

THE TARA NEWS

**Affiliate of the
American Radio Relay League**



Volume 13

Issue 5

May 2002



T.A.R.A. Prepares for Field Day 2002

The trees are turning green. Flowers are starting to blossom. The grass is almost ready for its' first cutting. Ah yes, the smell of clean spring air with the windows all opened. What does this all signify? SPRING, maybe? Hell NO !! It's time to prepare for that magic weekend that immediately follows the first day of summer. It's **FIELD DAY 2002 !!**

Yes kiddies, it's that special weekend when young and old amateur radio operators, both male and female, dedicate an entire weekend to their hobby with the purpose of simulating an emergency communications scenario in the field and also having a fun filled weekend communicating throughout the United States and around the world. Amateur radio groups throughout the U.S. take to the airwaves to exhibit the true spirit and skills of amateur radio for an entire weekend.

This is our GOLDEN MOMENT to show the general public what Amateur Radio is all about. This is our chance to show our neighbors and friends why ham radio is important !! This is our opportunity to let the public know why we are a valuable resource to our communities and our country !! This is our chance to educate the general public as to why our hobby is important to their safety and well being and that we are not just those weird people with the big antenna's that they blame for messing up their TV reception.

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Please invite your friends, neighbors and community officials to visit Field Day to help them better understand our hobby.



Stay tuned to the TARA Repeaters 145.17Mhz in the event of inclement weather.

The Troy Amateur Radio Association, Inc. is a Participant in the National Weather Service SKYWARN Program

TARA SODA DRIVE

In April we started our Annual Soda Drive, as of this issue we have only received a few six packs. We are again asking everyone to please bring a couple of six packs of your favorite soda to the next two (2) monthly meetings.

The soda will be collected near the front entrance of the meeting hall by Karen and Mac Smith. It is requested that you bring either cans or plastic.

NO GLASS BOTTLES, PLEASE

You can help out with the Field Day by helping the club in collecting enough soda to cover the weekend and maybe even some future meetings.

If you find yourself too busy to pick soda up, just give a cash donation to Karen and we will pick-up the soda, on your behalf.

**ANY SODA DONATIONS
ARE GREATLY APPRECIATED**

11th Anniversary Edition



More Field Day News

With Field Day just around the corner, the planning of this annual event is rolling into high gear. Our Field Day Committee has been working their butts off to make this another weekend to remember.

As it stands now, we have plans to load the trailer earlier in the week so that everyone can meet at Frear Park at 12 noon on Friday June 21, 2002 for unloading and setup. This will give us a few extra hours of daylight so that we can take our time setting things up. Plan on our usual Field Day Feast to be as good as ever.

This year Randy, KA2TJZ has a special power breakfast for those of you that have worked the rigs all night, Saturday or those of you who get there real early on Sunday morning.

We all understand that this being the first weekend of the summer, people have a lot of things planned such as graduation parties and other family events. Please do your best to try and participate at Field Day even if it is only for a few hours. You will be happy that you did !!

73 de Ken "The Chief" KB2KFV

TARA TECH TOY RAFFLE



Don't Forget to purchase your tickets for this great raffle to be drawn at our annual Field Day Dinner on June 22, 2002. Contact Mr Bill, Karen & Hollins if you need any tickets.

\$2.00 each or 3 for \$ 5.00

**First Prize: PALM Personal Digital Assistant Model VII x
Internet Ready With PALM Portable Keyboard**

Second Prize: \$ 40.00 CASH

**Third Prize: \$ 20.00 Gift Certificate Dining for two
Frank's Diner, 25 Lower Hudson Avenue
Green Island, N.Y.**



From Your Editor
Ken Davis, KB2KFV

I hope that everyone enjoys this Special 11th Anniversary Issue of the TARA NEWS. When time and resources allow, I will do my best to bring you a large and entertaining newsletter. What makes this publication a great success is **your** articles and input. If there are any members that would like to do an article or column for the TARA NEWS, please contact me by phone or e-mail.

This is your NEWSLETTER and contributing stories from the members give it that special touch !!!

In closing, I have a special favor to ask of the membership. Subscribing to the web version saves the club quite a bit of money in printing and mailing costs (anywhere from \$40 to \$60 per month). As of right now we have about 110 members. Of that total, about 45 people still are getting their copy by snail mail in black and white. If you don't have a computer or printer, we totally understand why you need a hardcopy. The only reason the web version has more is because of mailing problems and costs. Anything over five pages is more expensive and difficult to mail, fold and seal.

If you do not need to get it by mail, Please subscribe to the web version and I will gladly put you on the notification list. Contact me at kb2kfv@aol.com.

Nominations for Office are Open

Chairman: Steve Kopecky - KF2WA

As Nominations Chairman, it is my duty to inform all members that the following positions are up for election in 2002. If there are any members who wish to nominate someone or choose themselves to run for office, please contact me by email by the May 21st meeting at skopeccky@nycap.rr.com. The following positions are up for election and presently held by the following officers.

President: William J. Eddy - NY2U

Vice President: Karen Smith - KB2UUC

Secretary: Marilyn Davis - KB2JZI

Treasurer: Nick Demos - NW2D

Board of Directors: Term of Office (2002 - 2004)

Mac Smith - KB2SPM

Ken Davis - KB2KFV

Recipe of the Month - Old Fashion Rice Pudding

Here is a great treat for anytime of the day.

Enjoy!

Ingredients:

3/4 cups uncooked rice

3/4 cup sugar

1 quart milk

1 can (14 oz.) evaporated milk

1 tsp. vanilla

raisins (optional)

3 Tbsp. cornstarch

3 Tbsp. water

Preparation:

In a large saucepan, cook rice according to package. Drain any additional liquid and add milk, evaporated milk, and vanilla.

Mix and let simmer for 20 minutes. Mix cornstarch with the water and add to rice mixture. Simmer for 20 minutes longer. Let cool, add raisins and serve.

Makes 6 servings.

Ham Humor

A ham is driving up a steep, narrow mountain road, his antennas flapping in the breeze and flopping into the other lane. A YL is driving down the same road. As they pass each other, the YL narrowly missed them and leans out of the window and yells " **PIG!!** "

The ham immediately leans out of his window and replies, " **WITCH!!** "

They each continue on their way, and as the man rounds the next corner, he crashes into a pig in the middle of the road.

If men would only listen!!!.

TARA's New Field Day Mobile

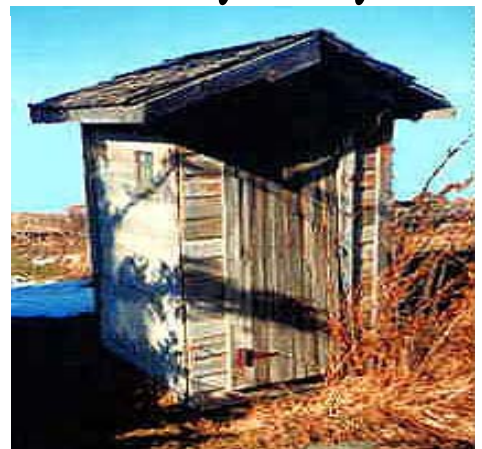


COME TO
TARA
FIELD DAY 2002

*

HAVE FUN
AND
SHARE
AN EXPERIENCE
TO
REMEMBER
JUNE 21-23 2002

All New Sanitary Facility-2 seater



REVIEW OF THE YAESU/VERTEX VX-150

By Joe Pasquini, N2NOU

When I originally stumbled across the **Yaesu/Vertex VX-150**, I wasn't even in the market for a new radio. Sure, virtually every amateur radio operator looks at all of the new radios advertised in the monthly issues of *QST*, but I just was not in the market for a new rig. My Alinco DJ-G5TH and Yaesu VX-5R were more than enough for my needs. However, one evening I came across a posting in one of the ham radio newsgroups mentioning something called a "VX-150." The author of the message had nothing but good things to say about this hearty 2 meter handheld, and with that my curiosity was sparked. I always wanted a little 2 meter radio that I could carry around with me to work or wherever and not worry about. After some brief research on the Internet - including reading all of the reviews on <http://www.eham.net> where it has earned an impressive 4.9 out of 5 - it quickly became apparent that Yaesu had real winner of a radio on their hands.

If you have never heard of this radio before, don't be surprised. Yaesu as part of their Vertex lineup released the VX-150, and its little brother referred to as the VX-110 (with no keypad), back in 2000. Maybe it was just me, but I don't seem to recall lots of advertising for either of these radios. They just sort of "appeared" one day without much announcement or fanfare. Since then, with the grass roots following that the VX-150 has earned, there has been some recent advertising.

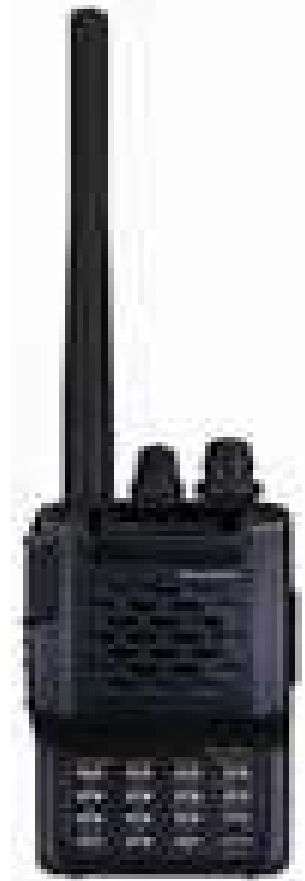
After a quick glance of this handie-talkie, it becomes apparent that this radio is derived from the Vertex commercial and public service offerings, and this fact alone is worth noting again. The VX-150 is a commercial quality radio. Another factor worth mentioning is the price. The VX-150 can be purchased from most dealers for about \$159 (Yaesu had a special discount coupon for an additional \$30 off until the end of March which has since been extended until the end of April). I picked my VX-150 up for \$125 shipped. Some of the folks on eHam.net were purchasing two or three of the radios with the intention of keeping one as a spare, giving to another family member who is a ham, etc.

The VX-150 includes the following features:

- 199 regular memory channels
- Seven character alpha-numeric capability
- Extended receive from 140MHz to 174MHz
- Dual VFO's
- CTCSS and DCS encode and decode
- Automatic repeater shift
- High (5W), medium (2W) and low (0.5W) power settings
- Backlit keypad
- Two user programmable keys
- Battery save mode
- Physical volume, squelch and VFO/multi-function control
- Heavy-duty cast aluminum construction and rubberized keys
- Computer programmable
- A "real" belt clip

Out of the box, the VX-150 comes with the belt clip, stock antenna, a 7.2-volt 700mAh NiCd battery pack, a very readable operations manual and slow charger. Yes, you read that correctly - it's a NiCd battery pack. Considering that its commercial cousins all use Li-Ion batteries, I was a little surprised that Yaesu decided to only offer a NiCd battery. But, nothing is perfect I guess. Besides, let's not forget the price relative to the current Yaesu promotion. Other vendors do offer replacement NiMh battery packs that are compatible with the VX-150. Also, according to an email I received from Yaesu Technical Support, you can use the commercial Yaesu Li-Ion battery packs as long as you use the correct charger (do NOT use the included slow charger as it will damage your battery and/or radio). Even with the 700mAh NiCd battery, though, I find that it lasts a couple of days of normal use before I need to charge it. My advice would be to pick up one of the after market NiMh battery packs.

An interesting aspect of the VX-150 is that the LCD display is mounted at a 45 degree angle on the front/top of the unit. This took a little getting use to when compared to traditional handhelds, but the transition is definitely worth it.



Editor's Note:

Joe, Thanks for an objective and interesting review. Marilyn and I ordered ours from GIGAPARTS on Friday. They were a few days extra on shipping because of the Hi-Band Mod, which is totally understandable. These radio's are beautiful. I got the desk (drop-in) charger, programming software - with cables, clone cable, mike adapters (so the old mikes work and/or packet cables will also work) and two SMA to SO-239 adapter cables to keep any pressure off the SMA antenna mount on the radio. All these goodies came to \$474.00 for both. Thanks for tipping me off to these. When I checked their website, I discovered that they have extended the rebate until April 30, 2002.

Ken - KB2KFV

Both transmit and receive audio are excellent on the VX-150. Signal reports have been very favorable. The internal speaker is among the best I have ever heard in any amateur hand-held or scanner. Simply put, the receive audio is impressive.

One great thing I discovered is that several of the VX-150 accessories, such as the mobile power adapter, slow charger and speaker mic, are also compatible with my VX-5R!

Some folks have mentioned in the newsgroups that they have had problems with the finals on their VX-150's. However, the problem is very sporadic and almost always seems to affect those who use their VX-150 mobile operating off of 12 V and running full transmit power for long periods of time. Like virtually all of the newer generation small and mid-sized handhelds, I would not suggest operating them mobile at high power for any length of time.

Another item to note is the programming software. I haven't picked the software up yet, but there are several available. There is the ADMS-1F from Yaesu itself. Folks don't seem to like this for some reason. Then there is the one from ARDTS-150 from RT Systems (http://www.rtsars.com/yaesu_template.cfm). RT Systems makes a lot of the ADMS software, but in the case of the ADMS-1F version, reports are that Yaesu decided to try their hand at developing the software themselves. For whatever reasons, most messages on the Internet seem to indicate a preference for the ARDTS-150 release. There is also a freeware product called EVE, which will allow you to "virtually modify" your VX-150 configuration, but caution is advised as some folks have had issues.

In conclusion, if you are looking for a new, commercial type quality handheld radio, and you are content with only 2 meters and do not need wide receive, then do yourself a favor and check out the VX-150. You will really be glad that you did. Now, if we can only convince Yaesu to release a dual-band unit in this configuration! For more information on the Yaesu/Vertex VX-150, visit <http://www.yaesu.com/amateur/vx150.html>.
73 de Joe Pasquini, N2NOU



Factory Specifications:

GENERAL

Frequency Range Rx : 140-174 MHz
TX : 144 - 148 MHz
Channel Steps: 5/10/12.5/15/20/25 & 50 kHz
Standard Repeater Shift: ± 600 kHz
Emission Type: F3 (G3E)
Supply Voltage: 6.0~16 VDC
Current Consumption: 130 mA (Receive)
8 mA (Auto Power Off)
1300mA (5W)
Case Size: 2.3" (W) x 4.3" (H) x 1" (D)
Weight: 325 g. (Approx., w/ant. & battery)

RECEIVER

Circuit Type: Double-conversion superheterodyne
Sensitivity (12dB SINAD): Better than 0.16uV
Adjacent Channel Selectivity: Better than 70 dB
Intermodulation: Better than 70 dB
AF Output: 0.4W @ 8 Ohms for 5% THD (@ 7.2 V)

TRANSMITTER

RF Power Output: 5/2/0.5W (@ 7.2 V DC)
Frequency Stability: Better than ± 5 ppm
Modulation Type: Variable Reactance
Maximum Deviation: ± 5 kHz
Spurious Emission: Better than 60 dB below carrier
Audio Distortion: Less than 5% (@1 kHz, w/3 kHz deviation)
Microphone Impedance: 2 k Ohm Condenser
Specifications are subject to change without notice, and are guaranteed within amateur bands only.



The T.A.R.A. Family - Working Together



On Behalf of June Wilson - KA2VEK. The officers of TARA would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to all of those members of the TARA Family that were able to assist June during the recent Antenna Tear down and move, as follows:

Rudy Ault - N2JZK

Teddy Ault - KC2GVS

Kirk Swartfiguer - N2LGE

Roy Warner - N2OWC

Margaret Warner - N2PEK

Nick Demos - NW2D

John LaBarr - KB2UKV

Vicky LaBarr - KC2GKY

Nick Skinner - KC2DZB

Ken Davis - KB2KFV

Marilyn Davis - KB2JZI

Bill Dillenbeck - N2UIE

Craig Wood - N2UID

Karen Wood - N2WDL

Whether you were able to help with the physical takedown or just there for moral support, you were still there. Also, "A Special Thank You" to anyone else who helped June with anything else during her time of need.

TARA'S 11TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY



April 16 2002
The TARA Gang shares
some quality time before
the beginning of the
Meeting.



Ken-KB2KfV tells VP Karen-
KB2UUC that MR. Bill wants her
to run the meeting !!!



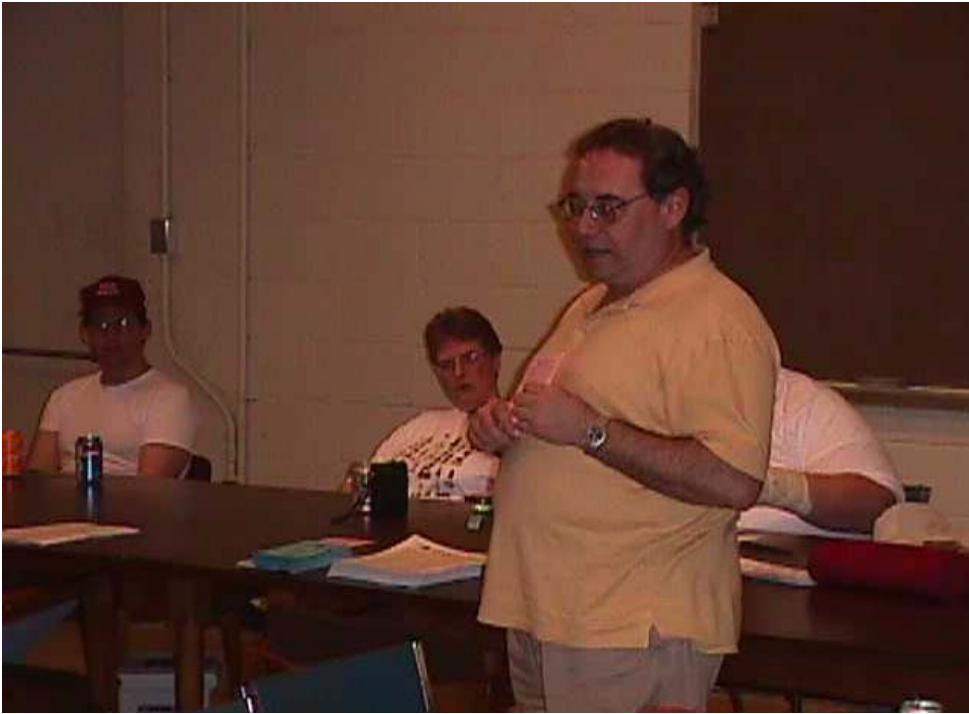
Karen threatens to pack
her bag and leave, if
she has to run the
meeting.



Chief lets Karen off the hook and calls
the meeting to order to explain to the
group that Bill, NY2U had car trouble.



Joe Pasquini - N2NOU
TARA Member
and
Newsletter Editor and
Vendor Liason for CDCENY
begins the guest presentation
of the evening and
introduces his cohorts
Bill Wurster - President
and Special Interest Group
Leader - Steve Garee



Bill Wurster, Pres. of CDCENY Emcee of the presentation, gives the group a brief history of CDCENY.

Bill also provided details of the upcoming CDCENY sponsored bus trip to New York City to attend TECHXNY (formerly known as PC Expo) on Tuesday June 25th

Those of you that were unable to make the meeting, missed out on two additional prizes for the 50-50. CDCENY was nice enough to donate two great books for door prizes.

These Books were the Hardcover Version of " Upgrading and Repairing PC's and also a paperback version of the same name.

Steve Garee, Special Interest Group Leader for CDCENY discusses with the group some of the outreach programs that CDCENY has including the WMHT Auction, local computer shows and some of the Special Interest Groups, which the club has and other community service events.

After the presentations were completed, the three gentlemen conducted a question and answer period with those in attendance.

Our audience kept them busy with plenty of questions until the food was ready.



The Ladies get the food uncovered for the Big Feast



We gotta work fast! This is a tough crowd.



A last minute check to make sure everything is perfect

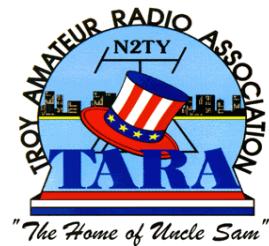
FOOD, FAMILY & FRIENDS



*Stand Back Ladies,
Here they come !
This could be considered
hazardous duty.
They do have knives and
forks, you know !*



**Congratulations
11 YEARS OF SUCCESS**



**We're more than a Club
We're a Family**

Public Service Corner



Expresses Their Appreciation

Dear Karen,

Thanks once again for all the help of you, Mac and all your club members who worked the "Runnin of the Green"(Island) race on March 9th. I thought everything went smoothly. If you don't mind, could you give me a call at work and let me know what you and your members thought about the conduct of the race. Thanks to the warm weather, we had a record number of finishers--316 this year compared to 181 in 2001 and 264 in 2000. We're planning our fourth running of the race already and will probably schedule it for Saturday, March 8, 2003. We'd like to have your club work the race again if you're willing, so mark your calendars.

In recognition of your club's support of the Green Island race, I'm enclosing a check for \$100.00 from the Hudson - Mohawk Road Runners Club to help offset any expenses incurred by your club in helping us with the Green Island race for the past three years, as well as a check sent out to the Legion for the use of their building.

Thanks again Karen and I'll speak to you soon on the Freihofer's Run For Women Race scheduled for Saturday, June 1, 2002.

Ken Skinner - Race Director, HMRRC

Upcoming Events

On Sunday, May 19 th, the 22nd Annual East Greenbush Rotary Run, our group will meet at the Green Meadow School, located at Rt. 9 and Rt. 20, located opposite the Schodack Plaza. The actual run starts at 8:30 am. We should all arrive there around **8:00 am**

On Monday, May 27 th, we have The Watervliet Memorial Day Parade. Please meet at Karen and Mac's house 567 Broadway, Watervliet around **9:00 am**. The parade starts at 10 am.

On Saturday, June 1 st, the Freihofer's Run for Women. Please be there between **8:30 a.m. and 9:00 a.m.** to get into the park. Security is tight, traffic access & control is a big problem and other events start as early as 7:30 am for the days' events. We will meet at the **Boat House** in Washington Park and be dispatched from there. That is why we have to arrive early. <http://www.freihofersrun.com/schedules.cfm>

If you can make yourself available to help at these events, it will be greatly appreciated. Contact me at **273-6594** or e-mail me at KB2UUC@n2ty.org



Next Meeting
Tuesday May 21, 2002
7:30 p.m.
Green Island Municipal
Center
at the intersection of
George St. & Hudson Ave.

HANDICAP ACCESSIBLE

TARA GET WELL WISHES

Also anyone who wishes to send Bob Jones - WB2SWA a get well card, he had is gall bladder removed about 2 weeks ago and before that his prostate operated on. His address is: 405 Broadway, Watervliet, N.Y. 12189



THE HURRICANE WATCH NET

HWN Manager Jerry Herman, N3BDW, Retires

"I feel very comfortable turning the net over to Mike, and I know that he will continue to maintain the high standards that we have become known for," Herman said in his announcement letter to HWN members. Pilgrim has been licensed since 1957, and he's been affiliated with the HWN for about five years. A long-time ARRL member and member and net control station for the Maritime Mobile Service Net, he retired from IBM in 1998 after 33 years. Pilgrim also is the creator of the [International Boat Watch Net](#).

Founded in 1965 by Gerry Murphy, K8YUW, the Hurricane Watch Net activates 14.325 MHz whenever a hurricane is within 300 miles of projected landfall or becomes a serious threat to a populated area. The net collects observed or measured weather data from amateurs in the affected area and passes those to [National Hurricane Center hurricane forecasters](#) via W4EHW. The net also relays weather bulletins as they become available from the National Weather Service and the National Hurricane Center.

Herman said he was very proud of net's accomplishments during his tenure as net manager. "During that time we have been awarded the Outstanding Achievement Award from the National Hurricane Conference and the International Humanitarian Award from ARRL," he noted. "We have established a very good working relationship with the forecasters at the National Hurricane Center, the ARRL and the FCC." [The HWN](#) also has developed a Web site that's been favorably received, Herman added. Hurricane Watch Net members have established themselves as "legitimate players in the hurricane business," Herman said, adding that he was most proud of the fact that the net has been on the air for every Atlantic-basin land-falling hurricane during a period of increased hurricane activity. "I realize that none of these accomplishments would have been possible without the support and hard work of you, the net members who made it happen," Herman concluded. "I thank each of you for your support during my tenure and ask that you continue to support Mike in the same manner."

Herman said that while he's stepping down as net manager he won't be stepping away from the net. "I will now have the time to resume on the air operations as a net control," he said. "I look forward to this role and to a long relationship with the net." Both Herman and Pilgrim attended the National Hurricane Conference this week in Orlando, where Herman officially passed the baton. Accolades from several quarters followed Herman's announcement of the changing of the guard.

ARRL Field Organization/Public Service Team Manager Steve Ewald, WV1X, thanked Herman on behalf of the League for leadership over the years. "The Hurricane Watch Net holds a prominent role in Amateur Radio public service communications because of your fine efforts and those of many other radio amateurs," Ewald said. "I look forward to working with Mike, K5MP, as the new Net Manager."

Julio Ripoll, WD4JR, the assistant Amateur Radio coordinator at the National Hurricane Center's W4EHW, also expressed his appreciation. "Thank you for your dedication to public service and Amateur Radio for so many years," Ripoll said. "I know that we at W4EHW/NHC understand the amount of time and effort that it takes to keep a vital service running smoothly every hurricane season and the planning, training and coordination during the off season as well. I look forward to working with Mike and the continued efforts to mutually improve the humanitarian services we provide."

Retired ARRL Field Services Manager Rick Palm, K1CE, invited Herman to visit him in Florida and enjoy a little fishing. "You and the net truly enhanced the ARRL's ability to serve its members with good reliable information during hurricane situations," Palm said. "It was great working with you."



Passing the baton: Retiring HWN Manager Jerry Herman, N3BDW (right), and incoming manager Mike Pilgrim, K5MP, at the National Hurricane Conference in Orlando.



The new Hurricane Watch Net Manager, Mike Pilgrim, K5MP, at home in Boca Raton, Florida



Saudi-Sat 1-A SO-41 On the Air

SaudiSat 1-A (SO-41) now is reported open for Amateur Radio communication. According to information received by AMSAT-NA President Robin Haighton, VE3FRH, SO-41 has been configured for FMvoice repeater operation.



Turki Al Saud, director of the Space Research Institute in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia--the satellite's sponsoring agency--told AMSAT-NA that SO-41 will automatically enable its UHF transmitter over Saudi Arabia and the US for approximately 20 minutes each pass. The spacecraft reportedly is configured for Mode J, with a VHF uplink of 145.850 MHz and a UHF downlink of 436.775 MHz. The spacecraft will operate in this mode intermittently, as power and spacecraft experiments permit, the announcement said.

SO-41's downlink RF power is 1 W with left-hand circular polarization. The uplink antenna--located atop the spacecraft--is linear in polarization. Experiments and software development continue with SaudiSat 1-B (SO-42), and that satellite is not yet available to amateurs.

SaudiSat 1A and 1B were launched along with TIUNGSAT-1 on September 26, 2000, from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, aboard a converted Soviet ballistic missile. Both satellites have been in various stages of commissioning since then.

From the CQ Newsroom: FCC Issues First Rules on UWB



The FCC has issued its first Report and Order on Ultra-Wideband (UWB) transmitters, deciding to permit the new technology even though promoters could not show that their products could operate without causing harmful interference to existing radio services. UWB transmitters are extreme spread-spectrum devices whose signals' bandwidths are no less than 500 MHz. The FCC is permitting the use of three types of UWB devices over three broad frequency ranges: 30-960 MHz, 1990-10,600 MHz, and 22-29 GHz. These ranges include several amateur bands. Uses include ground-penetrating radar, surveillance devices, vehicular radar systems and short-range wireless voice/data networks. Typically, a UWB signal would sound like noise to an analog receiver and the signal would be on any given frequency for only a fraction of a second, but the FCC admitted that proponents "have not provided information demonstrating that their products could operate without causing harmful interference to (currently) authorized services (on the same frequencies). Even so," the Commission continued, "we are not persuaded that higher emission limits for UWB operation are prudent at this time." The FCC promised to revisit its regulations after six months to see if changes were needed once UWB systems were actually on the air in significant numbers. The complete 118-page text of the FCC's Report and Order may be found on the internet at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-02-48A1.pdf or http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-02-48A1.txt.

New Countries Accepted for CQ DX Award



CQ DX Award Manager Billy Williams, N4UF, has announced that two new countries -- Ducie Is. and North Korea -- will be accepted for the CQ DX Award. The ARRL recently granted DXCC credit to P5/4L4FN and CQ DX will do likewise, says Williams. Contacts made with Ducie Island since February 2002 and contacts with authorized North Korean stations made since 1995 will be accepted effective immediately, making the new maximum number of CQ DX Award countries 335, as of June 1, 2002. Amateurs with valid confirmations from the recent Ducie Island DXpedition and from the P5/4L4FN North Korea operation should submit an update by May 31st to maintain ranking positions.

Other than the recently accepted P5/4L4FN operation, the only other authorized P5 operation of which CQ is aware is a small demonstration station set up by OH2BH and crew that made about 20 contacts. The P5RS7 operation was disallowed and those contacts will not be accepted. The recent P5A operation by YT1AD never got on the air, and any supposed contacts with P5A are invalid. Updates should be sent to P.O. Box 9673, Jacksonville, FL 32208-0673. There is no charge for updates not requiring issuance of an endorsement sticker. An SASE should be enclosed if the applicant wishes written confirmation of his or her new total.

In addition, Williams announced that CQDX Honor Roll standings are now online at <http://home.earthlink.net/~bwillia/wsn/page3.html>. Honor Roll operators are encouraged to check their listings and send any corrections to N4UF at n4uf@cq-amateur-radio.com. Complete rules for the CQ DX Awards are available online at <http://www.cq-amateur-radio.com/dxawdrul.html>.

Rail-Hamming & APRS

by Ron Cluster, KB7VIR

Chasing the SP 4449

Greetings to my fellow AMATEUR's

This article is a recap of our trip, on the weekend of March 23-24, 2002 chasing and photographing the SP 4449 steam engine as it made it's way from Portland, OR to Bend, OR. We ran our APRS tracking program on amateur radio which was a blast, but it also was helpful as a rail-fanning tool as we shared messages with hams in Vancouver as the train was moving. There are 2 sections to this story, one for the rail-fans and one for the hams. You're welcome to read both of course. It's a long story, if you don't read it all, I'll never know. (hee, hee)

General trip description: SP 4449 steam engine with extra tender and 14 passenger cars. Leave Portland Saturday morning, March 23rd to Vancouver, WA. Up the Washington side of the Columbia River to Wishram on BNSF trackage. Cross the Columbia and up the Deschutes River Gorge to Bend, OR on the Oregon Trunk branch of the BNSF. Return trip was the same route on Sunday the 24th. Our vehicle is a Chevy Astro van which, after removing the middle and rear sets of seats, we can sleep in. I have a dual band Kenwood ham radio (TM-V7A) which I have set up to run APRS on one half and VHF voice on the other. Kantronics KPC-3+ and an old Win98 laptop complete the APRS setup and the laptop also gives me detailed topo maps and street maps if I need them (I do.....often)

For the railfans: First off, I want to thank Andy Macha from the Vancouver, WA area for providing me with some detailed instructions on where to access the tracks in the Deschutes River canyon and the Washington side of the Columbia.

Although I have been in this part of both states several times before, this was my first rail-fan trip to this area. I had never tried to get down to the Deschutes River north of Bend and had no idea where to attempt to do so. His info made the trip a success for us. The other good reference I used is the "Rail-fan" timetable from Altamont Press. Lists the stations, mileposts, detectors, track speed, etc. Pretty nice. They can be found at <http://altamontpress.com/index.html>

We drove up to the Columbia River and camped Friday night on the Washington side west of Cooks. First time I have been on the BNSF trackage through the Columbia Gorge. They run a lot of trains!!!! Great scenery, lots of tunnels, enough talking detectors to help with train locations. Highway follows the tracks almost all the way. I'll be going back there!! !! We picked up the 4449 at the west portal of tunnel 6, MP 69.7, just East of Cooks.



Tunnel6Web.jpg - Taken at the West portal of Tunnel 6 Saturday. Train is Eastbound, east of Vancouver heading to Wishram

Nice spot to catch Eastbound trains as you can see them coming through a couple of the preceding tunnels just West of you. There is also a talking detector just west of you at MP 61.0 that gives you about a five minute heads up. Not much of a shot for Westbounds though. After 4449 went by, we went east and crossed over to the Oregon side at Hood River. Proceeded east on I-84 and caught up with 4449 at Wishram. Probably only because she had stopped just west of the OT Bridge to take on water. There is a nice wide parking spot eastbound on the freeway, just before you cross over the OT branch tracks Walk down the access road to the tracks. We crossed the tracks and crossed under the freeway so we ended up on the river side of the freeway overlooking the OT Bridge over the Columbia River. After taking on water (slow process nowadays because it has to be pumped in, usually from fire trucks. Not many water columns left) 4449 proceeded across the bridge at a snails pace. Speed limit is 10MPH on the bridge but it looked more like 3. We were close to the tracks on the south side of the bridge, right where the tracks cross under I-84. Great video from there. This is also a good spot to catch up trains with the river and the bridge in the background.



I84BrWeb.jpg - Moments after crossing the Columbia River, the train is about to pass underneath I-84 on the Oregon side of the river.



Colorado RvrBrWeb.jpg - Taken as the train was crossing the Columbia River starting it's southward journey to Bend.

Then it was back onto I-84 Eastbound to Biggs, south on 97 all the way down past Shaniko Junction to the turnoff to Gateway. Paved road to Gateway, cross the tracks and turn right at the BLM Trout Creek Recreation Area sign, then about 5-6 miles on gravel to Trout Creek Trestle. Just after you pass through a short, narrow tunnel under the railroad, you come into an open area where you have a really nice view of the tracks as they curve around you. A little further down the road you pass under the trestle. We chose a spot on the hillside opposite the tracks, just after you pass under the trestle. There were a lot of photographers up on the hillside near the south (or east) end of the trestle. Very nice spot. 4449 was working hard climbing up out of the canyon and the sound was fantastic.

We didn't get in front of the train again before it reached Bend. The light was fading and so were we so we didn't go downtown to fight the crowd at the depot. Sunday morning we were up early and drove north on Hwy 97 to the Crooked River Bridge near Terrebonne. This is a really nice viewpoint as the old highway bridge is now open to pedestrians only so your vantage point is out over the middle of the gorge looking West at the RR bridge with the Cascade Mountains in the background. Great for morning shots. 4449 was late getting out of Bend so we were standing around chatting with the other fans when she decided to surprise everyone. No whistle, no sound, and about 65 MPH. Talk about a mad scramble for the cameras!!!



TroutCrWeb.jpg - Crossing the Trout Creek trestle, climbing up out of the Deschutes River Canyon north of Madras, OR. Notice the helo hovering in front of the train? There were two of these following the train all day on Saturday, shooting a professional video I believe.



CrkRvrBrWeb.jpg - Sunday morning, blasting across the Crooked River Bridge near Terrebonne between Bend and Madras.

Back on Hwy 97 northbound. It sounded on the scanner like 4449 stopped in Madras to do a runby. There is a high trestle in town, west of Hwy 97, that you can see from the highway. Access doesn't look like it would be a problem. That is probably where they did the photo run but we were already north quite a ways and I elected to press on to our next location.

North on Hwy 97 to Shaniko Junction, then north on 197 drops you down into the Deschutes River canyon at Maupin. Before you cross the river, there is a paved road on the right, on the east side of the river that goes north to Sherar and Sherar's Bridge. We took that and when we got to Sherar, took the BLM gravel access road that continues north on the east side of the river. Only went about 1/4 mile before we had our photo spot. Nice view of the river with the track on the other bank in a sweeping curve. Had quite a wait here because of the photo runby earlier. This would be a good spot for East or West trains, in fact there are lots of nice spots along here. The gravel road continues north quite a ways, past the tunnel and twin bridges north of Sherar. Someone talked about a gate across it someplace but I didn't catch where.

Back to Sherar's Bridge, then we went west on Hwy 216 to Hwy 197 at Tygh Valley. North on 197 gets you to the Columbia River at The Dalles. As it turns out, we would have had plenty of time to get to Wishram to see it cross the Columbia again, but radio comms were so spotty that I couldn't tell where the train was. I knew I was in front of it, just didn't know how far. We went west on I-84 to the tunnels near Lyle. Pulled into Memaloose State Park on the Oregon side and drove down into the camping area. There is a nice little point that you can walk out on that has a sweeping view of the river. The UP tracks are directly in front of you. OK spot for UP trains but it's a pretty short "window".

Engines only probably, with the river in the background. Had a nice view of 4449 coming across the bridge at Lyle though the tunnels, and then on westward past some interesting rock formations. Great spot for that "mood" shot. You need a good telephoto lens and tripod to do any good here. "No wind" would have helped also but we didn't get that lucky.

After that, we continued west on I-84 on the Oregon side. Was pretty easy to tell where 4449 was because of the steam plume and the fact that she sets off every hotbox detector that she passes. Detects either the cylinders up front or the firebox so you get a radio announcement from the detector. We gradually caught up and passed the train but weren't really very far in front of it by the time we hit the Portland Metro area. We could have crossed at the 205 bridge and caught it again because it met Amtrak at Washougal, but we were ready for food, espresso and the drive home (another 2 hours yet). Radio comms in the Columbia River Gorge are generally pretty decent. Only channels I heard regularly were the two road channels, 161.250 east of Washougal and 161.415 west of Washougal. A little traffic on the PBX frequencies 160.665 & 161.130 but not much. South of Wishram on the OT tracks, I only heard the one road channel used, 161.100 for the entire route into Bend. Coverage on that stretch was generally poor unless you were very near the train, or south of Gateway where the tracks climb up out of the canyon. Not sure where the repeaters are located but they must not be up out of the canyon, because we didn't hear any comms at all along 97 or 197 north of Madras, until you got within 10 miles or so of the Columbia. It sounded like the dispatcher was having trouble at times also so that must be a really tough area to cover.



DshRvrWeb.jpg - Northbound in the Deschutes River Canyon just north of Sherar.

RAIL-HAMMING

I have said this before about other things with A.P.R.S., but this was the most fun I have had with ham radio in a long time.

Ran APRS on the entire trip, WinAPRS w/Precision Maps. Precision Maps are pretty decent but I wish there was a way to use Streets & Trips with APRS. You can add your own "pushpins" and routes in S&T and the maps are certainly more detailed. Guess I'll have to fork over the dough for APRSpoint one of these days. Same exact maps as S&T and I think the same features (plus some). Anybody know how to "share the data" coming from the GPS? Use it for WinAPRS and get it to S&T somehow? Has to happen in the laptop as it has only one serial port. S&T has the moving map capability but it wants the serial port, which of course WinAPRS has to have that to function correctly.

Got APRS messages from several folks while on the trip and that was really cool, knowing I was getting into the system and knowing people were watching our progress. Bill, K7MT in Montana sent me a message which I answered, but I'm not sure my reply made it to you. Thanks for letting me know we were getting out there. When I got home and checked findu, there were a few messages sent to us that I did not get. Sorry to Frank, KE6MZN in Hornbrook. If I had received your message on the road, you would have certainly got a reply from us. We were out of the system at times, sometimes for several hours so if the message was sent and then timed out before we got back into the system I suppose that could have been the reason. For those of you who did get replies from me, sorry for the lack of caps, commas, and all that nice stuff. Driving and typing is a time consuming, and a somewhat distracting activity. I don't make a habit of it, and I won't even attempt it after dark or in traffic. My wife doesn't touch computers though so sometimes I hunt and peck out a quick reply.

For you hams who are also railfans (you know who you are!!) whatever you have to do to get up on APRS, do it!!! I received real time info on the train as it was leaving Vancouver from Michael, KB7WUK in Portland. I was 60 miles upriver and probably not within voice radio contact, yet the message was relayed through the APRS digi's and arrived on my laptop like magic. (Well, how else do you explain this stuff.....) I could just as well have been 100 miles away, or 300, and the messages would have still made it. Sure makes train chasing a lot more interesting. We also were able to get messages back and forth to my son, KC7GTQ at home in Eugene. Could not have done that on 2m voice from where we were. (Well, yeah, there is always the cell phone. Don't you just HATE those things). On the return trip Sunday evening, I sent APRS messages to KB7WUK & Byron, W7SYJ in Vancouver letting them know where the train was. I think that was helpful to them also. Somebody who is sitting at home listening to the scanner could also post position objects out on APRS which would show up on your map. Just another possibility.

The only thing that I wish we could have done differently was PUT AN APRS TRACKER ONBOARD THE TRAIN!!!! OK folks, how do we go about doing this? Is it possible? Count me in to help out!!! Anybody got any connections with the train folks? I know, there would have been lots of areas on this trip where the train would not have made it into the system. But when it was.....WOW !!!!! Real time location info on the train. What could be better from a railfan standpoint.



Picture 1 (APRS01.jpg) is a shot of the center dashboard area. You can see the Garmin 12 GPS, the control head & mic for the Kenwood TM-V7A radio and my AOR 8200B scanner. GPS and Radio control head are mounted with the super-velcro so I can remove them easily and put them into my other vehicle. The super-velcro did a great job on our 8200 mile Alaska Trip last summer on some very rough roads. Never let go once. The GPS cable is the combo power/data cable, so I don't go through so many batteries. The front of the console, down at floor level hidden from view, has a heavy duty three hole 12v power jack (like the cig lighter jack but better and with a built in circuit breaker). GPS, laptop and scanner get plugged in there.

APRS coverage up the Columbia was pretty good, better on the Oregon side than on the Washington side. Probably because the two digi's I was hitting, N7NLL-10 & WA7ROS-12 are on the Washington side.. Once you climb up out of the Columbia Gorge and start heading south on 97 or 197, you have coverage for about 20 miles south, better on 97 than 197. It gets spotty then, especially when the highway drops into a lower area and you're out of the system completely if you drop in the Deschutes River canyon. Somewhere around Shaniko Junction you start getting into the system again via W7HDO-10. From there into Bend, it was touch and go. I thought it would be a little more solid in that area but it looked like I was only getting in about half the time. North of Bend it looks like I got several packets into the system via WALKER, now that's a trip!! Of course I-5, Eugene to Portland is pretty much in the system solid. A few times in that stretch I missed getting a packet in but not often.

Hope that gives everybody some info on our trip, on the area and on APRS. If you have questions about the trip, or if I obviously messed something up (yeah it happens, believe me) send me an email. If you like my long, rambling stories about this stuff, send me an email. (I promise not to do it often no matter what) Next big trip is to Yosemite and Las Vegas in June, wait 'til you get THAT email.....(just kidding)

Ron in Eugene, OR.....KB7VIR.....(-9 when mobile)

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Picture 2 (APRS02) is a shot of the center console that I made to keep all this stuff somewhat organized. The V7A radio mounts on the front surface of the console, below the laptop. It's recessed back in out of sight so it doesn't show in the photo. The laptop sits on a false bottom that is easily lifted out to gain access to the wiring and the fuse block. Kantronics KPC3+ and an old CB can be seen to the right of the laptop. There is also storage for the GPS, V7A control head and mic when not in use. The top of the console is hinged with locking braces so it can't fall forward if you have to brake suddenly. The top has a keylock in the front panel so the console can be locked when it's closed. Mounted to the inside of the top are three used Motorola speakers (for the V7A, scanner & CB) for better sound when mobile. They make a big difference. Console is built out of 1/2 inch plywood with upholstery fabric glued over it using contact cement. Took a little while to design and build but it was sure worth it. Console is bolted to the metal seat frames at floor level and wired direct to the battery (fused). Laptop is an old Pentium 100MHz running Win98SE, WinAPRS w/Precision Maps, Streets & Trips and Topo! Oregon.



Photo 3 (APRS03.jpg) is a closer shot of the console. Just a different view. Doesn't show the speakers in the top, but a better view of the laptop/TNC/CB area. Forgot to mention earlier, the false floor that the laptop sits on has a hole for the power and TNC cable to go through, and it can be lifted out, turned 180 degrees and put back in place to allow the laptop to face the passenger seat.



Photo 4 (APRS04.jpg) is a little wider view of the "cockpit". Shows the front dashboard area and the laptop but doesn't show the console lid with speakers.

The console was a custom design, built to fit in our Astro van and sized around my equipment. We looked at several of the pre-made consoles but of course most of them are not designed with radio and computer use in mind. And most of them were pretty cheaply made too, so they didn't afford much security. There are radio consoles out there designed for emergency vehicle use but the equipment is usually in plain sight and there wasn't really a good solution for the laptop. It's built mostly from 1/2 plywood, 3/4 inch square pine for inside corner braces, glued and screwed together and then covered with a heavy upholstery fabric. It took some time to put it together but we were getting ready for our Alaska trip so I was pretty motivated to get something nice put together. Ron....KB7VIR



Photo 5 (Van.jpg) is our van, still carrying a load of Central Oregon Dust. Antenna on the driver side is a dual band ham antenna for the V7A. Antenna on the right side is a mag mount, all band scanner antenna. Not on the vehicle is a mag mount CB antenna.

Editor's Note: I would like to express my sincere thanks to Ron KB7VIR, for a lot of hard work and giving us for an informative and fun article. We hope to have additional articles from Ron in relation to his trips and projects. Ken-KB2KFV

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