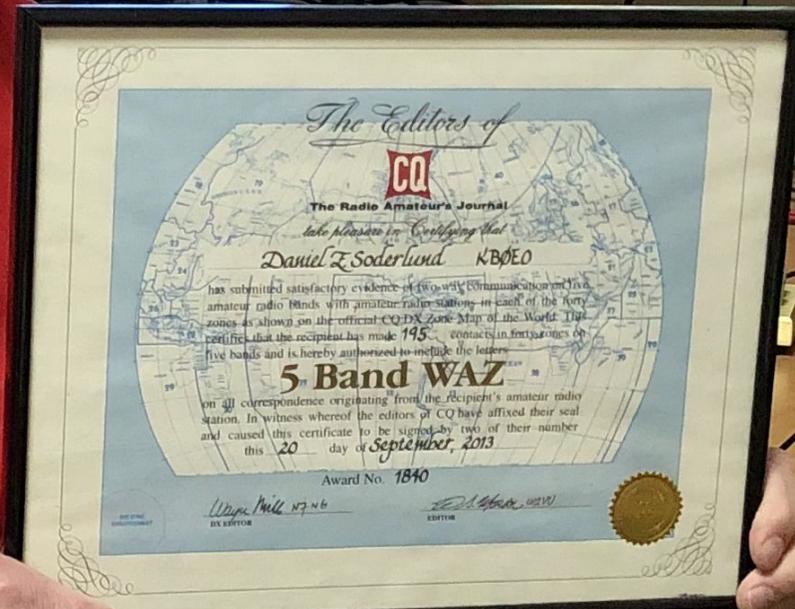


Gray Line Report

June 2020



\$50 QRP Radio
5-Band WAZ
Pandemic Hamming
... and more!

TCDXA
TWIN CITY DX ASSOCIATION



Minnesota

**Newsletter of the
Twin City DX
Association**
www.tcdxa.org



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Dan Soderlund, KBØEO,
displays his 5BWAZ cer-
tificate

Gray Line Staff...

WØJMP
KØJM
WAØMHJ
WØZF

TCDXA DX DONATION POLICY

The mission of TCDXA is to support DXing and major DXpeditions by providing funding. Annual contributions (dues) from members are the major source of funding.

A funding request from the organizers of a planned DXpedition should be directed to the DX Donation Manager, Mike Cizek, WØVTT. He and the TCDXA Board of Directors will judge how well the DXpedition plans meet key considerations (see below).

If the Board of Directors deems the DXpedition to be worthy of support, a recommended funding amount is presented to the membership for their vote. If approved, the TCDXA Treasurer will process the funding..

Key Considerations for a DXpedition Funding Request:

- ◆ DXpedition destination
- ◆ Website with logos of club sponsors
- ◆ Ranking on Most Wanted Survey
- ◆ QSLs with logos of club sponsors
- ◆ Most wanted ranking by TCDXA Members
- ◆ Online logs and pilot stations
- ◆ Logistics and transportation costs
- ◆ Up front cost to each operator
- ◆ Number of operators and their credentials
- ◆ Support by NCDXF & other clubs
- ◆ Number of stations on the air
- ◆ LoTW log submissions
- ◆ Bands, modes and duration of operation
- ◆ Previous operations by same group
- ◆ Equipment: antennas, radios, amps, etc.
- ◆ Valid license and DXCC approval
- ◆ Stateside and/or foreign QSL manager
- ◆ Donation address: USA and/or foreign

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Building a (Surprisingly Good) QRP Radio for Only \$50

By Al Dewey, KØAD

In 1962, I had just received my General ticket and wanted to move up from the WRL Globe Chief that I used as a novice. I decided that the rig I wanted was a HeathKit Apache which was the new generation of the famous Heath DX100. With money I had saved from my paper route plus some that my parents kicked in, I was ready to order one. Living in northwest Indiana at the time, I convinced my Dad to have us drive up to Benton Harbor, Mich. to pick it up the next Saturday. I could hardly wait! As fate would have it, we had a huge snowstorm that weekend and were not able to make the trip. So I put one on order and waited (impatiently) for it to arrive. When it did, it came in several big boxes all weighing a total of 107 pounds. Once I got organized, I took out the famous yellow instruction booklet from Heath and started putting it together mostly after school and on the weekend. When I was done, I fired it up using a



The first major kit I built was a HeathKit Apache Transmitter in 1962

light bulb for a dummy load and it seemed to be working but I had very little output. I had my Dad take a look at it and he found a bad solder joint on one of the 6146 finals. Once that was fixed, it took right off. I used it for many years and made thousands of QSOs with it.

In the mid '60s, I went off to Purdue. After graduating in 1968, I moved to Beloit, Wisc. With a compromised antenna, I decide I



I built a Heathkit SB200 amp in 1968 and used it for many years

wanted a little more bang so I bought the heath SB200 amplifier and put that together. It worked well for many years and even survived a 160 meter modification I put in. That was it for kit building for many years as I moved around and raised a young family.

When Elecraft started releasing some high quality kits in the early 2000s, I thought about getting a K1, K2, or K3 but never did as I was pretty invested in Yaesu and ICOM at the time. Because of interference complaints in the neighborhood when I fired up my Heath SB220 (purchased second hand – not built), I reverted to low power contesting



My first “modern day” kit was the Elecraft KPA500 Amplifier

for about 10 years. Around 2010, I decided I wanted to jump up to 500 watts and placed a KPA500 amp and KAT500 tuner on order from Elecraft. Both came in kit form. These were, of course, a different type of kit than the old Heathkits. Putting these kits together was basically an assembly process using a screwdriver and some small wrenches. There was no soldering. It was still fun but not the same as putting together the old Heathkits. I still had this yearning to put together a “real kit.”

A Surprise Gift

Several years ago, I signed up as an advisor for CW Academy which is a program sponsored by the CW Ops organization for teaching Morse Code on-line. I just completed advising my sixth class. When I asked my students why they want to learn CW, one common answer I get is that they wanted take a small QRP radio to do some portable operation in the summer. I mentioned that I had always wanted to build a QRP radio kit and do the same thing. Several weeks later, when we had our final class and were saying our good byes (in CW!), one of the students sent



A new basic Weller soldering station was used



This lighted magnifier / stand was a lifesaver

a CW message saying that the class had all pitched in and purchased me a QCX QRP radio kit as a thank you for teaching the class. I was blown away as this certainly was not expected. Sure enough, the kit arrived in the mail several weeks later just before the Christmas holidays. I was excited to start on it but set it aside until after the holidays. One of the things I got for Christmas was a gift card to Micro Center. I used it to purchase a couple things I needed to build the kit. The first was a good soldering station. All I had at the time was my trusty Weller soldering gun and a few small cheapie Radio Shack soldering irons. So (using the MicroCenter gift card), I purchased a Weller soldering station as well as some of the smallest soldering tips I could find. I also purchased a lighted magnifier stand which was a lifesaver for these old eyes. The rest of the tools were all common ones I had.

Building the Kit

With everything ready to go, I unpacked the

small box the QCX kit came in and was ready to start. The first thing I did was inventory the parts. I used a couple plastic boxes with small compartments to sort things out. I took my time doing this to make sure every single component was there. I even checked all the resistors with a VOM to make sure they were the right value.

Once everything was inventoried, I called up the Assembly Manual from the QCX site. Since I was putting the kit together at my ham shack desk, I saw no reason to print out the manual. I just called it up on my monitor.



Inventoried the parts

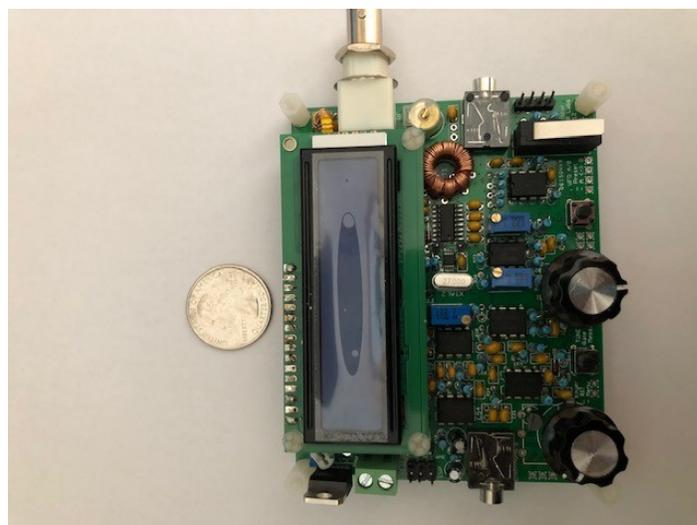
the possibility of inseting parts in the wrong spot. This was certainly a possibility with the extremely small size of the resistors, capacitors, and diodes !

The biggest challenge in building the kit was winding the coils, especially the main transformer. The toroid was only 1/2 inch in diameter but required four separate windings – three with five turns each and one with 38 turns. The windings just barely fit on the to-

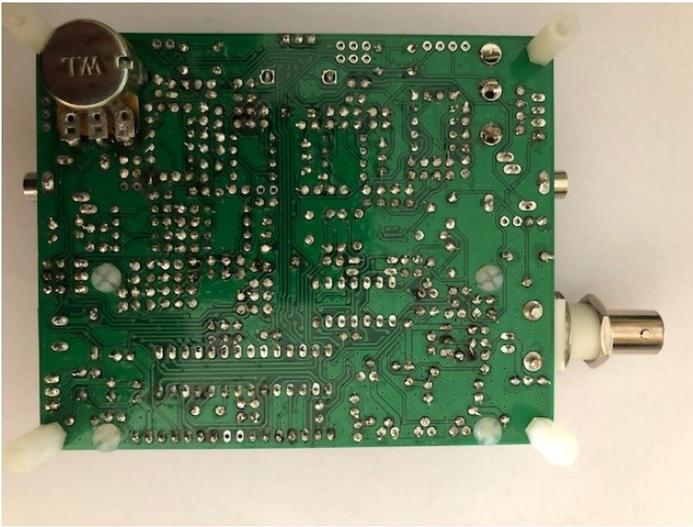


Basic tools used to build the QCX Kit

The QCX Manual is excellent! Each step was clearly described with plenty of pictures. The assembly instructions started with a picture of the circuit board with no parts yet installed. In each step, the parts to be mounted were indicated in red on the picture of the board. In the next step, the parts from the previous step were grayed out and the part for the current step were again indicated in red. This technique made it easy to find where the new parts belonged and minimized



The completed board with display inserted



The completed board – solder side

roid. It was difficult to keep all the turns tight. I finally solved the problem with some quick drying glue. Once the toroid was wound, there were eight leads to thread through the board and solder. The final (and most important step) was to check the continuity of each winding. To QRP Lab’s credit, the instructions for winding this transformer were excellent!

Once all the soldering was complete, I checked every connection again with a magnifying glass. There were only two small problems. I had mangled one of the soldering pads when I tried to remove an incorrectly installed component. Using the circuit diagram, I was able to correct that with a small wire jumper. The other problem was the potentiometer. The leads did not quite reach the circuit board so the instructions said to bridge the gap with a glob of solder. That did not work very well and the operation of the volume control was erratic until I made some better connections.

The final step was alignment. All the alignment procedures are built into the software in the QCX. The alignment procedure simply involved stepping through the procedure in the QCX while tuning various trimmers and potentiometers on the board. Once the alignment was complete, I was ready to try it on the air.

On The Air

Having spent a couple weeks putting the kit together, I was anxious to put it on the air. I decided to try it out before putting it in the case. I reviewed the operating instructions in the manual as well as the operational “cheat sheet” describing all the menu selections. The QCX has a surprisingly rich set of functionality for such a low cost radio. There are only four controls on the radio (Volume, Tune, Select, and Exit). The tune button doubles as Function Select dial. A pleasant surprise to me was that the QCX included a full function memory keyer as well as a very good performing CW Decoder.



Alignment software is built into the board



Initial QSOs were made before installing the board in the case

Having made four simple connections to the board (Power, Phones, Antenna, and Key Paddle), I tuned around the band for the first time. I heard a KN4 in Alabama calling CQ around 7.043 Mhz and gave him a call. He came right back and I commenced my first QRP QSO with my new radio. I was given a RST of 579. After signing with him, I called and worked a KD8 and received an RST of 599. I was convinced the radio was working so I went ahead and installed it in its case. The case, made specifically for the QCX, is available from BaMa Tech in Germany for about \$25. It was well worth it although it brought the true cost of the neat little QRP radio up to \$75.00 or so. Since that first QSO with the KD4, I have made and logged a number of QRP QSOs on 40. I typically take it out of the drawer about once a week to make a few QSOs.

Final Thoughts

The QCX is not a high performing ICOM, Yaesu, or Flex radio but it has an amazing amount of functionality and performs extremely well for such an inexpensive radio. QST reviewed the QCX in its August, 2019 issue. The Bottom Line from the QST Review was *“The QRP Labs QCX kit packs a surprisingly complete set of features into a small and inexpensive package. Assembly requires some time and patience, but the builder is rewarded with a 5 W CW Transceiver that is a joy to use on the air.”*

What’s Next ?

Now that I’ve convinced myself that I can build a small kit like this, I’ve been thinking about what I might want to take on next. Some possibilities are a 20 Meter QCX to go with my 40 meter box. Another possibility is the 50 Watt amp for my QCX that is available in kit form from QRP Labs for about \$85 (with case). Finally, QRP Labs is developing a 10 Watt all band all mode transceiver kit which sounds exciting. Estimated price is about \$150. This product is still under development by QRP Labs but sounds like it will be very popular once it is released.

To be clear, none of these kits are going to replace my commercial HF equipment at my home station. In between contest weekends, however, I do find myself gravitating to the little QCX radio to make a few CW QSO and even rag chew a bit. There’s something kind of pure about reminding me of my early days in the hobby.



The final QCX radio ready to use

Join TCDXA

Our mission is to raise *Dollars for DX*, used to help fund qualified DXpeditions.

Our funds come from annual member contributions (dues) and other donations.

TCDXA is a non-profit organization, as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. All contributions from U.S. residents are tax-deductible.

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All contributions (including annual dues) may now be paid on our secure site, using PayPal or credit card.



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Mark Endorf, WAØMHJ, displays his 5BWAZ Plaque
ON THE COVER: Dan Soderlund, KBØEO displays his certificate

5BWAZ – TWO JOURNEYS – ONE DESTINATION

Mark - WAØMHJ

5BWAZ is one of the most difficult awards to achieve. In 1979 ON4UN was awarded 5BWAZ #1. As of March of this year, there have been a total of 1047 awards issued for all 200 required zones. As difficult as it is to achieve 5BWAZ, TCDXA had two club members

*** Note that while Dan and Mark were working their last needed zone in January, Mike – WØVTT was being awarded, (also in January) for confirmation of his last needed zone, working HSØZLD on 80M in November 2019.*

achieve this in the month of January, thanks to an intense effort by K1ZM and K1LZ to activate the station of JT1CO using the call sign “JT5DX”, focusing quite a bit on both 80M and top band. Both Dan- KBØEO, and Mark -WAØMHJ were sitting at 199 confirmed; only needing zone 23 on 80 meters. Dan and Mark describe how they got to this achievement below.

Dan - KBØEO

When I upgraded my station and antenna system in 2010, I relied heavily on the advice of Larry WØPR. He helped me figure out what beams to put on the tower, including finding a used Hygain TH11DX, which became an integral part of the station. One of the things Larry mentioned to me was the difficulty in attaining the CQ 5BWAZ award from Minnesota. He knew a lot of hams that had been working on it for years without reaching the top. Never shying from a big challenge, I decided at that time to go for it. When my tower and station became operational in October 2010, I began the quest.

Fortunately, the high bands were rocking at that time, so I picked up all the difficult zones on 10 meters pretty quickly. The other bands also fell quickly and I submitted my application for the 5BWAZ with 195 zones confirmed in 2013. The last 5 zones were all 80 meters, which at that time of the sunspot cycle was not favorable to the difficult zones. However, with a little patience, they started

falling one by one in the coming years: zone 21, 22, 24, and 26...but no zone 23. I continued to see JT5DX spotted on the cluster, but could never hear him. Finally, as 2020 began, I started seeing them spotted more regularly at our sunrise – but only on 160 meters. Oddly enough, I got JT1CO on 160 meters on Jan 2, 2020...but still no 80 meter QSO. I listened every morning he was spotted on 80 meters, often hearing him, but with no luck. Mark WAØMHJ, and I both needed this zone, so we were sending messages back and forth about the propagation. Finally, on Jan 20, 2020, I bagged my last zone – zone 23! I sent my QSL card off immediately and got the return card within a month. When I posted on the DX cluster “JT5DX – thanks for zone 200”, you can’t believe the number of emails I received from around the country congratulating me on this difficult feat. I want to thank Larry WØPR for giving me the inspiration to go after this award – it was a great challenge!

Mark - WAØMHJ

I was really starting to resign myself to the fact that 5BWAZ would not be happening for me in my lifetime. But as I write this, my plaque from CQ magazine has been delivered, thanks to a QSO and confirmation from JT5DX on January 27, 2020! That makes this quest exactly 51 years, 4 months, and 24 days long since my first zone was confirmed. My last four zones needed were all on 80M,

and all of them, most likely would require a very early morning rise (Not something I really enjoy doing). Interestingly, in the order that I finished them up (Zones: 29, 26, 24, and 23); they were all worked in the month of January, and all worked in the wee morning hours except for one long path QSO with zone 26 around our sunset. Zone numbers: 197, 198, and 199 were worked in January of 2015, 2016, and 2017 respectively. So began the long wait and hope for that one last one. By the time I had 199 confirmed, I decided to apply for the award, especially since LOTW was now integrated with the CQ-WAZ award program. On close inspection, I realized I had 198 of the 199 already confirmed in LOTW, so I decided to mail in my one lone QSL card from Tony-KMØØ ,for my 9M6LSC contact, and get in the CQWAZ system at 199 confirmed in early 2018. When my JT5DX card finally arrived in the mail, I decided to open a bottle of 20 year Scotch Whiskey, (which has been sitting unopened in my cupboard for almost five years), and have a celebratory drink.

I now have set a new goal, which is 9BWAZ . I need about 15 more zones for that, the majority being 160M. I have no expectations of that ever happening, but will still give it my best effort.

CALL	Award #	Issue Date
WØVTT	1032	9-Jan-2020
KBØEO	1043	29-Feb-2020
WAØMHJ	1046	3-Mar-2020

New Editor for The Gray Line Report

By Dan Dantzler, WØJMP

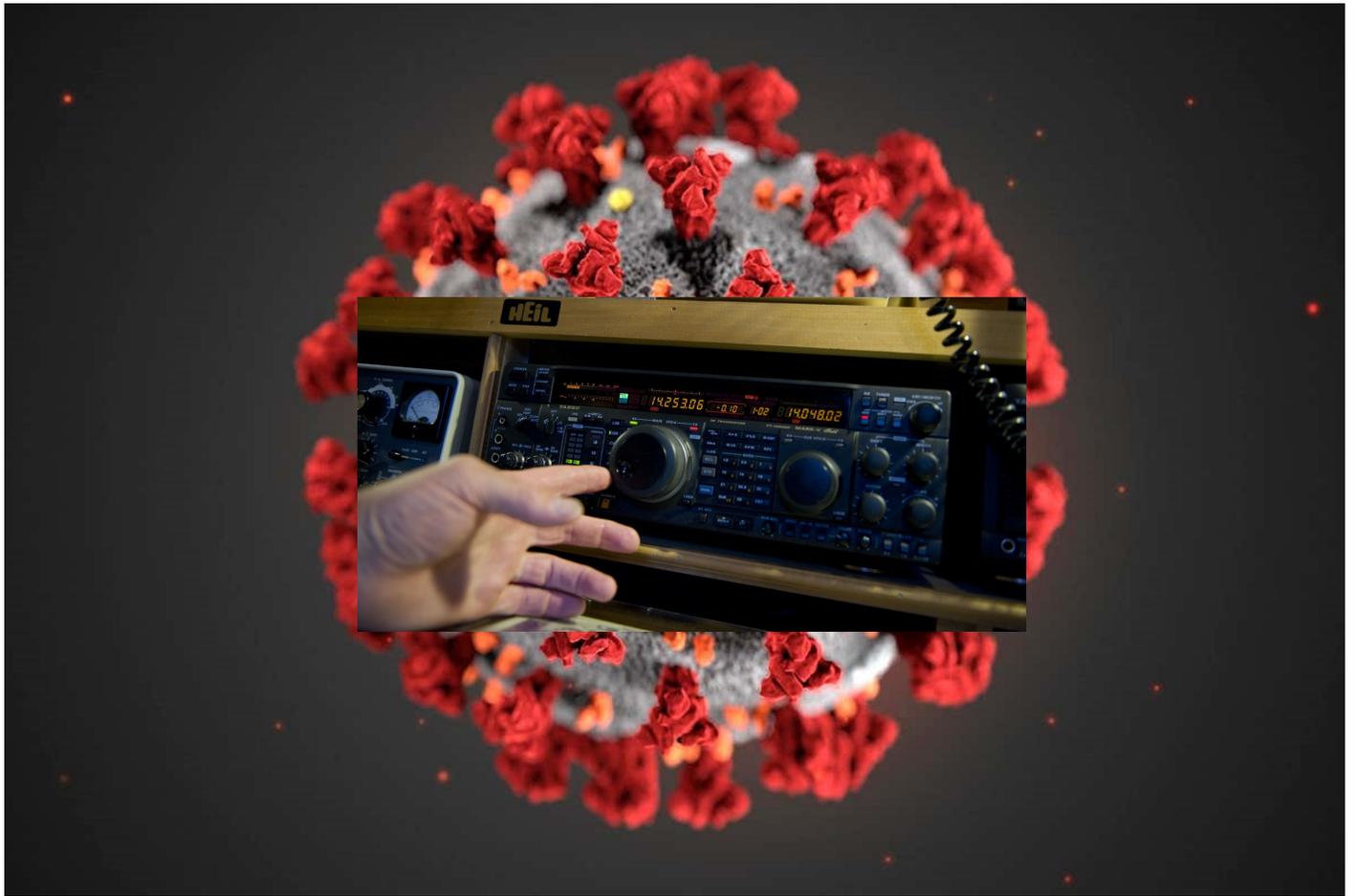
Hello TCDXA members. This issue marks the first one with WØJMP as the editor. I am certainly not the best qualified person for this role. Yes, I enjoy DXing but my 290 or so entity count does not make me a “real” DXer. The editor should be a real DXer. I am not well connected in the DXer community. The editor should be. I am not a great writer. I am not an expert on grammar and spelling or word usage like a good editor should be. I just do not want to see The Gray Line die. So, I am what you got.

I think the Gray Line Report stands well against any other ham newsletter in the country. Why is that? Partly because of the hard-working staff that volunteer many, many hours to put it together. Yes, that is important. But the real value of the Gray Line lies in its content. Where does the content originate? It originates with you, the members of this great club.

So if you, like me, want to see this newsletter continue, please continue to tell us about your adventures, big and small. Do you have an idea for a newsletter article? Please let us know.



Preparing to make contact with another ham operator via Lincoln High's new radio station are Danny Dantzler (standing) and Ron Van Boskirk.



Hamming During the Pandemic

By Dave Fugleberg, WØZF

We asked our club members whether the Covid-19 pandemic and related shelter-in-place orders had any effect on their ham radio activities. Many of you responded with your stories.

Several of our retired members report that the ‘stay at home’ orders had little effect on their on-air time. However, the shutdown has affected their operating in different ways. **NIØK** said “I miss the chase of trying to work the expeditions!”

KØAD said “The big thing I have noticed during the lockdown is the increased weekday activity on the bands. I am an active participant in the weekly CWTs that run on Wednesdays at 8 a.m., 2 p.m., and 10 p.m. Before the pandemic, activity in the first two sessions was OK but not great. On a good day, I was able to make 120 to 125 QSOs over three bands in the hour in the low power category. Once people were quarantined, the activity went up substantially. I am now able to make 140 to 150 Qs often all on the same band! Once people return to work, I expect activity (and scores) will go down a bit.”

WØVTT had a similar observation, saying “There seem to be more stations on the air most days, so that is a nice change. Let's hope at least some of these guys realize how much fun it is to be on the radio, and that they keep their activity up after going back to work.

“Conditions on 6 meters have been pretty good lately with some new ones down in South and Central America. One of the locals worked a VR2 on 6m the other night, but I missed out.”



Old Nye Viking Speed-X on a 1/4 inch aluminum base

Some of the increased activity was from **WØJMP**, who writes “I have been on CW for over 55 years. I passed all my exams including Extra with Morse code. There were periods of time when CW was my primary operating mode.

But, in the last 20 years or so, I have not used it regularly. I still worked DX with it but that was just pressing buttons on my keyer. I only had to copy my call and 5NN. A few months ago, my friend Carol, K4SAF encouraged me to get back on CW regularly.

But I was so rusty that I was afraid to try. Carol continued to encourage me (or gently fussed at me) and I got on the air. She also told me about the Straight Key Century Club (SKCC). I had an SKCC number, not sure how long I have had it. So, with trepidation and a shaky fist, I got on the air. Carol and I had a 33-minute QSO on December 23rd, 2019. That was my first real CW QSO in many years. I was terrible! In those 33 minutes, we may have passed as much information as most of you do in five minutes, but I had the first QSO in my SKCC log. I made a few more contacts before January 1st but then was gone until March 15th. When I returned home, I started to work toward the Centurion award. 100 SKCC contacts seemed daunting but, with the lockdown I had the time. I kept plugging away at it until I got this email on May 13th from SKCC:

"Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Gather 'round and pay heed to the news of this day!

Let there be revelry & celebration for yet another SKCC member has advanced to the Centurion Cx1 level of SKCC achievement!!!

Danny Dantzler, WØJMP, SKCC# 10581, has achieved the coveted 1st generation SKCC member achievement known far and wide as the Centurion Cx1 award”

With the centurion award, your SKCC number is appended with a “C.” This may be the first time I have ever been proud of getting a “C.”



KØRC noted that the shutdown prompted the termination of the mobile category in many state QSO parties, taking away some of the fun. He reports “The folks in Florida devised an ingenious alternative to circumvent the mobile shut down. A group of them created an operating schedule where base stations would ‘lend’ their call sign to stations in different counties. For example, K4AA might appear in a dozen different counties during the contest. These stations became ‘Virtual Mobiles’ and it brought back some of the excitement (and big pileups) of previous years. This idea is certainly worth looking into for future QSO Parties in other states.”

KØJUH said “My Ham Radio activity is at an all-time low. After chasing DX on CW for 60 years and filling up a wall with DX awards, the once roaring fire in the belly for operating is down to a few glowing embers. My activity is limited to checking into the Old Farts Net on 3680 kHz at 8 a.m., and on rare occasion, working a few stations on CW and FT8. I'm also on PEANUT and the English chat room, one of the many DMR hangouts. Digital Mobile Radio is VoIP on steroids.”

WØDC took a different approach to the pandemic. He says, “When working on my ‘to do’ list for the pandemic back in mid-February, in addition to buying lots of canned soup, canned tuna and Snickers bars, I wanted to get going on reading some books I've collected over the years. I'm not doing very well on the book reading, but I did finish *Two Eggs on My Plate* by Oluf Reed Olson. Olson was a resistance fighter in Norway during WWII and the book describes many exciting missions and close calls during his service. It includes descriptions of the radio equipment he used to communicate with the British and how he managed to evade the German RDF crews even when operating as close as a couple miles from a major airfield. If anyone is interested in reading ‘Two Eggs’, I have an extra paperback copy I can lend with the understanding the recipient will pass it along after he or she reads it. Otherwise, 6 meters has been opening up nicely the past two weeks and I've been having fun on FT8 using just my HF log periodic antenna and 25 watts power. To get into EU, I think I'll need to put up something better, though!”

N2RSC reports “I have been licensed since 1989, but not really active until earlier this year. I have been operating casually during the pandemic, but a lot more often than ever before. In the last three months, I have picked up 48 states toward WAS, and 35 countries toward DXCC. I am studying for my Extra. It's a lot of fun hearing others who are cooped up and connecting via wireless.”

KØQC wrote “Got my station back together after taking it with me to the winter QTH in Arizona. Since we got home in mid-April, I have been operating some, mostly FT4 and FT8, but like most summers, golf and other outside activities are where I spend most of my time. Nothing really much different than in years past. If there is a DXpedition going, that will pique my interest and BIC time.”

While the pandemic shutdown didn't keep **KØVG** from going to work, the riots finally did by forcing his employer to shut down. He said “What I noticed was more activity during the VHF/UHF sprints.”

Several of you mentioned shack upgrades during this time. **KØAD** said “The only real project I've done around the shack is to improve some automation. During K1DG's Contest University presentation, he said contesters should be able to make a band change in four seconds or less. This includes switching the radio, the amplifier, antenna, external antenna tuner, and logging software. With that incentive, and some technical support from KØPC and KØMPH, I fabricated some cables which allow me to switch my Elecraft KPA500 and KAT Antenna Tuner automatically when I switch bands on my Flex. Now a single selection in N1MM Logger switches everything!”



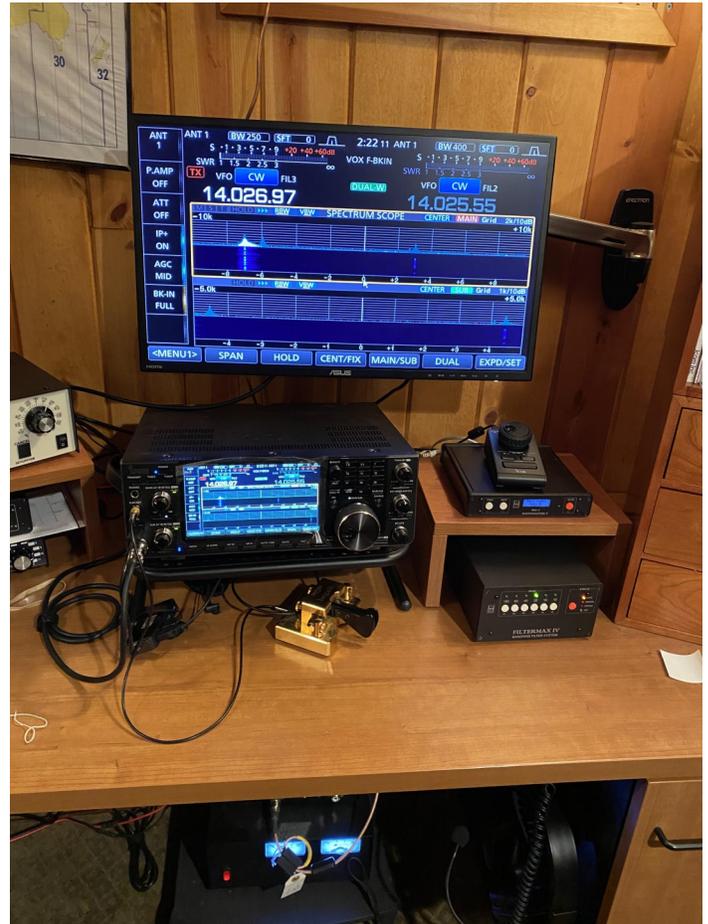
KØMD station with added iPLUS

KØMD writes, “I have been working on automation over the past few months at my station. The photos show:

Photo 1 - iPLUS added in line to make so2r contesting and so3r DXing easier with SSB as my MK2R+ would not key my old IC-7800 with audio. I also put the MK2R+ and the iPLUS within easy hand reach of the keyboard while contesting.

Photo 2 shows that I added a low power BandPass Filter and Bandpasser V to the Icom IC-7610 to allow automatic selection of frequency for the BPF when operating. I still manually change the antenna using a homebrew switchbox and an 8-pak from Array Solutions.

The homebrew switchbox (Photo 1) allows me to use one of 3 rigs as a second rig for the station, when I host M-1 or M-2 events. N1MM+ is my only logging program for the entire station. “



KØMD IC-7610 with Bandpass Filters

WAØMHJ went for a more complete shack makeover – “In the ham shack are two large desks. One is the primary station, and the other serves as a second operating position and office. I obtained a larger and nicer desk, so my ham desk of 30 years is now a very nice large box of kindling for my up-north campfires. I decided with all of the layout changes, I needed to pay closer attention to ergonomics, especially the monitor height and distance. I would notice in DX contests that eye and neck strain was occurring after

more than six hours in the chair. I purchased a larger monitor, and a universal VESA mount and made a custom mount, positioning it so that it provided comfortable and clear viewing. A fresh coat of paint, new windows, and clean-up of cable routing and switching, and I feel like I have a whole new shack!”

AEØEE also reported a shack upgrade, of sorts - As an apartment dweller, I typically have not had a radio set up at home. However, since “stay-at-home” has meant I am less able to travel to operate and removes any illusion that company might be coming, I have been able to set up a modest station on the dining room table. I have one radio and a j-pole antenna usually monitoring a local 2 m repeater, and an HF station attached to a 10 m dipole hung in the living room. The noise is atrocious (S9+ on 10 m), but I still managed to work J68HZ in St Lucia using 5 W for #100 on 10 m at the bottom of the solar cycle!

KØBBC made a different kind of shack upgrade – he said, “KØVAL and I purchased a cabin in Eastern South Dakota to get away from our apartment in downtown Minneapolis.

“An off-center fed dipole, in the trees, and Buddipole on the deck will be used for HF operations as we settle in.

We're still inside the contest circles and look forward to handing out the ‘SD’ multiplier during ARRL sweepstakes.”



Pre-pandemic hamfesting

Of course, the disruption to the ham social calendar has been felt by all of us, with events from club meetings to hamfests shut down or moved to the internet. As KØAD said “The Zoom club meetings are nice but I still look forward to that pre-meeting beer and in person conversation at Pub 42. I had to cancel my trip to Dayton this year but did attend Contest University on-line. I commend K3LR and the CTU team for an excellent job of putting Contest University on-line. With over 2000 attendees, it came off without a hitch. I almost preferred the on-line version to spending another day in Dayton.”

For me, this is the first time in 20 years that I was unable to make the pilgrimage to Dayton. I always look forward to those few days in May, so it was tough to see them come and go without the normal annual shenanigans. I did partake in the Hamvention QSO Party, but it’s not the same at all, and I sincerely hope for a return to normal soon.

Thank you to all who contributed your thoughts for this article!

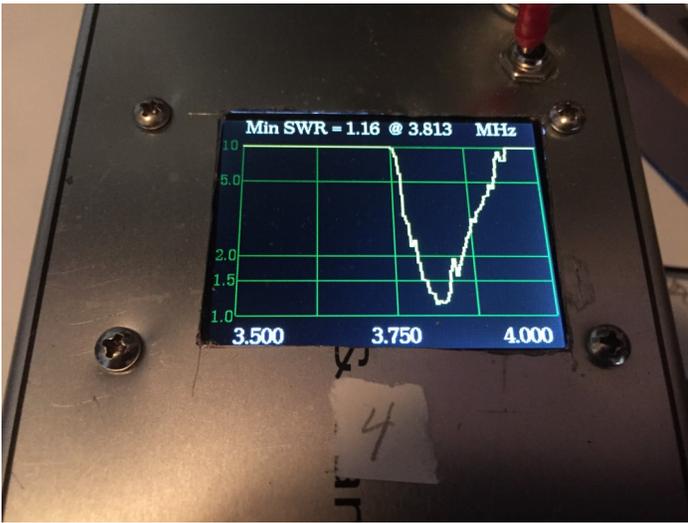


Extended Coverage for the Butternut HF2V Or, How to Squeeze More DX Out of an Old Antenna

By Dave Fugleberg, WØZF

The Butternut HF2V is a loaded vertical antenna for 40 and 80 meters. Although it covers most of the 40m band nicely, it is very narrow on 80M, with a useful bandwidth of about 75kHz. The desired portion of the band is selected at install time by adjusting the position of the lower mounting bracket for the 80M coil. I originally tuned mine to cover the General class CW portion of the band (3.525 to 3.6 MHz). This was great for CW, but useless for SSB DXing or contesting.

Like any loaded vertical, it's possible to change the sweet spot by tapping the coil at various positions. I attached a short piece of wire at the base of the coil with an alligator clip on the other end to manually tap the coil at any point. (Fig. 1, above) I spent an entire sunny fall afternoon documenting the SWR curve of the antenna with taps at various points, and with different



2 – Recording observations

initial tunings of the mounting bracket. My home brew antenna analyzer does not include a PC interface, so I took a picture of the screen for each setting, including a note to match the picture to my table of observations (Fig. 2). Armed with this knowledge, I could operate anywhere on the band by moving the wander lead, but it was not very convenient for a quick QSY!



3 – RCS-8V

While searching for information on this antenna, I found an article by Phil Salas - AD5X, where he described how he remotely tapped the coil with a pair of relays. This allowed him to select a small portion of 75m or even the 60m band in addition to the low end of 80m. I considered simply duplicating his work, when I realized that I already had an even better solution right under my nose.



4 – Tap detail

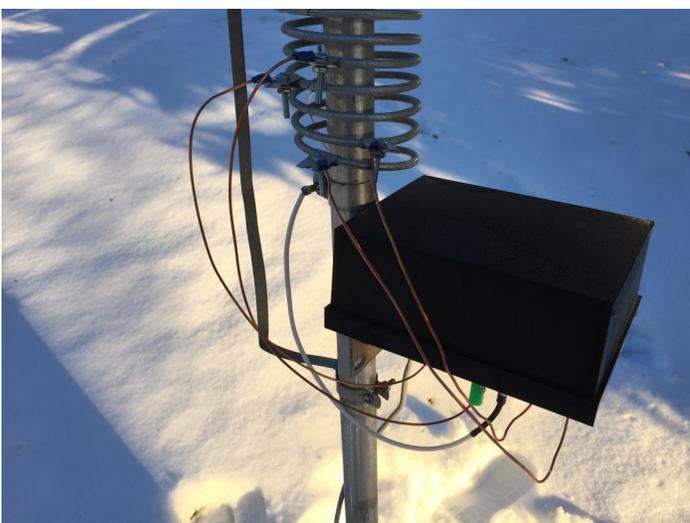
Repurposing an old friend

Many years ago, I purchased an Ameritron RCS-8V remote antenna switch (Fig. 3), which was mounted outside and allowed me to select one of five antennas, with only one coax and control line from the shack to the switch. After a redesign of the shack a few years later, the switch was no longer in use. I put the control box in storage and forgot about it. After reading the AD5X article, it dawned on me that the RCS-8V is nothing more than a bunch of remotely switched relays, already mounted in a weathertight box.

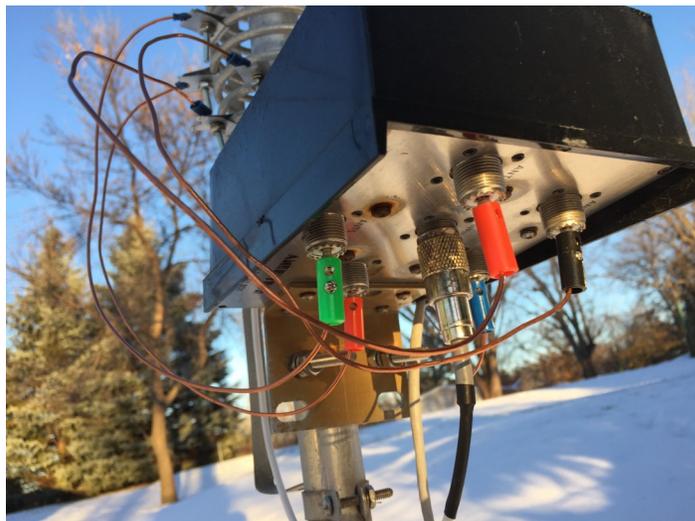
The RCS-8V switches any one of its five Antenna ports to a Common port. Only the center conductor is switched; the outer conductors are all bonded together. I reasoned that the switch could be repurposed to select one of five taps on the coil in place of the wander lead, and would allow me to select the desired portion of the band right from the shack.

The unused switch was still mounted outside, so I brought it in the shack and found the control box. A quick test revealed that everything was in working order.

I mounted the switch enclosure to the vertical itself, just below the 80M coil. The common port connects to the base of the coil with a short piece of coax (the outer conductor is removed). Each tap is fashioned from a short piece of metal pipe hanger strap and a machine screw (Fig. 4). A short length of bare copper 14 ga house wire with a crimped lug on one end and a banana plug on the other



5 – Adding taps



6 – Making connections

er was prepared for each tap. The five taps were simply attached to the coil at suitable points based on my earlier observations, and plugged into the ports of the switch (Fig. 5 and 6). As you can see, I waited for suitable Minnesota antenna weather to perform this installation.

I installed the control box in the shack and connected it to the switch with a six-conductor cable as usual – no modifications of any kind were needed for the switch or its controller.

Operating Notes

I've been using this switch exactly as described for more than a year, with good results. I can operate nearly anywhere from 3.5 to 4 MHz with reasonable SWR, although a few points on the band are a bit higher than I'd like. A few more taps would have been handy, but I've found it to be workable as is. Although the frequency coverage is docu-

mented for each switch position, it's not really necessary to refer to it in practice - just turn the selector switch for maximum noise wherever you've tuned the VFO, and it's close enough.

Over all, this simple modification has made the HF2V much more versatile on 75/80M. My cost was nearly zero, since I already had the switch, but it should be pretty simple to replicate with a handful of 12 volt relays, a weatherproof enclosure, and a rotary switch. If you have one of these antennas, I think you'll find this to be a very worthwhile investment.

THE TCDXA NEWS-LETTER EARLY YEARS

By Jim Junkert, KØJUH

How well I remember the first issue of the Gray Line Report back in 2004, and the original editorial staff – KØIEA, KØJUH, and WØBV. Dave was the chief proof reader, I beat the bushes for news, and Bob made it all happen. We'd send him draft copies of the text and images, and he'd perform his layout magic with MS Publisher.

Our goal was to publish new and original material and avoid running stories that had appeared before somewhere else. Thanks to our contributing members, we achieved our goal. The newsletter content was 99% fresh and homegrown.

Over the years the newsletter developed a worldwide readership which was confirmed

by Google Analytics. When we announced a new issue was ready for download, there would always be a huge increase in traffic on the newsletter web page. Google categorized the activity by ISP and Country, so there was no guessing. We knew exactly what country the reader was located in. We were indeed being read in locations outside the U.S.!

By 2016, age and health issues were catching up with "The Old Duck Hunter." It was time to turn the editorial duties over to some one who had made far fewer trips around the sun.

My very special thanks go out to KØAD, KØJM, KØRC, K3WT, K9WAG, WØJMP, WØZF, WAØMHJ, and others, who carried on and played a role in publishing a product many have said is par excellence.

TCDXA
TWIN CITY DX ASSOCIATION

DXing from Minnesota
Land of 10,000 Lakes

Newsletter of the
Twin City DX Association

Volume 1, Issue 1
March, 2004

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TCDXA Officers
President
Bill Dean, WØOR
Secretary
Dennis Johnson, KFØOR
Treasurer
Jim Junkert, KØJUH
Gray Line Staff
KØIEA, KØJUH, & WØBV

The GRAY LINE REPORT

DXing from Minnesota - Land of 10,000 Lakes

From the President's Desk
Bill Dean, WØOR

I believe a major turning point for TCDXA came last Spring, when members voted to invest significant dollars from the club treasury to sponsor the second annual WODXCC Convention. It attracted about 125 DXers from around the Upper Midwest. Attendees enjoyed what turned out to be a terrific program. Thanks primarily to Lou Sica, ACOX, and a handful of others, this event seemed to symbolize the start of a new era for our club.

So what's happened since? I have sensed a new spirit and dynamism among TCDXA members that hasn't existed for a long time. It has manifested itself with:

- A membership drive that has swelled our once dwindling ranks by more than twenty new DXers, including both veterans and newcomers.
- A colorful and attractive newsletter, being unveiled here, that promises to become a regular online feature of TCDXA, and that will enhance our club's image and reputation.
- The acceptance by members of a new policy: supporting selected DXpeditions with our dollars, as a prime responsibility of the club.

As always in any organization, the few lead the many. Kudos go especially to Jim Junkert, KØJUH, who has been the force behind much of this new activity. Thanks, also, to Dave Wester, Tom Lutz and Bob Garwood for the many hours they have put towards club restructuring.

Let me close by extending a hearty welcome to the new members who are listed, below. I hope you, too, will catch the new spirit of TCDXA. We will need your input, your energy and your ideas, as we continue to transform and energize our club!

Welcome to the Newest Members of TCDXA

Ralph Fedor, KOIR	Ray Voss, KGODK	Tim Blank, NOTB
John Spencer, KOIUC	Harold Strangeland, NOACH	Ron Stordahl, NSIN
Keith Gilbertson, KOKG	Brian McInerney, NOBM	Don Currier, WODJC
Don Taylor, KOQC	Rich Westerberg, NOLJZ	Glenn Johnson, WØGJ
Chuck Munn, KØSQ	John Baumgarten, NOLI	Curt Risvold, WØHY
John Desmond, KOTG	Mike Paskenic, NOODK	John Vostland, WØSEI
Jeff Strandberg, KOUU	Vlad Michtchenko, NOSTL	Bob Milbert, WØZT
	Ted Kirst, WIGL	



St Kitts Mini-DXpedition

By Paul Gacek, W6PNG

“I’m sorry sir but I can’t find Saint Kitts.”

Momentarily doubting my geographic prowess, I blurt out Charade style that it’s an island in the Caribbean.

“Ummm, sir, I have a Saint Christopher & Nevis.”

“Yes, that’s it,” I respond and moments later I’m handing over a serious wad of cash in exchange for a promise that my application will be delivered days later in both St Kitts and Saint Christopher & Nevis. Bingo, I’m off to the races or so it seems.

Days turn into weeks.

The application decided to spend Thanksgiving at LAX and for reasons unknown it then sat in Ft Lauderdale before an even longer sojourn in Miami. Finally, things are looking up as the web suggests it’s now crossed the Caribbean and arrived in St Kitts.



Hooray but maybe not as it appears that after an unsuccessful delivery attempt it's once again just sitting in a post office!

Whatever is going on here?

Help!!

My heroine steps forward and takes it upon herself to leave her desk at the St Kitts National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission and head to the main post office during the Christmas peak. Think busy, long lines and crowds but it's retrieved and now safely where it was intended to be weeks earlier.

Thank you Joya for your initiative and kindness.

Days later I receive my contest call sign V47P that we will use in early March. This style of call sign makes life much easier in a contest versus the mouthful I might have had to use, V4/W6PNG.

I've hit pay dirt in my choice of seats as I stare through puffy clouds making out islands large and small. Maybe that is Turks

OF CANNONS, BEER AND PARADISE

March, 2020 Contest, Suitcase DXpedition

Location: *Calypso Bay, St Kitts*

Contest: *ARRL DX Phone SSB Contest, 48 hours over March 7 and 8, 2020*

Contest Software Used: *N1MM*

Radio: *2 x Elecraft KX3, PX3 Panadapter and KXPA100 amp operating at 100 watts SSB*

Antenna: *80/40 vertical, 2 element 20/15/10 tri-bander*

Bands used: *80m 40m, 20m, 15m*

Solo operation: *No with Matt KØBBC*

Recommend: *Yes*

Photos: *Copyright Paul Gacek 2020*



Island sightseeing during 1,200 mile flight from Miami to St. Kitts: Saba, our Dutch neighbor

and Caicos, maybe that is the US Virgin Islands and I spend my time seeing what a non-cached Google map can tell me it is I am looking at beyond a string of beautiful pearls.

The Caribbean is truly a paradise and my mind wanders between pieces of eight, the thought of rum cocktails and operating radios.



Moments from touch down at St. Kitts

Our QTH

There is an art to finding a great contest location and one of the big appeals of John's place is the fact it has antennas. With the goal of trying out my SO2R setup, not having to bring antennas from the US is a big plus.

John's house is beautiful and well located to see the sea and dream the dream.

One is none, two is one

I fell into the idea of building a two radio system that is easy to take to islands like St Kitts after realizing the consequences of taking a single radio that is DOA. Game over before it even started.

Two radios, even for the uninitiated, have a huge benefit around "band awareness."



The house with verticals prominently displayed



V47P on the map!

When busily working or trying to work a single band, you often find yourself wondering, especially during slow periods, if the action is on a different band. Having a second radio allows you to monitor other bands while still concentrating on your perceived best band.

Being a SOTA guy, life started with the KX3 and it is a capable radio. The selling point for the “one is none, two is one” project is the modular aspect of the KX3 in that a spectrum display, the PX3 and a 100w amp, the KXPA100 are available and make the idea of compact transportation more viable.

To round it out I constructed a stand using off the shelf parts with an emphasis on transportability but also to support my perspective that I like everything directly in front of me to minimize arm, hand and neck/eye movements that over 24 or 48 hours can add up to misery.

That’s the theory. The practice is that two radios drag along a huge amount of RF filtering adding a lot to the volume and weight of your suitcase.

The KX3 isn’t really a contest radio and it

struggles to reject close in super strong signals that are the essence of a circa 2020 contest on 20m Which is a complete food fight for spectrum.

The doubling up of functions on a single button isn’t very ergonomic for quick and momentary corrections to nab a signal during the food fight but worst is the Elecraft chosen components tend to wear out and in truth 10-20% of my significant knobs struggle to do what they are supposed to do either easily or at all.

Matt (KØBBC) is a trooper but I know he is less than thrilled with the KX3 as a contest radio and would rather see my K3s (or one



KX3 and PX3 fit snugly into a camera lens insert from Timbuk2



The stand breaks down easily and lays flat in a checked bag

day K4) arrive instead of the KX3 assemblage.

Post-Contest Brimstone

The name alone suggests a visit and conjures up images of Macbeth or even a more benign Harry Potter. Billed as the most complete colonial fort in North America and being listed as a UNESCO Heritage site all suggests a great day out.

I love history and marvel at what our forefa-



2 x KX3, 2 x PX3, one laptop, passport and money!

thers accomplished realizing that sometimes the history is bleak and dark. Slavery is nothing but abhorrent. Brimstone is in fantastic condition and the recent restoration a labor of love. The views are spectacular in all directions, the engineering (or in-fact reengineering) to collect the maximum amount of rain water etc to not re-endure a failed siege was fascinating and the museum on St Kitts human evolution enlightening, yet sad.

As a complete package and experience it was fabulous and I would return simply to see what I missed and enjoy the initial delight again.



Operating position

Was the trip fun?

Absolutely!

St Kitts is a beautiful island and the people utterly charming.

John's house is a wonderful base at the south end of the island and within easy striking distance of many eateries and views.

We struggled in the ARRL DX SSB contest. It's hard being a 100w SSB station.

If you aren't "spotted" it can be a long drawn

out journey to dawn, to dusk and dawn again. The bottom of the 11 year sun cycle doesn't help as we are all struggling and



I relaxed by our pool and stared at Nevis



The community pool was a really welcome place

maybe the Juma 1000 would have been a better amp than the KXPA100. We were simply a whisper in the ether and hence really never spotted which is the kiss of death.

However, it was fun, having V47P a real treat and I verified my SO2R station gave me band awareness back and forth between 80m and 40m during a long lull. Onwards to the next contest and brighter days!

How I feel is summed up in one statement.....*I'd return in a heartbeat!!*



At left, V47P...Paul (W6PNG) and Matt (KØBBC)

See page 32 for more photos from St. Kitts!

Note from the TCDXA President

By Bill Mitchell, AEØEE

The past three months have been filled with rapid changes. Since COVID-19 arrived in March, we have been very strongly encouraged to stay home (you are continuing to do that, right?) and that has meant more activity on the bands. I have finally set up a station at home (indoor dipole for 10 m, dual-band J-pole for 2 m and 70 cm) and have been active on my local club's repeater and on 10 m FT8 (QRP and fighting S9 noise). More recently, my neighboring community here in South Minneapolis has been rocked by protests, riot police, and arsonists following the murder of George Floyd.

As I reflect on the last few weeks and months, it is clear that the world we live in is not the world that we should aspire to have. Waiting for the world to improve is not enough—we must work now to create that better world. It is imperative that we examine our own shortcomings, work to strengthen our community by ensuring that all are truly welcomed, and celebrate diversity.

Even within the realm of amateur radio, the number of different specialties and interests is staggering: HF DXing, VHF+ DXing, designing and building radios and accessories (electrical engineering), designing and installing antennas and towers (mechanical engineering), public service, contesting, and transmitter hunting, to name a few. No one ham is an expert in all of these areas, yet our community is stronger because of how we work together and learn from each other.

I urge you to look around and see who is active in the amateur radio community and who is missing. What barriers are there to new people joining? Is it lack of exposure, lack of interest, lack of equipment/funding, an unwelcoming or hostile environment, or some combination? What can we do to remedy this situation, support a new generation of hams, and strengthen our community?

Amateur radio has a lot to offer: connectedness without a monthly subscription, lifelong learning, world-wide community, and just plain old fun. When I was in California, a Black woman in my local radio association commented about a great feature of amateur radio. “People sometimes suggest I should join or organize a net for Black people in ham radio,” she said. “One of the things I like most about ham radio is that it is a place where the color of my skin doesn't matter. I don't want to be part of a net for Black hams when I could just be part of a regular ham net.”

Let us each do what we can to strengthen our community, bring people together, and build a better future. As you are doing that, please stay home, wash your hands, stay healthy, and help expedite our return to normal in-person gatherings after COVID-19 has passed.

73 and good DX!



The MWA Contest Corner

Thinking about Field Day

By Al Dewey, KØAD



I have always had a soft spot in my heart for ARRL Field Day. I remember my first Field Day at the age of 16 under the bleachers at Whiting (Indiana) High School on the shores of Lake Michigan. I was wide eyed as I watch the veterans from the Calumet Amateur Radio Club bring in radios like Hallicrafters HT-37s, SX101 Receivers, Viking Valiants, etc. Dipoles were stretched between the light towers. I was hooked on Field Day for the rest of my life. After that first field day, I did a few others at various places with just a couple friends or a big group. Field Day took a back seat as I went off to Purdue, got married, and raised a young family. During the early 1980s, I volunteered to head up the Field Day effort for the Twin Cities FM Club and ended up doing this for over 10 years from a variety of locations. When I stepped down, I would occasionally participate as a CW operator for the TCFMC for several years.

In the late 1990's, NØAT invited me to join NØKK, NØSTL and himself for Field Day at a property belonging to Ron's family near Dorset, Minn. It's a great location with lots of high trees for antennas, a nice little building called the "game room" for our stations, and plenty of cabins for sleeping. Being contesters at heart, we put a priority on coming up with a competitive score. To that end, we operated two stations around the clock mostly on CW. Over the years, a lot of TCDXAers / MWAers joined us for a year or two including, WØGJ, KØIR, AE5E, KØADX, KØAUG, N5QQ, KØBBC, WØOR, and some others who I have probably forgotten. Of course, we went for most all of the bonus points including Satellite, VHF, Natural Power, Digital Modes, etc. Often, we would bring our XYLs and make a laid-back social

weekend out of it. Although we're all getting older, it is still a lot of fun!

Field Day 2020 will Be Different

With the on-going pandemic, ARRL Field Day will be different this year. Surprisingly, most of the robust rules for Field Day will still apply to this year's field Day. However, the number of "A" Class (i.e. Club and non-Club groups of 3 or more) entries will probably be down significantly. These are still allowed but, except for families or perhaps people who have been quarantined together, there will certainly be a reluctance to participate with a big Class A operation. It's still feasible, of course, with the proper social distancing. Class "B" (one or two person) groups will certainly be possible and I expect there will still be a lot of these. Class "C" (mobile operation) is relatively unaffected.

That brings us to Class D (i.e. Home Stations using their normal equipment and antennas). Although Class D stations have always been a part of Field Day, the ARRL wisely put in place a rule many years ago mandating that Class D stations cannot work other Class D station on field day. This prevents Field Day from degenerating into just another big contest where home stations work each other and there is little incentive to seek out portable field day stations. Class D stations are not supposed to call CQ on field day but some of them do.

Within the last couple weeks, the ARRL issued a press release that said, **for this year only, they will waive the rule that does not allow Class 1D stations to work each other.** I initially had mixed feelings about this but, the more I think about it, I think it is good idea with so many people still hesitant to go too far from home – especially in groups. Also, for this year only, they will add a Club Competition to Field Day. I also think this is a good idea (for this year only) because it will allow club members who are normally with each other on Field Day to still feel connected.

The Class E category which allows you to operate your home station using emergency power will still be there. Normally, this is a pretty popular category but I suspect there will significantly fewer entries in it given the Class D rule change.

What I'll Be Doing

After much thought, I decided to opt out of NØAT's field day this year. I really hate to miss it but both my wife and I feel more comfortable with a bit more social distancing until we are sure things are back to (or close to) normal. I have never done Field Day from my home station so I am going to try that this year. To make it seem more like Field Day, I plan to operate my Flex 6600M remotely from our family room. I will set up a table overlooking the backyard and trees to make me feel a bit like I am outside. Up until last week, I had planned to rent a small gen-

erator and operate in the 1E class. With the new 1D rule for this year, I'm not going to go to that trouble and expense. I will probably operate mainly CW and possibly a little RTTY and FT8. I'll go for whatever bonus points I still can. It will be different but it is something that I always wanted to try.

What about you? What will you do for Field Day this year if you are not able to go out with your normal group? Perhaps you will do something similar to me operating from your deck or backyard. Maybe you have always wanted to try a specific multi-band wire antenna to see how it performs when there are a lot of stations on the air. Now might be the time to throw it up realizing it only needs to stay up for a day. Perhaps you might take that new QRP radio out to a park some place and try that. Maybe you can just drive somewhere and operate 1C. Have you ever tried an FT8 contest? There will be plenty of FT8 stations on contest mode. The possibilities are endless. Hope to work you on Field Day this year no matter where you are. In 2021, hopefully things will be back to normal (or is it a "new normal").

See you in the (Field Day) pileups!

Gary Grivna KØGX

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 grivn001@umn.edu

More photos from St. Kitts



Saba island from the northern end of St Kitts



Locally brewed Guinness.....yes, yes and yes again



View of Saba et al looking north from Brimstone

TOP LINE SUMMARY

**TCDXA OPERATING BUDGET FY 2020
(Sep 2019 - Aug 2020)**

June 12, 2020



INCOME	ACTUAL	BUDGET	Actual 2019
Surplus from FY 2019 (balance 8/31/2019)	5291.41		2945.79
Member Dues 2020 by Cash/Checks/PayPal	4406.11	4500.00	5219.28
Door Prize Ticket Sales club share	443.00	500.00	602.00
Donatons (estates, wills, etc.)	488.70	0.00	0.00
Refunds and Reversals	0.00	0.00	2400.00
TOTAL INCOME	10629.22	5000.00	11167.07
EXPENSES		BUDGET	Actual 2019
Member Recruitment/Retention	(160.96)	(150.00)	(35.00)
Website ISP & Domain Name	(130.69)	(150.00)	(84.69)
Office Supplies, Miscellaneous expenses	(25.00)	(50.00)	0.00
Flowers <SK> and Hospital gifts	0.00	(200.00)	0.00
Holiday Party Dec 2019	(386.67)	(500.00)	(425.73)
ARRL Spectrum Defense Fund	0.00	(250.00)	(250.00)
NCDXF Donation	0.00	(250.00)	(250.00)
MWA Plaque	(75.00)	(75.00)	(75.00)
DXpedition Contributions Total	(250.00)	(4000.00)	(4755.24)
#1 Dxpediton - W8S Swains Island	(250.00)		
#2 Dxpediton -	0.00		
#3 Dxpediton -	0.00		
#4 Dxpediton -	0.00		
#5 Dxpediton -	0.00		
#6 Dxpediton -	0.00		
#7 Dxpediton -	0.00		
#8 Dxpediton -	0.00		
#9 Dxpediton -	0.00		
#10 Dxpediton -	0.00		
TOTAL EXPENSES	(1028.32)	(5625.00)	(5875.66)
NET	9600.90	-625.00	
Checking balance	9475.60		
PayPal balance	48.30		
Cash / Checks on Hand	77.00		
NET BALANCE	9600.90		

When required, Wells Fargo & PayPal online statements can provide detail not shown in this report.

WELCOME ABOARD

John Lockhart, Jr., WØDC, Roseville, Minn.
David Merriweather, N2RSC, Eden Prairie, Minn.
Scott Freeberg, WA9WFA, Birchwood Village, Minn.
Welcome to these new TCDXA members!

Radio Amateurs of Canada Announces a New Section

01/02/2020

The number of Sections needed for a clean sweep in the ARRL November Sweepstakes (SS) will rise to 84 in 2020, with the addition of a new Prince Edward Island (PE) Section. Radio Amateurs of Canada (RAC) announced this week that the new Section will become effective on April 1.

RAC said its Prince Edward Island members have been working for some time to create a separate Section for RAC ARES activities there. The provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick will continue to be in the Maritimes (MAR) Section. In addition to Field Day and Sweepstakes, the new Section in Canada will affect the ARRL 160-Meter Contest but not the ARRL 10-Meter Contest, which uses states/provinces for US and Canadian multipliers.

The change will mean that logging software developers will have to update their software to include the PE Section as a valid exchange element for any affected operating events.

RAC also announced an adjustment in two of its Ontario Sections. Effective April 1, radio amateurs in the City of Hamilton and in the Regional Municipality of Niagara will shift to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Section from the Ontario South (ONS) Section.

DX World soliciting votes for top expedition of the last 30 years.

05/25/2020

An opportunity to place your vote for your favorite DXpedition is currently open on the DX World web site. Go to:

<https://www.dx-world.net/the-dxpedition-of-the-last-30-years/>

You are allowed to vote for two of those listed. Note that MANY of these efforts included TCDXA members in the DXpedition crews.