



TMRA Amateur Radio Beacon

February 2010



The Prez Sez

We'll start with yet another reminder to TMRA members that we have a Hamfest coming up in about 6 weeks. Not only is it at a new-to-us location (Owens Community College) but there are other new-to-us organizational aspects - notably that we're going to be responsible for setting up and taking down around 250 tables. At the Lucas County Rec Center, Rec Center employees did that for us, but as OCC has only around 60 tables, we have to rent from outside sources the others that we'll need, and we have to set them up; the old saying "many hands make light work" will apply - so the more volunteers we have to help, the easier it will be - so please, if you can, volunteer to help. Two other new-to-us events at the Hamfest will be several forums during the morning and VE testing during the morning also. These 2 events were made possible by OCC generously making available to us, at no additional rental charge, 2 rooms separate from the 2 main halls where we'll have the vendors' tables.

The Nobel prize-winning physicist Niels Bohr once remarked "Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future." Here are a few more examples that prove him correct. "Scientific investigation into the jet engine has given no indication that this method can be a serious competitor to the air-screw combination engine. We do not consider we should be justified in spending any time or money on it ourselves." British Government in 1934. "An amazing invention but who would ever want to use one?" President Rutherford Hayes in 1876 after witnessing a telephone call from Washington to Philadelphia. "The phonograph is not of any commercial value." Thomas Edison in 1880. He later thought that maybe it could make a useful dictation machine. "The Volkswagen does not meet the fundamental technical requirements of a motor car." Chairman of a leading English car manufacturing company in 1946. "Good enough for our transatlantic friends... but unworthy of the attention of practical or scientific men." Conclusions of a British parliamentary committee in 1878 on lighting by electricity. I still have a few more for next month.

73, Brian, WD8MXR

VE Session at Hamfest March 21st

I am looking for all the help I can get for the VE session during this year's Hamfest. If you are not "actively" involved in the Hamfest and can help from 9-11 a.m., please contact Steve, KC8TVW at 419-467-3734 or <KC8TVW@arrl.net>. We can even use a few Hams that are not VE's to help with the logistics.

Grab & Go kits - Feb 10 Meeting

The TMRA would like you to bring your VHF/UHF Grab-n-Go kits to the Feb. 10th regular meeting. We will be into the Spring/Summer storm season before you know it. This will be your chance to make sure your kit is ready as well as having the opportunity to see what others are doing. If things go well, we may do the same for March with our HF Grab-and-Go's.

VE Session Jan 9th

Congratulations to: Matt, KD8MVV (Tech); Matthew, KD8MVW (Tech); Harry, KC8ZVG (Extra) and Chris, KD8ZVG (Extra). Thanks to all the VE's that helped.

November Ham Fun

Being a newly licensed ham (April 2008), I'm finding new and exciting things to do with amateur radio all the time. This past November was certainly no exception.

MORSE CODE ADVENTURES

Earlier in the month I began playing around with Morse code. When I first started to study for the test I had tried this very briefly, but got very frustrated very quickly, as trying to do that while learning all the other new material quickly overloaded me! So I ended up giving up the Morse code, figuring I just didn't have the rhythm. I'm quite knowledgeable about my own self and rhythm... the fact that I have none. After getting divorced in 2005 some friends drug me kicking and screaming out to the dance clubs, and it quickly became evident that, um, fat white people shouldn't be in those places. Even after some tasty beverages.

But I digress, back to ham!

It was after I had become licensed that my father told me my grandfather was a ham. He passed away when I was young, and he was not active in ham for a number of years at that point. I asked my dad if he happened to have anything ham-related from my grandfather. He said no, however he did remember that once upon a time he had a large box of QSO cards. A few weeks later my dad dug up some old Morse code keys he had forgotten about. He passed these onto me. Now, again, keep in mind that I'm a newer ham, and I've had a career in modern technology for over 15 years. So when I saw these big Morse keys, covered in years of grime and dust, the only thing I could think of was... yeah, I'm going to use this to transfer one bit of information at a time???

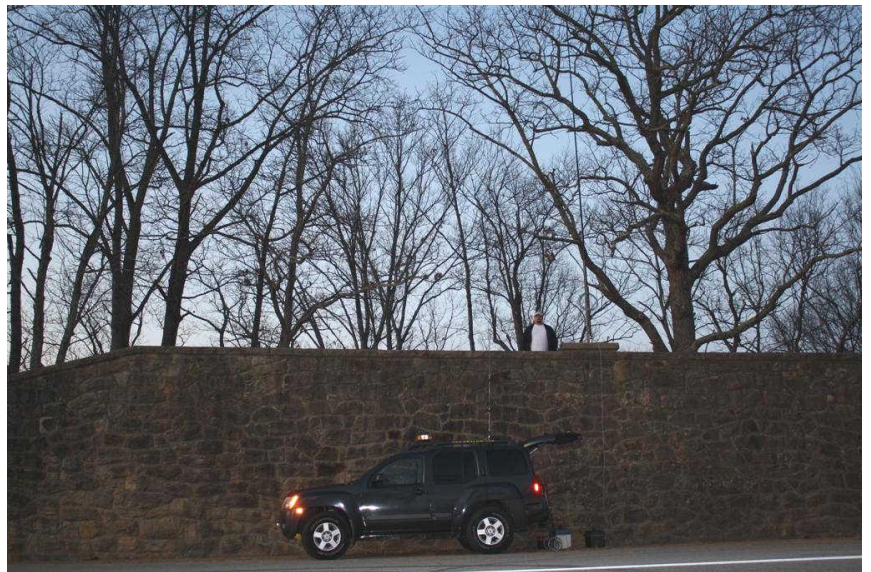
Hi hi, indeed. But I've learned over the past year or so that CW has its place. Just as the amateur motto "when all else fails, ham radio works" applies even more so to CW. After getting on HF and experiencing bad propagation and weak signals, I've seen first hand that you can still make out those little dits and dahs in even horrible conditions. Lately I've been learning more and more about the features of my Icom IC-7000 and its filters. I've been learning how to use the filters to zero in during a QSO, and it's amazing how much they can help. And it's a bit of irony how little the computer can help when weak signals and/or noise are present. I've been concentrating on sending CW more so than listening, figuring I could use the computer to decode. I've been using a Windows program called CWGet to decode Morse code. It's not very good with weak signals or noisy situations. In addition, I've found that the computer is actually better the faster the CW speed is! With slow CW and, ahem, inexperienced users, since the rhythm just isn't there, the computer has a real hard time with the timing. Because I can barely practice at 5 WPM and I'm likely using a CW cheat sheet to get my dits and dahs right, my timing between words, letters, and even individual dits and dahs is very inconsistent, so the computer has a real hard time trying to figure out what I'm trying to say. Let alone the other station in the QSO, with noise present. But I usually can get the gist of what the other person is saying, for those who are willing to listen to my slower than molasses keying! I'll get better with my CW, but it'll certainly take some time. I've only made a few contacts today with CW, but I am inspired to continue as I've recently received my first QSL card based on one of those contacts! So someone out there was able to make out what it was that I said, or at the very least, my call sign.

ARES S.E.T. DRILL

Recently, I participated in the local ARES Simulated Emergency Test drill. I was stationed in the Lucas County emergency truck/trailer along with Jeff, KC8NNO, and Steve, W8TER. This was a great learning experience for me. I was able to catch a glimpse of how things might happen in an actual emergency scenario. I certainly learned a lot about what worked and what could potentially cause issues... like trying to operate a net, Winlink 2000, and PSK31 all on 2 Meters when all the antennas are right next to each other... not a good idea! On the positive side I did get to see how relay stations could be of great help during a scenario where out-laying stations weren't able to be directly contacted on simplex via the truck/trailer with its low-profile antennas. I was anxious to try out a new HF vertical antenna I had purchased recently. However, due to the high wind that day, it took a good amount of strapping and rigging to get it stable. We did tune it up and KC8NNO was able to check into the OSSBN net with it, but I ended up bringing it down due to not feeling safe with it being up during the high winds. In addition, I've never passed traffic before, so W8TER ended up doing this with his 80M dipole setup. During the event several amateurs took up posts at area hospitals, testing equipment and trying out simplex. I come from a computer background, and I do a lot with computer networks. So it was fascinating to see a "human" communications network in action across the map. In addition, there was some PSK31 activity during the drill. However, for myself at the Lucas County truck/trailer, it didn't work out too well, as the combination of the close proximity of the 2M net operation, Winlink 2000, AND PSK31 just made things a mess. If I tried to transmit, I'd step on one of the others, and if I just tried to listen, they'd step on me. It was a very good learning experience. However, I was able to get a few messages out to Josh, KD8FMZ, in Wood County, and I do recall seeing some traffic between Josh and Chuck, KB8FXJ.

ADVENTURES IN KENTUCKY

A good friend (Rick, KD8RIC) and I visited a couple of spots in Southern Kentucky for the ARRL SSB Sweepstakes the weekend of November 21st and 22nd. We had a business meeting in Kentucky on Monday the 23rd, so I figured we'd have some fun and take some ham gear down with us and make a weekend out of it. It wasn't until after we already had scheduled this that I found out the ARRL SSB Sweepstakes contest coincided with this time! So, the previous weekend I traveled to the Fort Wayne Hamfest and purchased an Eagle One HF Vertical antenna. We didn't have a mobile HF antenna, and as soon as I



walked into the Hamfest I saw this antenna reaching towards the ceiling. I figured it would be perfect. It was! On the evening of Saturday the 21st, after venturing through the beautiful scenic Cumberland Falls, KY area, we found a relatively high area at a scenic overlook. It was about 1300 ft. elevation and had a clear view all around. Miraculously, there was a perfect spot already available to mount the antenna to. I didn't even have to use the tripod mount that I got with the antenna. The location had a signpost, sans sign. So we strapped the antenna up, ran some coax to the truck we were traveling in, and went to try it out. Before starting the contest, we tuned to a band that wasn't included in the ARRL SSB Sweepstakes contest... either 12M or 17M. We tuned it up, and our first QSO was with JJ2LPV in Japan! Talk about blowing the mind of a newer ham.

However, later disaster struck. An hour or so into the contest I decided to take a break so I set my laptop down and walked away. A bit later I came back and my battery had died! I was using contest software as well as a text editor to make notes. But I had not saved anything before I took a break! And the call sign of my Japan QSO was in the text editor! I was devastated. However, after getting the laptop back up with an inverter, I found that thankfully the contesting software had saved my records. However, it might have lost a few recent ones before I took a break, as later on in the contest I had one or two stations tell me we had already worked, but I didn't have records of them. They were also kind of rude about it and would not talk to me after stating that. Oh well, it's their loss as they're not in my log, and they'll get a couple of nice NILs (ARRL contest speak for Not In Log) subtracted from their score. On a more positive note, while tuning looking for contacts, I did notice on more than one occasion where hams had stumbled upon the contest by accident, and seasoned hams were taking the time to explain how the contest worked. Keep in mind that this is all time the contesters could have just told the guy to get lost and score some more QSOs. But they didn't and it was inspiring. I made about 25 contacts within a few hours that night. At 25 we called it a night, as we had been traveling all day and were looking forward to some sleep!

The next day we faced a small dilemma. Our target contest spot was Black Mountain, KY, in the Cumberland Gap area. However, after a map search, we found out this was about two hours away from where we were. As fun as it might have been, we were due in Lexington, KY early the next morning for a business meeting. And with the recent time change, dark comes much earlier, and no way did we want to drive two hours just for a couple of hours of contesting, then have to drive that distance back in addition to the travel time back to Lexington. So we consulted a topographic map (Google Maps, in addition to having regular street maps and aerial photography, also has great shaded-relief topographic terrain maps, with elevation markers). Unfortunately we didn't find much that was very high (elevation) off of I-75, north of where we were. We ended up making a compromise and traveled to Pine Mountain, KY, which was only about an hour away from where we were, and was listed at about 2400 ft. elevation. After our great experiences the previous night at 1300 ft., I figured we'd do just fine.

And we did! We traveled to a spot called Chained Rock. They have an amazing scenic overlook there. I was somewhat worried though, as a few hundred feet away was an antenna farm for all sorts of signals... some looked ham-ish, and there were a few "shacks" there, but no one was around. Apparently no one braved the mountain for the contest! So we claimed our spot and set up. Again there was a great place to strap the new vertical HF antenna to. The poles holding the guardrail on the overlook worked perfect. There were some close-by power lines running to the antenna farm, so we took extra care to ensure the antenna would not fall down in a wind gust.



Shortly thereafter we were on the air. But we sure had a lot of noise, and every few minutes during re-tuning or calling the rig would shut itself off. This happened once or twice during a QSO, so it was quite annoying. Eventually we tracked it down to the inverter we were using to power the laptop and other things. Immediately after shutting that off our problems went away.

I made 50 contacts in the span of the few hours we were there... all corners of the map, including one in the Pacific section somewhere, as well as Hawaii and Alaska. The guys in California were coming in great as well, and I scored a few in Southern Texas and Florida too.

The pace of contesting is amazing. I got somewhat hooked during the TMRA Field Day where I spent the night manning the 20M beam. I originally thought "that's dumb" and "why would I want to do that???". But after actually doing it, I found the challenge is the fun, trying to be "the one" that breaks through the pile-up.

Because this was only my 2nd contest, and this time I didn't have any hand-holding available as was the case at Field Day, I took the time to read the ARRL rules for the contest a few days before hand. They were very explicit, in my opinion, about the reasons behind the rules. What I gleaned is that the whole point was putting your human skills to the test, being able to copy and call to the best of your availability. But what I had found on the air during the contest somewhat surprised me.

Read on, fearless amateur newsletter reader, for we are not nearly through with this journey!

THE RANT

Let me again start off with the fact that I come into the ham arena from a computer background. Technology really is my life. But I've great respect for the amateur community and amateur radio as a whole because as is the motto, it works when all else fails. So, I was very surprised when I came across a great number of stations calling CQ which were using HIGHLY automated systems. Instead of manually calling CQ, they were just pressing buttons and having either a recording or a synthesized voice calling in automated intervals for them. Now, OK, maybe that is all fine and well. They're making use of technology to save their voices. It's a long contest, I can understand that. But it went further than that.

Some of these stations wouldn't even have a human being reply. Since I'm quite familiar with computers, I could tell when a computerized voice was calling out my call sign, then giving me a serial number, precedence, year and section. Surely there was a human being there behind the scenes copying the info into the computer, but not even having the respect to, in person respond to my call took me aback for some reason. I've dwelled on this for probably more time than necessary. While it's surely a great way to keep pace and rack up points, it surely goes against the spirit of the rules, in my opinion. Now, over time I have noticed hams who use synthesized voice to talk over ham, perhaps having a handicap of some sort. That's fine, I'm all for that. I think this is exactly where technology can be of amazing help to this world. But based on the number of stations I found doing this, I'm quite sure this wasn't the case. In one or two of these QSOs I did note that a human did break in to note a call sign correction, or respond to a request to phonetically repeat information. None of them seemed rude about it, so this was somewhat more helpful.

And there were many grey areas between the near-fully automated systems and the real human contesters. As noted before, some were only using this to call CQ over and over. But I think they may have left at times, because they wouldn't come back to me. That's fine, maybe they really couldn't hear me and my pitiful 100 watts on top of a mountain. But they weren't coming back to other stations as well. Nor would they respond to "is this frequency in use". Again, oh well, less points for them.

Another grey area I found was where they would respond to a call in person, they'd give the serial number in person, but then hit a button and their precedence, call sign, year and section were recorded. But I guess I don't have as much of an issue here, as again, that's something of a way to save your voice. However, there were situations where the ham had something of an accent, and with this information being constantly replayed with the exact same tone and enunciation each time, it sometimes made it hard to copy down all the information.

At one point I decided to "try it" before I dogged it. We were using an Icom IC-7000 rig during the contest, and it had the capability to record up to four different recordings which could be used to transmit via the touch of a button. But after a short time I gave up with this approach. While this did when replying to CQs in some cases, in others I would find that they were already replying to another station before my recording had even finished transmitting. I guess that's a huge reason to get a short Extra call sign! Trying to rapidly repeat "Ki-Lo Ju-Li-Et Ze-Ro Ech-o Yan-kee Tan-go" takes a bit of time. Sure I can just spit it out if need be, but with my enunciation, in order to make sure the other guy hears me, it takes time. So I ended up maybe using the automated system for the first call, then trying something faster. Or in situations where my signal wasn't cutting it, alternating parts of my call... using "Japan" for "Juliet", for example. Eventually, I decided I had more fun using my own skills to make the contact rather than use assisted methods. The contesting software I was using was already doing a boat-load of work... keeping the time, noting the band, checking to see if I had already made the contact, tracking sections, etc...

NEWBIE CONTESTER NOTE

What I found worked for me was this... after tuning into a station I would wait for others to make contact. I would wait until I had the call sign, precedence, year, and section noted before I went ahead and tried to make contact. That way, all I had to really concentrate on was getting the correct serial number. But in the above situation, there were times where I had to ask for phonetics and repeats.

This went a long way towards helping my record keeping and keeping my frustration level lower. However, there were situations where I would hear a station calling CQ, but no one was coming back to them. So in those when I did call, I had to pay close attention to the whole thing the first time around.

Another item I noted was that with so many of the hams/clubs out there putting out first licensed years of the 1950's and so on, some of them had a hard time with my "08". There were no negative connotations here, but some had a hard time... either with my enunciation or with noise or for whatever reason. Quite a few times I would get back "year is 06, QSL?". I can't even begin to figure out how "zero eight" and "zero six" mix, but that's the challenge. Other times it was the "zero" that was the problem. Later on in the contest when this issue came up I would repeat with "two thousand and eight" and this helped a bit.

Somewhat more mysterious were the issues with my ARRL contest section during the contest. Before I start, I had a hard time when reading the rules deciding what I was supposed to say. Firstly, I'm a native Ohio-an. But I opted for a fancy-schmancy vanity call from zero land because I'm vein. To make things worse, I was in Kentucky for the contest. In the end I opted for Kentucky. That's where I was. How else would I signify this? I mean, if you're from Florida, but happened to be in the Pacific during the contest, I would think the other person would want to hear that, not Florida. At one point I did get a comment of "What in the world is a zero call doing in Kentucky", but they quickly moved to calling CQ before I could ask what exactly the intent was there.

I had a lot of issues with having to repeat "Kentucky". This mystified me. How hard is hearing "Kentucky"? Anything else I can understand, but this was strange. There were quite a few occasions where I had to repeat it over 10 times. In most I would add "Kilo Yankee" (KY), as I had noted many others were doing the same (Alfa Kilo, Mike Delta Charlie, Sierra Japan Victor, etc...). I'm still not sure of the issue here, but again, it's part of the challenge.

WRAP UP

I made contacts on 15M, 20M, 40M, and 80M. I could not tune 160M, and I only tried 10M for a short while. I could not recall if 60M was a contest band, so I didn't bother.

I ended at contact number 75, the 50th contact for that day. It was getting dark, we wanted off the mountain before night fall, and just before that I made back to back contacts with Hawaii and Alaska, so I was fulfilled. After getting serial numbers of 1800 or more, I had no delusions of grandeur here. It was fun, and it was a great learning experience.


We had fun with the other people who showed up from time to time explaining to them what we were doing. Some just gave funny looks, while others were quite interested. One gentleman had a particular interest in not only what we were doing, but the nearby antenna farm. He seemed dumbfounded when I told him that, when atmospheric conditions cooperated, you could "work the world" on five watts... this after explaining that we were using one hundred watts, while others in the contest were surely working the legal limits (or more).

One non-ham note about the area. Look up "Chained Rock, KY" some time. The story is quite interesting. Also of note, at least to myself, was the fact that the city of Pineville, KY is surrounded by a wall. This includes large hinged walls that are capable of closing off the highway through town. While first traveling through, I had visions of the town fearing zombies of the undead. Or maybe bears or something. But the real story was much more benign... it's a levee wall. The town sits right next to a tributary of the Cumberland River, and being at the base of several hills and mountains, I'm sure they get hit from time to time. The gentleman above explained this to me, and also noted that they test the large hinged doors that close the highway once a month, and when they do, they don't announce it! So I imagine it was something like the Berlin wall... wherever you were at that time is where you stayed until the situation changed!

After returning home I found that my Japan contact, JJ2LPV, had already QSL'd me via eQSL.cc (a great service, by the way). So my laptop battery death wasn't utterly as devastating as I had originally thought! I know that this year the logs are due within 15 days, so at some point during this extended Thanksgiving holiday weekend I'll have to figure out that whole situation. This was my second contest, but my first doing my own logs, as the club had taken care of the logs during Field Day.

And with that I will say 73, KJ0EYT clear!

GREETINGS FROM JAPAN



JJ2LPV

Sige Ibuka
1-74, Hirano
Tajimi, Gifu 507-0823
JAPAN
Loc: PM85NH ITU: 45 CQ: 25
IOTA: AS-007 JCC: 1904

To: KJ0EYT This confirms our 2-way SSB QSO
Date: November 21, 2009 Time: 23:26 UTC
Band: 17M UR Sigs: 55

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Special Events Station

The Thomas Edison Memorial Radio Club, 4th Annual Special Events Station. Feb. 6 & 7, 2010. Milan Historical Museum, Milan, Ohio

The Thomas Edison Memorial Radio Club, NI8G, invites all radio amateurs and anyone interested in amateur radio to visit our station in the Lockwood, Smith & Company General Store located in the Milan Historical Museum, 10 Edison Drive, Milan Ohio, Feb. 6th and 7th, 2010. The station will be operating from 10 am to 4 pm each day, in celebration of Thomas Edison's birthday, Feb. 11, 1847. We will be communicating with radio amateurs throughout the United States and around the world. Please contact Jack Hubbard, 419-706-1308, E-mail: ni8n1@yahoo.com, for additional information.

Monroe's One Day Tech Class

February 27th, last Saturday in February, new one day technician class will be held at Bedford Township Hall on the east side - 8100 Jackman Rd. That is between W. Dean and W. Sterns roads. Please go on line and read the manual for the course *BEFORE* you come to the day's session. It is from 9AM to 3PM. Test will immediately follow. No cost for class, exam fee is \$15.00. The online address for the manual is www.kb6nu.com/2006techstudyguide.pdf. Contact me for info at: wb8fbg@chartermi.net.

Rita, WB8FBG

Mansfield Mid-Winter Hamfest & Computer Show February 14, at the Richland County Fairgrounds.
Talk-in- 146.940- info at www.w8we.org/hamfest.htm

Ride the TMRA bus to Dayton on May 15. Contact Mike, WA8SYD.

THE TOLEDO MOBILE RADIO ASSOCIATION P.O. BOX 9673, TOLEDO, OH. 43697-9673

President, Brian, WD8MXR; Vice-President, Steve, W8TER; Secretary, Ron, N8RLH;

Treasurer, Brenda, KB8IUP; Public Information Officer, Steve, KC8TVW.

Board Members: Dave, KB8EH; Chris, KC8UFV; Steve, KC8TVW; Tom, KB8PAI; Rita, WB8FBG; Dan, KE8UE.

TMRA Home Page www.tmrahamradio.org Webmaster, Tom, KB8PAI.

TMRA W8HHF Repeaters; 147.270+, 224.140-, 442.850+ (TMRA 2 meter, 220, and 440 repeaters operate with a 103.5 "PL", or a touch-tone access code of 1-2-3) Please "ID" before using phone-patch.

(10 digit dialing, *up and #down)

TMRA W8HHF Packet BBS Frequencies 51.780, 145.690, 223.480, 441.060

The TMRA meets at 7:30 PM every second Wednesday in

The Electrical Industry Building, Lime City Rd. Rossford, Ohio.

The TMRA Q & A net meets every Sunday night at 7:30 PM, followed by the TMRA "Information & Swap 'N-Shop" net at 8:30 on the 147.270+ repeater. All amateurs are invited to check-in.