.

My interest in bicycle mobile was sparked during late 2003 after working Joe, W5SAN, on his bike in Texas, and Ron, W9XS, running bike mobile near Chicago. At the time, I was using my home station near Seattle. I was surprised at the Q5 signals I heard from both of these bike mobiles. That, however, was before we hit the bottom of the sunspot cycle that we are currently experiencing.

"…hooked on this new dimension in Ham Radio…"

I started working bike mobile shortly thereafter with an ICOM 703 on my handlebars at 10 watts, but it didn't take me long to decide that with the sunspot cycle nearing the bottom, I would have to use my ICOM 706 instead of the 703 and run 100 watts for reliable QSOs.

In addition to working stateside stations, I have had the opportunity to work S9SS on Sao Tome, off the west coast of Africa, and several stations in the Caribbean. One of my most unexpected contacts was a call from Nori, JH1TMH, near Tokyo and, this year, I have had several calls from Yuu, JH1OCC. This winter, I was surprised by a call from Chris, VA3ECO, from his snowmobile mobile rig while ice fishing on a lake in Ontario. The QSO went well except for three interruptions while he pulled in three-pound trout from the icy waters.

After more than two hundred 17-meter contacts over the past two years, I still find many Hams who say I am their first bike mobile contact. The majority of questions from first time contacts with new stations have to do with my rig, batteries, antenna, and general questions about bike mobile. So I would like to use the rest of this article to describe what I use on the bike and mention some of the problems I have run into.

Starting with the bike: I acquired a new trail bike this year with fat knobby tires and front shock absorbers. I believe this makes the ride just a bit easier on the 706. I mount the rig directly onto the handlebars for best visibility.

The battery pack consists of 12-volt and 2-volt sealed lead acid (SLA) batteries in series and paralleled with a second set of 12- and 2-volt batteries resulting in about a 14-ampere hour capacity. SLA batteries in 12-volt, 7- or 8-Ah sizes are readily available, but 2-volt sizes are harder to find. *

I found the 14-volt battery combination superior for the 706, and necessary for an Icom 7000. The 12-volt package works with the 706 but the Icoms as well as other modern transceivers really run best at 13.8 volts. The battery pack is then connected to the rig through a Watt's Up digital wattmeter mounted below the 706 to monitor voltage and current drain. I turned off the dial lights on the 706 and got the current draw on receive down to only 1.03 amps.

The antenna is a Ham Stick mounted with a quick disconnect on the luggage rack behind the battery

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pack. The Ham Stick is connected to the 706 with a 20-foot Radio Shack coax cut down to an electrical ½ wave for 17-meters. Ham Stick tuning was done with an MFJ 259b SWR analyzer. I started with a 10-foot Radio Shack coax, but had some RF feedback problems as the coax length was very near ¼ wave on 17-meters. The balance of the approximately 17 feet of coax I now use is rolled up into a makeshift balun and taped to the luggage rack. The bike frame (don't use a high tech bike with a carbon composite frame) makes a good counterpoise on 17-meters, so there is no need to drag a ground radial behind the bike. In addition to the coax grounding at the luggage rack, I run an additional ground wire from the antenna mount to the frame and then on up to the ground lug on the 706.

I found the Heil Traveler headset with boom mike running VOX is far more practical than a handheld mike.

Lastly, get a full roll of electrical tape as a lot of it is used in taping all the wiring to the bike frame and the Heil headset to the mandatory (in California) helmet.

I hope this brief article on bike mobile will inspire some of you to give it a try. It really is great fun and good exercise as well. Join us on 18.157.5 (the frequency designated by the HFpack group as a mobile calling frequency) along with other bikes and pedestrian mobile stations. For information on HFpack see: www.hfpack.com.

As we start up the slope towards the next sunspot cycle peak I am sure there will be a lot more QRP and portable stations on 17-meters. I am looking forward to the day when I can put the 703 back on the handlebars and work the world bike mobile with 10 watts. ■

* A good cheap source for batteries:

www.ragebattery.com/

Hamstick Antenna and Battery Detail

Byron, W7SWC and his Mobile HF Station

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My First Do-It-Yourself DXpedition

Bill Penhallegon, W4STX

ZF2MK from Hotel

What stateside Ham hasn't thought what fun it would be on the receiving end of a "CQ DX" call, and I was no exception. My XYL and I had been planning a vacation in the Caribbean so the thought occurred that it shouldn't be too difficult to include some Ham gear in our plans and have a do-it-yourself DXpedition at the same time.

Location, Location, Location...

One of the more desirable spots for a DXpedition, in my opinion, is Grand Cayman. The Cayman Islands are among the last outposts of the British Empire and are politically stable, the language is English, the people friendly and numerous flights from the U.S. make the Caymans very accessible. They also have a 120/240-volt electrical system so our gear works without adapters. We decided the Caymans would be our destination.

A letter to the Cayman authorities brought an application for a "Non-Commonwealth Citizen Permit" and an application for a license to "import radio telegraphic apparatus." These completed applications, a photocopy of my current Amateur license and a U.S. postal money order, resulted in receiving an official-looking brown envelope impressively marked, "ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE." It contained my new license with the callsign, ZF2MK, and a license to take along my TS-120S transceiver, power supply, mike, key and wire antennas.

It was pouring rain the morning our Cayman Airways jet left Tampa International Airport and it

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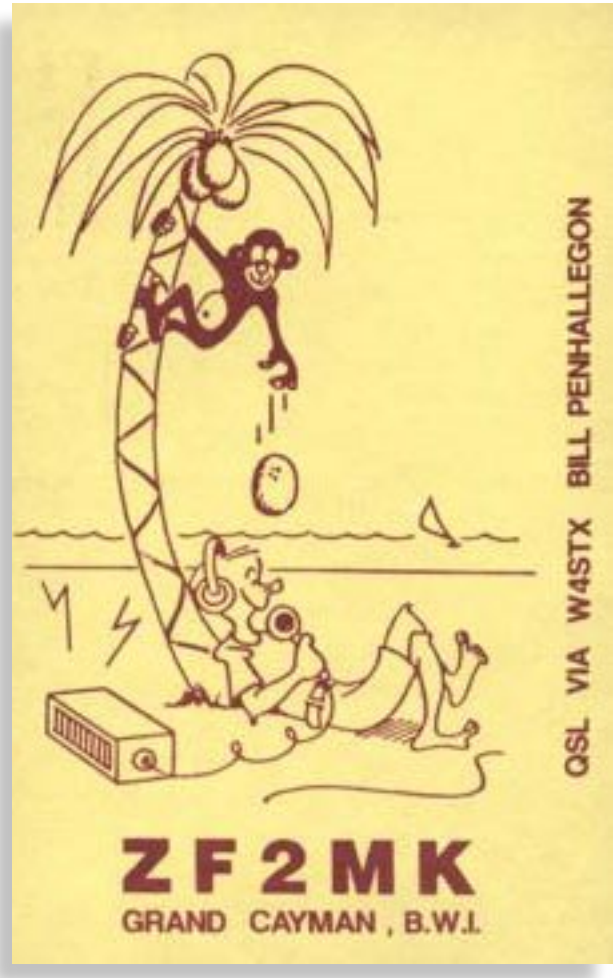
turned out we were leaving behind some of Tampa Bay's heaviest rains and flooding for Cayman Islands' sunshine. After arriving at the airport on Grand Cayman, we went through customs without incident. The power supply was in my checked suitcase and my transceiver and my 15- and 20-meter inverted vee antennas were in a carry-on bag. I kept all my licenses with our passports.

Our beachfront hotel had numerous possibilities for locating antennas. I used a lead fishing weight to toss a nylon cord over a wooden projection on the hotel roof to pull up the apex of my 15-meter inverted vee. I then attached one end to the balcony railing and the other end to a palm tree. After arranging my rig on the desk I was ready to go on the air.

Contact

My first contact on 15-meters was SSB, with a 5x9 report, to Texas and the next was a DL in Heidelberg, Germany. Now I knew the inverted vee would do a good job and it was easy to pack and hang. It was quite a thrill to call CQ and have so many people calling me! I finally found out what it is like to be a DX station and it was great fun.



By coincidence my Cayman call letters, ZF2MK, were similar to the original ARRL's station's call letters, W1MK, which some old, old timers will remember.

Bill, W4STX/QRP at Home

Many small Cayman hotels cater to scuba divers and snorkelers and are what I would call "laid-back" and probably for that reason no one ever questioned or noticed the wires. After a couple of days on 15-meters, I took down the inverted vee for that band and put up the 20-meter version and it got out just as well. Most of my QSOs were CW.

Farewell

My last QSO was a sked with KB4NIX back in Florida with 599 reports—going QRT, I packed up the equipment. The fight to Tampa the next morning turned out to be the last Tampa flight before Hurricane Gilbert arrived in the Caymans and that added a little more excitement to the trip.

After our return, a DXpedition QSL card was made from one of my regular cards by the local "jiffy duplicating" print shop and mailed to all my contacts.

Non-Ham Fun

My XYL is not a Ham so she found sightseeing, dining on the local cuisine, snorkeling and soaking up the sun on the beach to be enjoyable and it made a great vacation. However, it doesn't take a lot of elaborate preparation or equipment to turn your ordinary vacation into a do-it-yourself DXpedition and it will add a new dimension to your enjoyment of Amateur Radio and make a great vacation even better. This was the first of our many Caribbean trips combining Amateur Radio and a beach vacation. ■

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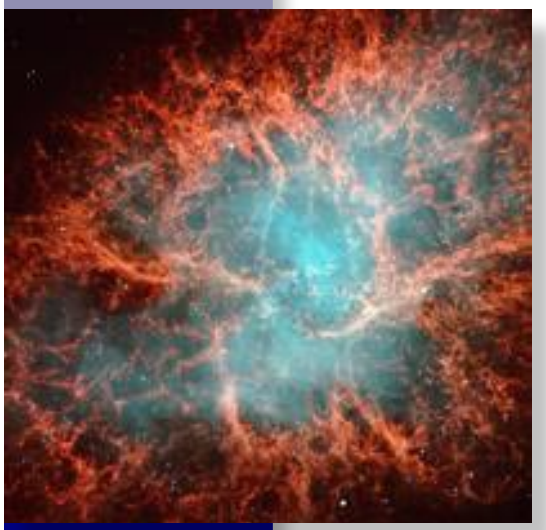
From a Galaxy Far Away

A Not-So-Silent Key

Rod Newkirk, VA3ZBB/W9BRD



Crab Nebula

Our club meeting in that exciting summer of 2031 drew overflow attendance. The guest speaker revealed the first authentic report of intelligent signals received from deep space. A Russian ham armed with a huge homemade log-periodic vertical, aimed skyward through an abandoned Siberian mine shaft, had been quietly recording HF and VHF spectra for many years. Vladimir's findings now were available on the Web, along with software for cross-referencing time and frequency.

The intelligence, however, turned out to be quite earthly. Quick analysis identified the transmissions as LDE, long-delayed echo—very long delayed. The signals actually originated on our own planet many years ago and were reflected or refracted back from the general direction of the Crab Nebula.

The speaker's presentation of Titanic's 1912 spark distress calls gave us an eerie thrill.

Extraterrestrial or not, Vlad's work caused a resurgence of interest in Morse code, a simple and effective communications mode now considered technologically unworthy as an avocation by mercenary licensing authorities. Thousands of skilled hobbyists could be heard having great fun with hand sent code in the art's dawning days. The teenaged Sherman twins joined the sport's revival. Tommy and Tony salvaged an old practice oscillator and promptly pushed each other to a respectable 15 words-per-minute. Then they embarked on a special mission.

The Shermans had had at least one ham in the family for more than a century, beginning with great-grandpa Harold. His key went silent long before their birth. One of his old QSL cards was among the kids' prized possessions. It clearly indicated the date, time and approximate wavelength of an ancient QSO. Could they possibly find such a tiny needle in Vladimir's timewarp haystack? Their desktop computer was unable to unravel the raspy, chirpy and unstable signals of early amateur radio, so they tackled the task with naked ears.

The yellowing souvenir QSL card gave reliable date and time, but hams in the early 1920s mostly guessed at frequencies. Tough challenge, indeed. They faced a frustrating mass of QRM, QRN and QSB. Booming interference from real-time contemporary stations didn't help. The twins doggedly scrolled and scrolled through the noise in their spare time day after day. No sign of their target, but they were fascinated to hear such a happy crowd of guys and gals enjoying themselves in that new wireless world of long ago.

Tommy and Tony finally were about to give up the whole idea. Just too much of a long-shot. Tony threw down his headset one evening, ready for bed. Then Tommy stood up and shouted "WAIT—there he is!" (Or was?) Yes, faintly but clearly, great-grandpa's old callsign was calling CQ. Next came a reply, just as stated on the QSL card before them. During that short contact Harold gave his age as fourteen.

"I sure wish we could have answered that CQ," sighed Tony, "The kid has a beautiful fist." They did the next best thing. When great-grandpa signed off with a traditional CW shave-and-a-haircut, his great-grandsons tapped the table twice. ■

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The Attraction of QRP

Grant McDuling, VK4JAZ

There's something about QRP, just ask anyone smitten with the bug, it's something quite addictive.

For one, it allows you to actually build and use a transmitter, all for just a handful of dollars. I have built many, but perhaps the most sophisticated in my shack would have to be the RockMite 20.

Now I haven't actually succeeded in raking up quite as many QSOs as I'd have liked, mind you. And for very good reason, so I am told. The rig works fine, it's just that my QTH happens to be at the bottom of the world where CW ops are thin on the ground. In fact, people are thin on the ground here. This massive continent we call home only has a total population of around 20 million. I guess that's about the size of the population in New York on a working day!

Anyway, I have become rather addicted to my little QRP set-up. I have it hooked up to one of those other QRP marvels of the modern world, the NorCal BLT tuner that feeds my miniscule 500mW signal into the Windom antenna up on my roof.

Every day, without fail, I put out a tentative CQ and wait… and wait. Nothing. Now, it's not that I haven't ever made a contact with the rig, I have. So I know it works. Being an active member of FISTS DOWN UNDER, I know I would be answered if I were being heard, because FISTS members are a real fine business bunch of blokes who would never let my weak signals languish in the CW "outback." Some say it all has to do with the condition of the sun, and perhaps it has. We all know how harsh the sun can be to us antipodeans at the best of time, so I am not letting it get in the way of my CW work as well.

To make things even more addictive, the key I use exclusively with this set-up is a 100-year-old General Post Office straight key. An uncle of mine, who was a career telegraphist in the South African Navy, used this key, so it has sentimental value. Funny thing, I find the more I pound brass, the more sentimental my QRP set-up becomes. ■

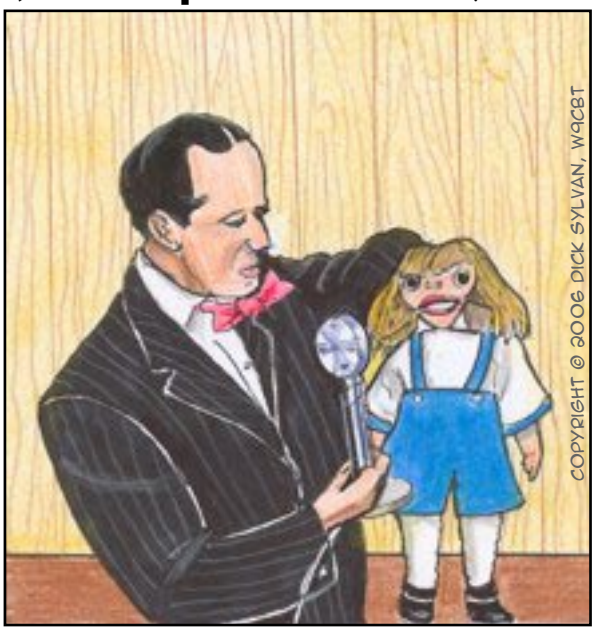
Continued - IT'S FUN from Page 1

Consider it, then have fun with whatever mode or modes strike your fancy; volunteer your skills to local agencies; present a program to your radio club or a local school; elmer a Ham-to-be; write an article for a Ham Radio publication; weather a Field Day; help a Boy Scout earn a merit badge; but, most of all, get on the air and have fun.

Think about it: how many 11-year periods can we enjoy in even a 60-year Ham Radio career? ■

Ham Quips

DICK SYLVAN, W9CBT



SENOR WENCES AND I WILL BE RUNNING THE NET TONIGHT

Help Wanted

The K9YA Field Day Team is looking for a few good Hams! Positions available June 24-25 in northern Illinois.

Satellite Operator - If you have the skills and equipment to demonstrate a satellite contact, please join us.

Non-Traditional Modes (APRS, ATV, SSTV) - We are looking for experienced operators to supply equipment and expertise to demonstrate one or more non-traditional modes.

Alternate Power - Set-up, install and demonstrate solar or wind, battery charging system.

Contact us at: k9ya@k9ya.org

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