

T H E K E Y

The Riverland Amateur Radio Club is a Special Service Club affiliated with the American Radio Relay League



Riverland Amateur Radio Club

P.O. Box 621

Onalaska, Wis. 54650

Repeater

146.970 PL 131.8

RARC Net

8 p.m. Sundays on the 146.970 repeater.

Club meetings

7 p.m., Tuesday, meeting room 1, lower level, Gunderson/Lutheran La Crosse. **Elmer session** 6 p.m.



Ron Martinmaki, W9E0A, searches for Swap Fest bargains.

Where's the fox?

Every weekend, in cities and towns all across the country, ham radio operators gather on hilltops for a very special kind of contest, the Fox Hunt. A small, low power transmitter is hidden and the rest of the crew tries to find it. Sound simple? It can be very challenging and a whole lot of fun. The direction finding skills learned in this activity can be very valuable in locating a repeater jammer, or a lost hiker.

It has been some time since members of the Riverland club have had a Fox Hunt,



something Bill Wood, KE9XQ, would like to change. Contact him at ke9xq@charter.net for details.

Most sport transmitter hunting is done on the 2 meter FM band. You can get started with just a portable 2 meter receiver that has a signal strength meter. You also have to rely on your ears to tell you whether the signal is getting stronger or weaker.

You will also need a directional antenna, but you can build one easily from plans available in the ARRL Antenna Book. A number of articles on building such antennas have also been in QST.

While participants gather at a specific spot the transmitter operator the fox is heading into the field to hide. A trick of foxes is to plant a low power transmitter near the starting location. They position the antenna so the signal reflects off hills making it seem as though it's many miles away.

The transmitter comes on the air at a pre arranged time. Hunters swing their antennas to take their first bearing. Within a few minutes everyone jumps into their vehicles and the chase is on. This hunt also may take place on foot.

Once you have a rough idea of the area in which the transmitter is hidden you stop and take more bearings.

It can be very challenging.

Sept VHF offers openings

September is here, and that means the VHF bands are hopping. The ARRL September VHF QSO Party, Sept. 12-13, is great fun and great for new Hams to start. With many HF radios offering at least 6 meter capabilities -- and some offering 2 meters and 70 cm as well -- any amateur with a Technician class license or higher can experience long haul communication on the VHF bands.

September is known for having good tropo

spheric propagation. If conditions are excellent, QSOs of more than 1000 miles are possible.

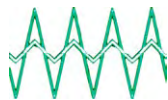
Most long distance VHF+ QSOs are conducted via CW or SSB which means you need a horizontally polarized antenna. A dipole for 6 meters is only 9 feet, 4 inches long and is an easy to build.

Activity will be centered on the calling frequencies of 50.125, 144.200, 222.100 and 432.100.



Club president Greg Miller, KA9FOZ, takes time out from Ham radio to see his daughter married.

President's Frequency Modulation



By Greg Miller, KA9FOZ

We made it through another swap fest. I am not going to comment too much on it as KC9HDS has more on it on page 3 of this newsletter. I felt it to be a success due to all the positive comments and no negative. Thanks to all that helped get it together and to all that attended. I will add that I did purchase some goodies that I wanted. Now the mind starts working on improvements for next year's fest. If any of you have any ideas send them to me at ka9foz@gmail.com.

Now we head into kind of lazy month for ham radio. Other than the monthly meeting on Tues. Sept. 1, and the Sunday night net, we don't have a group activity planned. That's okay though because it gives us a chance to relax and do our own thing on the radio. All of us have been very busy with a lot of activities lately and it will be nice to take a step back and turn on the HF rig for a change. Of course there is always some antenna work to do along with other hobbies.

So now I can relax too. This has been a very busy summer for me starting with a trip to Texas in April and ending with a daughter's wedding in my back yard Aug. 22. If you're like me you put more into doing things than what is needed. The summer could have been a lot easier if I would have just backed off on a few things. Now my only commitment is to the radio club. We have the monthly meetings, the Sunday night net on 146.970 at 8 p.m., the Trempealeau Wildlife Refuge operating in October, the Rotary Lights Parade in November and the Christmas Dinner in early January. What am I going to do with all this extra time? Maybe I will join an HF net. That sounds like fun.



Calendar

Tue. Sept. 1

➔ Riverland Amateur Radio Club meeting, 7 p.m, Gundersen La Crosse. Lower Level I meeting room. "Elmer Session" at 6 p.m.

Sat-Sun. Sept. 5-5

➔ RSGB SSB Field Day. www.rsgbcc.org/hf/rules/2014/rssbfd.sbtm

Sat. Sept 12

➔ License testing, 9 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 12, at the Church of Christ, 3506 28th St. South, La Crosse. readers@centurytel.net.

➔ September VHF. www.arrl.org/september_vhf

Sun. Sept 20

➔ North American Sprint, SSB

Sat. Sept.26

➔ Ozaukee Radio Club's Annual Regional Fall Swapfest, Fire mans Park, Cedarburg, <http://ozaukeeradioclub.org>

Tue. Oct. 6

➔ Riverland Amateur Radio Club meeting, 7 p.m, Gundersen La Crosse.

Wed. Oct. 7

➔ South Milwaukee Amateur Radio Club Auction, 7 p.m., American Legion, 9327 S. Shepard Ave, Oak Creek.

Testing

The next club sponsored license testing will be 9 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 12, at the Church of Christ, 3506 28th St. S., La Crosse. It is across 28th Street from Hintgen School.

Register at least five days in advance with Roger Reader, KA9BKK, 608 783 0723 or readers@centurytel.net.

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President Greg Miller, KA9FOZ
Vice president..... Van Elston, WA9FIO
Treasurer..... Tom O'Brien, WB9BJQ
Secretary..... Carl Thurston, KC9HDS
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This newsletter is sent by e mail to current and past RARC members and others. If you wish to change your address or subscription, e mail W9LSE@arrl.net



Club's Swap Fest grows (again)

By Carl Thurston, KC9HDS

In spite of the fact that amateur radio swap meets seem to be dwindling ours keeps growing and getting more enjoyable with each passing year. Since we moved our event to the Onalaska Omni Center, things have been improving even more. For many years our SwapFest lost about 5 per event and we seldom had significant door prizes. This was the case even when we held it at a church where we had free access.

Then we moved to the Onalaska Community Center and things improved. It was an accessible location and we decided to charge admission to cover the 25 rent for the building. We charged \$5 per entrant and had coffee, soda, and various snacks for sale. It seems to me that we made a small profit. All of this was due mainly to the efforts of Greg Miller, KA9FOZ. He was determined to make our Swap Fest a more viable and profitable event. As a result of that event, Miller was able to push for an even more spacious and commodious location. Thanks to his innovative ideas we were able to secure a large room at the Onalaska Omni Center, complete with tables, chairs, and the concessions were handled by employees of the center. This turned out to be a win win situation: we got a very nice place to have our event for a greatly reduced price since there wasn't anything else scheduled to be in the Omni Center on the date that we had our event, and since the management of the Omni Center wanted to have the building being used, we got a knock down price that enabled us to make a considerable profit.

The novelty of our new location drew a considerably larger number of participants. In the past, if we drew 30 people, we felt that we were successful. Last year the attendance was more than 100. Everyone had a good time and a lot of radio and computer equipment changed hands. Another draw at that event was there was a VE session and we had many significant door prizes. The event was scheduled to run from 8 a.m. 1 p.m. with the grand prize a dual band HT to be drawn at noon. It was expected that everyone would clear out once the grand prize was awarded, but surprise! A lot of people hung around to chat and have some lunch so that it went up to

the advertised end.

This year's event was looking like it would be bigger than last year's, after all we had vendors occupying eight of our tables and there were plenty of local Hams selling gear plus one husband and wife team from Minneapolis came with a fine selection of Collins radios and other fine restored radio accessories. The ARRL Section Manager was there to renew memberships, and there was an official QSL card checker to verify QSOs for DXers. We fell short of the total number of participants and we didn't make as much of a profit as last year, but we still made progress and we learned a few new points where we can make our event even better.

The current slate of officers are not going to return, but this should be a good thing as new blood means new ideas, and as a result also, Miller will be freed up to make even more new improvements to our SwapFest. So if you didn't make it to our other SwapFest, be sure to come to next year's as there are going to be even better things to see and do there. There may even be more vendors there.



ARRL card checker Mike Cizek, W0VTT, helped award seekers at the Swap Fest.

Making Contact In The 'Olympics' Of Ham Radio

By Karen Given

This story originally aired on Aug. 9, 2014 on Bill Littlefield's "Only A Game"

Two by two, competitors representing 38 countries were called to the stage at the World Radiosport Team Championship, held in Westborough, Mass. They're not identified by their names, which nobody knows anyway, but by their call signs.

Clutching manila envelopes crammed with maps and instructions, the teams rushed out of the hotel banquet room. They're eager to set up for what they describe as the "Olympics of ham radio."

Organizers had already chosen the sites and raised the antennas. "It's almost like we set the road course and now they're bringing their cars and drivers and now they see what they can do," said Randy Thompson, K5ZD, the co chair of WRTC 2014.

Teams would spend the rest of the day testing their equipment. The next morning at 8 a.m. sharp, they'd boot up their systems and begin broadcasting. For 24 hours, competitors tried to contact as many different people in as many different countries as possible.

"There is no defense or offense in this particular case," Thompson said. "You just make as big a score as you can and hope you're better than everyone else."

John Crovelli, W2GD, and George DeMontrond, NR5M, were testing their equipment in a tent pitched alongside a golf course in Devens, Massachusetts. DeMontrond turned on his receiver and almost immediately found a conversation originating in Russia, then one in Italy. But voice communication isn't the contestant's bread and butter.



For that, DeMontrond relies on his partner.

"Now what he does, primarily, is down here," DeMontrond said, tuning into a conversation in Morse code.

"Music to my ears," Crovelli responded.

Morse code was dropped for military and commercial use in the 90s. But, when there's a lot of interference, or when too many operators are trying to use the same frequency, Morse code is easier to isolate.

On the other side of the golf course, Scott Redd, KØDQ, was having considerably less success testing his equipment. But Redd knows to keep an even head.

"You can't panic, if you panic you'd be dead," Redd said. "It's like in war planning, they say the first casualty of contact with the enemy is the war plan. And so we had a plan, now we're going to find out what's wrong and troubleshoot it."

Redd knows a thing or two about war planning. He's the former vice admiral of the Navy's 5th fleet and served as the deputy administrator for the coalition provisional authority in Iraq. He's also won 11 world championships as a ham radio operator, and he was in the hunt for a 12th.

Back at competition headquarters, David Hodge, N6AN, and his teammate John Barcrof, K6AM, were prepared to do whatever they have to do to win.

"You don't go to the bathroom anymore, do you?" Barcrof asked.

"Yeah. I gave that up," Hodge replied.

For all they sacrifice, contestants win little more than bragging rights.

It's not that the organizers are cheap, Gerry Lynch, G1ORTN, of Belfast, Northern Ireland said. It has to do with the tiny bits of bandwidth set aside for ham radio operation. These bands, which Lynch describes as the National Parks of the radio spectrum, could fetch billions of dollars on the open market.

"We have use of this absolutely free, but we mustn't make a profit," Lynch

explained. "So the only prize we are allowed is maybe a trophy or a medal or the honor, the honor among your group of peers."

So there's no money in this sport and no real prizes. Qualifying for this event takes four years. Competitors must pay for their own equipment and fly all around the world to learn a set of skills, such as Morse code, that have little or no application in the real world. So, why do it? Believe it or not, Lynch says, ham radio testers are adrenaline junkies.

Jeffrey Briggs, VY2ZM, winner of 18 US and Canadian national championships, explained the strategy.

"We have five different frequency bands we can choose," Briggs said. "We can choose Morse code or voice, which means there's 10 different places we can choose to be."

Generally speaking, certain frequencies are better at certain times of day. Find yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time, and you lose valuable contacts. But propagation can be unpredictable, and testers face disadvantages beyond a lack of sleep.

"You have a weaker signal," Briggs warned. "You've got to pick and move, you gotta dodge, you've got to search and pounce, zig and zag, and kinda hope you get lucky."

Testers all speak of the joy of meeting face to face with decades long friends. They revel in the chance to show off a set of skills that might not be understood by co workers or wives or children. But for Briggs, contests are about something far more important than all that. Contests remind him of why those very precious bits of bandwidth have survived the ever increasing pressure for commercial use.

"In a way, this is a form of a readiness test," he said. "It is a major event, like the Olympics, but at the same time we're going out into tents, emergency powers, and when there is an emergency, guys like are here are the best equipped to handle it because they've got the sharpest skills."