

100 Pound DXpedition



For Sandy, who can light a room with her smile.

Contents

Welcome	19
A quick glance back	19
What is IOTA?	20
Scuttlebutt	20
Georges Island NA-148	21
Planning the big one	21
Georges Island NA-148 QRV	22
Safety	23
DXpeditioning Basics	23
The logo	23
Weight. The Final Frontier.	24
Field Day Eve	25
Field Day retrospective	26
Team Vertical web site	26
Reading material for my trip	27
Flooding damage in New York	27
Nifty Manuals	29
Researching an Island	29
Antennas for travel: MP-1	31
Antennas for travel: Buddistick	32
Quick wrap-up on small verticals	33
Antennas for travel: Buddipole	34
Buddipole wrap-up	36
Antennas for travel: Force-12 Sigma-5	36

Mount Washington Portable	38
Georges Island and RSGB IOTA contest	39
The DX Magazine	40
Boxboro announcement	40
Pelican cases	40
QSL cards	41
A little at a time	42
Hill-topping	43
Verizon letdown + Power to the People	44
VooDudes and Kure presentations	44
Weza first impressions	45
Off to Florida	46
Leaving that familiar item at home	46
Glimpse at Cay Sal Bank weather tonight	47
Doing my homework the night before	47
Doing my search the "old fashioned way"	47
Miami trip wrap-up	48
A boat!	49
Business cards and more	50
Georges Island IOTA contest QTH	50
Gear plan for Saturday	51
Packing for IOTA contest on NA-148	51
RSGB IOTA contest effort on NA-148	52
Quick contest primer	53
QSL card design complete	54
Log now on RSGB logs received page with picture	54

The art of QSL card design	55
eQSL	55
St. John DXpedition ~ 2006 ARRL DX SSB results	56
LoTW for NA-148 DXpedition	57
Return to Georges	58
Power Poles	59
Where's Waldo?	60
A bit banged up	61
Giving out a new one	61
Polishing the presentation	62
Going public: NA-103 DXpedition	62
Carry on	63
Return to Deer Isle NA-055	64
SLA battery goof-up	64
Establishing relationships with the locals	65
Miscellany and spam	66
Where's Waldo today?	66
Where's Waldo now?!	66
Nada Chair	67
Waldo arrives!	67
99 Hobbies and Joe in Montenegro	68
Force 12 Sigma-5 first impressions	69
Sigma-5 performs and Monserrat update	69
Daily DX	70
Montserrat Press Release	70
K1P call sign approved for 2007	72

Restating my purpose	72
Boxboro Day One	73
Boxboro Day Two	73
Boxboro wrap up	74
IC-7000 and LDG tuner	74
Status report	75
Model release and general agreement	76
Soufriere Hills Volcano activity	76
Summer reading: Common Mode Chokes	77
IC-7000 first impressions	78
RTFM	79
New Element	79
Publishing online logs	80
That great QSL card design	81
Time flies	82
NA-148 Georges Island Again	82
Importance of computer logging	83
Two small features are big	84
Five years after	85
License materials mailed	85
Whatt?	86
Group think on logging	87
Antennas for travel: fishing poles	87
Century mark	88
Feather-weight power supply	89
Tattoo?	90

Club Show-and-Tell	90
Satellites	91
Montserrat trip planning update	92
Contesting from your 100 pound DXpedition	93
Iceland	94
Pretty as a picture	94
Laptop robustness	95
Presentation tomorrow	95
Balance	96
A respite	96
IOTA cards and island names	97
What's with the /1?	97
A little change of plans	98
Practice makes perfect	98
Debug methodically	101
Last trip to Georges Island this year	102
Last day on Georges 2006	102
NA-148 slide show	103
It did work!	104
RSGB 2006 IOTA Contest results are in	105
New G5RV	105
Solar technology	106
G5RV tested	108
Are you still up working on that computer?	108
Cleaning the shack	109
Nice map	110

Parallels and Win98 up-and-running	110
Relevance	111
Plans for CQ WW SSB	112
Propagation book	113
Corrected NA-148 QSL cards on their way	113
Montserrat activity heating up	113
CQWW nearly half done	114
CQWW SSB 2006 now in the can	115
QSLing honorably	116
Montserrat flight reservations	116
Montserrat team finalized	117
Montserrat trip planning moving to next phase	117
CQ WW DX SSB 2006 analysis	118
Paradise (licensing applications) Lost	120
RIGtalk work-in-progress	120
T-shirts ordered	121
The plane! The plane!	122
HamMac	122
Weekly status Nov 12	123
Licensing - part deux	123
HamMac test drive	124
Conference call	125
Thinking vertically	126
10 pound DXpedition?	127
Our man on Montserrat	127
First conference call	127

Kerguelen video at local club	128
Cleaning out the old mail box	129
The reappearance of our applications?	129
Audio capture with TuneTalk	130
Video and a lazy day	131
Concall and spreadsheets	131
Licenses have arrived!	133
Hard drive failure and log processing tools	134
Recovering from the disk crash	135
Mixer has arrived	135
Mast repaired	136
Online log with sample data available	137
Flares, solar rotation, and licenses	138
Status report 6 December 2006	138
An excellent idea!	141
Solar events and legalese	141
3Y0X DXpedition video and con-call agenda	142
Band pass filters	144
ICE filters	145
Filters ordered... maybe	146
Loop repaired	146
Thursday, December 14, 2006	147
QSL manager: me	148
Sandy pokes a little fun	149
Looking for more volunteers in the group	150
Watching sky and Earth	150

Assembling the station	151
Monday, December 18, 2006	152
Cards and Cars	152
Group signing up for LoTW	153
Island tours	155
5A7A video	155
DXpedition announcements	156
QSLpro announcement	157
QSL route databases and a lazy day	158
We leave this month!	158
Goals and packing	159
Orange Juice	161
Watching all the little things	161
Volcano and C programs	162
Food	163
Wiring simplified	165
RF suppression	166
I'm a Nervous Nilly(tm)	167
Joe vs. the volcano	168
Redonda Island is NA-100	169
Safety first discussion	170
Weight, emergency info, and NEC2GO	171
Equipment inventory -- not done, but close	172
Bag sharing	175
Spare radio and fuses	176
Antenna plan for the Heavenly Suite	177

Testing filters	178
Morse Runner and those little things	178
Small update	180
Audio and some visuals	180
Aleve	181
Back on the mend, time running short	181
Last minute checklists	182
A Loss	183
Packed	184
MHT to MCO	184
We have arrived	185
Setting up	185
News from VP2M	186
Sorting things out	187
QSOs are flying into the log	188
6m a bust? But 160m a possibility. Exercises in extremes.	189
There are numbers...	190
1000	191
Cross mode QSO and more fun	191
Final hours	192
Online logs nearly complete	193
Flight home	193
Recalling Montserrat	194
NE1RD is back and blogging again	196
Logging accuracy and diligence	197
Lodging set for St. Kitts	198

Replenishing parts and a Buddi-beam	199
Finishing strong	200
Statistics	200
St. Kitts license materials sent	201
Interview on 99 Hobbies now available	202
QSL cards ordered	202
RIGtalk on MacOS X	202
RIGtalk procedure published for MacOS X	203
Heading West next week	203
Yet another Montserrat DXpedition wrapping up	204
Progress on the RIGtalk	205
eDX	205
ARRL DX in the bag	205
Long flights and learning	206
Other people's DXpeditions	207
Leave the radio at home	208
In search of the featherweight tribander	209
Visiting childhood friends and high SWR	210
NE1RD/W7 is now QRT	210
Ours go to 102	211
Featherweight tribander (continued)	211
Analyzers considered	212
Visalia on my mind	213
DXLab suite	214
NCDXF	215
1:1 baluns	215

WPX and statistics	216
TZ-900S	217
Off-topic: Kathy Sierra	217
Mosley mini beam ordered	218
Nice to be thanked	218
AntennaSmith first impressions	219
VP2M Cards -- worth the wait	220
Problem solving with the AntennaSmith	220
I don't fit	221
QSL cards enroute	222
A score and the joy of hands-on do-it-yourself	222
More power Mr. Scott!	223
A couple of quick notes	224
No K1P or Deer Isle this year	225
QSLing in-progress	225
QSL cards ready for the Post Office	226
IRCs	226
Other QSLs now caught up, too	227
NEQP results in	227
Declare your QSL routine on the air	228
Slow news day	229
Show and tell this week	229
Solar panel ordered	230
Thoughts on logging	231
New mitt-full of QSL card requests has arrived	233
Farewell, Kurt	233

Fun with anagrams	234
Buddi-beams	234
48 Watt Solar Panel Arrives	235
3B7C	235
Scarborough Reef and things closer to home	236
K3... oh my!	237
SLAs and K3s	237
A message from Elecraft	238
Scarborough ... aghast	239
How not to QSL	240
Making lists	241
Preliminary thinking and planning for St. Kitts	242
What's the Frequency, Kenneth?	244
Noise	245
Your operating position	246
300	248
BURO cards for Montserrat have arrived	249
Generate some buzz, and the YCCC at 30	249
RF ground and the answer to "how many?"	250
This is why we practice	251
Shameless plug department	253
Dayton retrospective	254
Stay in the seat	255
Sleep	256
Propagation planning	257
What the Prefix, Kenneth?	259

DXpedition contesting class	260
Build a kit	261
XP on Parallels	262
My to do list	263
My first piece of HF gear	264
SO2R	264
Finances	266
Field Day planning set	267
Youtube video	267
40m vertical	268
In Tampa	269
Buddistick radials	269
Field Day retrospective	270
Try some antennas	271
Toolbox Talk: Dipoles	272
What I'm reading: Kon-Tiki	273
The To Do list	273
Just a couple of kits	274
QSLing and a trip to NA-148 for a look-see	275
Rethinking	275
Thank you	276
Phantom QSOs	276
Wednesday, July 18, 2007	277
Prepping for Lovells	278
CQ VHF Contest	279
CQ WW VHF contest wrap-up	279

I love when a plan comes together	281
A thoughtful gift	281
Weather and St. Kitts planning	281
eQSL and LoTW for V4	282
2007 RSGB IOTA wrap-up	283
NA-148 LoTW uploaded	285
RSGB IOTA Contest log submission system up	285
You snooze, you lose	285
TW2010	286
Social network websites	287
RIGtalk USB to serial rig control interface on MacOS X	288
Mosley tested, shirts ordered	288
Facebook revisited	289
Hurricanes	289
Better late than never	290
QSL card pondering	290
The simplest tool: a ruler	291
Mosley notified of the problem	293
Mosley steps up	293
TW2010 company response and vertical thinking	293
Picture from the IOTA Contest in July	295
What makes a good blog?	296
VP2M DXpedition video (abbreviated)	297
Mini-32-A now complete	297
Where'd he go?	298
Packing (1st round) for St. Kitts	298

Six	299
Weighing in and self-sufficiency	299
Presentation and award	301
Twitter	302
3B7C	302
Painter pole mast	302
Backup rig	303
Antennas for travel: bring your brain	304
3B7C now QRT	305
Propagation planning meandering	305
ZF2LH on 17m	307
Melting solder	307
MFJ Cub	308
Nashua group presentation	308
Gear selection part 1	309
Jamaica 100 Pound DXpedition by N0NJY	310
Model release form	311
For sale: Force-12 Sigma-5	311
A small wager	311
Pre-St. Kitts equipment check	312
Contesting tips by K9JY	313
Station wiring drawing revisited	313
More talk and a another tip of the hat	314
I am a junk-box junkie	314
W2IHY	315
The eve of St. Kitts	316

Pushing limits	317
Live! From St. Kitts!	319
Rain	319
Photos posted	320
A bust?	320
Sense enough to come in out of the rain	321
Half	322
V4/NE1RD QRT	323
St. Kitts lessons learned	323
All good things	325

Welcome

Monday, June 12, 2006

I've just begun planning several DXpeditions and thought it might be fun to keep track of the kinds of research, thinking, and planning that goes into a successful personal DXpedition. I plan on posting what I learn, when I learn it. You'll see it all: insights, wrong turns, goof ups, and epiphanies. If it helps you plan your next DXpedition, I'll be very pleased indeed.

-- Scott (NE1RD)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:50PM (-04:00)

A quick glance back

Tuesday, June 13, 2006

Before I begin dumping a lot of details for the upcoming trips, perhaps it would be good to just mention some of the past work (since that is feeding into the planning process for these next efforts). Earlier this year Sandy (my XYL) and I went to St. John USVI for our vacation. It happened to coincide (by design) with the ARRL's DX SSB contest. There were a couple of reasons to take this trip when we did and pick the place we picked:

1. We wanted a great place to visit. This was our vacation and we wanted to go someplace nice where both of us could enjoy a little peace and quiet and relax. We rented a little house on St. John atop a nice hill overlooking the edges of the island. What a view that was!
2. We picked that time because I love to do radio contesting and this is a fun contest. It isn't quite so "cut-throat" as some of the other contests yet it is a 48 hour affair so you've got plenty of time to operate. I've been in this contest before, but this time I'd get to be a (hopefully wanted) DX station.
3. The place was remote and isolated, but there were still hardware stores around and even a Radio Shack (on St. Thomas) if I had a real problem. This isn't like a trip to a desert isle where if something was broken you'd be totally hosed.
4. The island of St. John is a numbered IOTA island and I'm very interested in that program. I'll write much more about IOTA later.
5. We went in March, just about the time everybody was going stir-crazy from the long Boston winter. We needed a break!

As you can see, many of the reasons for going were associated with family and fun. This isn't some work assignment; this is play-time! I've worked hard in the planning and execution of the trips I'll describe here but at no time did I lose track of the fact that I was doing it for fun. I had made a trip to Hawaii in 2005 which was really, really fun but had brought only the bare minimum of equipment to operate (just a K2, a Buddipole, and some other pieces) that just helped me get started in this. The St. John trip was the first trip where I'd gotten serious about putting QSOs in the log.

This was also the first trip that I had really buckled down to see how close I could get to that 100 pound limit imposed by the airlines for checked bags. In the end, this part of the exercise was much more important than I had originally imagined.

My work on this concept of a "100 pound DXpedition" have been going on for some time. If it isn't too confusing, I'll likely bounce back-and-forth in time trying to fill in the history as

I document the work in progress for the future trips.
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:41AM (-04:00)

What is IOTA?

Wednesday, June 14, 2006

I've mentioned the Islands on the Air (IOTA) program before but I thought it might be nice to say a little more about it since it has helped shape some of my 100 Pound DXpedition thinking. The IOTA program is sponsored by the Radio Society of Great Britain. The program's idea is simple: there are lots of islands and island chains around the world. Wouldn't it be fun to talk to people on all of them?!

In order for an island to qualify for this program it needs to meet certain criteria. It must be at least a certain size, all or portions of it must be above sea level at all times, and it needs to be in "open water" of an ocean or sea and not enclosed by land. This prevents river islands in the Mississippi or islands in lake Michigan from being considered, for example.

Islands in the program are numbered and categorized by the continent they are near. The continent provides the "prefix" so North American islands are prefaced with "NA-" and European islands are prefaced with "EU-". Each island is then assigned a three digit number. The full list of islands for North American may be found [here](#). Links to the lists for the other continents may be found at the top of that page.

Going to an island and operating from it is called "activating the island". At this point, I have activated three islands:

- Hawaii (OC-019)
- St. John USVI (NA-106)
- Deer Isle, Maine (NA-055)

None of these islands are particularly *exotic*, though I had a really great time going there and playing radio. There are some islands that are exotic like the Peter I DXpedition that traveled to the Antarctic (IOTA NA-004) early in 2006. At the time of the trip, more people had flown in space than had stepped on that little piece of the Earth.

My Trips are a great deal more modest than that! Still, when I activate an island I give other ham radio operators a chance to talk with this island, add it to their list of islands they have worked (which can subsequently be applied toward awards the RSGB offers in this program), and give them a chance to get a pretty cool QSL card that I design myself for each island activation.

I would like to encourage anybody who thinks this sounds interesting to check out the RSGB IOTA web site. Being familiar with the program will also help you get the most out of this blog since many of my planned personal DXpeditions are going to be to islands associated with this program.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:18AM (-04:00)

Scuttlebutt

Thursday, June 15, 2006

The Yankee Clipper Contest Club puts out a fine newsletter six times a year called Scuttlebutt. I recently joined the YCCC and submitted an article entitled *The 100 Pound DXpedition* describing my trip to St. John in March of 2006. The article appears in the June 2006 (#184) issue, available off the Scuttlebutt home page. Scuttlebutt is a PDF file so you'll need either the Adobe Acrobat Reader or something similar to read it.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:58PM (-04:00)

Georges Island NA-148

Friday, June 16, 2006

The rain has finally abated here in New England and it is a beautiful Spring day. With luck, the weather will hold out for the rest of the weekend and I can make a quick trip to Georges Island, one of the Boston Harbor islands, for a little radio adventure.

Georges Island is located at N42 19' 09.96" W70 55' 37.14" and can easily be viewed from Google Earth. The island is approximately 30 acres with Fort Warren, a Civil War era bulwark against the sea, dominating the center of the island. Around the periphery of this imposing granite structure are walking paths, picnic tables, and parade areas that I hope to use for my portable operation.

The island is just over 7 miles from Long Wharf in Boston and is accessible by a ferry service that runs hourly. Given the cost of flights these days, accessing any IOTA island with only a \$12 ticket looks like a bargain!

The Massachusetts State North Group (NA-148) includes Georges Island and many of its neighbors including Bakers Island, Great, Little, Middle, and Outer Brewster Islands, Calf Island, Gallop Island, Long Island, Lovell Island, Milk Island, Rainsford Island, Spectacle Island, and Thacher Island. While not exactly rare, the RSGB IOTA site claims that only 23.3% of its members have worked stations on one of these islands. I hope to change that, of course!

I have a commitment to assist with a radio exam session on Saturday morning but plan on getting up early Sunday and making the trek to Boston to catch the ferry and operate QRP from Georges Island. I'll bring my Elecraft K2, Buddipole, and a solar panel to help keep my battery charged. See you on the bands!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:23AM (-04:00)

Planning the big one

Friday, June 16, 2006

For a little giggle at my expense, I confess that my midwestern upbringing, while satisfactory in many ways, is sadly lacking in any background or training in anything a seafarer might need. The proper pronunciation of "Cay" (which is like "key", by the way) was something I learned only recently. I'm still working out the difference between leeward and windward.

So, while I'm still working on my *sea legs* I'm busily planning a substantial adventure which would dwarf all previous efforts: a trip to Cay Sal Bank and Double Headed Shot Cay. This little spot is about 60 nm south of the Florida coast, closer to Cuba than the US, and is part of the Bahamas. This is not an easy place to get to, nor is it going to be an

easy trip to plan. The fact that I would be spending a great deal of time and effort working out the details of this trip was one of the impetuses for this blog!

The IOTA web site lists NA-219 credited to only 7% of the IOTA awards chasers. It isn't quite in the top 10 list of "most wanted" but it is in the top 20 for North America.

I'll be going on more modest trips that I'll be discussing while I work on the details for this adventure. It might be that such an endeavor is beyond what I can reasonably accomplish (or afford!). Even so, I'm guessing the lessons I learn, wrong-turns and all, will be helpful to those reading this blog trying to plan their own trips.

The details will be posted on and off over the next year or so. Yes, it will take at least that long to pull this together. Some thinking has already been done on this. I'll fill you in on those details in blog entries soon.

In the mean time, I'm off to a testing session sponsored by MMRA to hopefully mint some new hams and give some others well-deserved upgrades. And, of course, I'm looking forward to my trip to Georges Island on Sunday.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:27PM (-04:00)

Georges Island NA-148 QRV

Sunday, June 18, 2006

I have just returned from Georges Island. The trip was pretty simple: drive down to Long Wharf in Boston by the aquarium, hop a passenger ferry, and in 20 or 30 minutes walk onto the island. This is still early in the season so ferries only run once an hour but beginning June 23rd they will be running about twice an hour.

This was a "trial run" to the island to see if there would be good places to operate and to see if the solar panel I'd recently purchased from The Alternative Energy Store could successfully keep my Elecraft K2's internal battery charged. I had purchased the panel in May but not long after it had arrived it seemed like we had 40 days and 40 nights of rain, so this was the first serious workout it received. I'm happy to report that the panel did a pretty good job of keeping the battery topped off while I sat and called CQ.

Here's how I looked walking out of the house today: on my back was a backpack with the solar panel, charge controller, Heil Traveler headset, and plenty of water. My "small" Buddipole was slung over one shoulder, and an 8x8 pop-up enclosure folded into its 3-foot diameter carry bag was in my hand and my K2 with accessories in a Pelican 1510 case ("carry on" baggage size) with wheels was pulled behind me. It was a little cumbersome but easily manageable for the short walk between the car and ferry, and then from the ferry to the picnic area on Georges Island.

Even with this very modest set-up, I was able to pop-up the enclosure over a picnic table, set up the Buddipole, and have a very capable and comfortable station that could stay on the air for many hours. That's one of the things I'm trying to drive home with this 100 pound DXpedition idea: you don't need complicated or heavy equipment to successfully operate away from home!

Propagation was a bit soft today but I still managed to have QSOs with Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Bermuda among others on 20m, and a few more on 17m. One of these contacts was with Bill operating from the Handihams organization. That was a very nice happenstance! If you don't know about this organization, please follow the link and check them out.

I goofed up a couple of things and learned from the mistakes: I should have brought forgot the Triple Ratio Switch Balun for the Buddipole. I should buy a second one to pack with this antenna (the one I own is packed with the bigger antenna system). Also, I need to practice folding up that pop-up enclosure so I can get it back into that tiny carry case without looking so puzzled and clumsy!

What's next? Field Day is next weekend. Just another chance to try some lightweight gear for the next trip. I'll write more on Field Day later this week.
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 07:09PM (-04:00)

Safety

Monday, June 19, 2006

Yesterday's trip to Georges Island (NA-148) was great fun. We did lots right--much that had nothing to do radio--including bringing good shelters to keep both me and Sandy out of the sun, bringing enough plenty of water, and not trying to stay too long, especially since this was our first trip of the season.

This brings us to one of the things that has gone into my planning for previous trips and, certainly, for upcoming trips: safety first. The day-to-day safety concerns probably boil down to some simple things like

- Health - take anything adversely affecting your health seriously while away from home including cuts and the danger of infection, food poisoning and resulting dehydration (much more common than you might believe), and keeping your "shots" up-to-date for tetanus and other hazards.
- Weather - Lightning, wind, sun, or sudden temperature changes can turn a trip into disaster. With Field Day coming up in just a few days, please take this caution to heart.
- Situational awareness - where are you, what is around you, and what could happen? This runs the gamut from climbing safety to knowing to avoid bad areas in a foreign country.

On St. John I was just up-the-road from a hospital. Same deal in Hawaii. Even on Georges Island I was only minutes (by helicopter) from some of the best medical facilities in the world. That won't be the case if I actually make it to some of these places I've been considering. Planning, specifically safety planning, will be crucial for these more exotic DXpeditions but all these principles should be applicable to even the most routine operation. Again, with Field Day right around the corner I hope all of you will keep this in mind.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:55PM (-04:00)

DXpeditioning Basics

Tuesday, June 20, 2006

There isn't as much written on DXpeditioning as I would like so I thought I'd drop a quick nugget of something worth reading. The booklet DXpeditioning Basics by Wayne Mills (N7NG) is available from the ARRL off their DXCC page. Enjoy.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:00AM (-04:00)

The logo

Wednesday, June 21, 2006

You may have noticed the logo on this blog and on my home page. I designed this "100 pound DXpedition" logo because I thought it would be fun to dress up some of the documentation I'd been pulling together and maybe even make a T-shirt or two. Here's



the logo in case you are wondering what I'm talking about. In case you've missed the point and at risk of repeating myself, all of this is for fun. Having a logo, mascot, team name, and so on, are ways of taking an activity and giving it a little personality. After all, if a bowling league can have a name, why can't a DXpedition team?

There are several famous DXpedition teams such as the "VooDoo Contest Group" and "Microlite Penguin DXpedition Team". If you are organizing a trip, go ahead and give your

team a name! Of course, I'd love to hear about it, too, so drop me an email or even leave feedback here if you decide to take the plunge.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:27PM (-04:00)

Weight. The Final Frontier.

Thursday, June 22, 2006

This might be a good time to start the discussion about weight. The 100 pound figure was originally conjured by me because of the recent airline restrictions on checked baggage: two bags each no more than 50 pounds. That gives you 100 pounds total. This might sound like a lot until you start checking out these statistics:

- Pelican 1610 case -- largest checked bag size is 22 pounds empty
- FT-897D + LDG bolt-on tuner + internal PS is 12 pounds

This brings me up to 34 pounds. Now watch what happens...

- "Big" Buddipole system, 16' mast, etc. is 12 pounds
- "Little" Buddipole system, 8' mast, etc. is 8 pounds
- MFJ 259B analyzer is 2 pounds

A couple of antennas and the analyzer is 22 more pounds (56 total)

Now we need coax:

- Each 100 foot RG8 coax run is about 9 pounds
- Each 100 foot RG8X coax run is about 3 pounds
- Each 50 foot run of RG8 is about 4 pounds
- Each 50 foot run of RG8X is about 2 pounds

I brought about 300 feet with me to St. John and it was barely enough. I had four antennas and had to switch the coax between two of them. Assume 10-15 pounds of very lightweight coax, more if you go for the RG8 instead of the RG8X. Coax 10 pounds (too little, but let's just see) brings us to 66 pounds.

Then there are tools. In my first effort I had omitted tools from the bag and ended up buying them in San Francisco. Now I pack 'em. This is a must have. Soldering iron, pliers, wicked Leatherman knife, screwdrivers, etc. Figure 5 or 7 pounds of tools, tape, and handy stuff. Our total is now 71 pounds

Now try to inventory all the stuff you haven't brought such as dacron rope, masonry line, manual tuner, baluns or center insulators for wire antennas, Heil headset, power strips, extension cords, paddles or key. Let's throw another, say, 5 pounds for that. Our total is

now 71 pounds (and likely more).

What if you get there and your radio is broken? If you don't bring some kind of backup, you'll be totally hosed. I brought an FT-817 to St. John. Yeah, QRP would have been harsh--but it beats nothing. A full backup radio would be another 12 pounds PLUS the case to put it in.

The second case for me was a hard-sided golf bag. Empty, the bag weighs 20 pounds. I had also brought fishing poles and collapsible masts for verticals so I needed the big case. But, even if you bring something smaller, it has to protect the backup radio. Assume a 12 pound case and another 12 pounds of radio -- and you have $71 + 24 = 95$ pounds.

By the way, are we packing tooth brushes, clothes, etc. That has to be counted towards our weight, too. It is pretty easy to get to that 100 pound limit. The key is having enough resiliency in your equipment that you can overcome some failures, but not have so much that you completely blow your budget (weight or money!). It is managing these trade-offs that make this kind of DXpeditioning a challenge.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:24AM (-04:00)

Field Day Eve

Friday, June 23, 2006

On the eve of Field Day I'm going through my stuff to see what I'd like to use for the event. Field Day is an excellent opportunity to try that new power supply or run of feed line to be sure it is in good working order before it gets packed for your next DXpedition. I've got a new Alinco DM-330MVT power supply that needs to be checked out, for example.

This year I'll be doing Field Day with the PART group of Westford, Massachusetts. The weather forecast for the area is heavy rain and thunderstorms for the entire weekend so their usual venue (a soccer field) would have been a muddy and possibly dangerous mess. Luckily, we were able to obtain permission to operate from a large training room in one of the town's fire stations.

In many ways, this makes the exercise like a typical *relaxed* DXpedition in that we'll be in a nice climate controlled building with power, coffee makers, bathrooms, and tables from which to operate. We'll also have no obvious way to hang dipoles for our operation (which makes it very much like a typical island DXpedition!).

I'll be bringing my two Buddipole systems, my 33-foot military mast I got from The Mast Company to hold up a tribander somebody is supposed to bring, and some dipoles including a Cobra UltraLite, and two G5RVs. Like I said, it isn't obvious how to hang it but I'll see what I can do.

Finally, things will be interesting because there will be three stations all operating within a small area: a CW station, the SSB station (that I'm running), and the GOTA station. (There will be a VHF station, too, but I don't expect any QRM from that one.) As we all crowd into the lower bands now that the bottom of the solar cycle is upon us, we'll see if one station desenses the others when it transmits.

Again, Field Day is an provides an excellent chance to try out all this great stuff you might use on a DXpedition while still close to home. I hope all of you get out there and give it a try!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:39PM (-04:00)

Field Day retrospective

Monday, June 26, 2006

Field Day is over and after some restorative sleep, I'm ready to return to life-as-usual. The change in venue from the soccer field to the new fire department meeting room that was indoor, air conditioned, nicely carpeted, with an easily accessible restroom, nicely appointed with furniture, and a TV showing the weather channel was an enormous improvement in the operating environment. I was dry and comfortable for the whole event.

Because of the last minute change of venue, though, there was no planning for how antennas would be deployed until Saturday morning. I brought all the things I had mentioned in my last post: buddipoles, military mast material, etc., but in the end I only used the Cobra UltraLite antenna for my SSB station, one run of 100-foot RG8 coax, and the contents of my 50-pound 100-watt Pelican case with its FT-897D. (I did exercise the new power supply. It performed beautifully.)

This might seem obvious but I'll say it here: the site survey and corresponding antenna plan is key to a successful operation. Sandy and I spent a long time puzzling over what our options were in St. John before deploying the antennas used there. I had also spent time with topographical maps, Google Earth, and looked at photographs from both the villa's web site and from shots taken by a friend (non-ham) who had been to that villa last year. I had lots of rough-cut plans even before I had stepped foot on the island--and it paid off.

I'm forced to compare that to last weekend's effort. We were very short on time (the venue was changed Friday afternoon) but I can't help but think we should have spent more time on Friday night looking over the site and considering our options.

The point of all this is simple: the next time you go on vacation, do a site survey and figure out where you would put antennas (even if you didn't bring your radio). Measure off how much feed line you would have needed. Ask yourself how two or more transmitters could be accommodated. What would you have to do to make this site be a successful DXpeditioning site? Like any activity, the more you do it the better you'll get. I believe I learned something even from last weekend's exercise.

One last point, just to drive the message home, because we didn't have a good plan for what we needed I had to fill the car with stuff that never got used (or even got a look). Hundreds of pounds of stuff got hauled out to the car, driven to the site, only to hauled back to the car, driven home, and subsequently unloaded again. What a waste! Planning more means less weight. This was an extreme case of that lesson, but it was reinforced again on me this weekend.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:20PM (-04:00)

Team Vertical web site

Tuesday, June 27, 2006

I attended a talk by Ann Santos (WA1S) at a New England DX Century Club meeting earlier this year where she gave a presentation on the Kure Atol DXpedition (K7C). Great stuff! One of the things Ann discussed was the effectiveness of vertical antennas on one of these islands. There have been lots of things written about this in the National Contest Journal, but I was hungry for more.

There are a number of articles from the "Team Vertical" web site that makes comparisons between yagis and verticals that is worth a look. I made a pass through some of the material yesterday and noted that they drew all the same conclusions Ann had made in

her talk.

In short, verticals on the beach are very effective for low angle signals. This is great news for us 100 pound DXpeditioners because (a) these antennas are lighter, and (b) they are easier to assemble and configure. Take a few moments and check out some of these articles, especially DXpedition Antennas for Salt Water Locations.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:07AM (-04:00)

Reading material for my trip

Wednesday, June 28, 2006

I'm off for a quick business trip to up-state New York. Traveling there would be a 5 hour flight. Driving there would also take 5 hours. I'll drive, thanks.

The meeting isn't until tomorrow so I'll have a nice quiet evening to myself. I thought this might be a good time to go over some of the DXpedition books and papers I've not examined in a while. It will help me with my planning for my upcoming adventures.

The first is an easy one to find: *DXpeditioning Basics* by Wayne Mills N7NG which you can find on the ARRL DXCC web page. The price is right, too (free).

The other book I threw in the bag to review is *DXpeditioning: Behind the Scenes - A Manual for DXpeditioners and DXers* by Neville Cheadle G3NUG and Steve Telenius-Lowe G4JVG. You can get this from the ARRL store here.

There is lots of great stuff in both the white paper and the book but the book really gives you some idea of the level of planning that goes into a successful DXpedition. Highly recommended.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:08AM (-04:00)

Flooding damage in New York

Friday, June 30, 2006

This post is long and not about DXpeditioning. Skip it if you like.

My business trip to New York state was anything but quick or routine. Flood waters coursed across my route and the damage it imposed was almost unimaginable. After hitting Albany I had angled south but was detoured. Rumors were the interstate had washed away taking the lives of two truck drivers in the process. Bypassing this mess only led me to a virtual dead-end near Oneonta.

By this time, Tom (a fellow from our partner company that was to join us in this larger meeting) called me on my cell phone and I began getting the full picture. The Binghamton area, where tomorrow's meeting was to occur, was hard-hit by the rising water. There was no way to get there tonight. Further, the hotel we had booked had closed and was partially engulfed in the flood-waters, too. Could I meet them elsewhere?

Elsewhere, in this case, meant traveling north to Utica then west to Syracuse and then south again. I agreed to try.

It was now 5:30 PM, my estimated arrival time when the trip had begun. I was hungry and a little weary from the drive. "Now is a good time to reassess", I thought to myself. I canceled the route on my StreetPilot and pulled into a strip mall parking lot. A meal and a look at the map would be a good next step, except everything was closed. I wandered up the road to an Arby's which was also closed. The locals had obviously done the right thing by packing up and moving to higher ground. I should do the same.

I turned around and headed towards Cooperstown, north of Oneonta, in hopes of eventually making it to Utica and interstate 90 to again head west. As I began my trek the

full damage was apparent. The isolation of the interstates I had traveled on thus far had hidden the worst of the storm's wrath. Now, as I wind my way north, I see streams and rivers pouring over their banks, mercilessly washing out anything in its newly adopted path: parking lots, cars, and houses. Water, only inches deep, thankfully, laps over the road in places.

Past Cooperstown lakes have risen so high whole houses are consumed. Families wander along the road surveying the damage to their homes and their lives. After seeing this my complaints about being a little hungry and a little sore from driving seem small and petty.

My cell phone rings again. My colleagues have located a new hotel and urge me to move my reservations quickly, before it fills. At least cell phones still work.

Route 20, which is part of the path I need to follow to reach that more northerly route, is packed. Some are those rerouted from other roads now flooded. Others are most certainly refugees abandoning their homes and traveling, perhaps, to impose on relatives. I get into the long line.

Men standing with flares burning and wands waving direct traffic first this way then that. I creep along at the same pace one could walk until finally directed north again. The line of cars both in front of me and behind becomes apparent as I crest a hill. People who live along this sleepy road sit on their porches staring at the endless parade of cars. One young man holds a video camera, points it towards me and my car, and smiles. I smile back and even wave. I'm sure this spectacle is a marvel to him as he's not seen its cause.

I turned on the radio and scanned through 2m to see if I could find an active repeater. I found several with SkyWarn activity on it. I listen. What I hear is disturbing: reports of pea or quarter-sized hail are first predicted and then reported. More rain is on the way. When there is a lull, I call out and ask for some advice. The ham on the other end is near my ultimate destination for tonight and tells me where the storms are and best routes to take and avoid. He ends with, "be careful. 73."

It seems that every intersection has men with reflective vests and flares telling people, "no, you can't go that way." I realize that I've probably not seen the worst of the damage as I'm not even allowed to get close to it!

Hour-by-hour we creep along. Finally, I get close to Utica and interstate 90. It is dusk and I can see the lightning on the horizon. The temperature drops slightly. The wind picks up. Then it begins to rain. Not some wimpy soft Protestant shower but a good, old-fashioned Baptist downpour. My wipers cycle furiously and barely keep up. Then comes the thunder and the light show. Cloud-to-cloud first, then cloud-to-ground, clearly visible in the distance.

Finally I make it to the interstate and though top speed for us few on the road at this point is 45 miles-per-hour (with flashers blinking) we are, at last, making progress. I arrive at the hotel only 6 hours later than my original ETA, crawl into my bed, and crash.

Morning brings news that the meeting has been canceled. The facilities we were to use are being accosted by the rising water. After breakfast and a few formalities, I climb back in the car to head east and home.

Now, from interstate 90, which runs long the rise between valleys, I can see some of the devastation even more clearly than yesterday. Whole downtown areas submerged. What was a lumber yard now has water nearly to the high roofs of the material sheds. Just a half mile away, the former contents of those sheds, plywood and shingles, lay strewn where the receding water had left them. For some reason, this saddened me even more than the other horrors for it seemed to me that this was especially cruel: while people's homes and businesses had been destroyed, Mother Nature now felt that was not enough, that the seeds of hope for new construction in these planks and 2x4s and plywood sheets should also be destroyed, taking both the past and the future from these people with its

torrent of water.

A 100 yard phalanx of debris in the form of trees, branches, brush, and anything that can float now presses against an old iron bridge just north of the interstate. That bridge had been there for, what, 50 years? 70 years? 100 years? Will it survive the night?

As I approached the Massachusetts border the damage from the flooding diminished until it was only a memory. I made it home, safe, dry, and happy in the late afternoon.

I took no pictures of what I saw, but neither was it necessary. The images are so vivid in my mind it is hard to believe that I would ever forget them.

Again, this was not about DXpeditioning. Sorry for the distraction. I will return to the topic in tomorrow's post. 73 de NE1RD.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:37AM (-04:00)

Nifty Manuals

Saturday, July 01, 2006

A couple of days ago I ordered the Nifty! Quick Reference Guide Mini-Manual for the new Icom IC-7000. Just a quick point: I don't even own this radio yet! So, officially, this is the first accessory I will have bought for it when I do, and justly so.

I read the manuals that come with my radios. I pretty familiar with the equipment before I pack up and go, but in the field you'll sometimes have a question that a quick glance at a manual would answer immediately. That's where these Mini-Manuals shine. Each Mini-Manual is light, waterproof, with an easy to read print that is color-coded in such a way as to bring your eyes quickly to the relevant piece of information you're looking for (or, at least that's how it works for me). The plastic lamination ensures it will survive all but the harshest treatment.

I have one of these manuals for nearly all my radios: IC-706IIimg (in the car), FT-897D, Elecraft K2, and quick reference cards for the Yaesu VX-5R, Kenwood TH-D7A(G), and Elecraft KX1. I also own their "field reference" manual (two, actually), and a couple of other of their offerings I've not mentioned. At this point, these little waterproof wonders are a standard part of any kit that travels as they weigh nearly nothing, have all the information I need that any manual would likely contain, and it means I can leave the *original* manual at home where it can be safe and dry. Sure, they cost a couple of bucks, but it makes no sense to me to spend lots of time, money, and effort to get to some far away place only to be stymied by a forgotten setting or quirk in the radio. These manuals help ensure that mishap doesn't happen.

As I said, at this point, I order the manual even before I order the radio. Highly recommended.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:03AM (-04:00)

Researching an Island

Sunday, July 02, 2006

One of the things I'd like to stress in all these posts is that you'll have more fun if you plan well. Planning requires thinking, sure, but also a bit of research. With Google Earth and the other *view from above* technologies around, you've got excellent opportunities to do site surveys that would have been impossible just a few years ago. Still, one of the best ways of doing research is talking to people who have been there. I've tried to do that in all the places I've visited. Finding people who have been to some place as isolated as Cay Sal Bank is a little tougher than most research you might do. But, it can be instructive to

see how I tracked down a resource for even this:
I started by typing
na-219 dxpedition "Cay Sal Bank"
into the Google search string listed four results including this one that mentioned
NA-219/Pr W5BOS/C6A Dog Rocks, Cay Sal Bank Cays (October 2000)
I can now see *somebody* has tried to get there! I went to QRZ.com to see if W5BOS had
anything on his page about this. No luck. OK, so I Google
w5bos na-219
and come up with over 100 hits, many of which sound promising. Eventually, through
some more careful Googling, I end up with
<http://www.his.com/~wfeidt/DxnI/dxnI1380.html>

BAHAMAS, C6, NA-219 Joe, W8GEX, Wayne, K8LEE, Mike, K9AJ,
and Phil, W9IXX, are going to the Double Headed Shot Cay in the
Cay Sal Bank Cays (NA-219) signing C6DX from Mar 25-29, 2004.
QSL via K9AJ.

So, I send a little note on June 7th, 2006 to that group that reads like this:

Gentlemen,

I am interested in doing a DXpedition to NA-219 and
would love to hear about your trip taken in March of 2004.
Any information you could provide on getting there
(I'm assuming a chartered boat), permissions you obtained
and from whom to land there and stay there, and any
problems you had, anticipated or otherwise, that I should
factor into my planning.

I am in the very, very early stages of planning this.
The current thinking is for a team of four or five to make
the landing and stay for 3 or (at most) 4 days on the island.
We'd operate 100 watts (or 50) with small generators
and verticals or lightweight dipoles such as Buddipoles.
Of course all this is sketchy at best.

Again, any information or direction you could
provide would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Sincerely,

-- Scott (NE1RD)

Almost immediately Joe (W8GEX) sends me mail and we connect on the telephone for
about an hour. Joe first tells me about his aborted attempt to get to the area. Rough seas
and possibly weather made traveling to the island impossible. Their crew had made it to
Bimini but the traversal across the Gulf Stream had so battered crew and boat that the
captain was reluctant to proceed further. So, their group checked in with the Bahamian
authorities and then waited for a break in the sea and sky which never came. They never
made it to the Cay.

I was saddened by this for several reasons: first, they had spent *a lot* of money to get that
far only to fall short, and secondly they had brought an absolutely first class operating

crew which would have done very well had they made it. Joe was gracious and generous with his time, telling me about their plans, decisions, insights, and mistakes. The hour I spent with him on the phone was absolutely invaluable!

If you can find somebody who has been on the ground at your desired destination, take the time to interview them. Your planning will be greatly enhanced by the effort.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:32AM (-04:00)

Antennas for travel: MP-1

Monday, July 03, 2006

For the next couple of days I'd like to talk about some of the antenna options you have when traveling with your radio. Before I begin, though, I should make a couple of points: first, I don't have any financial relationship with any of the manufacturers that I might mention. I'm not trying to make any money from this; I'm just trying to have fun and share that fun! Secondly, there are plenty of things that I've tried and like, and a couple of things that I've tried and didn't like. Just because something worked for me (or didn't work for me) doesn't mean you'll have the same results. All of this is my opinion and, as my boyhood friend has been fond of telling me for the last 35 years, I'm often "full of beans." (GRIN)

The four antennas I'll be discussing in these next few days are:

- Superantenna MP-1
- Buddistick
- Buddipole
- Force-12 Sigma-5

We'll start with the MP-1. This was one of the first small antennas I bought and I picked it up on a lark from Ham Radio Outlet in New Hampshire while browsing around (which is probably why Sandy gets nervous when I start browsing at HRO!). The antenna is pretty simple: it consists of a mount, a small rod, a clever coil assembly, and a collapsible whip. The coil consists of two parts: one with the wire coil and a second sleeve that slips up and down on the coil to change the tap. Tuning the antenna means sliding the sleeve until you get a good match.

The antenna is a shorted vertical so it does need a set of radials. I've added some nice lengths of wires with quick-connect connectors on them for this purpose. The whole kit weighs very little and the longest piece is about a foot long. This makes it easy to pack and carry.

How does it perform? Rather than give my testimony or do a lot of mathematics here talking about efficiency and dBs, I'm going to point to a web site that provides a great set of comparisons for a whole slew of antennas. The HFpack web site has a couple of Shootout reports that directly compare the performance of various antennas using a "reference" antenna such as a 1/4 wave vertical or a full-size dipole. The Vertical Antenna Shootout Results show the standard MP-1 antenna to be about 2 dB down from the reference antenna. That's pretty good given that we've drastically shrunk the size and weight of it!

The MP-1 is an excellent antenna for operating off of a hotel balcony. As I said, it is small, light, and easy to assemble and tune. The other reason why I like this antenna is that it uses standard 3/8-inch by 24 threads for its pieces so you can mix-and-match other antenna parts to further improve the antenna's performance. Adding a longer whip, for example, would help. So would substituting a longer rod between the coil and mount. I made both substitutions on my Hawaii trip and the antenna performed very well. Because of the successes I've had with this antenna, it is now packed with my big (50 pound)

Pelican trunk and always travels with that rig.

Your first DXpedition need not be elaborate. You might consider just bringing a small HF radio and one of these antennas on your next business trip. If you can get to the hotel balcony, you can use an antenna like this one to make HF contacts. That sure beats HBO!

Tomorrow I'll talk about another shortened vertical: the Buddistick. Until then, 73!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:07PM (-04:00)

Antennas for travel: Buddistick

Tuesday, July 04, 2006

The Buddistick is a creation from the makers of the Buddipole and is, in essence, half of a Buddipole. (I'll talk about the Buddipole tomorrow.) Like the MP-1 discussed yesterday, the Buddistick is a shortened vertical antenna with a loading coil and mount. It breaks down into small pieces for easy travel and the nice zippered bag stuffed with antenna parts, radials, mount, and a 25-foot run of coax weighs in at only 4 pounds.

Because it is a vertical antenna (shortened quarter wave vertical) it needs a radial system or other mechanism to give it a low resistance return path. The Buddipole comes with a nice radial wire wound around a kite string handle for this purpose, but I've created a small collection of very lightweight radials from some very small and tough wire sold by The Wire Man. Having a set of radials (maybe 5 or 10) is a big improvement over just a single radial.

The Buddistick has the following construction: there is a coil with 3/8-inch x 24 threaded rod on one side and a place where such a rod could screw in on the other side, it comes with two 11-inch rods that are to go between the mount and the coil, and a whip antenna that extends to about 6 feet. The whole system comes in a nice zippered bag that organizes everything and keeps it safe for travel.

Assembly of the antenna is easy as everything has standard 3/8-inch x 24 threading. Screw the two rods together giving you 22 inches of base, screw the rods into the mount on one end, screw the coil on to the rods, screw the whip into the coil, and it is assembled! Easy. It takes about a minute once you know what you are doing.

The coil is larger in diameter than the MP-1. You tap the coil by inserting a small device into the winding at a particular place and then tightening it. A wander lead with a small banana plug then plugs into this little gizmo to accomplish the tapping. It isn't as convenient as the MP-1 with its sliding sleeve, but it works fine.

The thing that makes tuning this antenna easier (and this goes for the MP-1 and Buddipole, too) is an antenna analyzer like the MFJ-259B. I find all I need to do is hook up the antenna to the analyzer and then slide the wander lead up and down the coil until the match looks good. Then, stick the little gizmo in the place you spotted and tighten it down. With practice, this can be done very quickly.

Since the antenna uses standard 3/8-inch x 24 threading you can substitute parts if you like to improve the performance. I've purchased a couple of MFJ 12-foot telescoping whips that I've used with both the Buddistick and the MP-1. More whip means less coil and more efficiency. The MFJ whip is not nearly as sturdy and robust as the stock one that comes with the Buddistick, but if you are careful it should hold up OK. Also note that a full-sized 15m antenna can be made from just the 12 foot whip, mount, and radials!

The carrying bag has enough room in it for a couple of extra things: I have a spare whip, some extra coil clips, radials, four plastic stakes (to hold down the radials), and a 25-foot piece of RG-8X coax. This is the antenna system I bring with me when I'm doing short trips by car. I toss this little bag along with the Pelican case with my Elecraft K2 stuff in the back of my Element and hope the hotel has windows that will open. (GRIN)

At \$139 it is a little more money than the MP-1 (\$99) but it is also a little more rugged and comes with the carrying bag. You'll also want to get the table top mounting clamp for another \$25 unless you've already got one that you use with your camera or camcorder. I'm very pleased with my Buddistick. It performs very well compared to other antennas (like the MP-1) and is very rugged. And, like I say, it is easy to assemble, easy to disassemble (these things aren't always symmetric) and travels well--which is the point here in case you forgot!

One last note, you won't find this in the HFpack Vertical Antenna Shootout because the antenna was introduced after this event. For this time, at least, you'll have to take my word for it: it performs at least as well as the MP-1 (LONG) as it has the extra "base rod" as compared to the original MP-1 design *and* a longer whip.

Tomorrow I'll discuss the Buddistick's big brother, the Buddipole.

(Updated this post in the afternoon to correct the lengths of the rods. There are two 11-inch rods, not two 22-inch rods.)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:25PM (-04:00)

Quick wrap-up on small verticals

Tuesday, July 04, 2006

My last two entries on the MP-1 and Buddistick gave a good overview of two different antenna systems that could serve you well in a couple of particular situations. After rereading my posts I thought it would be good to clarify a couple of things and provide a little more rationale (and a little less product review).

Here's some situations where you might find these small vertical antenna designs helpful:

- **Balcony portable** -- in this case you have no good or permanent access to a roof or even an area of ground you can deploy an antenna. Perhaps you are in a hotel room in a multi-floor hotel or your ground floor room is adjacent to a heavily traveled foot path and it would be awkward, or even dangerous, to deploy something more permanent outside. In this case, you can use the railing of the deck or balcony as your antenna support and deploy the small vertical from the railing. The radial wires would be spread as far as your limited space allows. I used this strategy in Hawaii and it worked very well. You can see pictures of that effort here.
- **Picnic table portable** -- In this situation you've brought a radio (probably a pretty small one like an Elecraft KX1 or an FT-817) and a small battery and solar panel to keep the battery charged. You're just looking for a small antenna, lightweight and unobtrusive, to make a few casual QSOs.
- **High-band rooftop mono band antenna** -- I had access to the roof of the building I was using for my shack while on St. John and found the small vertical antenna solution to be an excellent way to deploy a high band (15-6m) full-sized vertical. There were rafters above the roof line that made it easy to attach the Buddistick mount overhead. My site survey prior to the trip alerted me to this possibility.

There are likely other situations that would make one of these antennas the most logical choice, but you should get the idea. The last one listed, the "high-band rooftop mono band antenna" is especially interesting. Most of the antennas I'm going to discuss are single-band antennas. Since full sized verticals for 15m-6m are small (less than 12 foot in height), it is pretty easy to make full sized vertical antennas from these simple parts.

On St. John I deployed four single band antennas on the roof of the guest house. You can see those antennas here. They were (a) a 15m full sized vertical from a Buddistick kit, (b) a 20m dipole from a Buddipole, (c) a 40m vertical from a fishing pole, and (d) an 80m vertical from another fishing pole.

The point, as I do a little review of these two antennas, is not to bring "this **or** that" antenna, but to bring "this **and** that" antenna. If you want to operate on multiple bands, the easiest thing to do is to deploy antennas for each band you want to use (weight and size permitting) and then switch between them. (Instead of reconfiguring and retuning a single antenna.)

I hope this quick summary clarified my thinking. Tomorrow I'll discuss an antenna that is a little heavier but much more versatile: the Buddipole.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:12PM (-04:00)

Antennas for travel: Buddipole

Wednesday, July 05, 2006

This is a long post. Sorry. But, this post talks about the one antenna system I rely on most for my trips. I hope you enjoy it.

One of the simplest and most effective lightweight antennas is the trusty dipole antenna. When we say "dipole" we're really talking about a whole family of antennas with various shapes and sizes but they all have the same constituent parts: two *arms*, a feed point, and possibly a matching network or transformer to present a convenient impedance to the transceiver. Dipoles have a major advantage over a quarter wave vertical antenna: there is no need for an elaborate radial system to make it work efficiently. The two arms do the trick nicely.

A typical half-wave dipole is fed in the middle with arms of equal lengths on either side but there is nothing *magic* about the middle of the dipole. It is just as valid to feed the thing *off center* (making an *off center fed dipole*). As you move off center, the impedance of the antenna goes up compared to the center fed cousin but a matching network can take care of that. We can even use the fact that moving off center raises the impedance to our advantage as we'll see later.

Some of these specific designs have become popular enough to have been named such as the Carolina Windom and G5RV. These are wire antennas that weigh only a couple of pounds and operate well on many bands. For example, the G5RV covers 80-10m, every HF contesting band except 160m! So, if these antennas are super lightweight, cover multiple bands, and are well-proven by years of use, why don't we just carry one of these on our DXpeditions and declare victory?

The answer is simple: these antennas work well when hung high in the air and many places we might visit on a DXpedition will not have any trees, or indeed any structures, that are tall enough to hang the antenna high enough to make them effective. Further, if you want to have a wire antenna in a *flat top* configuration you'll need to hold it up in three places: the middle and the two ends. If you live in an area like New England with its nice tall pine and oak trees then getting a dipole pulled up high is pretty easy. If you are looking for a tall tree on a tropical island where hurricanes periodically flatten everything, the task is a lot harder.

The Buddipole provides nice solutions to many of these problems. In its simplest form, the Buddipole is a dipole antenna made from stiff aluminum parts and whips. To add electrical length without adding too much physical length, two coils (one for each arm) are supplied. The coils may be tapped anywhere along their lengths as needed to give you a good match. An antenna for the VHF bands (2 and 6m) can be made with just whips and arms alone. HF antennas require the arms, whips, and coils.

Like the Buddistick and Super Antennas MP-1, the Buddipole is made using parts with 3/8-inch x 24 threads. The standard configuration is center "tee", then on each side one 22-inch aluminum arm, a coil (usually tapped except on the bottom band 40m), followed by a whip.

You can see how well the Buddipole performed in the HFpack Horizontal Antenna Shootout. Budd Drummond tested three configurations: the standard configuration described above, a configuration with an extra "aluminum arm" on each side (adding 22-inches of arm), and finally a configuration with two extra arms (for a total of 3 arms). When compared to a reference antenna (a 20m wire dipole) the short version was just one dB lower in power than the reference antenna, the two-armed version was neck-and-neck with the wire antenna, and the 3 armed version outperformed the reference dipole by a hair. Clearly, this is a no compromise antenna for 20m and up!

The shootout compared the performance of the Buddipole to a standard 20m dipole with each hung horizontally. The Buddipole need not be a horizontal antenna, however. A "rotating arm kit" allows you to adjust the position of each side of the Buddipole. You can make a vertical dipole by rotating the arms so the "hot" side is up and the "shield" side is down. You can also make an "L" shaped antenna with the "hot" side up like a vertical and the "shield" side like a single raised radial. I've talked to Europe from a park near my home with just 8 watts SSB with the Buddipole in this "L" configuration.

The ability to add, subtract, or substitute parts in this antenna system is something that drew me to it. I believe the Buddipole is the Erector Set of ham radio. You are limited only by your imagination! I have found this system to be so versatile that I have purchased two whole systems:

- **Big Buddipole system** -- This system consists of the Buddipole antenna, matching tripod, 16-foot mast, guying kit, two extra aluminum arms (four total), 5-section shock-cord whips (longer and stronger than the stock whips), the rotating arm kit, and a Triple Ratio Switch Balun (TRSB) which gives me 1:1, 2:1, or 4:1 matching with a quick turn of the switch. It all fits into a nice bag (and weighs 12 pounds). You can see pictures of this from my St. John trip [here](#).
- **Little Buddipole system** -- This was the original system I bought which consists of the Buddipole antenna, matching tripod, 8-foot mast, the rotating arm kit, and the TRSB. At 8 pounds, this is the one I grab when I want to do some quick picnic table portable some place. (Remember, even this configuration was nearly as good as a full-sized dipole on 20m!)

This antenna system covers many contingencies that would be difficult to cover otherwise. It gets your antenna off the ground. It provides a great antenna for 20-2m and a pretty good radiator for its size for 30 and 40m. You can even leave the tripod and mast at home and attach the antenna to a painter's pole. If you knew you could obtain such a pole locally once you arrived at your destination, this would be a great alternative to carrying the tripod and mast. This isn't cheating! Using local materials, especially if they are heavy, is a perfectly reasonable thing to do--if you know you can do it.

There is a Yahoo! group that supports the Buddipole and its companion Buddistick. You can find that group [here](#). The product is well supported by Budd and his son Chris. The nice thing about the Yahoo! group is you can join before you purchase the antenna and any question you pose will be seen by the thousands (!) of users within the group. It is unlikely any question would go unanswered for long.

I try to bring one or both (Big and Little) Buddipole systems on each big trip because I *know* I can make it work, even if nothing else will. That's a nice feeling to have far away from home.

Tomorrow I'll either talk more about the Buddipole or, perhaps, I'll move on and tell you why I ordered the Force-12 Sigma-5 antenna. Until then, 73!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:30PM (-04:00)

Buddipole wrap-up

Thursday, July 06, 2006

In yesterday's post I talked about the Buddipole. Today, I'll just fill in a last few facts and thoughts about this system and its cousin the Buddistick. Both of these systems use a tapped coil system to give you the correct electrical length for the selected band. Below is a picture of one of these coil taps just to take the mystery out of them.

You can see the little bend in the end of the metal. That is the "finger" that grips the winding. The whole plastic top screws down drawing that finger up to hold the winding tight. Just make them snug, please! You don't want to start pulling the winding off the coil form. Both the Buddipole and Buddistick use these coil taps.

The instructions that came with my Buddipole gave suggestions for where to tap the coils and how far to extend the whips to achieve resonance on each band. My system came with three taps, one for the "shield" side (called *black*) and two for the inner conductor (hot) side (called *red*). The center "tee" has that color coding as well so everything is easy to match up. With just those three taps, and judicious setting of whip lengths, you can easily and quickly set the antenna up for all ham bands 40-10m using the standard whips.

Now the instructions talk about four taps. Check out the antenna setup card in the Buddipole Yahoo! group's file section. This diagram and chart illustrates nicely how easy it is to change bands.

This four tap strategy is different from the one that came with my antenna. As more and more refinements are made to the antenna and as more and more users play with it, better ideas emerge. I can't wait to try these new settings!

Which brings me to one of my last points: I rarely use the antenna with the settings on these cards. I'm continually trying new things. For example, I bought the longer and sturdier shock cord whips. I have two of the 5-section whips and one of the 7-section whips. The seven section whip is 148 inches long. That makes a great vertical radiator! But it also means I'm a bit off the beaten path in that there are no "standard" settings for all the crazy combinations of things I have. As I said yesterday, this is the erector set for ham radio. And, just as I never built the stuff in the erector set instructions (I was always building something more elaborate and fun), I'm rarely building the Buddipole up the way those instructions read, either. Instead, I have my own settings guide I've made for the new whips and I've got lots of weird, but promising, configurations still to be documented. The goal is always the same, though: to get the best antenna I can made with the limited weight and bulk I'm willing to carry on one of my trips.

Tomorrow I'll talk about the Force-12 Sigma-5 antenna and why I thought it was worth a try.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:58AM (-04:00)

Antennas for travel: Force-12 Sigma-5

Friday, July 07, 2006

Today I'd like to just mention a few things about the Force-12 Sigma-5 antenna. I ordered this antenna about a week ago and am now awaiting its arrival. Of course I'll revisit the discussion after I've used the antenna in the field!

I thought some of you might be interested in my motivation for ordering the antenna in the first place. After all, I've just finished several lengthy posts describing the MP-1, Buddipole, and Buddistick antennas. Exactly how does this new antenna fit into the mix?

So, before I tell you why I ordered it, let me tell you a little about the antenna.

The Sigma-5 antenna is a 5 band vertical antenna covering 10, 12, 15, 17, and 20m. It is rated at 1200 watts SSB (700w CW) and its makers claim it is greater than 90% efficient. That's nice, but how about size and weight (two things we care about deeply)? The antenna breaks down into 2 foot sections and weighs only 7 pounds. At this point they had my attention!

The antenna is basically a vertical dipole with capacitance hats. These capacity hats reduce the height of the unit while keeping efficiency high. The *trick* that the antenna uses so it can operate on multiple bands is found in the center housing where a set of relays can be energized from the wired remote switch to select between the various bands. If no relays are energized, the antenna is left in its default state as a 20m antenna.

At this point we can begin making some comparisons between the Sigma-5 and some of the other antennas I've already discussed. Here are some things the antenna has going for it:

- **Weight and size** -- My *Big* Buddipole system is 12 pounds; my *Small* Buddipole system is 8 pounds. The Sigma-5 comes in a pound lighter than even the smaller Buddipole. That's nice.
- **Remote band switching** -- This is an important advantage. If you are working on 20m and want to just sneak up to 17m or 15m meters to see if there is an opening, the other single-band antenna solutions would require that you reconfigure the antenna for the new band, a very time consuming process. The Sigma-5 can change bands instantly with the twist of the band select switch run from the antenna to your operating position by its 50 foot cable (which you can extend if you like).
- **Higher power handling** -- I don't own an amplifier (yet) and, in fact, do much of my work QRP. But, that said, I could see a day where I'll be on an island (maybe on Cay Sal Bank) with a small 500w solid state linear for, say, 20m just to ensure we get heard on at least one band. This antenna could handle that power. The other antennas have a 150 watt or so power limit.
- **Quick assembly time** -- As good as I am with the Buddipole I believe the no tools, no tuning, 5 minute assembly time for the Force-12 will beat even my best time for the Buddipole or any of those other antennas mentioned. When you are operating far from home you want to reduce any complication you can. The quick assembly time promised here is a serious advantage.
- **Built to be a vertical dipole** -- I like to operate my Buddipole as a vertical dipole when near the salt water but I'm always concerned about the interaction with the aluminum mast. The Sigma-5 has no such complication since the entire thing is the radiator. That is an interesting point, in fact: about half the weight of the Buddipole package is *dead weight* in the form of tripod and mast. A seven pounds (less control cable and switch) of the Sigma-5 is radiator. I like that idea.

With all these kudos, you might think I'm ready to abandon the other antennas. Not so. Here is the other set of arguments against the Sigma-5:

- **Only covers 10-20m** -- As we approach the bottom of the solar cycle, 10m and 12m are only a memory. Even 15m (which I worked a bunch on Field Day) is spotty at best. That means this antenna only covers two bands when the Sun is sleepy. My Buddipole, Buddistick, and MP-1 all cover down to 40m and perhaps lower with some clever hacking. We can argue efficiency all day but if an antenna *can't* be used on a band, it is zero percent efficient and any antenna that radiates beats it.
- **The antenna draws current** -- As I said, I operate QRP in the field much of the time. I'm proud to say the radios I've built from Elecraft draw very little on receive, usually on the order of 20-40ma. The review of the antenna claims it draws only 95ma!

Goodness! That's three or four times the current draw of my radio! (I plan on doing some measurements of this when I get my unit. I can't help but think latching relays would have been a better option here...)

- **Price** -- At something approaching \$400 delivered (I'll know when they ship it), this is no cheap antenna. I can't help but wonder if I should have gone with a small handful of monoband vertical dipoles. I'm not sure I could have made the 7 pound weight limit, but I'm sure I could have beat the price! [grin]

I could go on but you get the idea. It may not be an obvious that blowing a wad of cash on this is a good idea. I don't know myself. Still, while sitting on the water's edge while operating from Georges Island in Boston Harbor, I couldn't help but think, "this is a perfect place for a vertical like the Sigma-5." I'll let you know.

In the mean time, you can see the review from the ARRL's October 2002 QST here. The glowing review was part of the impetus to try this antenna. See if it doesn't sell you on it, too.

Tomorrow I'll discuss why a man that never fishes needs so many fishing poles.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 07:00AM (-04:00)

Mount Washington Portable

Saturday, July 08, 2006



I have visitors in from out-of-town this week and it gives me a great excuse to be a tourist in my own area. Boston and the surrounding region is rich with history and wonderful sites to see. Unfortunately, I rarely take the opportunity to soak up all this culture and history unless prompted by visitors. When they come, though, I make the most of it!

My two nieces, now young women, have come to visit their old Uncle Scott and we've been going everywhere and seeing

everything we can in the short week they're here. Yesterday we went to the top of Mount Washington, the centerpiece of the Presidential Range in New Hampshire. You can get to the top of this 6288 foot wonder one of two ways: drive up the mountain's access road, or take the Mount Washington Cog Railway, a steam powered locomotive that pushes you up a sinuous line of wood and steel with inclines sometimes greater than 30 degrees. What a ride!

Mount Washington has some of the worst weather in the world as you can see from the Mount Washington Observatory web site. It is cold, windy, sometimes snowy and foggy, and that's on a nice spring day. [grin]

We packed the car early for the roughly 3 hour drive and in my gear (besides warm clothing) was my Elecraft K2 and Buddistick. I was bound and determined to make at least one QSO from the top of the mountain!

The trip up was wonderful and after a quick romp up to the peak for a photograph, I headed off to the observation deck with its long metal rail and flat ground. You can see me huddled and attempting to shelter myself from the wind here:

The Buddistick went together quickly and it only took a few moments with a small antenna analyzer to find a reasonable tap for 20m. I tapped the coil and then allowed the autotuner in the K2 to give me the rest of the match I needed.

The wind was fierce and it was blowing some kind of dust. I found I was closing one eye then the other unconsciously to protect them from the assault. Once I was done setting up everything I sat on the ground hoping for some relief from the wind and called CQ. Nothing. I called again. Still nothing. I'm only running 8-12 watts here so you have to be patient.

I tuned around and found a couple of gentlemen finishing a conversation. When they were done, I squeezed the PTT and called out, "This is November Echo One Radio Delta portable on top of Mount Washington. Can you copy me?" One of those gentlemen came right back. Yes! N4EUQ Dan from Virginia gave me a 55 and then, after a quick QSO, encouraged me to look for others on the frequency.

WB9PMF Tim from Wisconsin worked me next. Again, a 55 signal report--but that's just fine given I've got a small vertical and 8-12 watts out!

The wind had picked up and the Buddistick blew down for about the 10th time. I need to pack a small guying kit for the Buddistick in its bag! It doesn't need to be much. Just a few short lengths of dacron rope would do. Well, I learn something on every trip; this was the lesson for this round.

Tim encouraged me to call out CQ one more time but there were no takers. So, I told Tim I had to pack up and get out of the wind. He wished me 73 and I started packing stuff back into their bags.

I had just two contacts in 20 minutes, but I'm sure had I been able to survive the elements I would have been able to work people all afternoon. It only takes one packet spot for people all over to know you are there.

Again, I always learn something on one of these deployments. That's why I believe they are so crucial for a run-up to a larger far away personal DXpedition. (Oh, and they are tons of fun, too!)

Perhaps I'll talk about fishing poles tomorrow. In the mean time, get out there and do a little portable operation. See what you learn from the experience!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:35AM (-04:00)

Georges Island and RSGB IOTA contest

Sunday, July 09, 2006

Big day yesterday for our little tour group. My nieces, Sandy, and I took the harbor islands boat to Georges Island in Boston Harbor. This is only my second trip there and the first for Sarah and Katie. The boat ride out provided us with some fantastic views of the Boston skyline, a lighthouse, and every kind of sail boat and recreational boat you can imagine.

While on Georges Island we toured Fort Warren inside, outside, and on top. That is a big place! The view from the top also allowed us to see several other nearby islands that would be great fun to visit.

On the way out, I talked with one of the rangers about possibly connecting to the island's generator to operate in the upcoming RSGB Islands on the Air contest at the end of July. Georges Island is part of the Massachusetts State North Group. The ranger took my business card, name, telephone number, and email address after a nice conversation. She also mentioned her brother is a ham (that might help!).

Even if you don't think you are a *contester* you might want to give this one a try. You don't have to be a member of the Radio Society of Great Britain to join in the fun. Just go to an island and get on the air! If you are lucky enough to live close to the ocean and one of these islands identified by the RSGB's IOTA program you've got a perfect place to start building up experience for your own 100 Pound DXpeditions.

I hope to hear back from the ranger in the next week-or-so. It is probably a long-shot as

the island has limited power in only a few rooms of the ranger station and one room in the fort. Still, you have to try, right?

With the big day we had yesterday I didn't have time to start my big blog entries on using fishing poles for all this. Perhaps after I put my young visitors back on the airplane (and after I've had a really good night's sleep!) I'll be able to tackle that subject.

In the mean time, get out there and activate an island, do a little picnic table portable, or even drive your car out to the end of a long country road and try operating. See you on the air!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:35AM (-04:00)

The DX Magazine

Monday, July 10, 2006

This is the last full days for touring the Boston area with my nieces. We're off to Salem, Massachusetts to the House of Seven Gables and other cool stuff. (Have you noticed how *everybody* seems to have a web site now-a-days? Wow.)

Other than picking up the mail and shuffling around stuff for the next adventure, we've not spent too much time around the house. Still, I did manage to get a few moments to sit and page through the latest issue of The DX Magazine that arrived on Saturday. Many of you probably get QST and CQ and these are both fun, general interest magazines. The DX Magazine, on the other hand, is dedicated to doing DX and DXpeditions. This is the third issue I've received and, so far at least, it is a winner! A subscription is \$22 for a year (6 issues) and is certainly worth a try. Highly recommended.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:49AM (-04:00)

Boxboro announcement

Tuesday, July 11, 2006

My young visitors have been safely returned to Illinois and my life should again return to something approaching normal now. After a Spring here in New England brought record rainfall and flooding, they were fortunate enough to see a solid week of beautiful sunshine and warm breezes. Now, as I sit typing this, thunder echoes through the condo and hail bangs off the roof and sidewalk. Perhaps I should bring my lucky charms back!

I'm going through the mail that collected during their visit and found an announcement for Boxboro, the ARRL New England Division Convention. I'll be speaking there on the "100 Pound DXpedition". The current schedule has me in the noon time slot on Saturday. If you live in the New England area, I hope you'll come and see the show.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:44PM (-04:00)

Pelican cases

Wednesday, July 12, 2006

Carrying around fragile equipment is tricky business. It doesn't do you any good to pack up 100 pounds of gear only to have it all arrive broken. I've decided that a good, solid, waterproof case for the transceiver and related parts is a key ingredient for a successful trip. Although there are lots of solutions for this problem, I've mostly settled into one solution: a Pelican case.

These cases come in a variety of sizes and are all very strong and tough. I have four

cases: a Pelican 1200 (for my Elecraft KX1), Pelican 1610 (for my FT-897D kit), and two Pelican 1510's (one for my Elecraft K2, and the other for my next project). The 1200 is small and would be suitable for a camera or very small radio like the KX1. The 1510 is the largest Pelican case you can use as a carry-on bag according to airline rules. The 1610 is the largest case you can use as a checked bag.

Though these cases are sold many place, I've found one dealer that I've been very pleased with so I stick with them. DXer case has a good variety of the Pelican cases and their prices and shipping rates are reasonable. The Pelican 1510 that just arrived the other day, for example, was \$115.00 plus about \$16 to get it across country from California to Massachusetts.

Pelican guarantees their cases for life as unbreakable, watertight, and dust tight. They are tough! But, that toughness comes at a cost: weight. The 1510 weighs between 12 and 14 pounds empty (or with the foam packing included) and the 1610 weighs about 22-23 pounds. Given a checked bag can only be 50 pounds total weight, the 1610 empty is almost half of the allowance! Still, I know that the stuff inside will arrive safely, dry, and ready for use. Again, saving weight on the case does you no good if the contents don't survive the trip.

There are some nifty add-ons to these cases that I'd also like to recommend. There is an order form inside the case that allows you to order a customized name tag that slips nicely into a recessed area in the case. I've ordered tags for all my cases. You can also get a drying agent enclosed in a little metal canister that can be kept in the case to help keep things dry. Given the case has an O-ring seal, it could easily trap moisture inside as well as it keeps moisture out! I ordered one of these in January and have been using it in the 1610. I like it. When it has absorbed all the moisture it can, the little beads inside turn a different color. To dry the pack out again you just throw it in the oven at 300 degrees for 3 hours and it is ready for use again. I just ordered two more of these gizmos for the two 1510 cases.

If you don't already have a good way of transporting your equipment, consider these Pelican cases. Yes, they are a bit heavy--but the peace of mind you'll have knowing your stuff will arrive safely can't be beat. After all, it would be better to bring less stuff and have it all work than bring more stuff and have it be broken!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:00AM (-04:00)

QSL cards

Thursday, July 13, 2006



I just received an envelope from the QSL buro and within it were a few surprises. I received a card from Cyprus (IOTA AS-004) which was both a new DXCC entity and new IOTA island for me. Double bonus! I also had received a card from Japan confirming a QSO from my Hawaii trip taken in February of 2005. Finally, near the bottom of the pile, was a card from W1ZS in Vermont. How did this card end up in a

buro drop? Upon a closer look at the card, it was to KP2/NE1RD from my St. John trip last Winter. I didn't know you could do that (basically send a card from a US station to a US station) with the buro. Live and learn.

QSLing is fun for me. I understand many have probably developed a *been there, done that* attitude towards filling out all those little cards, but not me. I feel like I get to re-

experience the QSO, contest, or trip when I'm doing the QSL paperwork. I also hope that I'm able to give a small thrill to somebody when they receive my card like the thrill I just had holding that new Cyprus card. To that end, I try to design a nice card that conveys the polish and dedication I have both preparing for the trip and operating on the air.

There are lots of places you can get cards printed but I've found some people that have been fun to work with and have helped me create some pretty fantastic looking cards. They are The QSLworks in South Dakota. So far I've had them help me with three different cards: my home call card for Acton, Massachusetts, my card for KP2/, and the special event K1P card from the Deer Isle, Maine trip celebrating Patriots Day. The key points are (a) the good folks at the QSLworks take my mock-ups and work with me to give me a card I can call "my design", and (b) they take that design and apply the kind of polish that professional designers and printers know how to do so the final result looks *great*.

If you go someplace interesting you'll likely be getting requests for QSL cards. Spend some time planning your card's design (I had the KP2/ design sketched out long before the trip was made, for example) and make sure you get some nice digital photography done while on-site for that card. Then, pick somebody who will help you get a first-class card printed when you're done. You'll probably make somebody's day when you send them out later.

If you are one of the people who *hate* the QSLing process, find a QSL manager before your trip. Maybe some high school aged ham wants the job or your local club has somebody who really likes handling cards. There are lots of alternatives here but it is best to plan ahead.

Paper QSL cards either direct or through the buro are still the standard way to confirm a QSO. I'll try to discuss electronic QSLing in upcoming blog entries.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:01AM (-04:00)

A little at a time

Friday, July 14, 2006

It is *crunch time* at work as we've got a pretty serious deadline coming up. There are two good things to report about this, though: first, this is actually a rare event at the firm where I work. In fact, overall I've worked more "normal" hours at this job than in most of the gigs I've had. Secondly, management offered a very generous "comp-time" program so extra hours I might work now can be put towards time off later (say, DXpedition time!). Because I'm putting in extra hours in the office, I'm not spending too much time thinking about radio stuff right now. That said, this is an excellent time to work on some of those long lead-time items. I've already ordered (and received) my new Pelican case, ordered that Force-12 antenna, and have started doing some work on yet another trip (which I've not disclosed here) that won't take place until some time next year.

Though I'm not spending too much time each day on these planning activities, I am spending some time every day on this effort. I've also begun carrying a little notebook with me to jot down ideas as they come to me. Oddly enough, I've had some worthwhile ideas sort of hit me out-of-the-blue and the notebook has helped me keep track of these little gems. I know I've probably beat this topic to death but a successful DXpedition depends on good planning. The best planning, in my opinion, is done a little at a time, over a long period of time. So, even though I'm really busy at work, I believe I'm still making good progress on some of these trip plans in those few minutes I spend on them each day.

I may try to take some time on Saturday to trundle off to Mount Wachusett for the CQ VHF contest. It doesn't really do anything to help me prepare for a DXpedition--it is just a

fun contest! And, I'm sure by then I'll need a little break from work.
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:34AM (-04:00)

Hill-topping

Saturday, July 15, 2006

It is a beautiful day here in Acton. I'm hanging around the condo waiting for the Verizon repair person to fix the phone. The thunderstorms that went through earlier this week did something horrible to our line and now all I hear when I pick up the receiver is screeching static. Of course, the window for when they might do this repair is something like 8 AM to 4 PM. Ugh.

Today is the CQ WW VHF contest (you can find the rules here). I did pretty well in last year's contest and had a great time. The follow-up article even quoted me

Meanwhile, NE1RD extolled the virtues of the QRP Hilltopper category, "working from atop Mt. Wachusett in FN42 with a cool breeze, cool drinks, and a great view."

Up on Mount Wachusett the view really is great but the flat parking lot at the top doesn't provide too many ways to pop up antennas. Last year I used a painter's pole to hold up my Arrow 2m antenna. There wasn't a good way to guy it so I used bungee cords to lash it to the back of my ugly Honda Element. This really wasn't a good arrangement.

On 6m I used my Buddipole which had its own tripod and 16-foot mast. Instead of guying the thing, I hung a heavy weight from the bottom of the tripod with a bungee and it was pretty solid.

This year I purchased an MFJ 6m beam that I had hoped to take up there. Of course, figuring out a way to hold it up on that concrete and gravel parking lot will be a challenge. In many ways, operating from the top of Wachusett is like operating in a typical island DX location: I've got a great view of the horizon in all directions, and I am the tallest thing I can see for miles!

So, with no tall trees or other structures from which to hang wires, we're stuck with bringing our own mast material and hoisting up radiators from there. With VHF-sized antennas, this isn't too much of a problem. Even the 6m beam is pretty small compared to any HF antenna. Bringing enough mast material that is strong enough to hold up a big HF yagi would be much harder. We did just that up in Maine for the K1P special event station. For that we used the *Vertical Antenna Kit* from The Mast Company. Five sections of the aluminum mast were put into the base bringing the Force-12 Tribander up to about 20 feet.

Sounds good, right? Check the weight, though: each mast section is 4-feet long and weights 2.2 pounds. Five sections weighed about 11 pounds. Now add the base (another couple of pounds) and some other stuff and you're nearly up to 15 pounds just for the mast. If you're going to bring one antenna, this mast, and "make do" with everything else, perhaps you can still hit your 100 pound weight budget--but it would be difficult (not impossible, just difficult).

These are great exercises to learn about your equipment, think through alternatives, and see what works (and doesn't work). I know I've mentioned this before, but it really is true: operating away from home, packing stuff and taking the radio on the road, is a great way of facing all these kinds of challenges and allows you to work out solutions and viable alternatives while you *are* close to home. It can help make your next DXpedition to some far away place more likely to succeed.

I don't know if I'll get to go to Wachusett today. At this point it depends on when Verizon shows up [sigh]. But, I've done lots of prep that I know will help me later. Hope to see you on the air. I'll be **FN42** if I can get on. 73!
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:13PM (-04:00)

Verizon letdown + Power to the People

Sunday, July 16, 2006

I never made it to Wachusett yesterday. Verizon repair never appeared, the static on the line is worse than ever, and I wasted a day sitting at home instead of working the contest. But I'm not bitter. [grin]

I did try to make the best use of my time (other than the nap I took, of course) including assembling the MFJ 6m yagi just to be sure all the parts were there and everything fit. It was a good thing I did this! The holes drilled into the boom for the U-bolt weren't quite right so I had to re-drill one of them. That would have been problematic on top of Mount Wachusett! Again, always familiarize yourself with your equipment (radios, antennas, power supplies, tuners, etc.) long before you need it for something important. I was going to try the new MFJ beam but I had a backup plan in case something wasn't right. If you take some new piece of equipment on a 100 pound DXpedition and it isn't right, you'll be hosed!

As I said earlier this week, we're in *crunch mode* at work. I'm here now, in fact, jotting down a few notes for today's blog and then *at it* full-tilt. I'm slated to travel Wednesday to Florida to The Open Group meeting. We'll see if that's still on after a status meeting we'll no doubt have early this week. While I'm down there I'm going to try to talk to people about boat charters to Cay Sal Bank. We'll see if I can find anybody interested in helping. Finally, I received two magazines in the mail yesterday: QST and World Radio. QST had an article about a foot-powered charging system that captured my attention. Given that I've not heard back from the Rangers, I'm not counting on being able to tap into their power for the IOTA contest held at the end of this month. Therefore, I still have the problem of powering my rig all day. The solar panel helps, but it can't keep up with the drain. The Freeplay FreeCharge Weza look like it solves this problem nicely. The unit contains a 7 Amp-hour seal lead acid (SLA) battery and a foot-activated generator. Power to the people, baby! Here is a picture:

I should be able to run all day with the combination of solar power and this gizmo. I can't wait to try! I ordered it last night (kind of big for an impulse buy, but what the heck). I'll let everybody know how it works out.

Finally, I just noticed my **to do** list on my desk. I've fallen behind on lots of things. I've signed up to do some stuff for the New England QRP club and I have to put an update out for Cab-converter to support the recently held ARRL VHF contest. I should try to do those things before leaving for Florida. My how time flies!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:19AM (-04:00)

VooDudes and Kure presentations

Monday, July 17, 2006

I was thinking about my trip to Dayton today. It was my first time at the Hamvention and, to be honest, I was a bit overwhelmed. I began the trip with a short drive down to Newington to attend a talk given by Roger Western G3SXW, author of *Up Two Adventures of a DXpeditioner and Contesting in Africa Multi-Multi on the Equator* (which



is really by the VooDoo contest group). I own and had read both books. Mr. Western was kind enough to both sign my copy of *Contesting in Africa* and indulge me with a photograph with the two of us together.

The venue for the presentation was the first floor conference room at ARRL headquarters and the talk lasted about two hours including the Q&A session. Certainly there was lots of discussions about equipment, storage, border crossing adventures, and negotiations with, well, practically every bureaucrat and business man within arms reach, but there was also a great deal in the presentation about the

local people, customs, music, and how they live.

It is difficult to imagine people more dedicated, hardworking, and competitive than the *VooDudes* (as they like to be called), yet they took the time to "stop and smell the roses". I have to remind myself to do that occasionally, too.

The other thing that triggered these thoughts about DXpedition presentations was a newspaper article Sandy had given me today on the new Hawaiian wildlife refuge. On the map showing the area now protected is Kure atoll, home of the recent K7C DXpedition, way off to the west. I had seen Ann Santos WA1S speak this spring and part of her presentation was a short video of that trip. She'll be speaking again at Boxboro at the DX dinner. If you can, come and see the show. She's an excellent speaker and, if you're like me at all, her tale will fill you with the sense of adventure that will make you want to go out and try this stuff yourself--even if your plan is a bit more modest!

These very experienced DXpeditioners do come out and speak now and then. I urge you to make that club meeting or convention to see them, talk to them, and learn from them. Stop and smell the roses. You'll be glad you did.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:01AM (-04:00)

Weza first impressions

Tuesday, July 18, 2006

My Freeplay FreeCharge Weza just arrived from Sundance Solar. This will just be a couple of notes on first impressions. Here's the first note:

WOW!

This thing is built like a *tank*. It appears to be very well constructed and rugged. It is also packaged very nicely with a rubber-bottom canvas bag that holds the Weza unit and all its accessories. The bag has a set of carrying handle straps and a shoulder strap with pad. Inside the bag are a number of pockets that hold the AC charger, the jumper cables, and a bunch of other connectors for running small radios or other electronics.

The unit was plopped on my floor here in the office, I extended the rear stabilizer bar, and stepped on the charging lever. It made a very satisfying **zoop!** The LEDs arrayed near the top of the interface lit up indicating how well my charging effort was doing. That wimpy stomp I just gave it wasn't nearly what it could take. In fact, you could step on this thing vigorously about once a second to really put the alternator at top performance. The unit feels so solid I don't have any fears about an "overly athletic charging session" breaking

the thing. After all, it isn't just a charging source, it is a workout program!
In short, this is a very nicely thought-out and packaged device. This will definitely be making the trip with me to Georges Island for the IOTA contest.
Finally (and this post I'll only have one "finally" instead of the two "finallys" I had the other day [grin]) a quick word about Sundance Solar. As per my earlier posts, I ordered this thing online off their web site on Saturday evening. Early Monday I received an email message from them telling me they had recomputed the shipping and thought I could still get it very quickly with the cheaper UPS ground method. They wanted to save me some money on shipping costs. If that was a problem, I could write them back. Obviously, they shipped it yesterday and I received it today. The paperwork for the sale is in the box with the unit and it is even signed by the Sundance Solar person that filled the order with a little smiley face. Quick service, responsive, and the product I ordered arrived quickly and safely. Now, for the words that make Sandy *really* nervous: "Good folks! I wonder what else they sell?"
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:52PM (-04:00)

Off to Florida

Wednesday, July 19, 2006

I'm heading off to Florida this afternoon for a conference. I've not had much time to research possible boat charters for the Cay Sal Bank trip. My goal still to spend some time along the coast, from Miami to Hollywood, to see if I can find some people to talk to about this idea.

I've stuffed *DXpeditioning Basics* by Wayne Mills (N7NG) and *DXpeditioning: Behind the Scenes - A Manual for DXpeditioners and DXers* by Neville Cheadle G3NUG and Steve Telenius-Lowe G4JVG in my bag. I've mentioned these works before. Perhaps this trip I'll actually get a chance to go through them again! What I'm trying to get out of these works is the start of my own DXpedition manual that covers all the things we should have worried about and handled on our trip. These things could range from "model release forms" for the videos and still photographs that might be taken, to releases of liabilities wavers, to how we will handle QSLing. All these things need to be worked out. I'm pretty sure much of this would also be reusable on several trips--once I develop it in the first place!

Blogging will be light during my trip. I'll be back very late Saturday night or Sunday morning.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:36AM (-04:00)

Leaving that familiar item at home

Thursday, July 20, 2006

I spent a long day in a meeting but the group was lively and it seemed like we covered a lot of ground. All-in-all, I'm glad I made the trip. After today's session concluded, I got directions to Pro Player stadium from the concierge and zoomed up to catch a Marlin game. I arrived just in time to see the first pitch.

I don't know what it is about this area but I seem to be turned-around every time I try to drive some place. I should have brought my Garmin StreetPilot GPS but I stupidly left it at home to save weight in my bag. Dumb. Very dumb. Maybe that's a lesson for packing for one of these lightweight DXpeditions, too: if you've come to rely on a piece of equipment (particular radio, antenna analyzer, etc.), take it. Work the other stuff around the weight and bulk of the thing that helps keep you centered. At some point, when you are far away

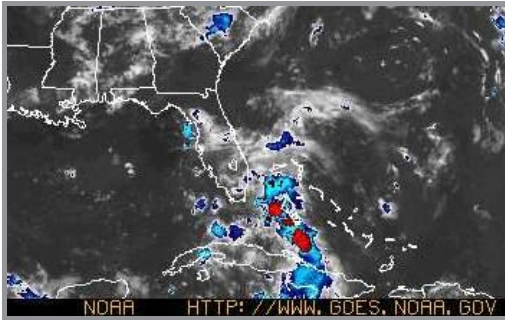
from home, a little comfort from a familiar object might be just what you need. (Don't go nuts, obviously. If you've got a favorite brick, leave it at home [grin]).

The other thing I noticed here is how quickly the weather can change. Storms seem to pop up out of nowhere, then disappear, then reappear. Very fluid, very spontaneous weather down here. My fantasy of working the world from Cay Sal Bank or Double Headed Shot Cay always has me hanging out, wearing the cool sun glasses, and soaking up rays while I work DX. In reality, I've got to plan for foul weather, too. And it can get pretty ferocious down here. That's one more thing for the planning document.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:57PM (-04:00)

Glimpse at Cay Sal Bank weather tonight

Friday, July 21, 2006



Just to give you a little picture to go with the Cay Sal Bank weather concerns, check this out (just snagged it off the NOAA site).

Nasty!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:15AM (-04:00)

Doing my homework the night before

Friday, July 21, 2006

As the meeting here in Florida was winding up the group began the usual chatter of "when does your flight leave?" and, if leaving tomorrow, "what's on tap for tonight?" I tried to recruit folks to join me tonight at the Florida Marlins game but could get no takers. Tonight's game was *excellent*.

I also chatted to the stragglers left in the meeting (those that were not sprinting out the door for the airport) about tomorrow's task of learning about the boat charter situation for my Cay Sal Bank adventure. There were no other hams in the group (the only lapsed ham was one of those doing the airport sprint) so I got a lot of blank stares and "you must be nuts" looks. I probably am. [grin]

I'm up late on Friday night surfing for candidates for tomorrow's trip up the coast. I've not really done enough research and I'll be scrambling tonight and early tomorrow morning to find possible charter companies to talk to -- but I have no regrets going to the ball games. I'll post the list that I come up with.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:50AM (-04:00)

Doing my search the "old fashioned way"

Saturday, July 22, 2006

Well, I came up empty again. In last night's post I'd indicated that I'd waited until the last minute to "do my homework" and locate potential candidate boat chartering companies. In actual fact, I had spent many hours over the last few weeks *googling* around looking for matches for things like "florida boat charter" and "hollywood florida yacht charter" and

every other combination you might think would work. All I would come up with is one day fishing adventures, cocktails and shrimp cruises for my business clients, and small-boat scuba diving tours.

I am such a hopeless nerd and I am so used to finding anything and everything on the web that it didn't occur to me that I might have to get out there and beat the pavement to find what I'm looking for, but it appears that will be the case. So, I'm going to finish packing, check out, stalk the wild breakfast, and then head to the docks and just start asking around.

Of course, something else just occurred to me just now: I wonder how long it will take the DEA to hear about my inquiries and make the (obviously false) assumption that I'm trying to get this boat for some nefarious reason. [sigh] I guess I'll cross that bridge when I get to it.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:59AM (-04:00)

Miami trip wrap-up

Sunday, July 23, 2006

Yesterday's hunt for a boat went a little better than I had expected. I checked out of the hotel and drove to the Miami Marina about 11 AM. From there I just started looking for anybody who charters. The first place I saw was Reward Party & Fishing.

Behind the window was Captain Wayne Conn. I explained I was looking for a charter to Cay Sal Bank and did he know of anybody who might be able to help me? He nodded and said of course he knew where that was and that he has known of people taking fishing expeditions down there. But, his firm didn't have anything appropriate for such a trip. I gave him my business card and wrote "crazy ham radio operator" on the back. He gave me his card and said he'd check around. I'll follow up with him in a week or so.

It occurred to me that I should probably have business cards made up with the "100 pound DXpedition" logo, my home address, email, phone, call sign, etc. on it. I'll likely make one up later today.

I walked a few paces and found Florida Yacht Charters & Sales and the General manager Bob Everhard. Bob said that he remembered another group a few years ago making the same kind of inquiries about Cay Sal Bank. He seemed pretty positive about being able to find somebody to help but thought it might be more of a 10 day to 2-week trip, not the 7 days I had mentioned. (I reflected on this after the meeting and I believe he has a point.) Again, we exchange cards and I write "crazy ham radio operator" on the back of mine.

After the second successful meeting (IMHO) I took a walk around the marina and looked at all the boats. There were certainly some beauties there! Which of them might be appropriate for this trip, I wondered? On the end of the public pier I see the price of diesel fuel advertised on the pump. Of course it has gone up considerably since the last group made its run at Cay Sal. How much will this increase the cost of the trip?

At this point I'm getting a little warm so I go look for some air conditioning. I find Hopkins & Carter Marine. As I step inside the store I see a display case full of marine radios. I've been wondering how to do the island-to-boat communication and this probably makes the most sense. I should learn more about this when I return to Boston (yet another *to do* item).

Once I'd cooled off a bit and found a cool bottle of water to down, I began walking towards the ocean. This morning's conversations gave me a great deal to think about. Should I try something more modest in that area before making the Cay Sal Bank trip? Perhaps I should try a place like Dry Tortugas 70 miles west of Key West. Would I do this run with the same team going to Cay Sal? Should these trips be in two separate years?

The quick walk to the water was refreshing but the sun was beating down hard. I had a few hours before I had to make my flight--time enough to walk along the surf but no time for swimming. After walking along the water's edge and taking some pictures I noticed a storm front on the horizon moving towards me. Time to go!

I hustled back to the marina and reached it just as the sky opened up. Good time for lunch, I thought, and settled into a seat at Monty's Raw Bar for some fish & chips. (MMM good!)

When I was finished with lunch I headed off for the airport for that 2 1/2 hour flight back to Boston. We'll see what becomes of my inquiries.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 05:00PM (-04:00)

A boat!

Monday, July 24, 2006



I had left my business cards with a couple of folks on Saturday while in Miami in hopes that somebody would help me locate a boat that would be willing to take me and a few other brave souls to Cay Sal Bank. When I arrived a work today (Monday) I had a voice mail from Lindsay Davis at the Florida Yacht Charters & Sales office saying she had something for me. That sounded tantalizing!

I just got a chance to call her back about 5PM and she said that she had located a

boat with somebody willing to take a group to Cay Sal. The boat is an 85-foot Hatteras that had just gone through a \$700K refit. A boat that might be similar appears below (or not similar, I know nothing about boats):

The boat would be \$3000 per day. Plus, I'm sure, some *gratuity* for the captain of about 15% more. So, figure 8 days and the budget will need about \$28K for the boat. Wow. That's a lot. For a six person crew that would be \$5K a head. For a four person crew (my original idea) that would be \$7K a head!

The last group had a 55 foot troller and (though I can't find it in my notes) put up about \$12K for the trip. That was when diesel was about half the cost it is now, of course. That has to be factored in, but doesn't explain the differential.

I am thinking as I type and I have a couple of observations. The first one is I don't need a boat that makes me feel like Onassis when I'm getting to this island. Lindsay was talking about plasma TVs, state rooms, circular couches that seat 20, etc. That's not what we're looking for here. The second one is even more simple: this boat is almost twice the size of the one the other fellows chartered so I'm almost certainly looking at too much boat!

All that said, I'm extremely encouraged that in only a half day's worth of digging I was able to find somebody interested in making the trip. Also, the good folks at Florida Yacht have done a very good thing by treating me politely during my visit then quickly locating what I asked for. I didn't set a price range as part of my criteria so they contacted me with the first thing that fit the facts as they had them.

I should now think though how much I think is reasonable to spend on this part of the exercise and follow up with Florida Yacht. I might make another call to Joe (W8GEX) first, though.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 05:28PM (-04:00)

Business cards and more

Tuesday, July 25, 2006



I solved the business card / eyeball-QSL problem. Sunday afternoon I took a few minutes and created a nice business card in Photoshop using my logo. I dropped off the artwork to a printer Monday morning and picked up the results this afternoon. The low resolution version below doesn't do it justice.

I'll have them in my pocket at Boxboro so if

you want one, ask.

In other news I got a really great note from Dave (KB1LKE, a fellow who started following the blog after it was featured on the ARRL Surfin' page. Dave pitched in with lots of observations and links that were very helpful! In case my mission here gets lost, let me repeat it: I believe anybody who is interested in traveling with the radio should try it. If you find information here that helps your first adventure be successful, I'd be very pleased indeed. I'll share my experiences, good and bad, and my victories and goof-ups. Feel free to share your insights, too. Hopefully, anyone reading this will benefit from all of it. Thanks again, Dave!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:46PM (-04:00)

Georges Island IOTA contest QTH

Wednesday, July 26, 2006

I just got a call from a ranger associated with Georges Island asking me about my request to operate from the island and use a little power off their generator. (I discussed some of this in a previous blog entry). No promises were made but he seemed interested in helping.

One of the questions he had for me was, "did I belong to a club?" I replied, "Yes, I belong to the Yankee Clipper Contest Club, along with several other organizations including the service club in Westford called PART."

The other question he had regarded my antenna. My intention is to use my Buddipole systems on the island. (No word yet on the Force-12 Sigma-5.) When I described the system you could sense the relief in his voice. The Buddipole is compact, reasonably small, and easy to describe: there is a tripod, a 16-foot mast, and the antenna fits on top of the mast either horizontal or, perhaps, vertical, depending on how I set it up.

I made it clear I was coming this weekend no matter what and that I'd operated from there before with battery power. I also dropped a few details that the RSGB has on their IOTA pages and the fact that fewer than 25% of the members have Georges Island in their logs. I'd be sought after (I hope).

I don't know what will happen. Perhaps the answer will come back as "sorry". No matter what happens, I'm very pleased that somebody followed up on my request and took the time to talk with me. Cross your fingers!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:52PM (-04:00)

Gear plan for Saturday

Thursday, July 27, 2006

No word back from the Georges Island people on possible use of their power so I'm going to proceed with the QRP plans, at least for now. Even though the QRP stuff is smaller than the 100 watt outfit, there will still be a significant amount of stuff I'll need to wrestle on to the island. Here's a rundown as I'm considering it now:

1. **Shelter** -- This is a pop-up screened in area that will keep the sun off of me during my stay. Just as I did in June, I'll pop this thing over a picnic table and make that my operating position. The shelter weighs about 10 pounds and collapses into a roughly three foot diameter flat bundle that hangs nicely in a nylon mesh carrying sack.
2. **Rig** -- I'll bring the Pelican 1510 case outfitted with the Elecraft K2. This weighs in under 25 pounds, I think.
3. **Big Buddipole** -- The Big Buddipole system discussed earlier weighs in at 12 pounds and can be slung over my shoulder. It has the tripod, 16 foot mast, and now has the triple ratio balun tucked into it so it won't be left behind like last time.
4. **Backpack** -- This will hold my solar panel, charge controller, coax, enough water to last the day, a clipboard and paper for logging, compass, GPS, sunglasses, reading glasses, and any other personal comfort items I think I might need for that day in the sun. (I should think about packing a lunch, too.) Total weight here is probably about 10 pounds, counting the water.
5. **Freeplay Freecharge Weza** -- This is the portable power device I mentioned a few days ago.

This puts my weight about $(10 + 25 + 12 + 10 + 20 =)$ 77 pounds for the trip, well within my goal of 100 pounds or less. I might bring the second Buddipole and set it up for a second band (like 15m) which would add just under 10 more pounds with coax. The problem on this trip won't be weight; it will be managing the bulk and clutter! Luckily, I just need to get it *to* the boat, *on* the boat, and then *off* the boat again on the other end. There is pavement for me to drag the wheeled Pelican case for nearly all of the trip.

This is a pretty reasonable selection of gear for a day trip of this type. The Buddipole gives me a way of erecting an antenna in an area with no trees or buildings. The battery in the K2 and the Weza gives me enough juice to operate for the day. And, I've not forgotten the safety stuff like plenty of water, sunscreen, and shade to stave off heat and sun stroke. If I can wrangle everything there, it should be a good time!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:05PM (-04:00)

Packing for IOTA contest on NA-148

Friday, July 28, 2006

I'm packing up the stuff for the Georges Island trip and laying it out on the floor so I can see it all in one place. At this point I'm planning on bringing both Buddipoles and all the stuff I mentioned yesterday. The only thing left to stick in the backpack is the water and my lunch. I plan on getting out of here early in the morning so I can make the first ferry to the island.

This will be a QRP trip since I never heard any follow-up from the rangers on the island. That's OK. This will be fun!

I believe every DXpedition should have a set of goals. Here are mine for this trip:

1. **Work the IOTA contest for at least 6 hours** -- it would be nice to be able to work a

full 12 hours (since the categories are 12 or 24 hours of operation) but I've no alternative currently but to use the ferry service. The first ferry leaves for the island at 9 AM and the last ferry returns to the mainland at 6 PM.

2. **Make 100 QSOs** -- Actually, I hope to make more but even 100 would be a good showing, I think. Space weather conditions (check this out) were spotty today with a coronal hole raising the speed of the solar winds. Hopefully, things will calm down by morning.
3. **Work 10 DXCC entities** -- Again, I hope to work more than that, but it will depend on conditions.

I've charged up the battery in the lid of the K2 and topped off the 7Ah battery in the Weza. My power strategy goes something like this:

- Run off the K2 battery and solar panel until it starts looking tired.
- Switch to the Weza and let the sun recharge the K2 battery until it is full again.
- Switch back to the K2 battery and charge the Weza with the foot peddle.
- Repeat

Depending on how quickly the K2 recovers, perhaps I'll not have to charge the Weza much on this trip. But, if I do need to put power back into the system myself, at least I'll have the option. (You do get a healthy respect for how much energy is in one of these batteries when you have to charge it yourself!)

Those are my goals. That's my plan. I'll report back tomorrow as to how it went!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:23PM (-04:00)

RSGB IOTA contest effort on NA-148

Saturday, July 29, 2006

Here are the results from the Georges Island trip. According to my logging program I worked:

- 10 DXCC entities
- 23 states
- 13 IOTA islands
- 102 QSOs

I made my goals! I use a program I've written called Cab-converter to take log files and prepare a Cabrillo file suitable for consumption by the contest sponsor's robot. If I'm ambitious, I'll write the code to do the "claimed score" to see how I *really* did.

Today was a beautiful (and hot) day in Boston. I rose early this morning and checked out the propagation numbers on the NW7US web site. Yesterday's conditions were a bit unsettled and I was worried, but things looked like they were going to be much better. After a quick breakfast I hit the road, drove down to the New England Aquarium and parked the car. I had plenty of time to catch the first ferry to Georges Island.

The ferry left promptly at 9 AM and the trip was great. I never get tired of looking at the Boston skyline from the water! Once we landed on Georges Island I hauled my gear to the first picnic table by the sea wall I saw. I set up the *big Buddipole* system in an L configuration. I used my two 5-segment shock-cord whips for the vertical radiator and horizontal radial. I then had an idea: I used my 7-segment shock-cord whip as a counter-balance on the other side of the VersaTee. That made a big difference! With the other whip in place, the system was nicely balanced.

I was on the air not long after 10 AM and ran until after 4 PM. I was mostly "heads down" either calling CQ or doing search-and-pounce the entire time--except for the time I spent

talking to visitors. My first visitor was a ranger on an ATV wondering *what in the world is all this?* I took the time to explain this was amateur radio and I was talking to people all over the world using only 5 watts--less power than you might use in a night-light!

Two other rangers stopped by later followed by a couple from Ireland visiting Boston, a man with his young son, and finally three women who had been seated under the shade of a tree near my operating position and had finally worked up the courage to ask me what I was doing. Sure, I wanted to make lots of QSOs but the other thing that a 100 Pound DXpedition can do is bring ham radio to the public. We are ambassadors for the hobby. Take advantage of any opportunity to show someone who is curious exactly how fun, and still very relevant, our hobby still is.

Recapping: a successful trip. I achieved my goals, left the Georges Island staff with a good impression, and perhaps earned a reasonable score in the RSGB IOTA contest. That's a pretty good start to my weekend!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:13PM (-04:00)

Quick contest primer

Sunday, July 30, 2006

I just finished updating Cab-converter to support the RSGB contest. My claimed score was 6942 (which, in a sense, represents the *highest* score I could have as "not in log" or "exchange wrong" errors can only reduce it). Still, not a bad score for QRP!

For those of you who might be new to radio contesting, here's a snapshot of how it works: a contest sponsor, perhaps a magazine or radio club, announces a contest to the ham community along with the rules for that particular contest. All contests are roughly the same, get on the air and work as many people as you can within the rules, but the specifics for each particular contest are important.

For this contest, the RSGB IOTA contest, anybody can talk to anybody for points, but talking to an island gets you more points (15 versus 3 for a non-island station). Further, and this is key to most contests, there is a concept of *multipliers*. At the end of the contest, your score obtained by the QSOs you have made multiplied by another number based on your multipliers. In some contests, the multiplier number might be related to the number of states you've talked to, while other contests use the number of countries, or DXCC entities, or even the number of different callsign prefixes you worked.

The RSGB IOTA contest bases its multipliers on the number of IOTA-numbered islands you've talked to during the contest. So, talking to somebody on an island not only gets you more points for that QSO, but also increases your effort's multiplier number. My score this year was a result of 102 QSOs and 13 different islands. I talked to some islands more than once but you only get to count an island as a multiplier once per band/mode. As you can see, operating from an island makes you very popular in this contest!

The Radio Society of Great Britain has a wonderful web-based interface to confirm your contest log submission. The process goes something like this:

1. Create a "Cabrillo" file to submit to the RSGB. I could talk for an hour about this "standard" but suffice it to say that the easiest way to create one of these specially formatted files is to take your computer logging program and any other appropriate tools and have it make this file for you. I use a Macintosh as my shack's computer and use MacLoggerDX as my logging software. I created Cab-converter to do the final conversion to Cabrillo so I can submit my logs to the contest sponsor's "robots".
2. Submit your log to the contest sponsor. This usually means mailing it to a special email address set up to automatically read and process your log. The thing that

does this magic is often called the "contest robot". The robot should tell you immediately via a return message if your entry was accepted or rejected. If rejected, it should tell you why.

3. In the case of the RSGB, there is a further step which I find absolutely wonderful: the contest robot sends you an email message with a URL. When you click on that URL, it brings you to a page with all the details of your submission and asks you to confirm they are correct. Did you have 102 QSOs? Is this the mode and category in which you competed? Please verify all the details are correct. I found this very, very comforting. Instead of blindly dropping my log to an entity that gives me no feedback other than an email with the equivalent of ACK, I get a chance to see that the robot really did consume the entry correctly and no data was lost. I love it.
4. You wait. Sometimes you wait a year (or more) to see how you did in the contest. I hate to wait.

We'll see how I did compared to others when the results are published. Of course I'll drop a note here when that happens.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:29PM (-04:00)

QSL card design complete

Sunday, July 30, 2006

I just finished the design of the QSL card for the NA-148 operations. I'm using QSLworks again. The other three cards I have in my stash (home call, KP2/, and K1P special event) were all printed by these folks and they look fantastic. I'm sure they'll do a nice job with these, too.

There were a couple of contacts this weekend that made it a point to tell me they'd been looking for Georges Island for a while and would be QSLing. Well, that's part of the point! According to the RSGB only 23.3% of members have NA-148 in their log. I expect (and look forward to) filling out a bunch of QSL cards. I think that QSLing is half the fun!

I'll drop a posting of the final design when it is ready.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:36PM (-04:00)

Log now on RSGB logs received page with picture

Monday, July 31, 2006

The Radio Society of Great Britain Contest Committee web site has a page for the log submissions from this weekend's IOTA contest. You can find my entry in the N's as NE1RD/1. Next to it is a little icon indicating I've also uploaded a picture with my log. If you hover your cursor over that little picture icon you'll see a pop-up window with a thumbnail of the picture and the caption. (Of course I've got a typo in the caption. I should know better than to do this stuff late on a Sunday night.)

A direct link to the page with the photo is here. This is the photo I used for the front of the QSL card being prepared by the QSL works, too.

So far, at least, I'm the only one in the **IOTA DXpedition single-operator unassisted SSB 12H QRP** category. I guess if it stays that way, I win that category [grin].

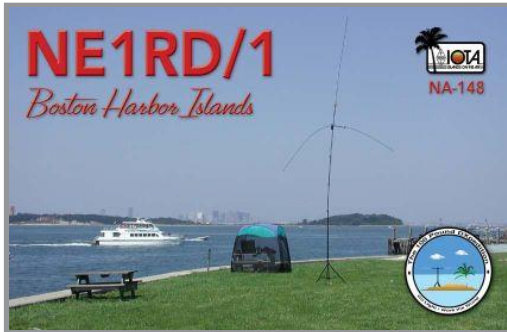
P.S. This is the 50th post to my blog. I hope everybody reading it is having as much fun as I am writing it. Thank for stopping by!

-- Scott (NE1RD)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:05PM (-04:00)

The art of QSL card design

Tuesday, August 01, 2006



I just got a note from the graphic designer at QSLworks that she had finished my card's design and was looking for some feedback. Here is what Tami came up with:

I wrote back almost immediately and told her I thought it looked **fantastic!**

In an earlier post I'd mentioned that you really want somebody with some artistic

talent to help you get the best card design. I know even less about art than I know about boats, so I know I'm not that person. Tami, on the other hand, appears to be the real deal. I stumbled across Tami's web site and blog. Check out her sketchbook and other pages. I think I'm beginning to realize why my cards look so good!

So, now I wait. I hate to wait! In a couple of weeks I should have my cards and, hopefully, there will be a pile of QSL requests asking for them.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:23PM (-04:00)

eQSL

Wednesday, August 02, 2006

QSLing has become a more rich activity recently with the advent of computer-based logging and the internet. It is now possible to confirm QSOs electronically through email or web-based QSLing services like eQSL or the ARRL's Logbook of the World LoTW. A QSL is the *final courtesy* of a contact. In a sense, it is also a recognition that both parties wanted something out of the QSO: you hauled a hundred pounds of gear in hopes of making some contacts, and the people you met on the air would like to have a souvenir of that contact with a QSL card or electronic confirmation that they could then possibly use towards earning an award. The way I look at it, they didn't ask me my motivation for going to this far away place; I shouldn't ask about their motivation for wanting a card, eQSL, or LoTW confirmation!

As it turns out, assuming you are doing computer-based logging (and if you're not, please consider it), providing your contacts with an eQSL or LoTW confirmation is extremely easy. I'll just discuss eQSL today.

Your logging program probably has a way to export your log (or selected entries from your log) to a file. There is a standard called ADIF, the Amateur Data Interchange Format that your logging program will most likely offer as an export option. According to the standard, the purpose of ADIF is to

"Provide a standard interchange independent of operating system or programming language for amateur data that will permit easy and direct transfer of data conforming to the standard between various amateur programs as well awards and contest sponsors."

That sounds very much like what we are trying to do here! For this weekend's efforts, I took my paper log and (with Sandy's help) got all those entries into my logging program. From there, I can do lots of interesting things including track QSL cards received and sent, generate a Cabrillo file for submission to a contest sponsor, or export an ADIF file for use with these on-line QSLing programs. Once the data was entered (and checked), I exported those QSO entries to an ADIF file.

I already had an eQSL account but I wanted to keep the logs for my regular home call and QTH to be separate from any DXpeditions I do (which is one of the reasons why I was signing NE1RD/1 last weekend). The eQSL system allows you to easily create sibling accounts to your main account for just this purpose. In fact, I have already created separate accounts for my home in Acton, for activity on Hawaii, the K1P special even station, my KP2/ log, and now for NE1RD/1 (Boston Harbor Islands). To add a new location to your account, just click on the *My Accounts* button and scroll to the bottom of the page where it says *Register a New Attached Account*. Once you've supplied the callsign you'll use for that account, date range for valid QSOs, and other information, this account will now be listed on the *My Accounts* page. Easy! Once the account is listed, just click on *Login* and that will be the active account for this session.

After that, everything works the same as it did for your first account. I created my **NE1RD/1** account, logged into it, and then uploaded that ADIF file I had exported from my logging program. Those QSOs appeared in my electronic *Out Box* and within a few days I had received 11 QSLs.

Even if you don't necessarily find value in the eQSL system, chances are somebody who worked you does. Perhaps you'll bring joy to a youngster who has been using borrowed equipment to get on the air and has no money for postage or cards. Or, perhaps it is a retired person who has decided the money once spent on paper QSLing could be better put elsewhere and now tries to do everything electronically. Just take that few moments--and it really is just a few moments--and upload your log. Who knows what joy that simple act may bring.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 05:16PM (-04:00)

St. John DXpedition ~ 2006 ARRL DX SSB results

Thursday, August 03, 2006



The results from the ARRL International DX SSB Contest are in and I can't help but be pleased. I traveled in March of 2006 to St. John in the USVI for the contest and a little R&R. I wrote about what it is like to be on the DX-side of the pile-up here and here. You can see my log from that trip here. There are some nice pictures here.

My goals for the trip and for the contest were (a) to make 500 QSOs, and (b)

100,000 points. I was originally going to bring the Force-12 C3SS tribander with me but in the end I decided it was pushing my weight budget too much. So, with small antennas such as the Buddipole and some verticals made from fishing poles I thought the 100K goal was plenty.

I know I've mentioned this but it bears repeating. Every personal DXpedition you make

should have specific goals. There are two excellent reasons for this. The first reason is specific goals help you provide focus when you are preparing for the trip, especially regarding equipment selection. The other reason to have specific goals is it gives you a way to breathe a sigh of relief when you've made your goal and significantly reduces the chances of experiencing pangs over a missed opportunity later. Compare this to going for a run. If you set out to run 3 miles and complete that course, you have done what you set out to do and feel good about the effort. That is much better feeling than wondering how far you've run or whether you should have done more.

Like every contest, this one had categories and you largely compete against others in your category. My category was the following: **Single operator Low power DX** (not in the continental US or Canada). Here is my score:

Call Score QSOs Mults Club KP2/NE1RD 106,926 502 71 YCCC

From a "place" perspective, in my category I placed 41st of the 449 entries. That's in the top 10%. I'll take it! Remember, this is a *100 Pound DXpedition* so I'm not bringing towers and yagis; I'm using lightweight materials with a weight and size limit imposed by two checked airline bags. As you can see, even with these limits you can still do well and have fun!

Earlier this year the Yankee Clipper Contest Club was kind enough to admit me as a member. My score contributed to the group's effort of edging out the Frankford Radio Club as shown below:

YCCC 196,375,278 with 205 entries

FRC 174,069,834 with 131 entries.

Sandy and I had a great time on St. John and I'm pleased to see that my efforts in the contest also met the goals that I had set for myself. Perhaps one more look at that gorgeous QSL card is in order!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:01AM (-04:00)

LoTW for NA-148 DXpedition

Friday, August 04, 2006

On Wednesday I discussed uploading your log to eQSL to give people credit for the QSOs you've made on your DXpedition electronically. Adding a new QTH to the eQSL system is pretty easy. Today I'll talk about the other electronic QSLing program sponsored by the ARRL called Logbook of The World (LoTW).

If you already have an account on LoTW then getting a new certificate and adding a new

QTH is pretty straightforward--though there are a lot of steps involved. Rather than discuss all those steps here, I decided it would be better to write them up and publish them on my home page. In fact, I expect to have several helpful pages like this so, with complete respect for the good folks at QST, I've created a new little area on my home page called **Hints and Kinks** where I can put stuff like this. The very first entry in this new section is a piece on how to add a QTH to your LoTW account. The direct link to this page is [here](#).

I went through this exercise yesterday and by this morning I had 10 QSLs! The list included Wales, Mexico, and eight USA QSOs in seven states. Not bad at all!

Now, I love QSLing. I love to get cards in the mail (a small pile has already formed after last weekend's contest), I love looking at the cards and reading them, and I even love filling out the return cards, writing a little note on them and doing all the log up-keep. To me, this is restful and a way to experience the QSOs long after they happened.

I know others don't feel this way and believe QSLing is drudgery. Well, for those of you who are closer to that end of the spectrum the LoTW is a fantastic option. You can give *full credit* for QSOs that can be used for ARRL awards such as DXCC and WAS just by going through a few steps to get your certificate established and then uploading your log. Easy as pie.

I hope you will use **both** LoTW and eQSL to give your contacts all the options they deserve. After the small startup cost on this, the process is quite easy and may really make somebody's day.

Don't forget to stop by my home page to see the new write-up on LoTW.

I am planning on another visit to Georges Island tomorrow. Look for me on 20m and maybe even 15m if there is an opening. See you on the bands!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:53PM (-04:00)

Return to Georges

Saturday, August 05, 2006

I made it down to Georges Island NA-148) again today and used the opportunity to try a few new things. The first change was in how I got to the island--or more precisely, how I got to the ferry to go to the island. I parked at the Alewife station on the edge of Cambridge and took the T Red Line to Park Street, then the Green Line to Government Center, then the Blue Line to the Aquarium and the ferry docs. For those of you not intimately familiar with the Boston subway system, here's a little help.

Well, as you might have guessed, that's a lot of fooling around on trains! It was an interesting experiment, though, having to haul the equipment through a complicated public transportation environment, up and down stairs, escalators, and narrow ticket gates. I had reduced my load to just the Pelican case with the K2 (25 pounds on wheels), a 7 Ah battery in a bag which rode on top of the Pelican case, my backpack on my back, my *Big* Buddipole system slung over my shoulder, and my pop-up enclosure carried by hand. Weight wasn't really a problem (as most of the heavy stuff rode on wheels) but the bulk was a bit troublesome. Still, I managed nicely.

Imagine now trying to get through some airport in a far away place with this kind of bulk. Even if you make your weight limit (as I had done easily today), the bulk needs to also be managed or you'll never be able to negotiate through a busy public place. The Pelican case goes a long way towards managing this: it is very solid and has a big pull handle

that is strong enough for me to heft the whole thing up stairs if need be (as was needed repeatedly today). There are plenty of luggage models that have strong enough cases for this kind of duty but the pull handles would never hold up to the kind of abuse I gave this case today.

Once I finally reached the island, I looked for a new spot to operate from and found it. I went to the North side of the island with a very nice view of Little Brewster Island lighthouse, the LNG tanks (OK, maybe that's not a great landmark), and the Boston skyline. The big reason for trying this new location is it is well away from the monstrous Fort Warren giving me a nice clear shot to Europe. The new spot was up on a little hill, still very close to the water, and much cooler and breezier than the operating position used last week for the IOTA contest.

The setup was essentially the same as the other trips: pop up the shelter over a picnic table, set up the Buddipole, stretch out the solar panel, and hook everything up to the K2. I ran the Buddipole in a vertical dipole configuration today using the rotating arm kit. Conditions were not very good but I still managed to snag TI8 (Costa Rica), CU8 (Azores), PA (Netherlands), and a few states.

I also spent some time talking with Whitey W1AA who was activating yet another lighthouse (read about it here). These fellows have been activating lighthouses up and down the coast for a while and having a ball doing it. Today was the start of the National Lighthouse Weekend QSO Party and there were many stations on the air calling CQ lighthouse. Perhaps I should see if I could activate Little Brewster next year.

I only spent a couple of hours operating before I packed it up for the long train ride back. On my way off the island I ran into Alex Hall of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the fellow I had talked with just prior to the IOTA contest. I began talking to him about the possibility of tapping into their power when a woman approached him and said her companion had cut his foot on some rocks and was bleeding badly. I can see why he might want me to wait until later in the season to do this (when there are fewer people around). I'll follow up with a letter and see what happens.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:44PM (-04:00)

Power Poles

Sunday, August 06, 2006

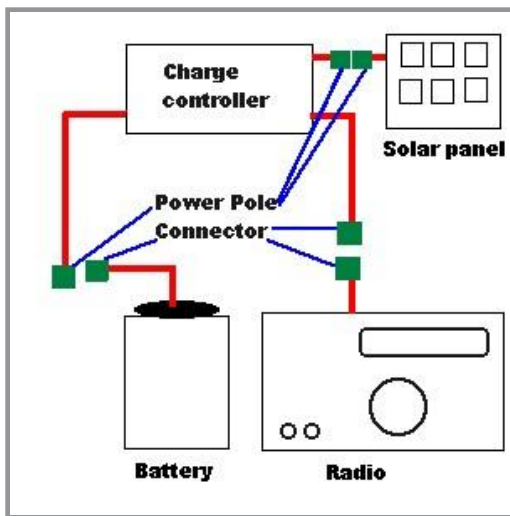


It occurs to me that something has become so second nature to me that I've probably not mentioned it anywhere in this blog--yet it is very important (at least to me). I've standardized all of my power connectors on Anderson Power Poles and doing so was one of the best decisions I've made in organizing my equipment.

Power Pole connectors are genderless.

That is, you don't have specific *male* or *female* connectors, same size connectors can connect to each other. They are also *keyed* so it is impossible to cross connect positive to negative in a properly built connector. Power distribution systems such as West Mountain Radio's RIGrunner make powering several pieces of equipment from a single power supply a breeze.

Just to make a point as to how pervasive this connector technology has become in my equipment stash, consider the power connections I was using yesterday:



Every interconnect of power was with a mated set of Power Poles. The solar panel has a Power Pole, the charge controller has 3 (one for connection to the solar panel, the battery, and to the load/radio), and the batteries I have along with the power cords for the radios are all terminated with a Power Pole connector. If I need to swap out the battery, just pull apart the connection and insert the Power Pole connector from the new battery. Easy!

Because I've standardized on this connector for everything I'm never worried

that I'll not be able to power something in the field. Further, I only need one set of weird connectors (big alligator clips, cigarette lighter adaptor, etc.) to power all the equipment I've brought because once I've tapped into the power *somehow* I can then use a Power Pole distribution box to get juice everywhere else.

There is lots written on Power Pole connectors, how best to crimp them, which tools are best, etc. I'll not repeat any of that here. My advice is use them. Use them at home in your home station. Use them for all your DXpedition equipment. I even have a distribution panel mounted on the floor in my car. Again, it has become so automatic for me to assume these connectors are present I've not made any mention of them until now. I hope they become equally second nature for you.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:46PM (-04:00)

Where's Waldo?

Monday, August 07, 2006

I just got off the phone with Force-12. I called to see if they had indeed shipped my Sigma-5 antenna yet. I had order this some time ago and my American Express card was charged early last month. So, where it it?! (I've now dubbed my errant antenna "Waldo".)

The woman at Force-12 said that there had been a "small mixup" but it should be shipping out tomorrow. OK. Good. (Of course, I'll never know if it was already going to be shipping tomorrow, or, if my phone call prompted them to ship it tomorrow.)

This is my second order with Force-12. The first order for a Force-12 product was placed last winter, an indirect order through Ham Radio Outlet. I had ordered the Force-12 C3SS through HRO and it was to be drop shipped to me from the Force-12 factory. Finally, after I decided I had waited long enough, I called HRO and asked, "where is it?!" HRO suggested I follow up with the factory. I called (this was just a few weeks before my St. John trip) and was told the order had been lost. Oops. But, to their credit, they expedited shipping to me and got it here in a couple of days to make amends. Alas, it was still too little time for me to become comfortable with it enough to take it to St. Johns (though it did get a workout on Deer Isle).

Today's call was a similar thing: they've had my money for a while but nothing shipped. Well, if they really ship it tomorrow and I get it soon thereafter, OK (I guess). It is a little awkward to see your credit card charged and no product appearing for weeks, though.

To be clear: I really liked the C3SS. It is a very nice antenna. (I've since sold it but only because I was concerned about the weight, not the performance.) I've had two telephone

conversations with the Force-12 factory and in both they were pleasant and courteous. One conversation immediately resolved my problem (last winter). The jury is out on this latest one.

Force-12 seems to make great stuff--though you might want to be a bit deliberate following up with them after you order (getting tracking numbers and so on). I'll let everybody know when Waldo (my Sigma-5) finally arrives.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:54PM (-04:00)

A bit banged up

Tuesday, August 08, 2006

After tonight's baseball game we were struck from behind while stopped dead in traffic. We're sore but I believe Sandy and I are OK. The car will need some serious repairs, though, and it will certainly be a distraction over the next month. All in all, my Honda Element held up pretty well given the collision from the 7,000 pound Ford F150 pickup was violent enough to have the offending truck's airbag deploy!

I've got lots of interesting stuff in the works including a fairly large DXpedition I've not even discussed here (our group hasn't disclosed the plan yet) and the very last thing I needed was this nightmare. But, so long as everybody is *really* OK, I guess the other stuff is just a quibble. My hat's off to the Lowell Police department and the officer who helped get us through the paperwork and calmed us down after that rush of adrenaline.

Hopefully, this will be the last I have to say on the matter and we can return to the much more fun topic of lightweight DXpeditioning!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:28AM (-04:00)

Giving out a new one

Tuesday, August 08, 2006

If you've been keeping up on the *DX scene* you've been seeing activity on a couple of new DXCC-qualifying entities in Montenegro and Swains Island. The operators working those crews are having the thrill of "giving out a new one" every minute they are on the air.

While these small DXpeditions I'm organizing can't really be compared to those huge efforts, I've also had the pleasure of *giving out a new one*, in this case a new IOTA numbered island. There have been many contacts that have thanked me on the air for NA-148 and have since followed up with QSL cards and requests. Since fewer than 25% of the participants in the IOTA program have the Boston Harbor Islands in their logs, I'm not surprised by the response, but it is still gratifying.

Email just arrived telling me my QSL cards from QSLworks should be here by Friday. I can't wait to see them! Plus, I'll be able to turn around some of those requests that have been piling up over the summer. If you've got a QSL card in to me for NA-148, it won't be long now!

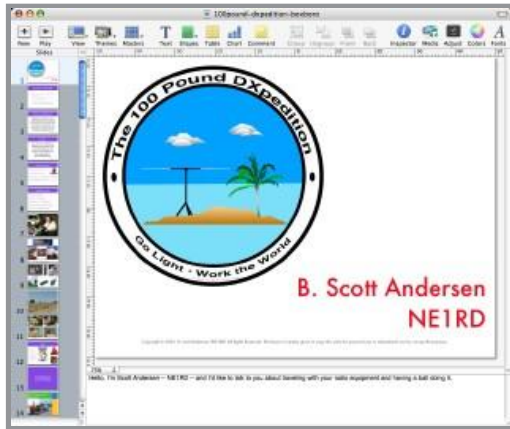
This might not be the same level of prestige as activating DXCC's most wanted, but even activating an island on the IOTA list that is mildly rare can bring that same thrill from *giving out a new one*. When the fellow on the other end of the QSO is excited to hear from you, you can't help but feel good about it.

So, check down the list on the IOTA site. See if there are islands you might want to visit and operate from. These islands need not be expensive, exotic, or even far away. Perhaps something along the California coast or in Maine could be considered. You could even combine your DXpedition with your next family vacation. Even if the IOTA site

says 50% of the participants have the island logged (which would make it far from "rare"), half don't have it confirmed and that other half would be grateful to hear from you. Perhaps you could soon be the one *giving out that new one!*
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:39PM (-04:00)

Polishing the presentation

Wednesday, August 09, 2006



I've been working on refining my presentation for Boxboro, the ARRL New England Division Convention. I'm slated for noon on Saturday (the full schedule for the event can be viewed [here](#)). I had given my talk *The 100 Pound DXpedition* to PART, a local club in Westford, Massachusetts earlier this year so this really is just a polishing of an existing work.

The thing I most worried about is keeping to the one hour time slot that I've been given.

At the PART meeting I could take up all the time I wanted (I was the only speaker) but here I've got to set up, do the show, and be off within my slot. Some of the things that made the presentation in Westford fun (passing around equipment, showing how things can be set-up quickly, and showing how small things can be when packed) will need to be skipped because there just won't be time. I also need to ensure I've got plenty of time for questions, too, of course.

The point of the presentation (and I hope this comes through) is that this approach of lightweight DXpeditioning is well within the capability of most of us. If you travel, you can travel with a radio and a little supporting equipment and add to your have fun. I believe the presentation conveys that. I'll let you be the judge. I hope to see you all at Boxboro Saturday, August 26th!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:05AM (-04:00)

Going public: NA-103 DXpedition

Thursday, August 10, 2006

I've made some mention to another DXpedition that I've been planning but haven't written about yet. Well, here it is: I will be traveling with a small group to Montserrat (NA-103) in January of 2007.

As some of you might know, Montserrat suffered a catastrophe when the Soufriere Hills volcano destroyed a large portion of the island, including the capital Plymouth. Half of the island is now uninhabitable and even dangerous to this day. Much of the population has left the island and so, this once beautiful gem in the Caribbean now stands as a shadow of its former self.

What you might not know is the other half of the island is just as beautiful as ever. Our group has already secured a set of villas for our stay but little else in the trip has been

worked out. As we nail down these details, I'll blog about here here so, hopefully, you'll see how a trip is planned and executed.

This has been in the works for a while but I asked only yesterday if the group would OK me making it public here. Hearing no objections, I did! Just to be clear, though, I'll report in my blog about things we've arranged and finalized but the discussions among the group members will be *behind closed doors*. Having a little privacy while you make important decisions is key to building confidence and trust within the group. I wouldn't dream of breaching that.

This doesn't mean I'll only be talking about the Montserrat trip. Far from it. Life goes on and I've got lots of other, more immediate, stuff in the works. For example, I was eyeing Little Brewster light house while last on Georges Island. There's an International Lighthouse/Lighthship Weekend event coming up and that might be an even more interesting way to hand out NA-148.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:43PM (-04:00)

Carry on

Friday, August 11, 2006

While I am taking great pains not to have anything political in this blog, I can't ignore current events if they directly impact the kinds of planning we would need to do to mount one of our *100 Pound DXpeditions*. Recent arrests in Britain in connection to a plot to smuggle explosives on to a commercial airliner fall into this category, especially since this has prompted airlines and air security agencies to make fundamental changes in the rules for carry-on baggage.

Here is a note from the American Airlines web site regarding recent changes:

"Effective immediately, no liquids or gels of any kind will be permitted at the security checkpoints or in carry-on baggage. This includes all beverages, shampoo, suntan lotion, creams, tooth paste, hair gel, perfumes and other items of similar consistency. This policy also includes liquid and gel products purchased as duty free. All liquid and gel items must be placed in checked baggage only. Customers may carry-on approved electronic devices such as personal computers, electronic games, and cell phones, except when traveling from or thru the United Kingdom."

The current restrictions still allow personal electronics which, for us, might mean either radio equipment or computers. But, that is only if you are not traveling to, or through, the United Kingdom. Several thoughts come to mind immediately:

1. If I was going through the UK, what would I do with my computer? Check it? In what? Do I need to get a whole separate Pelican case for my laptop now? Plus, limits for checked baggage in Europe are even more onerous than in the US or other places. Is this even practical?
2. Will these restrictions be extended to beyond travel through the UK?
3. How long until restrictions prohibiting any electronic items as carry-on items are instituted? No iPod, no DVD player, no more getting work done on the laptop during those long cross-country trips. Egad!

I have no answers and no profound wisdom to offer on this. I only make the observation that these changes, and perhaps some that follow, will affect the planning we must do to get our equipment safely to our destination. The option of carrying on the most delicate of our equipment helps make the 100 pound weight limit viable. Denying us that severely limits our options.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:23PM (-04:00)

Return to Deer Isle NA-055

Saturday, August 12, 2006

Patriots Day is celebrated in Massachusetts, Maine, and Wisconsin. Running fans might know the Boston Marathon is run that day. I live in a part of the country rich with history. The founding of our nation began along the roads I drive every day. The first man to fall at Concord was from Acton, my home town. The town monument in the center of Acton graces my home QSL card.

Last year I got the idea that it might be fun to learn a little more about Patriots Day and maybe run a special event station. I looked for something in my research that might be surprising to people, perhaps even unexpected. I found it, I think, and put this in the special event description:

Patriots Day celebrates Massachusetts in the founding of our nation but many do not know Maine was part of Massachusetts until 1820, split as part of the Missouri Compromise. Join us from the Maine sea coast celebrating Patriots Day and the New England tradition of the sea April 10-17, 2006.

Last year Dave and I operated from Deer Isle, Maine (NA-055) from a rented house right on the sea coast. We had such a good time that I've arranged to return next April and operate the special event again. I've requested the same call sign **K1P** to be active April 11-17, 2007. If you'd like to see some of last year's stuff, check out K1P.org.

Maine is a few hours drive away and the house we are renting is quiet, isolated, and in a beautiful setting. Sandy and Dave's wife Carol had a great time, too, reading, relaxing, and just hanging out. Here's an excellent example (I believe) of a personal DXpedition that is family friendly.

Next time you're planning a vacation, see if you can't combine a little DXpeditioning in with the family fun. It isn't as hard as it might seem.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:43PM (-04:00)

SLA battery goof-up

Sunday, August 13, 2006

I am trying to share all of the experiences I've had planning for these small DXpeditions, preparing equipment, managing logistics, and so on. It is fun to share my successes but pointing out my mistakes might be just as instructive. So, when I'm an idiot, I will document it in gory detail here. [grin]

I got a couple of 17 Ah sealed lead acid (SLA) batteries from a friend some time ago. Of course I forgot about them for a while and rediscovered them recently. I popped on one of my "smart" SLA two stage chargers to see what happened. Actually, I connected them up and walked away. When I came back later, the little green light was on and I thought, "Great! I'll use those on my next trip!"

Here's a little secret about some of these spiffy little SLA chargers: if the battery voltage is below a certain point, the charger just gives up. So, I wasn't charging these batteries at all. These batteries were dead, dead, dead. I didn't realize this until I had (a) run out and bought new bags to carry them in, and (b) made harnesses for them with inline fuses and PowerPoles. Only then did I realize that one battery was reading 8 volts and the other 2(!) volts. Sigh.

Of course I should have put a voltmeter on these things long before I invested any effort. And, if I were serious about this (and I should be), I would get one of West Mountain

Radio's Computer Battery Analyzer (CBA II). A friend has one and swears by it. I should just bite the bullet and get one, too.

In the mean time, I did a cursory web search looking for some cheap Absorbent glass mat (AGM) batteries and found these. The good news is I already have bags and wiring ready when they arrive. I've also got two SLA chargers that will be connected to them trickle charging them constantly. I only need to make that mistake once.

The purpose of these batteries is to give me an opportunity either run nearly forever at QRP levels or even run at 25-30 watts with a larger radio while running portable (like on Georges Island). Of course, at 14 pounds a piece, they chew up my 100 pound budget quickly, but for some trips they'll be well worth it.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:09PM (-04:00)

Establishing relationships with the locals

Monday, August 14, 2006

Going to the operating location and getting on the air is certainly the most fun part of the DXpedition but there are plenty of activities both before and after where things need to get done. My advice on this is pretty simple: bring the right attitude and have fun with these planning and post operation activities, too.

This weekend I worked on some of those activities. For the Montserrat trip, I sent an email to the head of the Montserrat Amateur Radio Society (MARS) indicating that our DXpedition team would like to join their organization. If you are thinking of going to some interesting, far away place, consider joining the local radio club. To me it seem like "good form" and "the right thing to do" to support local hams while you are guests in their part of the world. Plus, these folks could be a very helpful source of information. Establishing a healthy relationship could be very helpful for your efforts. I've also asked if they would like to join us for a cookout one night while we are on the island. I hope they'll join us!

I also wrote to the owner of the villas we're renting asking if he could help me finding options for getting to the island. There is a small airline that makes runs between Montserrat and the Antigua, but the baggage restrictions are fairly draconian and it would be nice to have another option. I had hoped to find a boat we could charter (the ferry service halted some time ago) but our host indicated there might be a chartered air service that should also be considered. That's the first I had heard of that!

Again, establish a relationship with people at your destination and, while being considerate about taking up their time, ask for some help and advice. The *locals* could be your best asset during planning.

There are lots of other loose ends that need to be tied up. We hope to do some portable operation while on the island and will need to procure some batteries (maybe car battery size) to power the radios on these jaunts. So, I asked our host if he had ideas on that issue. He did and I'll follow up.

The level of planning I'm trying to do for this trip might seem excessive to some but I believe it is best if I can answer all the important questions about how we will operate, log contacts, QSL, coordinate multiple transmitters, travel on the island, and communicate back home before we even step foot on the airplane. When I get down there I just want to relax and have fun knowing that nothing is left undone and nothing has been forgotten. That should be a good feeling--but there is lots of work to do in the mean time. I'm counting on the *locals* to help me.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:07PM (-04:00)

Miscellany and spam

Tuesday, August 15, 2006

Just a couple of things in the works today. I've got the first pile of QSL cards from my NE1RD/1 Boston Harbor Islands (Georges Island) activity that will get filled out tonight. They should be in the mail by morning.

A few minutes ago I called about my car to see if the body shop had given it a look. (As mentioned earlier, we were in a bit of a bang-up recently.) The body shop manager said he finally received the paperwork from the insurance company and would be prying it open to do a more thorough inspection in the next day or so. Once I have all the numbers, I guess I decide if I just fix it (if the damage isn't that extensive) or just roll the money into a new Element. Of course that means moving all the radio stuff. [sigh]

I just cleaned out the first pile of spam from the blog this morning. Ugh. Just a couple of spam-comments but perhaps it was the wake-up call I needed. I've now enabled the feature that demands comment posters type in the squiggly word in the box. By the way, the term for this irritating little feature is captcha. Sorry for the inconvenience.

While cleaning out the spam I also noticed that I had a couple of comments posted on previous blog entries including a question. I didn't see these until this morning. I've answered the question (about PowerPole crimping) but I should add here that I welcome feedback on the blog and am happy to answer questions privately if you like. Send mail to my call sign at ARRL dot net if you'd like to reach me.

Finally, **Where's Waldo?** Waldo, the name I've given to my errant Sigma-5 Force-12 antenna, is on its way. It should have shipped last Tuesday but, in fact, it shipped on Wednesday of last week instead. My FedEx tracking shows it had departed Los Angeles on the 10th but no other word since then. It is still slated to arrive tomorrow. I hope it does!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:58PM (-04:00)

Where's Waldo today?

Tuesday, August 15, 2006

Waldo's box was just scanned in Willington, Connecticut. It has been banging around on a truck since Wednesday from California to the East Coast. I hope all the good QSOs haven't fallen out of it. [grin] Looks like it will make it here tomorrow.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:30PM (-04:00)

Where's Waldo now?!

Wednesday, August 16, 2006

When Daniel Boon was once asked if he ever got lost out there in the American wilderness, Boon reply, "No, I can't say as ever I was lost, but I was bewildered once for three days." Like Boon, my ever errant antenna Waldo appears to still be a little bewildered.

Checking the FedEx tracking site today showed the dreaded *Shipment exception* and *Cannot locate recipient* in the 3:34 AM status. A quick call to FedEx resolved the problem: Force 12 had mangled the shipping address using the street and city from my work address, zip code from my home address, and who knows what else. FedEx fixed the problem immediately in their database but it looks like the package won't be delivered

until Wednesday or Thursday Thursday or Friday now. Arrrggghhh.

On a happier note, I spent time filling out the first batch of QSL cards from the Boston Harbor operations last night and dropped them in the mail this morning. About 2/3 of the cards had a nice note telling me they were excited about the new IOTA number. That made me smile!

The North American QSO Party is this weekend. Last year I placed third in the QRP category. I'll probably take this opportunity to try out a shortened G5RV I bought at Dayton this year. This little gizmo will likely get packed for the Montserrat trip in January. Yes, even wire antennas should get tested before you travel with them! See you on the air Saturday.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:08AM (-04:00)

Nada Chair

Thursday, August 17, 2006



Sitting at a remote site for hours on end can be a pain in the ... back. Being somewhat larger than your average person (I'm 6 foot 8 inches tall) I am stressed into uncomfortable areas and positions more than most so I make it a point to find things that provide a little comfort when I can.

I was attending MacWorld Expo in Boston a couple of years ago and happened upon a booth with people selling products branded as Nada Chair. Their products provide lower back support and the design looked

interesting to me. Straps extend from the padded back support and loop around your knees. The little pads and straps didn't grab my attention but then I noticed vests with similar knee straps.

The only one they had left happened to be in their largest size. It fit me perfectly. I believe I paid something like \$100 for this thing and it has been worth every penny. The one I have (olive-khaki) has a bunch of pockets (14 according to the web site) great for holding connectors, HTs, repeater guides, copy of my license, cell phone, pens, mini log book, and so on. It is constructed of strong material and seems like it will last forever.

When I'm sitting at a picnic table or other seat without a good back support, I just pull the straps from their little pocket and loop them over my knees. You might even hear me say "ahhhh" when I do it. The lower back relief is instant and I can sit for hours like that racking up the QSOs.

If you have problems sitting places that have insufficient lower back support I suggest you try a Nada Chair. There are many models and they are even sold on Amazon.

Waldo's saga: In apparent retrograde motion, Waldo has made a return to a Connecticut FedEx facility. Delivery estimates say it will be here tomorrow.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:07PM (-04:00)

Waldo arrives!

Thursday, August 17, 2006

Where's Waldo? Here! It just arrived. I'll post first impressions tomorrow.
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:59PM (-04:00)

99 Hobbies and Joe in Montenegro

Friday, August 18, 2006

Sorry for the late post. I'm very busy at work and I took the time today to meet with my good friend and Elmer Dave. Dave has the 99 Hobbies web site and has been interviewing really interesting characters for his podcasts. He spent Thursday at ARRL headquarters and got a couple of interviews I think you'll really enjoy. Lunch with Dave along with the stories of his exploits down there was a welcome break at the end of a long week. Go give 99 Hobbies a listen.

I have stuff to report on the Force 12 Sigma-5 but I'll just wait until tomorrow to write it up. Saturday is the North American QSO Party (SSB) and I'll see if I can put the Sigma-5 on the air for some of that contest. I'll be able to do A/B comparisons between the Sigma-5, my G5RV, and my MFJ HiQ loop. (I guess that would be A/B/C comparisons.)

In other news, those of you following along might remember that I had talked with Joe Pater (W8GEX) about his planning and experiences trying to reach Cay Sal Bank. Joe was extremely generous with his time and shared with me information that was invaluable going forward. He's a true gentleman and expert DXpeditioner.

Joe has popped up again recently in the newest of DXCC entities. Here's how today's Daily DX began.

W8GEX, Joe Pater, from the current 4O6DX team in Montenegro reports the group is trying to have three stations on the air all the time, depending on band conditions...

I dropped Joe a quick email on August 11th offering him congratulations and good luck for the trip. Joe was kind enough to write back within a couple of hours with this:

Hello Scott I do remember talking to you.
If we work from 4O6DX please tell me who you are. After a while all the calls run together. Joe W8GEX
PS: Keep me posted on Cal Sal.

You can count on it, Joe! I hope you'll all work the folks at 4O6DX. When you do, tell them Scott said 'hello'. [grin]

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:54PM (-04:00)

Force 12 Sigma-5 first impressions

Saturday, August 19, 2006

My friends kid me that every time I get a new antenna the HF bands go dead. Well, true to form, my Force 12 Sigma-5 is now stuck into the umbrella stand for my patio table and the HF bands have gone to pot. (I promise not to get any new antennas for CQWW contest weekends! [grin])

The antenna boasts that assembly requires no tools. True enough for the main antenna unit, but you'll need small screwdriver to attach the controller cable wires to the switch box. I had assembled it in the office the day it arrived in about 10 minutes. I probably beat that time today.

I fashioned a power cord for the unit with a PowerPole connector and moved the switch from 20-17-15-12-10-20 and back again. I could hear the relays clicking as I moved the switch. So far so good!

The MFJ-259B analyzer showed a good match across all bands 17-10m and a very large chunk of 20m. The instructions show how I could alter the coils inside the unit to move that range on 20m, but there is no need. I've got auto tuners to smooth out everything anyway. So as not to let the major point be lost here: I have a 5 band antenna with instant band switching (largely) resonant across all bands. For a 7 pound antenna system that breaks down into two foot sections, that is very good news indeed!

One of my concerns was the current draw on the relays. Measurements show each of the four relays draw somewhere between 80-90mA when energized. Nobody is going to care about this small drain from an operation with wall power available, but portable operations with a 7Ah battery and a QRP radio, the drain a more serious problem. Still, I knew this when I bought the antenna and believe it is a reasonable tradeoff. (If Force 12 wants a product improvement idea, though, latching relays might be considered.)

I made my first QSO on it a few minutes ago to a special event station in Michigan. I received a 57 report for my 20m contact. I was also able to do an A/B comparison to my MFJ HiQ loop and the signal strengths are roughly equivalent. Not bad considering the MFJ loop is at 35 feet and the Sigma-5 is at ground level!

After some prompting from Sandy, I sent Force 12 a letter outlining the trouble I'd had from my two orders with them. I also made it a point (and will make it again here) that I like their stuff, I can recommend their stuff with a clear conscience, and I believe it is a good value. I'd just suggest folks *hound* them a bit to be sure your order gets shipped, credit card receipts are actually sent, etc.

The NAQP begins in about 30 minutes. Contests are a great way to break in a new antenna (with a target rich environment spread over a large area). But, if conditions aren't improved, I might wait a bit and make my 10 hour run (the limit for single operator entries) towards the end of the contest.

I had thought about taking it out to Georges Island tomorrow, but the weather forecast shows heavy rains are coming. So, I'll have to wait. I hate to wait!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:38PM (-04:00)

Sigma-5 performs and Monserrat update

Sunday, August 20, 2006

My short workout with the new Force 12 Sigma-5 yesterday was very productive and encouraging. In roughly one hour contacts were made in Florida, British Columbia, Colorado, Oregon, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Louisiana, Newfoundland, and Italy. All of these contacts were with 5 watts except for the Italy contact. I had to turn up the power to

10 watts to get out of the noise for the guy. Very impressive! I think it will make a good addition to my 100 Pound DXpedition antenna collection.

The planning for the Montserrat trip had to take a back seat this week while I attended to other matters. I hope that the majority of the distractions are now behind me. Today I followed-up on a couple of things including joining the Montserrat Amateur Radio Society and finding a charter aircraft for the short hop between Antigua and Montserrat which our host at Gingerbread Hill is helping us with. (Email arrived while I was typing this blog entry from our host with the phone number. Thanks!)

I also made it a point to send out a *status report* to all the members highlighting the things that are in the works, the things that they need to follow up on, and those things we've not yet addressed. I hope to be organized enough to get such a status report pulled together each week and I think it would help our organization effort. There is a lot to do!

This week's hot points were licensing, joining MARS, and getting to the bottom of the airplane charter opportunity. I also have asked all the members for their T-shirt sizes. I've got a little gift I'd like to give everybody and want to be sure it fits.

Finally, there are two legal documents that I believe we need to get organized and signed: a general agreement among the traveling members (like the one in the DXpeditioning Behind the Scenes book) and a *model release form*, a standard release that says it is OK for people to use your likeness and voice. Simple, straightforward, and important. Just *dotting the I's* and *crossing the T's*.

This all might sound like overkill but I believe if we run this like a *project*, taking care at every step, then we'll all be more comfortable when we arrive. We'll know there is nothing important left undone.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:43PM (-04:00)

Daily DX

Monday, August 21, 2006

I mentioned the Daily DX in passing in Friday's post. Perhaps I should say a little more about this fine service.

Two years ago at the Boxboro DX dinner there were a number of door prizes awarded. My good friend Steve walked away with a brand new MFJ-259B antenna analyzer. I was called a few minutes later to receive an envelope entitling me to a year's subscription to the Daily DX email newsletter. Though Steve's prize had a higher dollar value, I almost believe I got the better deal.

The Daily DX provides you with 250 issues per year (5 days a week, 50 weeks a year) with all the "who is operating where, on which bands, for how long, and how do I QSL with them" information you could ever want. When my renewal came due after the first year, I did so unhesitatingly. It was due again (this being the second anniversary of that Boxboro dinner) and I renewed again. For about 20 cents an issue (or, about a tenth of a good cup of coffee), you can't beat it.

You can view a sample of a daily mailing here. Subscriptions are \$49 a year. A *Weekly DX* emailed once a week as a PDF is about half that. They'll even let you try it for a couple of weeks for free (details on the order page). Try it and see if you're not hooked. Oh, yeah, and look for my call sign in there once in a while [grin].

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:24AM (-04:00)

Montserrat Press Release

Tuesday, August 22, 2006

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: 22 August 2006
Contact: B. Scott Andersen (NE1RD)
614 Old Stone Brook
Acton, MA 01718
Phone: (978) 263-9617
EMAIL: dxpedition.vp2m@gmail.com

BUMS GROUP ANNOUNCE DXPEDITION TO MONTSERRAT

Acton, MA — August 22, 2006 — The Buddipole Users on Monserrat (BUMS) will mount a DXpedition to the island of Montserrat from January 29th to February 6th 2007. The team members include Budd Drummond (W3FF), Chris Drummond (W6HFP), Dan Gagnon (WZ1P), Paul Van Dyke (KB9AVO), Mike Greenwood (KC4VG), and B. Scott Andersen (NE1RD).

The DXpedition team will pack light in the style of a 100 pound DXpedition (<http://100pounddxpedition.blogspot.com>) taking only lightweight transceivers and portable antennas. The maximum equipment weight taken to the island will be 100 pounds per person. With this lightweight equipment, the team plans many on-island portable operations in the hills, on the beach, and from the volcano observatory on the southern part of the island.

VP2M call signs for team members, QSL information, operating frequencies, and operating schedules will be released prior to the team's departure in January 2007. Please check our web site <http://dxpedition-vp2m.com/> for more information.

About Montserrat

Montserrat, often called the Emerald Island of the Caribbean, got its name from Christopher Columbus in 1493 during his second trip to the New World. It is roughly 102 square kilometers (39 square miles) and is a territory of the United Kingdom.

It was a popular tourist destination rivaling many of its neighbors until July of 1995 when the Soufriere Hills volcano began a long and violent eruption which eventually buried the island's capital Plymouth with over 12 meters (40 feet) of mud and debris. The Southern half of the island remains uninhabitable. The northern half, however, continues to retain its charm which now includes a magnificent view of a still active volcano.

DXpedition Sponsorship

The DXpedition premiere sponsor is Buddipole Antennas (<http://www.buddipole.com>) who will be supplying antennas to the team for this trip.

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Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:49PM (-04:00)

K1P call sign approved for 2007

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

I just got a message from Perry Green (WY1O) that my special event call sign request for K1P was approved for April 11-17, 2007. So, I'll be on Deer Isle again next year for Patriots Day. You can see our web site for this special event here.

Last year's operation was complicated by a solar event that largely wiped out the HF bands for the weekend. Dave got through with CW and data modes but SSB was tough going. Hopefully we'll not have a repeat of that mess!

It might seem really early to be setting up for a trip like this. I've already got the special event call sign, the lease for the house is ready to be mailed back to our hosts, and Dave and I have already discussed some of the operating aspects of the trip. It isn't too early. My advice is to work on these things far in advance and a little at a time. That ensures you'll have everything planned, everything done, and you'll have a great trip!

Speaking of planning head well in advance, I mailed the Montserrat DXpedition Press Release to the ARRL, CQ Magazine, WorldRadio Magazine, and The DX Magazine this morning. If you want publicity for your event, you have to be sensitive to the long lead times the print media has. Hopefully, one or more of these publications will find our story interesting enough to pick up and print.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:47PM (-04:00)

Restating my purpose

Thursday, August 24, 2006



The good folks at The Daily DX picked up our Press Release about the Montserrat DXpedition. Between this and the posts I made to the Yahoo! groups for the Buddipole Users Group and the HFpack, traffic here has picked up considerably. This might be a good time to restate what this blog is about.

Traveling with your radio can be tons of fun. Being on the other end of the pile up and being the pursued rather than the pursuer

is a fun change of pace. My idea in this is simple: you can do this with a minimum of equipment. Sure, if you don't bring towers, yagis, and amplifiers you won't be the biggest signal on the band, but you just might be the one having the most fun. And, for me that's more important!

I've got three trips actively in the works: Montserrat, Deer Isle (ME), and Georges Island right in my "back yard", with a fourth, Cay Sal Bank, way off in the distance. I talk about planning and execution of these trips here. What I'm really hoping, though, is each of you will be inspired to try this yourself. Grab the radio and some wire, go someplace interesting and have fun!

Boxboro is right around the corner and I wanted to have the Montserrat trip announced and *out there* so I could talk about it. I finished the initial work on the VP2M web site last night, including the logo. Of course there is lots more work to do, but at least it is started. I think my logo turned out nicely, don't you?

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:10AM (-04:00)

Boxboro Day One

Friday, August 25, 2006

Today was Day One at Boxboro and it was a full day of Ham radio. It began with an ICS-100 training class taught by MEMA. Two other fellow members of PART (the Westford, Massachusetts club) were there. I'm going to try to get through all three courses (-100, -200, -300) and the 700 level course so I've got all my credentials in order. We'll see when I can allocate the time.

The Boxboro DX dinner sponsored by New England DX Century Club was held tonight with special guest speakers Bob Heil and Ann Santos. Bob Heil received a rock star ovation from the crowd when announced and why not? Bob's company Heil Sound was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame this year. In his remarks Bob said he owed it all to ham radio. You can't beat that!

Ann Santos was next with her video presentation from her trip to Kure Atol and the K7C DXpedition. The sound wasn't quite right when her video began and Bob Heil popped up, adjusted the microphone picking up her movie's audio, then went in the back room to further adjust the sound. He circled back and reentered the room near my table and asked me if the sound was OK now? Yes. Thanks. I turned to my fellow table-mates and said, "this is the best AV guy we've ever had here." I crack myself up.

My presentation is at noon in the morning. I ripped out a bunch of slides today in hopes of leaving more time for questions. I've also got some cool give-aways for those who suffer through the whole hour with me. [grin]

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:55PM (-04:00)

Boxboro Day Two

Saturday, August 26, 2006

Today was Day Two at Boxboro and the first official day of the event. I gave my *100 Pound DXpedition* talk at noon and, once I got over my nervous jitters, had a good time sharing my experiences, successes, and goof-ups. I gave away a couple of items at the end including a tote bag with my 100 pound DXpedition logo on it, and a couple of goodies I'd been collecting from Rex Harper (W1REX) including a box of his famous *Zomboids* (Altoids relabeled) and one of his Tuna Tin transmitter kits. I was kidding attendees that the little 3 ounce transmitter is a good start to your 100 pound equipment budget.

The question and answer session after my presentation was lively and I believe I engaged a few people's enthusiasm. Again, if I have successfully encouraged a few folks to go out and travel with their radio I believe I've done a good thing. I was also stopped a couple of times after the session in the long hallway between meeting rooms to answer questions about antennas, plans for my next trip, and so on. It was fun meeting so many people!

Prior to the talk, when I was hanging out in the garden area with the intention of rehearsing the presentation one more time, I met Bill Barber (NE1B), a very interesting fellow who was sorting through some of the latest QSL cards he'd received in order to submit them for his DXCC credit. Somehow we got to talking about Cay Sal Bank, boats, planes, and (believe it or not) Bebe Rebozo, who, according to Bill, had a residence down there in Cay Sal at one point. Bill, in addition to being on the Honor Roll with 7BDXCC, and a long list of other awards, knew a great deal about the Bahamas, and the recent DXpedition efforts to Cay Sal. The more I talk to people the more I realize I've got to learn a whole lot more about Cay Sal and that area of the world before I go there. (It was also a

little disconcerting to realize I was old enough to know who Bebe Rebozo was. [grin]
The majority of the afternoon was spent split between the New England QRP presentation and the Yankee Clipper Contest Club meeting. I am definitely spread too thin!

The YCCC meeting featured many very interesting presentations including a wrap-up by Mitch Stern (W1SJ) who operated FS5KA for the ARRL DX SSB contest (the same contest I operated from St. John this year). Mitch and I were (clearly) in different categories, though: Mitch was in the "Single Op High Power" category, and I was in the "umbrella drink" category. At least that's how it appears when you compare his 4,717,152 points to my 106,926 points.

One more day at Boxboro and then it is time to get really serious about the organizing effort for Montserrat. Getting licensing arranged and finding suitable transportation from Antigua are the top two concerns.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:38PM (-04:00)

Boxboro wrap up

Sunday, August 27, 2006

Today was Day Three at Boxboro and the last day of the event. With my presentation behind me I was able to just hang out and have fun. My hopes of winning one of the *big prizes* were dashed about 2 PM as the last card was drawn. Still, if you can't be a winner at least *know* one. Bill Ricker (N1VUX), a very bright fellow who worked for me a long time ago, won an HT from the Minuteman Repeater Association. There were many other great prizes given out by the corporate sponsors of the event including Cushcraft, HeilSound, Unadilla, West Mountain Radio, Icom America, MFJ, and too many more to name here.

One of the (many) things I picked up at the convention was how pervasive the use of audio and video has become in these DXpedition presentations. I really need to think about this for the presentation and video reviews of my trips, and particularly the Montserrat trip. It is quickly getting to the point where the static picture slide show style of presentation will seem lame and not hold an audience's attention.

Montserrat trip planning will be shifting into high gear for me now that Boxboro is over. Expect to see updates here pretty much daily on the things I'm worried about and those things I've accomplished (or messed up, depending, I guess).

Finally, a web content update: I added links for the Montserrat DXpedition and Dave's 99 Hobbies web site. Dave's 99 Hobbies effort is most decidedly on the rise. As he walked around Boxboro people would say to him, "I was hoping to run into you!" He's got some great new podcasts lined up from this event. (I got a sneak peek at a sample last night. Awesome!)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 05:14PM (-04:00)

IC-7000 and LDG tuner

Monday, August 28, 2006

While I'm careful to tell all of you that *it isn't about the equipment*, it doesn't mean that you can't bring a nice radio. In something that was in-between a planned purchase and impulse buy, I snagged an ICOM IC-7000 yesterday at Boxboro and picked it up from The Ham Radio Outlet this morning.

I also picked up the AT-7000 autotuner from LDG, a sweet little device that has the same footprint as the radio and integrates into the system by emulating the AH-4 tuner, drawing

power from the four pin molex connector on the radio and responding to the *tune* button on the front of the radio. The tuner came with the molex to DIN cable that connects the tuner to the radio and even a 12-inch patch cable to run between the tuner and the radio. That was a nice touch.

I've had extremely good service from LDG. When some switches in my Z-11 were damaged, I called the company to ask for some help and they offered to send me **for free** a replacement panel with the switches. When we were hit by lightning here a couple of summers ago, my AT-897 took a beating. Again, I called LDG and told them what happened and they said they'd look at it. They fixed it **for free**, even though it was obvious the damage was from lightning. They've always been generous with their time and, obviously, they're service and repair policy has been extremely good to me. They've earned my tuner business pretty much for life. Period.

I've gotten as far as crimping PowerPoles on the power cord and making sure the unit will come alive when powered. It does. Golly that display is sweet! I'll give a full report after I've given it a workout. I plan on using it for CQ WW. That will give me a good idea of how it holds up with things get *interesting*.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:38PM (-04:00)

Status report

Tuesday, August 29, 2006

For the second week in a row I've created a status report for the Montserrat trip. There will likely be such a document right up until we leave. With six operators scattered across the country from Massachusetts to California, the causal "let's get together for coffee and talk about it" approach isn't going to work. Truth be told, that approach probably wouldn't work anyway!

If you've got a group (that is, two or more) collaborating on a project such as a DXpedition, it is best to err on the side of thoroughness: make lists, have a schedule, set goals (including intermediate goals), make assignments, and have clear lines of authority. I'm trying to help organize this project with this approach and, so far at least, I believe it is working well.

We have created a Yahoo! group that is private to just the 6 of us to exchange this information and I must say that having an online collaboration area is very convenient. It is difficult to imagine how people did this in the days before the internet! Here's a glimpse of what I have in the status report:

- * General status
- * Actions this week
- * Open issues (hot)
- * Open issues
- * Closed issues
- * Discussion

Right now the *hot* issues are getting our licensing paperwork into the Montserrat authorities, joining the Montserrat Amateur Radio Society, and figuring out how we're going to get from Antigua to Montserrat (plane? boat?). There are many more things to worry about and once we think of things that need to be handled, it goes on the list. If we are disciplined about this we will be able to split up the work, get everything done, and have a very relaxing and successful DXpedition. We are already splitting up tasks nicely and as the saying goes, "Many hands make light work."

There are other items right behind the *hot* ones that also need to be handled, but we'll get

to them in good time. I'll talk about two of them tomorrow: the model release form and general agreement. There are some things that should not be done "on a handshake". Finally, I am developing a manual for the DXpedition. This might sound *over the top*, but it is common for serious DXpeditioning efforts to have such a document and it can be invaluable during and after the event. Think about all the things that need to be decided and handed: how will you QSL? Who will update your web site? How will on-line logs be handled? Will you participate in on-line QSLing? Who buys the QSL cards? These are all excellent questions and represent just one thin aspect of the mechanics of your project! Some of this work will be specific to this trip, of course, but other work should be reusable. That gives me a head-start on my next big adventure!
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:26PM (-04:00)

Model release and general agreement

Wednesday, August 30, 2006

I mentioned a couple of legal documents that we are going to try to work through in the next couple of weeks within our group. One is the *model release form* which essentially says your likeness, image, voice, or things that make you recognizable, may be used by people producing photographs, videos, or audio recordings. If you are part of a public event or something newsworthy, this doesn't apply. But, say, if people wanted to use your likeness to promote a product (maybe a new brand of oat meal) then they would need to get your permission to use your likeness for such purposes.

I expect to create a video of my adventure down in Montserrat. Other team members, including our principal sponsor Buddipole Antennas will also likely make recordings and take videos and photographs during the trip. Team members should agree that this is OK. My expectation for this document is that each of us will give permission to all other team members (and Buddipole Antennas) to use their likeness, voice, or other recognizable artifact for any activity related to the DXpedition whether it be a book, web site, CD, DVD, or product brochure.

The second document is a little more involved as it is the *General Agreement* of each member as it relates to the DXpedition. If you already own the fine book *DXPEDITIONING Behind the Scenes* (available here) you can find an example on page 52. I do not yet have a draft of the agreement prepared (something on tap for this weekend) but the general idea is to capture the important financial and liability aspects associated with traveling to a foreign country, using public and chartered transportation, while taking expensive and delicate equipment into an area that has already been destroyed by the still smoldering active volcano. I'm sure there is at least one hazard in there that should be covered by the agreement {grin}.

Most of us are not lawyers, and many of us shy away from anything that sounds like *legalese*, but this is an important topic. There are thousands of dollars on the line here with risks of injury and death. Better to get everybody to agree upfront than spend the rest of your life in an argument where nobody wins. I am not a lawyer. I am not giving any advice here other than this is an important topic and one you should consider before leading any DXpedition.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:15PM (-04:00)

Soufriere Hills Volcano activity

Thursday, August 31, 2006



Paul (KB9AVO), a member of the Montserrat DXpeditioning team, has been sending around reports of recent volcano activity on the island. You can follow along with what we are reading from the stormCARIB web site. Another fine place to check out is the Montserrat Volcano Observatory web site. Obviously our team is watching the activity at the Soufriere Hills Volcano very carefully.

In my efforts to prepare and plan for this trip there are some things that are foremost in my mind and safety is chiefly among them. I have several places in my outline for the DXpedition manual that discuss safety

including a section on "Extraordinary Events" including sickness, injury, or death, political instability, transportation failure, etc. But, I really need to add at least two more things to my list: what do to if there is an *event* while we are on the island, and what might we do if there was an event preventing us from getting to the island. Our plan should address this. It would be A Bad Thing™ to be sitting in the airport lounge in Antigua with everybody saying, "now what?"

Budd (W3FF) wondered aloud in a group email if Antigua should be a backup operating place. Our current plan is to fly into Antigua and then trek over to Montserrat. But, if the volcano is going nuts and we can't get to Montserrat, what then? This is going to require some thought. In the mean time, we'll watch the volcano from here.

For some reason, I can't get this Jimmy Buffet song out of my head. Any ideas out there? {grin}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:57PM (-04:00)

Summer reading: Common Mode Chokes

Friday, September 01, 2006

Now that it is September 1st and the return to school is right around the corner for many, it is time to start thinking about all that summer reading you've been putting off. Chuck Counselman (W1HIS) has a piece that you should add to *your* summer reading. The title of the work is **Common Mode Chokes** and you can find it here on the Yankee Clipper Contest Club web site.

If you have ever had RF in the shack, have higher than you'd like noise levels (especially on the lower bands), or any of a myriad of problems associated with common mode current running someplace it shouldn't, this is for you. In fact, even if you've *never* had these problems yet, trust me: you will. Read it now!

I've already had some problems along this area in my trips. For example, while in St. John for the ARRL DX contest I had a simple but very irritating problem: whenever I would transmit on a particular band my computer laptop's charger would stop charging the battery. I suspect it was something simple like the charger seeing a current on the wires leading to the power plug on the laptop and interpreting that as *the battery is*

pushing back--it must be full. It is a stupid problem to have during a contest but I had it! The reason I had a problem like that directly relates to the 100 Pound Dxpedition charter: do more with less and accept some compromises and tradeoffs. Everything on these trips is a compromise: I bring less equipment, run fewer radials, take smaller and more lightweight coax, and my installations are all extemporaneous and temporary. This kind of brazen tempting of fate is bound to generate some problems, including RF current running where you don't want it. This white paper discusses problems like this and does so very well.

I talked with Chuck for about an hour at Boxboro and while he calls this 42 page work an *article* I believe it more closely resembles the draft of a *small book*. In fact, I'm going to write Chuck today and make that very recommendation: don't cut it up to fit into QST; expand it, tighten it up, and make into a book!

This is an important work and has already been described by many as the seminal writing and thinking on this particular problem. Highly recommended.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:53AM (-04:00)

IC-7000 first impressions

Saturday, September 02, 2006



When a telescope is first used it is said to have *first light*. I don't know what the equivalent for a radio should be, but I happened tonight for the new IC-7000 I picked up at Boxboro. I must say, it is a surprisingly nice radio!

The first QSO was with XE1NVA in Mexico City and he gave me a 59. He was S9+10 or S9+20 here so I believe his report. The contact was just under 2000 miles according to my logging program's calculations. Not bad for the first one!

I had spent some of today obtaining and preparing cables for this setup. I like to have each radio have its own Pelican case and pack within the outfit everything needed to make that radio effective including the tuner, patch cables, power supply (if it will fit in the case), computer connection gizmos, and headphone/audio adapters.

One of the biggest mistakes you can make, in my opinion, is to continuously cannibalize one setup to make another one work. That is almost certainly a recipe for disaster as leaving behind that crucial component becomes not just possible but likely the longer you take that approach. Following my own advice, today I purchased another Keyspan USB Serial adapter (USA HS-19HS) and the mating DB-25 to DB-9 reducer so the 7000 now has its own computer interfacing hardware. Again, keep it all together or you'll be having a scavenger hunt before every trip and likely leave something behind.

I'm using my ICOM CT-17 level converter for now but I've purchased a West Mountain Radio RIGtalk that I hope to use instead of the heavy CT-17 once I get the driver working on my Macintosh. (I've not spent any time on this problem. I'm sure it is just a matter of tracking down the driver and installing it.) The RIGtalk will eliminate the Keyspan adapter, CT-17, the DB-25 to DB-9 reducer, and the USB cable, replacing it with something that resembles a stick of gum that plugs directly into the USB port on the computer. That's a savings!

Finally, you'll notice in the picture I have a larger display sitting on top of the loop antenna controller box. This is a portable DVD player with the video in connected to the radio's

video out via a simple 1/8th-inch mono jack patch cable. It gets a little squiggly when I transmit, but looks great the rest of the time. That larger display is very easy on my old eyes. I can tell that this little DVD player will be a common *option* in my discretionary equipment!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:12PM (-04:00)

RTFM

Sunday, September 03, 2006

Today's lesson is *Read The Friendly Manual*. After I made my first QSO with the IC-7000 last night I found a safe place in a Pelican 1510 case for the radio and all its accessories. So far, I have the radio, power supply, auto-tuner, PowerPole distribution box (RIGrunner 4005), CT-17 with DB reducer, 12 volt harness for the power supply, power harness for the radio, and a plastic box filled with little cables that make everything connect to everything else. All this with the case now weighs **27 pounds**. Not a bad start.

While I was putting the power supply in the case I noticed the markings on the outside mentioned only 120v/60Hz. Panic ensued. I thought for sure I had been careful selecting this power supply, ensuring it worked with both 120 and 230 volt mains. Was I wrong?!

So, at 11:30 PM last night I'm rifling through my stack of radio papers for the Alinco manual. I look through it and find no mention of switching between 120 and 230v. Nothing. I got my screwdriver and carefully opened up the power supply to look inside, ignoring the *Do Not Disassemble - No User Serviceable Parts Inside* warning. (It funny how hams never heed that advice anyway.) Sure enough, there was a big rocker switch on the bottom of the circuit board for this function. Additionally, there is a hole in the bottom of the case allowing access to this switch. It was there, just not in the user manual.

It was mentioned in the Alinco DM-330 Service Manual that I downloaded just now, however. (I should have looked for this document before reaching for the screwdriver. Old habits die hard.) Sure enough, the dual voltage feature is highlighted clearly enough in the service manual (though the reason why it wouldn't be included in the user manual that came with the device escapes me).

I came away with several lessons and ideas from this experience:

1. Don't try to start solving a problem at midnight.
2. The tool to use first is your head, not the screwdriver {grin}.
3. Collect all the manuals for an important device **when you get the device**. That way, when you've got a question later, you'll have the document you need.
4. Put all the documents for your equipment on a CD or thumb drive so you can reference them when you travel. You might not have internet access from your place in paradise and even if you do, why spend valuable vacation time doing a panicked web search on stuff you should already have?

I'm going to start that electronic document collection this month. If you find my argument compelling, I suggest you do the same.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:42AM (-04:00)

New Element

Monday, September 04, 2006



As reported nearly a month ago, we had a little accident and got a bit banged up when my Honda Element was struck from behind. It was finally out of the body shop last week but it didn't *feel right*. We decided today it was time to swap it for a new one. So, I'll pick up my *new* Honda Element tomorrow. I removed the last of the radio stuff this



evening and will start working on getting my two radios installed in the new vehicle immediately. I'm going to try to get the service department to run my power cable through the fire wall and to the battery. I can do the rest. The two radios are the IC-706 IIMG and the IC-2800.

Needless to say, with all this going on I didn't get a chance to do much on the DXpedition stuff today. But, other people are

thinking about DX! I noticed another bump in the web site traffic statistics today at least partially attributed to a mention of our trip in the Ohio/Penn DX Bulletin.

I would really like to put more content up on our Montserrat web site so everybody will become as jazzed about this trip as I am. Perhaps after I get past some of these really *hot* issues I can spend some time on that.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:32PM (-04:00)

Publishing online logs

Tuesday, September 05, 2006

One of the things that I would like to do while on Montserrat is to provide a daily upload of our logs in a form that would make it easy for people to see that they are, indeed, *in the log*. I had posted some notes about this idea in our private collaboration area and not long after that the ARRL announced changes they were making to the DXCC Accreditation Criteria outlining many of the very same issues we had discussed privately. Principally, the concern was online or other publications of a log providing complete data about a QSO would invite the unscrupulous to claim they had made the contact instead of the genuine station. From the ARRL article:

"Although this information is generally limited to call sign, band and mode, it has been useful in reducing the number of duplicate contacts in the DXpedition log," Mills points out. "Publishing complete QSO information or information from which full QSO information can be derived, on the other hand, threatens the integrity of the QSLing process, and is unacceptable."

Consider a contact you make with *KZ1O*. If you put that log entry up in its entirety with time, date, frequency, mode, and call sign, another station, say *KZ9O* claims you made a mistake logging the contact and it was they, not *KZ1O* that should be credited. (I used these two calls for my example. I have no reason to believe that *KZ9O*, the Midwest WWYC club, would *ever* do anything unsavory. In fact, they have an extremely cool QSL card and seem like a really fun group.)

If, however, you publish only the band and day, such a false claim can be resolved quickly by the simple question, "when do you believe you made this call?" If they can't give you the QSO time, they're sunk. I believe that addresses the ARRL's concern but I'll be giving it some more thought over the next few months.

One of the tasks I've given myself in the ever-lengthening *to do* list is to write some software that will read my log (as an exported ADIF file and create a series of web pages that could be posted to our Monserrat DXpedition web site. We should have internet access at the villa on the island but in case that does not work well, we have recruited a *pilot* that will be Stateside to help us with all our off-island tasks including updating the web site. Once this software is written and tested on this trip, I'll likely put it someplace so everybody can have it.

Today's puzzler: "What does a typical software development project and my new car have in common?" Answer: "Both miss their promised delivery date." I'm now assured it will be ready for pickup tomorrow.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:15PM (-04:00)

That great QSL card design

Wednesday, September 06, 2006



I've got some great looking QSL cards in my very modest collection, a couple from famous DXpeditions like 3B9C, and many more from DXpeditions made by people like you and me. All these cards, the ones from the big DXpeditions and the ones made by we mere mortals, have one thing in common: they weren't created by luck or accident; they were well planned and executed.

One of the classic shots on a DXpedition is the team huddled in front of a flag or set of flags and banners. For the Montserrat DXpedition I have just received one of the *props* we will use for our group pictures. I ordered a 2x3 foot Montserrat National Flag and it locating it couldn't have been easier. I just went to Amazon and entered "Montserrat flag" in the search bar, picked the size I wanted from the list, and pressed "Add to cart". Simple! The order was actually fulfilled by *Design A Product LLC* in Tampa, Florida and it arrived without incident. The flag itself is nylon, feather light, and the colors are quite vibrant. It should make for a nice feature in our group photo.

In addition to the flag, I've printed a large roll-up (vinyl) banner of my 100 Pound DXpedition logo, and plan to print the BUMS logo as well. I expect the banners to hang in the operating areas at the villas and the flag to be used mostly for the group shot. It would be especially nice if the Montserrat Amateur Radio Society members would join us in that group shot!

The other common thread in these great QSL pictures is the classic DXpedition T-shirt. I've already sent out 100 Pound DXpedition T-shirts to the team members and plan on getting T-shirts made using the new Montserrat DXpedition logo I created. When I hit the *big time*, perhaps I'll have a first class graphics designer like Randy Juhl make us one as cool as the penguin they used for the Peter I trip. Until then, we'll have to make do with the matching T-shirts using my logo for the group shot.

The point of all this is **plan ahead**. Bring along props like banners or flags that will help you create that distinctive, gorgeous, and impressive QSL card. Just a little extra effort

upfront will make your card, and your group, look like a *class act*. That great QSL card design begins with great pictures, including great group pictures. Props you bring from home for this purpose can really help.

Finally, I've got a couple of random thoughts. It is a little dangerous for me to write these blog entries and search for cool links. I just visited the Peter I web site and noticed they now have a DXpedition DVD available. So, I took a moment and ordered that {grin}.

And, I picked up my new car tonight. It is a new Honda Element (just the newer version of the one that was hit) and it is lovely. Now, of course, I have to get it back on the air!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:20PM (-04:00)

Time flies

Thursday, September 07, 2006

The Montserrat trip is slated for the end of January 2007. That might seem like a long time from now but in reality it is right around the corner. Consider the fact that most people are pretty tied up at the end of the year from early November through the end of December. There's that mad rush at work prior to Thanksgiving. Then we have that long (tedious?) Thanksgiving holiday with travel, family, and end-to-end college football games. After that we're into December with a couple more holidays, more travel, more family, and more distractions. Before you realize it, January will be upon us and it will nearly time to go!

Knowing all this, I had made the suggestion that we finish as much as we could by the end of October. That, too, sounded like a long way away when I first spoke of it in June. Now, that proposed deadline is only about 6 weeks off! Time flies! My advice is still **start early** and **stay focused**.

We had a small misfortune just in the licensing exercise. We're going to send in all the applications in one bundle. Unfortunately, one team member's envelope sent to me (I'm coordinating this) was somehow lost in the mail. OK, it is *really* frustrating and inconvenient, but had this happened at the last minute in December or January of 2007, it could have been disastrous. Because we've been trying to be proactive and finish up all these details early, such a setback is only an annoyance.

I've taken the role of "group nag", sending reminders (friendly, to be sure, but persistent), trying to ensure that things get done. Unless your DXpedition group consists of retired millionaires with nearly infinite amounts of personal time and nothing better to think about than the trip's *todo* list, somebody will need to take this role. Family commitments, work commitments, and even commitments to other things in their personal life, will always be present. Things get done because (at least) one person remains focused.

So, each group should have a lead, even if it is, like me, the *lead "nag"* to keep prompting things to *move along, move along*. Again, treat this like a project you might have at work, keep on top of the details, and keep things moving.

Car update: The new car drives beautifully, but it is sorrowfully short on radios! I managed to get the power wires pulled through the firewall tonight and will build out the battery harness (fused on both leads) tomorrow.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:35PM (-04:00)

NA-148 Georges Island Again

Friday, September 08, 2006

I wanted to make at least one more trip out to the Boston Harbor Islands before it got too cold. Unfortunately, I had lost a month from all the distractions with the car accident and now the season is quickly coming to a close. My plan is to get out there Saturday (September 9) and be on the air from 1400 to 1700 GMT.

My plan is to take the following equipment:

- **ICOM 7000 setup** - I've got a Pelican 1510 case filled with the "right stuff". This will be the first real workout for the new radio.
- **Force-12 Sigma-5** - Thus far I've only used my Buddipole on the island so this will be a change. Then again, one of the reasons for buying this antenna was to see how it would perform in situations precisely like this.
- **New 17Ah batteries** - I had purchased two sealed GSM batteries (model ES17-12) from eBatteriesToGo and have had them on the smart charger topping them off. I hope to get a full four or five hours of operating time using one or two of these batteries.
- **shelter, lunch, water** - Sandy will be joining me on the trip so wrangling all this stuff should be a little easier than when I tried to do it by myself.

The upshot of this is: I will be QRO compared to previous trips with 50 watts instead of 5 output. I have not yet received word from the Boston Harbor Islands National Park, Department of Conservation and Recreation on my request to tap into their power generator so I could run the full 100 watts and run the computer. Alex Hall, the gentleman I talked to about this possibility, indicated it would be better if I tried doing this late in the season when traffic on the island was smaller. If Alex comes through, I'll do at least one more trip.

I hope to work you all from NA-148 tomorrow!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:04PM (-04:00)

Importance of computer logging

Saturday, September 09, 2006

Sandy and I made the trip out to Georges Island this morning with the setup described in yesterday's post. Assembly of the Sigma-5 went quickly and smoothly. I brought 3 stakes with me and guyed the antenna with some lightweight Dacron rope. The whole process was finished in about 15 minutes, including the time spent running the controller cable and coax feed line to the picnic table.

The two sealed GSM batteries (model ES17-12) from eBatteriesToGo performed very well. I operated 25 watts output from the first battery for the first couple of hours, then switched batteries and cranked it up to the full 100 watts for the last 45 minutes. As you might expect, the jump from 5 watts QRP with the K2 to 25 watts using the IC-7000 gave me that extra S-unit of power and people did have an easier time hearing me. Going the rest of the way, to 100 watts, made it even easier to make contacts. It would be wonderful to have access to the power from the island's generator even for a day and have that full 100 watts from morning until evening!

My first QSO was at 14:23 and my last logged entry was at 17:50. In there was a little lunch and a chat with Sandy so I worked the bands about 3 hours before we packed everything back up and headed for the docks. In that time I worked 50 stations (my goal for today). Here are the prefixes worked:

AA1 AC0 DG0 DH6 DK4 DL3 DL6 DL7 DL8 DM4 EA3 EA5 F5 HB9 I5 IW1 IZ8 K3 K5 K8
K9 KB5 KB5I KE0 KF4 KZ1 LY2 OE7 OH5 ON3 ON8 RA3 SP1 SP4 UA1 VE4 W4 W5
W6 W7 W7O W8 WU0

Even with only 50 entries to transcribe between my pencil markings in my mini-log to my computer log, it was a tedious process. Sandy assisted me when I moved the 100+ contacts made during the IOTA contest and that was a big help. I must confess that I am completely spoiled by the ease (and accuracy) of computer-based logging. If you only make a handful of contacts per day, perhaps the tedium is manageable, but not if you plan on making dozens or hundreds of contacts per day. (Thousands of contacts couldn't be managed with paper and transcribing later, could it? No. it can't work!)

I've got to have the discussion *soon* with the Montserrat group about this very issue. I had planned on handling the transcriptions from their paper logs to my computer logging program while on the island, but I now see how naive that plan was. If these guys are going to make lots of contacts, they better figure out how to capture them with a computer. I can collate results, produce summary and detail pages for the web site, and even organize the QSLing, but only if the logs are in electronic form already. It is certainly my hope to have enough activity while on Montserrat to have this be a *big* problem! {grin} The upshot is: This paper logging approach isn't viable for a medium to large size DXpedition. This might sound obvious, but I'm not sure how many members are planning on bringing their computers. Remember the weight restrictions we are working within! This is definitely something to think about.

Car update: I finished the direct connections to the battery tonight so power is now live to the RIGrunner on the floor just behind the two front seats. As long as we're redoing everything, Sandy suggested I put the head for the dual-bander higher than I had it in the original Element. So, we made a trip to HRO in New Hampshire looking for RAM mounts. Their selection was uncharacteristically poor and we didn't find a suitable one there. Later, while perusing Radio Shack for something else, Sandy had a *great* idea: why not use a speaker wall mount to hold up the head. We're going to try it. I'll pop up a picture here when it is in.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:01PM (-04:00)

Two small features are big

Sunday, September 10, 2006

I'm still thinking about yesterday's trip to Georges Island. Sandy mentioned to me this morning that I didn't sound hoarse after yesterday's operation and reminded me that the last couple of times I went to the island my voice was shot from calling CQ. What was different this time was the voice keyer built into the 7000 got a workout, saving my voice. I lusted after the 7000 because of the IF DSP capabilities (which I sorely missed while on St. John) and the form factor (small!). But, the radio has many very nice features that are particularly useful for lightweight and portable operations that you could easily miss in the data sheet's fine print. I'll mention two here: the voice keyer and the clock.

The voice keyer provides you with up to four different recordings for a total of 120 seconds. Once everything was assembled yesterday I thought it would be a good idea to record my outgoing CQ message. Of course, with everything going on, I'd not had a chance to read the manual yet. Luckily, the Nifty Manual I had packed with the radio gave me clear directions for recording and playing back the messages.

Dave (KZ1O) found me on the air yesterday and captured a 30 second audio clip of my operation. You can listen to it here. The first few seconds are from the voice recorder; the

remainder is me live in a QSO. I can't tell the difference between the recording and my live voice in the QSO. (Many thanks to my friend and *Elmer* Dave for the recording.) The other feature that you might miss was the real-time clock in the display. Since I was not using computer logging, I needed a way to capture the time of the QSOs in my paper log. I have the MFJ Dual LCD clock that I'd bought a couple of years ago, but this feature in the radio means I don't even need to bring that. Again, it is a minor feature you'd likely not notice in the long list in the brochure, but in a portable operation, it is very handy.

Car update: Sandy's idea to try a speaker mount for the head of the dual-band radio was a great one. We pulled an Omnimount AB2 mounting kit off the wall in Radio Shack yesterday and I installed it today. It looks great! So, one of the two radios is now back up-and-running. One down, one to go. It feels good to be *back on the air* in the car!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:43PM (-04:00)

Five years after

Monday, September 11, 2006

Today's entry is not about ham radio or DXpeditioning. Skip it if you like.

Today is September 11th and all of us remember what happened 5 years ago today. I was lucky. I didn't lose a child or spouse, parent or sibling, or even best friend. For those of you who did, I am deeply sorry and you have my best wishes.

There were two lost that day from my home town of Acton. I knew them both, not well, but I knew them. Amy Sweeney was my neighbor. We were both busy with our own lives and I only spoke with her a couple of times. Because we were neighbors, I thought there would always be more time to get to know each other.

Phil Rosenzweig worked in my building and on my floor at Sun Microsystems. Again, I did not know him well, but I did know him. With his office just a few hallways from mine, we probably brushed shoulders dozens or hundreds of times, smiling, saying "hello", and going on our way.

There were others lost that day that I knew. A young woman from a software quality interest group and a young man I tried to recruit to work for me are among them. I thought, perhaps, the wife of a good friend who worked at ground zero might be lost, but an *all clear* message from my friend, her husband, came a day or so later. She had been one of the thousands that had walked out of the city.

Sandy and I attended a small ceremony in Acton's center this morning. It was brief and solemn, with ringing of the bell from the nearby fire station for the "last alarm" for the brave firefighters and first responders lost, the playing of taps, and the lowering of flags. It felt right to be there, necessary to be there, though I cannot tell you why that is so.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:02PM (-04:00)

License materials mailed

Tuesday, September 12, 2006

I packaged up and mailed the licensing materials to the authorities on Montserrat today. Hooray! It was a bit later than I would have liked, but at least it is on its way. Whew! The licenses on Montserrat last for a calendar year. Since we are going to be there in January, I was worried that they would give us a license for 2006, then have it expire just

weeks before our actual arrival. So, I included the renewal fee in with the request. We should either have licenses for 2007/8 or 2006/7. Either way, we should be *good to go*. I asked for **VP2MRD**, thinking the *Radio Delta* thing should roll off my tongue after a while. I still plan on having our group join the Montserrat Amateur Radio Society (MARS). I'll try to take care of that in the next few days.

I'll post here when we get our credentials back from the island.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:27PM (-04:00)

Whatt?

Wednesday, September 13, 2006



One of the things we are planning for the Montserrat trip is portable operation. Wandering around the lush green hills or heading up to the volcano observatory sounds like great fun. But, taking batteries to the island would blow our weight budget, so we plan on buying batteries once on the island. Car batteries or marine batteries should be available. Just a small reminder: it isn't cheating to use local materials to make your 100 pound DXpedition work!

The portable work I've been doing on

Georges Island has been great practice for this kind of operation. This last weekend Sandy and I went out there with just small (17Ah) batteries and a solar panel, a very similar setup to what I hope to use on Montserrat.

One of the questions I had out there was "how much battery have I eaten so far?" I was periodically checking the battery voltage with the small voltmeter I had brought with me (it now lives with the Icom 7000 stuff permanently) but what I really wanted to know was the number of amp-hours I had sucked out of the battery and how much of the battery might be left. Also, you can damage batteries if you run them down too far, so I would like to know when I might be approaching that point. I need data!

Luckily, there is a gizmo that gives me exactly what I need. It is distributed by West Mountain Radio and it is called the Super Whatt Meter. The unit comes with PowerPoles so it goes easily with all the other power connections I have. The unit draws only a few milliamps to power its little processor and run the display. It computes all sorts of stuff but the big things I was looking for are voltage, amps, and the total number of amp-hours drawn thus far. This is exactly the information I need to assess the health, efficacy, and projected life span of my battery during a portable operation. I've got a picture of tonight's test setup (sorry, it is a little dark).

The display shows the 7000 drawing 1.32 amps, 16 watts, with the battery voltage at 12.62 volts, and 0.780 amp hours have been drawn from the battery. Pretty nice! The display alternates between amp hours and watt hours, too. Putting things in perspective, my "15 watt" solar panel (which probably puts out about 10 watts when not in the optimum conditions the specifications call for) supplies insufficient power to run the radio *on receive*. Compare the 7000 to the Elecraft K2 that draws about 35 mA on receive!

The Super Whatt Meter retails for \$69.95. If you want to put your own PowerPoles on it you can buy the *Astro Flight* unit for somewhat less. (Just Googling around I found one online here). If you plan to do any portable operation with batteries, this can be a great source of data. It seems like a nicely thought out device. I've just made mine a permanent part of the 7000 kit.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:57PM (-04:00)

Group think on logging

Thursday, September 14, 2006

Traffic on the private Montserrat email reflector our VP2M has picked up. As Chris pointed out,

It seems to me that much of what we're doing here in preparation is helping to create a template for future "100 pound dxpeditions."

Absolutely! This planning and learning we are doing for this trip should translate to other trips. So, though it may seem occasionally (even to me) that we're being deliberate and obsessive, it is all worthwhile.

Today's exchanges were mostly around our plans for computer logging. Who is bringing a computer? How will we get Logbook of the World (LoTW) and eQSL updated? For example, LoTW requires that you have private keys to sign your log files before submission. I've suggested that everybody put these credentials on *thumb* drives and practice using these credentials on a separate computer.

Also, I asked the group to ensure that they all have LoTW and eQSL accounts. It is reasonably easy to add a new call sign to an existing account with these services; getting an account started is a bit more difficult, especially with LoTW which requires a whole step with a postcard.

I'm sticking with my plan to write a little software that will process all these logs and update the web site each day. Oh, one more thing to double-check: we believe the villas have internet access, but Chris is going to follow up to make sure.

This kind of planning, how we will be accomplishing logging, is precisely the kind of thing you want to get settled early in your planning. I'm pretty sure our group will have this one *in the bag* within the next week or so.

The group is starting to get very excited about the trip. I believe the mailing of the licensing materials has made it more *real* for me. Perhaps others had the same emotion run over them when they heard that one very formal part of the preparation had happened. This is going to be great!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:24PM (-04:00)

Antennas for travel: fishing poles

Friday, September 15, 2006

In a previous post I said that I would try to explain why a man that doesn't fish needs so many fishing poles. This was part of a series of posts that I had made called *Antennas for Travel* that I ran in July. I did not expect so much time to have passed between elements of this thread. Sorry!

Lightweight vertical antennas are an excellent alternative to bringing yagis and dipoles on your trip. You can certainly make vertical antennas out of aluminum pipe, and many are made that way, but the other way to create a light duty vertical is to use a fishing pole or other mast to hold up a wire. The Black Widow fishing pole shown below is an excellent backbone for such an antenna. It weighs next to nothing and easily holds up a radiator long enough to cover 20m without loading, and down to 40m with a little bit of coil.

While on my recent trip to St. John I used one of these beauties to hold up my 40/15m radiator, a 33 foot wire suspended from the top of the pole (which was affixed to a corner



of the roof) leading down to the ground where it was attached to the feed line. I made many of my contacts during the ARRL DX contest this March with this very simple, and very lightweight antenna.

At Atlanticon, the New Jersey QRP Club's yearly conference, I ran into Ed Breneiser (WA3WSJ) who has an interesting add-on for these poles including a loading coil that you can see here. While I don't own his coil, it is an interesting idea and there are plenty of folks in the QRP community who use it successfully.

Ed and Ron Polityka (WB3AAL) are involved in a group called the Polar Bears who carry lightweight QRP transceivers and very lightweight antennas such as these Black Widow specials when they camp on the Appalachian Trail. These guys have been very successful operating from Pulpit Rock near Hamburg, Pennsylvania with little more than fishing poles, wires, and QRP.

If you wish to get something a little longer, try the DK9SQ 33-foot collapsible mast available from Kanga and other places. I use this mast on St. John as well and found it very strong. Like the 20 foot black widow, I mounted this on the roof of the guest cottage and hung my 66 foot wire for 80m from the top, sloping down to the ground. Both this 33 foot mast and the 20 foot Black Widow collapse to under 48 inches so they both fit into a hard-sided golf bag for easy travel.

You might also wish to procure some very lightweight and strong wire to go with these poles. I can highly recommend the number 534 wire from The Wire Man. It has the following description:

'Invisible' Toughcoat 'Silky' 26 AWG, 19 strand 40% copper-clad steel (OD 0.020") with the same jacket as 531 (Nominal OD, 0.050" including 0.015" jacket, but super small for that 'low profile' antenna or pocket 'weekender' long wire. Weighs less than one pound per 1000 feet! Not recommended for 160 meters.

This stuff really is tough, very strong, and it weighs next to nothing. I've used it for the radiators and radials on St. John and have cut a set of radials for my Buddistick that are now packed into the bag with the antenna. I've attached *spade terminals* (Gardner Bender Model 10-143M) to the ends of these radials and have a mating female bundle to accept them at the feed point of the antenna for quick deployment.

Verticals, especially using this fishing pole or fiberglass mast approach, are a very effective way to get a whole lot of antenna for very little money and very little weight. I've had good luck with this approach, even when I've been lazy about putting out radials. Down on St. John, both verticals (the 33 foot wire and the 66 foot wire) had *one* radial. I could have done more, but I wanted to see what the minimal setup would get me. I was pleasantly surprised.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:09PM (-04:00)

Century mark

Saturday, September 16, 2006

Tonight's post marks the 100th entry to this blog. I hope you have found at least a few good ideas here in these last few months. I've enjoyed writing these entries and it has been useful for me, too, thinking things through as I commit them to paper (or bits, I guess). The next 100 entries will bring us right up to the end of the major planning for the Montserrat trip. I hope you'll stick with me through that -- and if you find this blog useful or enjoyable (hopefully both!) please tell your friends about it. Thanks.

I'll be giving my presentation *The 100 Pound DXpedition* at the Colonial Wireless Association club in Concord on September 27th, 2006. The schedule has this at the Concord Carlisle High School (500 Walden Street) from 7:30 - 10 PM, but let me assure you I'll not be speaking that whole time! {grin} What will likely happen is I'll speak for a while and then it will be *show and tell* time with all equipment I'm planning on bringing including my new IC-7000 setup, Buddipole and Buddistick systems, solar stuff, and lots of other fun gizmos.

I've always found it helpful to see interesting devices firsthand, holding them, assessing the quality of their construction, and getting a feel for their weight and size directly. Sure, you can look at web pages and catalog pages, scan brochures, and read magazine reviews, but there is no substitute for the knowledge you gain by direct physical inspection. I'll bring lots of my goodies so attendees can do just that.

If you would like to access this blog via the *feed* capability, try this: <feed://100pounddxpedition.blogspot.com/atom.xml> in your favorite browser. Some find this way of accessing things more convenient than the regular web page.

Again, I would like to thank all of you who have been reading, and especially thank those who have written to me over these last 100 days. I enjoy the correspondences and am especially thankful for the suggestions and ideas contributed. 73 DE NE1RD!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:15PM (-04:00)

Feather-weight power supply

Sunday, September 17, 2006



My fellow Montserrat DXpeditioners (the BUMS — Buddipole Users on Montserrat) have been taking the whole *100 pound* thing quite seriously. One of the pieces of equipment that has become symbolic of this is the Gamma Research HPS-1a power supply. What's the big attraction? It weighs 1.25 pounds!

I don't own this (yet) but most of the other guys in the group either have it or are seriously considering getting it. I'm still on

the fence as my Alinco DM-330MV is nearly brand new and has treated me well. Then again, the difference is about 3 pounds (1.25 pounds for the Gamma versus roughly 4.4 pounds for the Alinco). I'm still thinking about it, I guess.

I've had far too many distractions lately including the new car (I finished installing the Icom IC-706mkIIg yesterday so I've got HF back in the car), doing some artwork design

for a local club, and, of course, work. My goal this week is to start ditching some of these distractions (though not the job, I still need that) and begin concentrating in earnest on the trip. We'll see how it goes.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:58PM (-04:00)

Tattoo?

Monday, September 18, 2006



I've got a bad habit that I picked up as a kid and have never quite outgrown. (Truth be told, I've got many bad habits that fit *that* description, but I'm thinking specifically of one such behavior.) I will take an object meant for one purpose and use it, often inappropriately, for a completely unrelated purpose. Sometimes the results are remarkable; other times the results are downright embarrassing. My defense for those times things do not turn out well is the experience of thinking things through and trying this crazy combination allowed me to learn something new.

The other thing this penchant has brought me is an alertness to possibilities. For example, I have grown accustomed to using a foot pedal to trigger the PPT, allowing me to keep my hands free for logging (usually on the computer). In fact, for contesting, this arrangement is almost mandatory. I find VOX to be tricky, and taking my hands off the keyboard makes logging too error-prone. What is needed is a very light, inexpensive, and reasonably small foot pedal that I can make part of a 100 Pound DXpedition kit.

Sure, you can buy foot pedals sold specifically for ham use, but what is the fun in that? Figuring the use of a foot pedal must be handy for more than just hams and contesters, I did a little poking around to see if I could find something even remotely appropriate to the task. I did. Consider the foot switch I just picked up on eBay for use with my Heil Traveler Dual headset (also pictured).

This little foot switch was advertised as an accessory for a *TATTOO MACHINE*. Well, that's about as far away from ham radio as you are likely to get! You can find the item here: [Foot switch for a tattoo machine](#). I placed the order and within a few days it appeared in my mail box from Jolly Ole England. It weighs just a few ounces and even has the right connector already attached (a 1/4 inch mono plug). It is so nice, I confess I just popped an order for two more!

The last piece of the puzzle is a small deficiency in the Heil Traveler Dual Headset system: there is no standard fixture sold by Heil to accommodate a foot switch. No matter. I'll make an adapter cable to allow for this. Of course this foot pedal will work with my Heil Pro-Set Plus headset, too.

Keeping the total weight of your traveling station within 100 pounds (or whatever goal you have set) will always be a challenge. My advice is keep looking for that feather-weight part that makes things work, no matter where you find it, and no matter what it was originally *designed* to do!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:12PM (-04:00)

Club Show-and-Tell

Tuesday, September 19, 2006

I had a long day at work followed by a really fun night at the local radio club. Tonight was *Show-and-Tell* night where many brought things that might be of interest. I used the opportunity to show the equipment I had used on Georges Island recently including the Icom 7000, the Force-12 Sigma-5, solar panel, charge controller, etc. Many of the items passed around are things you can't see locally (even at HRO, our local dealer) and most had either never seen them, or had only seen them in magazines.

After I was done, there were several other really interesting pieces shown by club members. Two young men finishing their senior year in high school, Bryce and Brent showed an old Heathkit linear amplifier in the process of being rebuilt. The unit has an interesting history as it was once used at ARRL headquarters for transmitting the code practice sets. They've got the original manual and have been quite methodical about its restoration. First, they disassembled it working through the manual backwards. Then they carefully cleaned all the metal pieces removing all the rust, corrosion, and mildew. Now they are reassembling it, replacing parts as needed. This amplifier is a *beast*. I bet it blows my 100 pound budget by itself! Finally, the twins (did I mention they are twins?) said they really enjoy working QRP. That statement, made standing next to the colossus, nearly brought the house down.

I'm not sure if I'll ever make amplifiers part of an expedition. If I did, it would need to be lighter than your average amplifier and probably transistorized (not tubes) like the SGC-500 SmartPowerCube. Even with something like this, you still need to feed it 40 amps average for SSB and nearly 90 amps for CW. The power supply would probably kill my weight limit, even if the amplifier didn't!

I'll continue on with my 100 pounds and 100 watts until something better comes along. I've had plenty of good luck and lots of fun with this combination so far. Still, I wouldn't mind playing with that rebuilt Heathkit when those guys have finished with it!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:51PM (-04:00)

Satellites

Wednesday, September 20, 2006

Living within a weight limit, in my case that limit is 100 pounds, means making choices in equipment taken on a trip, but it hardly puts a limit on the range of activities you do. For example, digital modes require only a transceiver, computer, and antenna. In many ways, digital modes such as PSK31 are much more forgiving of a compromised setup than, say, SSB. I'll talk more about digital modes in a future post.

Satellite work can be done with very little equipment and almost no weight. In fact, if you bring an HT with you a simple, very lightweight antenna is all you need to successfully work many of the low Earth orbiting (LEO) satellites now available. During Field Day at our local club my friend (and Elmer) Dave slipped outside for a few minutes while everybody else was chatting and worked a QSO or two on the satellites for score. All he used was an HT and a hand-held antenna.

A great place to get started with this is the AMSAT (Radio Amateur Satellite Corporation) web site. There you can learn about the various satellites now in orbit and available along with some tips about how to use them. I don't know which radio or antenna he used for this, but I own the Arrow II Satellite antenna with the split boom and duplexer. This antenna breaks down to a very small collection of parts that slip nicely into a custom bag. The total weight is under 2 pounds.

You will need to know when the interesting satellites pass over you in order to work them. You have plenty of options for this but allow me to give a *plug* for a product that I use called MacDoppler. (Note that AMSAT members can register this software at a discount.) Just to give you a taste, check out this screen shot from the Dog Park Software web site:

The point of this is simple: traveling light doesn't mean doing only limited activities. In fact, this might be a great time to try something new and different that you wouldn't be tempted to do at home. Also consider the point that even well-traveled places not sought after on HF might be very much in vogue as a satellite QSO. You could hand out a *new one* on a new band/mode with just a couple of pounds of equipment and a little enthusiasm. Who knows? You might have some fun, too! So, there's something to think about when you're selecting that magic 100 pounds worth of gizmos.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:33PM (-04:00)

Montserrat trip planning update

Thursday, September 21, 2006

Here is an update on the planning for the Montserrat trip. First, I must say, we've got a good group. I had picked up some slack when everybody else got busy and that was good. Then, I got busy with commitments at work (and other places) and the rest of the team picked up *my* slack. I believe that bodes well all around!

I have packaged up all the materials for our licenses and have mailed them to the Montserrat licensing authority. We've not received a response yet, but I included everything we need (including enough money) to ensure that we should have a license for at least next year and perhaps the year after as well. This really is the most exciting aspect of it all. When I receive my *first* foreign call sign, I think I'll smile from ear-to-ear. I also mailed off a nice letter to the Montserrat Amateur Radio Society (MARS) along with a financial contribution to the club. The club offers "Overseas Membership" and, with luck, we will all become members of this organization. I also hope they will join us for a meal (and a cool, refreshing drink!) while we are there. I enclosed a fair amount of money with the letter. I know how expensive it is here in the states to keep a repeater running, I can't imagine how costly it is there! In fact, as I reflect upon this, I suspect we'll leave them with either some money or equipment when we leave the island. These folks are in a place where emergency communication is absolutely critical considering there is an *active volcano* right in their back yards! They are brave folks. We should give them all the support we can!

After I got this done, I got busy and started falling behind. Other group members, though, picked right up where I stopped. Chris started researching the extra baggage problem, for example. As I may have mentioned, most airlines allow up to 100 pounds of luggage here in the states. The little airline that runs between Antigua and Montserrat, though, limits you to 20 Kilograms (44 pounds)! That is too tight a restriction for us to accomplish our goals. Chris is looking into how easily we can bring extra baggage above that (ridiculous) limit.

One of the other discussions is centered around logging. We know we need to do computer logging there, but how? Should everybody bring a computer? What will we do when we are portable (and we expect *lots* of portable operation)? We're now vigorously working that issue on our internal email reflector.

Finally, I posted my Model Release Form for inspection. This is one of the two legal documents I thought we should have signed among us. I used to do some photography so I knew about these things. If you want to learn more about them, check out this page. I used a variant of the form they had for my document. The idea is really simple:

everybody is going to want to take pictures, videos, and audio recordings and use them in presentations, product brochures (in the case of the Buddipole guys, who are a sponsor for this trip), magazine articles, web pages, and every other place you can imagine. We should all happily release our fellow DXpeditioners to use our images, voices, and likeness for these purposes. This form formally agrees to that very reasonable thing.

I also published my first *status report* to the group in nearly a month. I'm not proud of that. Hopefully, I'll be able to devote the time this deserves now that things have mostly returned to normal here in the NE1RD household.

There is still lots more to do. I've picked up my DXpedition manual again and started editing it. It is mostly outline at this point but it should have lots of good stuff in it that will be handy to have on the island. That's the plan, anyway. Plus, as Chris pointed out a few days ago, much of what we're building here is experience and materials that could be reused later. I sure hope so!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:52PM (-04:00)

Contesting from your 100 pound DXpedition

Friday, September 22, 2006

Contesting season is right around the corner and one Friday night not long from now I'll be participating in one of these events that combines ham radio, computers, and a touch of insanity. I know lots of people are not contesters. Don't worry. I'm not here to convert you. What I would like to do, though, is remind you that the level of activity on the bands during a contest is quite intense. If you simply wanted to put a lot of QSOs in the log from your *100 pound DXpedition*, then contest weekends are good weekends to operate.

I've packed up and operated in two contests this year, both of which have been described in this blog to some extent. The first was for the ARRL International DX Contest. I flew to St. John in the US Virgin Islands and operated as KP2/NE1RD. That's a big contest and I certainly didn't expect to *win it* (or come close!) but I did have some personal goals such as successfully deploying antennas for 80-10m and making 500 QSOs during the trip.

More recently I went to Georges Island in Boston Harbor for the 2006 IOTA Contest sponsored by the Radio Society of Great Britain. This contest had a 12 hour QRP SSB category and I thought, just maybe, I might win this. I had two significant handicaps, however: [1] I was not in Europe and European stations clearly do better in this contest, and [2] I could only operate about 6 of the 12 hours since that's all the ferry schedule allowed. Still, I had delusions of possibly winning this category.

Since then, logs have been slowly posted to the contest logs submission area and I see that I probably have some stiff competition from Petar Milicic (9A6A). Peter is President of the Croatian Radio Amateur Association and I suspect he is an excellent operator.

Contesters (and I claim to be one) hate to wait for official results and have devised their own area to compare notes (and claimed scores). The web site contesting.com has an email reflector called the 3830 list. This nothing more than an email reflector that allows people to post their claimed scores immediately after the contest. There is nothing official about this; this is just a way for contesters to *compare notes*. You can see NE1RD/1's IOTA contest claimed score entry within the 3830 reflector's archive to get an idea of the kind of thing that gets posted.

I enjoy the excitement of having the bands light up during a contest. I know this isn't everybody's *cup of tea*, but it is fun for me. I think one of the extra benefits operating in a contest might afford a lightweight DXpeditioner is the contest gives you an excuse to reflect upon your trip. It is exciting to turn in your score, see other people turn in their score, compare notes, and even talk about where you were and what you did for the

contest. Going to an island, the top of a mountain, or a cabin in the wilderness for a contest can be a lot of fun. And, I guarantee you will not be lonely on the bands during one of those big contest weekends!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:56PM (-04:00)

Iceland

Saturday, September 23, 2006

I'm in the mist of a last push on my project at work so there's not been too much time for ham radio lately. Still, sometimes things find you. I got a call from my buddy Dave this afternoon and he asked, "Do you have Iceland in the log?" I did, but not on 20m.

So, I walked out of the office, down to the car, and called TF3ZA and worked him. The cool thing was Dave recorded it!

The 99 Hobbies site's Weekend goofing off entry has the recording. That's the second time in a month Dave's managed to capture one of my QSO's audio.

Dave emailed me and added, "Maybe a DXpedition for us at some point? I've always wanted to go to Iceland." Me too! What an interesting idea!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:46PM (-04:00)

Pretty as a picture

Sunday, September 24, 2006

I've always appreciated a good diagram. A picture that conveys information quickly and cleanly is, in my view, beautiful. It therefore follows that I'm a fan of Edward R. Tufte and have ordered his new book Beautiful Evidence. Even with this deadline pressure at work, I have been able to put my imprint in the book (a nice embossing stamp Sandy gave me years ago) and page through it for a few minutes. Nobody talks about information display like Tufte. I wonder if we hams couldn't use more help in this area.

Icom America has a nice Band chart as a PDF file you can download from their site. While this is a beautiful chart, it doesn't have all the information that you might need if you're talking to distant land, or even more interestingly talking *from* a distant land. For that, you need to know what the band plans are in, say, Japan or Australia.

To help with this, the EI8IC web site has lots of resources including 5 Contest Bandplans 98Kb, a collection of 5 GIF files that have a nice layout of the band apportionment for VK, JA, UK, and W call areas. Looking at the 80/75m diagram, for example, lets you see quickly the SSB overlap between JA and W is 3750 to 3754.

I plan on including information like this in the DXpedition manual. If you want to call CQ and try to work JA stations, you better be in a part of the band where they operate! Having information like this all in one place can be a boon when operating from a place far away. Not having it, and not knowing the band plan for your area, can be embarrassing.

Just to emphasize that last point, I'll tell a little story at my own expense. When I went to Hawaii I was greeted on the local repeaters by the area hams who invited me to join their afternoon net on 40m phone. They told me their afternoon net met on "088". At first, I was confused (because the SSB part of the band starts at 150, right? Of course, I'm in a different ITU region and SSB is actually OK on 7.088 in Hawaii. Because I had forgotten that (it was on the test, right?) and had not reviewed the band plans prior to my trip, I almost missed out on something really fun. Luckily, I had brought with me the ARRL operator's guide booklet and corrected my misconception. Lesson learned!

So, important safety tip: know the band plan for the area you are visiting *and* the areas

you believe you'll be contacting. It can make the difference between an opportunity ceased and one lost.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:36PM (-04:00)

Laptop robustness

Monday, September 25, 2006

One of the issues with traveling light the way I do means that there are not many backups for equipment in case of failure. I have mentioned that bringing only one radio tempts fate. Even a small QRP rig like the FT-817 is a better alternative than no working rig at all. (Actually, I'm kind of a QRP nut so running flea power doesn't seem like much of a handicap to me, but I understand that attitude isn't the norm.)

With just one hundred pounds, you can't bring two of everything. There are some things, even key things, that you'll just bring one of, and hope it doesn't break. An example of this is your logging computer. Sure, big DXpeditions will bring spare computers just in case a hard drive crashes or a power spike eats one, but with the kinds of weight limits contemplated here, spare laptops are likely not part of the plan. Yet, computers are probably one of the most fragile items you would take!

I've know this, of course, but the point was driven home for me tonight when I received a call from my niece. Katie, now a senior in high school, had been lent an iBook I had bought for Sandy. This particular model was ordered the very day it was announced (May 1, 2001) and had given six plus years of faithful service until tonight, when the backlight failed. The machine boots and works properly; the display simply remains dark. To think that I'd considered bringing that computer with me to Montserrat!

So, tonight we bought Katie a new computer, one promised to her for college, just a little early. If she has as much good luck with this new one as we did with that old iBook, she'll do very well indeed.

I guess I knew this, but I needed a *poke* from reality to finally clear my head on the matter: if you are already skimping on weight, you can't skimp on the quality of the things you're bringing, too. I've been careful to pick out the most robust radio equipment, antenna systems, and other pieces, bringing an old laptop would be no savings if it failed on the trip. So, no *hamfest-specials* and no ancient and semiretired boxes on their last legs. I don't want to be someplace special, exciting, and faraway trying to log with a pencil and paper because my computer died.

I've said that these trips aren't about the equipment, and I still mean that. You don't need to run out and buy all new stuff to do this. But, the things you bring should be *solid* and reliable, right down to the computer.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:58PM (-04:00)

Presentation tomorrow

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Just a quick entry tonight as I just walked in the door from a local club meeting. I received a DVD on Montserrat in the mail today. I'll post a review once I view it.

I'll be giving my presentation The 100 Pound DXpedition at the Colonial Wireless Association club in Concord tomorrow. If you are in the area, please stop by and see the show. Mention my blog and win a free handshake and big smile from the author! {grin}

I'm planning on bringing lots of equipment for *show and tell* with me including

- FT-897D system in a Pelican case (50 pounds)
- K2 system in carryon sized Pelican case

- Icom 7000 system in carryon sized Pelican case
- My *Big* Buddipole system
- My *Little* Buddipole system
- Force-12 Sigma-5
- and solar power and battery systems used on Georges Island and other places

I also need to remember to bring a pile of QSL cards and business cards. Oh, yeah, and I have a couple of prizes to give out, too. It should be fun.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:59PM (-04:00)

Balance

Wednesday, September 27, 2006

I gave my presentation The 100 Pound DXpedition to the Colonial Wireless Association club in Concord this evening. What a great group! Many thanks to Steve Telsey (N1BDA) for inviting me.

The presentation, and just the chance to show off my toys and talk to interesting people, was a nice break from work. We've had a really big push which is now coming to a successful completion. It has left me pretty tired at the end of the day and eaten more weekend days than I'd like to admit. Still, I'm reminded of the Old Man's Amateur Radio Code and particularly point five:

[5] The amateur is balanced.... radio is his hobby. He never allows it to interfere with any of the duties he owes to his home, his job, his school, or his community.

I've not been making the progress I'd like in my planning for the Montserrat trip, but I've tried to stay true to the spirit of *the code* and keeping my priorities in order. That said, now that the project is coming to a close, I should have more of a *normal* life to move things forward.

Speaking of *normal*, Sandy and I will be taking a couple of days for a trip to see some baseball this weekend. I may leave the computer at home and skip blogging. We're taking a 10 hour drive to Pittsburgh to see the Pirates in their last home games. So, the plan is to finish this project, have a little family fun time, then buckle down and help get this Montsrrat trip planned. The fellas have been pretty patient, but now it is time to pull my weight!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:13PM (-04:00)

A respite

Thursday, September 28, 2006

We're packing up for the weekend trip to Pittsburgh. Sandy and I *love* baseball (it isn't all ham radio around here) and we always try to get at least one new Major League baseball park in our score books each year. This year will be the Pirates and PNC Park.

We're driving the 10 hours to Pittsburgh from Acton, Massachusetts and will be on HF for at least some of that time. I'll also bring an iPod full of 99 Hobbies podcasts that I know Sandy has not heard yet. If you've not given these a listen, do so!

There will be games on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon. Friday night is open, though, so I'll be doing some *hotel balcony portable* from the road. I just need to decide which kit to bring!

I'm leaving the computer at home. So, no blog for the next couple of days. But, when I return I'll be talking about the DXpedition manual, following up on the Montserrat licensing and MARS membership, and getting ready for *contesting* season.

Finally, I'd like to thank everybody for reading along with me on all this. Also, thank you to all who have written to me. I appreciate the feedback and interest expressed. See you Monday!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:11PM (-04:00)

IOTA cards and island names

Monday, October 02, 2006

We are back from Pittsburgh and the games were fantastic. It was also a pleasant, relaxing drive through the hills of New York and Pennsylvania giving us a little quiet time that we've so desperately needed. One of the things we did to pass the time was listen to some of the Long Delayed Echoes podcasts by Jeff Davis (KE9V) on the history of ham radio through World War II. If you're not following these shows, you're missing something extraordinary. Begin with episode 25 to pick up the WWII thread.

I left the computer at home this weekend but pocketed the Blackberry so I could continue to read my email. I got a message from one fellow who had trouble getting credit for my Georges Island (NA-148) card. I had missed something important in the IOTA rules. Here's the part I goofed up:

QSL cards submitted **must** have printed on them the name of the island from which the operation took place. This **must** be an island mentioned as qualifying for that IOTA group in the island listing in the latest IOTA Directory or in the list of Additional Qualifying Islands on the IOTA Manager's web-site. The IOTA group name and the IOTA reference number are not acceptable alternatives although it is desirable that they also appear on the card, nor are geographic coordinates, a locator square or a lighthouse or castle name. The name of the island should not have been handwritten, nor should it have been added in a way that makes ambiguous the location of the station at the time of contact.

My Georges Island card has only the name of the island group (*Boston Harbor Islands*) and not the name of the specific island (Georges). Of course, the reason why I had not put the name of the island on the card is because I had hoped to work from several islands of that group and didn't want to have the card be too specific. To solve the problem, I've ordered a rubber stamp from The Sign Man with the words "Georges Island" around the periphery and my call used on the island **NE1RD/1** in bold in the middle. Check out the "InstaStamp 24". Thanks go to Don (W9DC) for putting me on the right track with this. Anybody who needs a new card, please drop me a note at ne1rd at arrl.net.

The ferry to Georges Island stops for the season on October 9 so I have one more chance to get out there and puts some QSOs in the log before the snow flies here in Boston. The weather outlook is good so plan on hearing me from NA-148 this Saturday. Perhaps I should update the RSGB IOTA site, too.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:15PM (-04:00)

What's with the /1?

Tuesday, October 03, 2006

I received a note today from a fellow who was wondering, why do I use the call NE1RD/1 when I operate from Georges Island (NA-148)? After all, there is already a "1" in my call sign!

The answer lies with the way the electronic QSLing programs work. When you set up an account with eQSL, for example, you specify the location, grid square, and IOTA number

(if there is one). The Logbook of the World (LoTW) has similar data associated with each location. So, to give people full credit for NA-148 I wanted to have a separate call sign, account, and log for those contacts. If things were only done on paper, I probably could have just used the regular call and sorted it out when I looked in my log. But, with these on-line programs, I found it is easier to have a separate call sign for each location.

I could have just called NE1RD/P (portable), but I was afraid that doing so would just encourage people to log it as simply "NE1RD" and, therefore, the QSOs would not match on LoTW. Of course, with the double-blind LoTW system, I'd never know that we had that mismatch ("NE1RD" versus "NE1RD/1").

The other operations I've done had more sensible calls: I was K1P from Deer Isle (and will be again next year during Patriots Day week), I was KP2/NE1RD from St. John, and I just use my home call "NE1RD" when I operate from the top of Mount Wachusett since that location and my home both fall within grid square FN42. (If it hadn't, I would have scrambled to figure out how to differentiate that location as well!)

The question now becomes: what will I do when I activate another island here in the Northeast? I've thought a little about that, but haven't made any decisions. There are lots of islands along the Massachusetts, Maine, and Connecticut coast and I'd like to operate from all of them eventually!

One last point, the LoTW service allows you to combine several call signs for your awards calculations. So, the QSOs from NE1RD, NE1RD/1, and K1P operations can all be used towards the ARRL's DXCC award, for example, because the operations were all from the same DXCC entity (the continental US). Similarly, eQSL also merges these QSOs for their awards.

So, that's why I use the /1 while operating from NA-148. It helps me keep these QSOs separated and helps ensure those who QSL electronically get the full credit (grid square, IOTA number, etc.) for the contact. So far things have worked out nicely using this scheme.

This was a great question! Thank again to everybody who has written to me and given me feedback on the blog. I hope all of you are having as much fun reading it as I have writing it!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 07:27PM (-04:00)

A little change of plans

Wednesday, October 04, 2006

There is a possible change of plans for the weekend. I had offered to help a friend help with a little ham radio demonstration for a youth group some time ago. I just learned today that the event is this weekend. Oops! I think the ferry runs through Monday so perhaps I'll get out to Georges Island on Monday (instead of Saturday). I'll post more as I figure all this out.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:28PM (-04:00)

Practice makes perfect

Thursday, October 05, 2006

I'm always looking for a way to improve my operating skills. Accuracy, ability to work through QRM and bad conditions, and even endurance, are some of the aspects of my operating skills that I'm always looking to polish. In the event that I ever get to operate from a truly rare place, I'll need all that and more to be effective.

While contesting isn't everybody's *cup of tea*, it can be an excellent way to hone the skills

you will need to operate in a high stress DX location. I had bursts of high QSO rates while on St. John during the ARRL DX contest that sounded very similar to those scenes you see on a typical DXpedition video. Though nervous, I was able to keep up and log accurately though those bursts largely because of all the practice I had gotten in previous contests.

Improvement needs to be a *closed loop* activity: you need to do something, assess your effort, make a plan to correct what you didn't do well, and then try again. Assessing your effort is pretty easy if you participate in one of the major contests run by the ARRL or CQ Magazine as they provide access to a **UBN** (Unique, Bad, Not-in-log) report. An article describing this *Learning from Your Log Checking Report* just won the ARRL QST Cover Plaque Award for September. The article is brief, but it provides some excellent advice such as *record* and *listen* to your on-air operation after the event to see what you missed. Use the log checking report to revisit those problem QSOs. See what went wrong. Did you miss that extra dit making an "h" into an "s"? Did you hear "J" and log "G" in that call sign?

To give you an idea of what is in one of these reports, I've included one of mine (so you can see all my goof-ups). I believe practice makes perfect but you also need to have an improvement plan that analyzes your shortcomings and tries to address them. And, like my little 100 pound DXpeditions, I have goals in these contests, too. For example, in the next major contest I would like to have no busted calls. We'll see how I do. In the mean time, here's the log from my QRP effort in last year's ARRL November Sweepstakes contest. By the way, this was SSB with my Elecraft K2, a low hung inverted-vee antenna, and a lot of grit. I may not have had the most competitive station for this contest, or indeed any contest, but doing your best with the working conditions you have is also excellent practice for lightweight DXpeditioning! OK. Here's the UBN report. I hope you, too, can learn from my mistakes. Enjoy.

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SWEEPSTAKES LOG REPORT FOR NE1RD

CATEGORY: SINGLE-OP ALL QRP

DUPE CHECK RESULTS

There were no dupes found in your log.

TIME ON CALCULATION

0015-2124 = -1610

On time = -1610 minutes (max of 1440).

CALLSIGN CHECK RESULTS

AG3G is a busted call. The correct call is AJ3G.

You had 1 calls in your log which were not found in the database of good callsigns. All of these were judged to be busted calls and will be removed from your score - along with an additional penalty of one QSO per busted callsign.

Unique percentage = 0.0

EXCHANGE CHECK RESULTS

QSO #68 W4NTI : M 64 AI should be M 61 AI
QSO #119 K0HC : S 71 Ks should be S 97 Ks
QSO #147 W4QK : B 73 Ct should be A 62 Ga
QSO #160 WP2Z : M 58 WWa should be B 58 Vi

100.0% of your non dupe QSOs had their exchanges checked.

There were 4 exchange errors found. These QSOs will be removed from your score with no penalties.

CROSS CHECK RESULTS

87.6% of your remaining good QSOs were cross checked.

There were no cross check errors found - congratulation!

MULTIPLIER CALCULATION

List of 67 mults = Il Ga NLi Va ENy Wv Mdc Mar NNj Mi Nh Em Vt Ep WMa WPa WNy
Oh WWa Mn Mt Ks NFI Al Az Ar Mo Ia Vi WTx STx Sjv Org Wcf NTx Nd Scv Sv Sk Sd
Ew Ne Or Eb Wi Mb Ok SFI Ri On SNj Nc Sc Ct Ms Sf Lax Nv Wy In Tn Sdg De NNY
Pr La Co

SCORE SUMMARY

Raw QSOs = 168
Time Expired = 0
Dupes = 2
Busted QSOs = 5
Valid QSOs = 161 0 80 26 29 25 0
Penalty QSOs = 1
QSO Points = 320
Multiplier = 67

Final score = 21440
Error rate = 3.0% (100 X (Busted QSOs / Duped QSO total))

BUSTS FOUND IN OTHER LOGS

The following information shows contacts you made that were removed from the other station's log. These are not deducted from your score. They are listed for your information only.

AD4EB: QSO #724 NE1RD : Q 40 Em should be Q 02 Em
K0GND: QSO #915: Received QSO# 5 should be 105 NE1RD
KE3WM: QSO #340 NE1RD : Q 02 Me should be Q 02 Em
KQ6MU: QSO #157 NE1RD : A 02 Em should be Q 02 Em

N4TP: QSO #364: Received QSO# 25 should be 65 NE1RD
NP2B: QSO #810 NE1RD : A 02 Em should be Q 02 Em
W1QK: QSO #286: Received QSO# 22 should be 147 NE1RD
W3GH: QSO #602: Received QSO# 189 should be 29 NE1RD
W5JJ: WE1RD is a busted call. The correct call is NE1RD.

Number busts found in other logs = 9 (5.6%)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:39PM (-04:00)

Debug methodically

Saturday, October 07, 2006

My buddy Greg (NE1OB) and I took a little drive today to New Hampshire to provide ham radio demonstrations to some young people in a weekend camp. There wasn't much planning for this event (I learned of it only Wednesday) so, again, I packed too much into the car, using only half of what was brought.

There were kids wandering around everywhere and I was concerned about my antenna systems being a hazard. To minimize the possibility that someone would become entangled in the antenna, feed line, control line, or guy lines, I set up the Force-12 Sigma-5 antenna close to some large boulders, thinking that would be the safest thing to do. Perhaps it was safe, but it wasn't a good idea.

I began operating on 20m with the IC-7000 and noticed immediately that the SWR was running pretty high. This was puzzling because the Sigma-5 is a resonant antenna on all bands 20-10m. Plus, I had used this successfully on Georges Island just a few weeks ago and had no such problems. I mentioned this to one of the other hams sitting with us and he offered to allow me to use his G5RV he had hung. "No", I said, "if you find a problem you should debug it!"

Here is something that is a carry-over from my professional life: if you have managed to create a problem that is repeatable, figure it out! These little side trips and portable operations provide an opportunity for me to learn about my equipment and prepare for the big, important trips. I was determined to figure this out so if it were to happen on, say, Georges Island, Montserrat, or some other faraway place, I would know what to do.

Here is the first symptom: there is high SWR on 20m. Let's walk through what I did to debug this problem. I wondered if this problem was only on 20m so I switched bands to 17m and tried transmitting there. Again, the IC-7000 showed a high SWR. So, we quickly determine it isn't associated with one band. I have my MFJ-259B antenna analyzer in my kit so I disconnect the coax from the back of the radio and connect it to the analyzer. I quickly determine that the antenna is resonant at 13.7 MHz when switched for 20m. That's not right!

At this point, I walk out to the antenna and swap the coax. I'm virtually certain it isn't the coax, but by eliminating this possibility completely, I know that the problem has to be with the antenna. The 50 foot piece of RG-8X is quickly replaced with a 75 foot run and, indeed, the problem persists. So, I've now convinced myself something is wrong with the antenna, or how I've assembled and erected the antenna.

I look over the antenna and see nothing obviously wrong. I had been a bit careless in how I had routed the coax and control cable away from the controller box, but that seemed unlikely to be the culprit. I then glanced at those big boulders I had huddled up against. The lower part of the antenna was just inches away from one *particularly red* one. Gee, I wondered, do you suppose there's a bunch of iron in that one?

We moved the antenna about 15 feet away from the low rock wall, guyed the antenna in

its new position, and took a few extra moments to route the coax and controller cable away from the antenna at a 45 degree angle like the manufacturer recommends. I put the MFJ analyzer on the system again and remeasured. Sure enough, now the antenna showed a great match on all bands, just as it had before.

In hindsight, my initial choice of antenna placement was pretty stupid. While it was a good idea to put the antenna in a place that was safe for this public venue, I still needed to have the antenna sufficiently far away from other objects so it would not couple with them as it did with those iron-laden boulders.

I could make the glib recommendation, "don't be stupid", but that isn't the point of this post. You will have problems, even if you aren't as stupid as me, that you'll need to resolve. When you see a problem, don't just do random stuff to see if you can make it *go away*; think through how you will investigate the problem so you can learn what is causing it. Take single, well considered steps to eliminate candidate pieces of equipment. Narrow what can be wrong until you are left with a small handful of things, preferably one thing, and then consider the situation again. Has this worked before? What is different from the configuration that worked well? And, especially with antennas, what items in the general vicinity might be affecting the antenna?

Because I took a disciplined approach to this problem it was resolved in minutes. And, I learned something that will prevent me from making this particularly stupid mistake again (though I reserve the right to make other, equally stupid mistakes {grin}). I hope you will follow this advice and consider every problem you encounter in the field as an opportunity to learn more about your equipment, learn more about the hobby, and prepare you for your next portable operation or personal DXpedition.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:51PM (-04:00)

Last trip to Georges Island this year

Sunday, October 08, 2006

I'm going to Georges Island in the morning (NA-148). This is the last day the ferry runs so this will be the last trip this season. I am bringing:

- The IC-7000 kit in its Pelican case
- 2 17Ah batteries
- The Force-12 Sigma-5 antenna
- My backpack with Heil headset, solar panel, etc.

I am going to leave the pop-up enclosure at home this time just to lighten the load. We'll see if that is a mistake!

Look for me between 1400 and 1700Z on 20 and 17m SSB. I will be running 50 watts so you should be able to hear me. Hope to work you.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:37PM (-04:00)

Last day on Georges 2006

Monday, October 09, 2006

We made our last trip of the season to Georges Island (NA-148) this morning and it was a glorious day. We had blue skies, temperatures in the 70's, and an easy breeze accompanying the sounds of the ocean washing up on the rocks just below my operating position. This was a wonderful way to wrap up the last of summer here in New England.

We got a bit of a late start and just missed the 10 AM ferry so we didn't arrive on the island until 11:45 AM local time (15:30Z). We made our way to the northern part of the

island (try Google Earth with 42 19'19.42"N 70 55'46.76"W) and set up the equipment. In addition to the Force-12 Sigma-5 antenna (good for 10-20m) I brought my little Buddipole system so I could play a little on 40m from this location.

My goals for this trip were modest: put another 25 or 30 QSOs in the log, evaluate battery performance with the IC-7000 using one of my 17 Ah batteries and the solar panel, and possibly do some A/B comparisons between my Buddipole and Force-12 antennas. I easily made my QSO goal as we put over 40 contacts in the log in just 2.5 hours thanks to some helpful activity on the spotting network. Here are the spots for today courtesy of the DX Summit spot database:

KZ1O 7155.0 NE1RD IOTA QRP needs help 1803 09 Oct 2006
KZ1O 7155.0 NE1RD IOTA QRP needs help 1803 09 Oct 2006
KZ1O 18155.0 NE1RD NA-148 QRP needs help 1814 09 Oct 2006
KZ1O 18155.0 NE1RD NA-148 QRP needs help 1814 09 Oct 2006
GI3DZE 18155.0 NE1RD/1 na148 still there 1826 09 Oct 2006
GI3DZE 18155.0 NE1RD/1 na148 still there 1826 09 Oct 2006
CT1BXX 18155.0 NE1RD/1 NA-148 Good signal 1833 09 Oct 2006
CT1BXX 18155.0 NE1RD/1 NA-148 Good signal 1833 09 Oct 2006
CT1BXX 18158.3 NE1RD/1 Sorry Freq. 18.158 NA-148 1834 09 Oct 2006
CT1BXX 18158.3 NE1RD/1 Sorry Freq. 18.158 NA-148 1834 09 Oct 2006
IOSYQ 14000.0 NE1RD/1 PSE 14 SSB.MANY TNX! 1837 09 Oct 2006
IOSYQ 14000.0 NE1RD/1 PSE 14 SSB.MANY TNX! 1837 09 Oct 2006
WP4NIX 18158.2 NE1RD/1 57 NA-148 1842 09 Oct 2006
WP4NIX 18158.2 NE1RD/1 57 NA-148 1842 09 Oct 2006
IZ8EJB 18158.0 NE1RD/1 IOTA NA-148 1900 09 Oct 2006
IZ8EJB 18158.0 NE1RD/1 IOTA NA-148 1900 09 Oct 2006

You might notice the first couple of spots are from my buddy Dave (KZ1O). I had called Dave on the phone and talked with him after operating for a while and he offered to get the spotting activity started. We worked on 40m and after his spot I worked one other station on 40m (Maryland) before switching back up to 17m. After *the pump was primed*, the spots took care of themselves as you can see.

It isn't cheating (if you are not in a contest!) to have somebody get you spotted in the packet spotting network. In fact, once the spots started appearing I was able to make many people happy by handing out a QSO for NA-148! If you can, arrange to have somebody perform this service for you if you can't spot yourself.

I'll continue with this thread tomorrow and talk about battery usage, the effectiveness of the solar panel (now that I can measure things with my Super Whatt Meter), some antenna comparison impressions, and managing the little pile-up I had generated from all those spots.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:59PM (-04:00)

NA-148 slide show

Tuesday, October 10, 2006



I was going to talk about the power management lessons from yesterday's Georges Island trip but I just uploaded the pictures we took to my PowerBook and they are too wonderful not to share! So, instead of a treatise on solar panel efficiency and power management issues you might have when running portable, I'd rather point you to my Boston Harbor slide show so you can see what we saw on yesterday's trip. You can read more about the Boston Harbor Islands here.

The ferry service has stopped for the season so there is no more island hopping for me this year. Ferry service resumes in the Spring. I believe after seeing these pictures you'll all understand why I can't wait to get back out there!

I'll pick up the *lessons learned* thread tomorrow.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:59PM (-04:00)

It did work!

Wednesday, October 11, 2006

On Monday's trip to Georges Island I brought two antennas: the Force-12 Sigma-5 and my *little* Buddipole system. The little Buddipole system has the 8 foot mast (instead of the 16 foot mast) and fits in a smaller bag. The Sigma-5 covers 10-20m; the Buddipole covers 2-40m.

One of the goals for the trip, as described the other day, was to do more antenna evaluation, including some comparisons where appropriate between these two antennas. I did do some of this, but the biggest lesson was learned today, delivered in an email. Allow me to explain.

The Buddipole can be configured as a horizontal dipole, vertical dipole, vee, inverted-vee, or any number of other shapes by using the rotating arm kit. On Monday, though, I just configured the antenna to be a 40m dipole in the horizontal configuration. This effectively makes the antenna an NVIS, or *near vertical incident skywave* antenna which is typically good for a range of a couple hundred miles. There is lots of good stuff written on NVIS systems but the general idea is this: set up an antenna parallel and close the ground (under an 1/8th wavelength and maybe even lower) and the antenna will send much of its radiation *straight up*, bouncing high above your head, and then nearly *straight down* again. Great for short distance communication, not so good for DX.

I only spent a few minutes on 40m with the Buddipole as time was running out and I wanted to make my primary goal of putting QSOs in the log. I talked with Dave (KZ1O) on 40m and then had him *spot* me on the packet spotting network to see if anybody else could hear me. After working WR3KI in Maryland and then not hearing anybody else immediately, I shifted back up to the high bands. To be honest, I wasn't sure the Buddipole was really performing that well on 40m in this configuration and I didn't want to waste my valuable time on the island trying to push a mediocre antenna setup.

Fears that nobody could hear me with this antenna configuration were unfounded as I learned today in a mail message from Bill (K9RR). Here's a snippet:

Hello Scott:

I was excited to hear that you were going to Georges Island yesterday, since that is a IOTA I have never worked. Unfortunately you were nil on 17m here in the midwest. When you went to 40m you were strong but I tried to call you after you talked to that one station but your friend called you and then you switched back to 17m. ...

Wow. Not only could he hear me but I was strong in Illinois (approximately 1000 miles / 1600 Km away). Again, the performance of the Buddipole surprises me. If I had been the least bit patient, I probably could have worked a bunch on 40m, too. Truth be told, I had so little confidence this would work well that I didn't really give it a chance. I had broken some of the most basic rules I have for myself: don't assume, listen, and be positive. (It wouldn't be wrong to have *listen* twice in that list!) Luckily, Bill wrote me to correct my misconception. I can't wait until next year to try that configuration again!

Things aren't always going to do what I expect. In fact, one of the reasons for doing all these brief portable operations is to get more experience and figure out what works and what doesn't work. Intuition is good; experience and facts are better! I had made some assumptions about how well and how far the Buddipole would work in that configuration and, quite simply, those assumptions were wrong. I've made a vow here to be a little more open minded when I'm running experiments like this in the future.

Finally, relating back to a previous post, I received an eQSL today from John (K9QVB/9). John is from Wilmette, Illinois but signs /9 when operating from Stone Lake, Wisconsin. Like I said the other day, this is a great way to keep your logs organized when operations from different locations.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:03PM (-04:00)

RSGB 2006 IOTA Contest results are in

Thursday, October 12, 2006

The *unofficial* RSGB IOTA contest results are in and, as expected, I will come in 2nd in my category of QRP SSB DXpedition with 12 hour operating time. You can see the results here. The bottom line is Petar (9A6A), the President of the Croatian Radio Amateur Association, *cleaned my clocks* with a fantastic effort and score of 62646 points versus my paltry 6084 points. Interestingly, he didn't have that many more QSOs than me, but he had four times the multipliers. Congratulations Petar!

The contest was one of the best run contests I've ever entered. The log submission process was easy and well considered, and the results were computed and released in a relatively short amount of time (just a couple of months). There is even a place next to my entry where you can click on a map to see my operating position from a satellite view. Very, very nice!

I had two bad QSOs (one a multiplier, sadly), three duplicates, and 97 good log entries. The duplicates can't be helped. If somebody calls you a second time, you just log it because you can't be sure it is really a duplicate. Perhaps the previous entry was erroneous. The bad QSOs were caused by me not capturing the other station's serial number in my log. One mumbled their number and then disappeared; the other one I just goofed up on. So, my error rate is still one or two per hundred QSOs. Too high! As I said the other day, this is something to work on.

I'm taking Friday off from work and hope to do a little *home improvement* around the condo. I'll also have a little more time for a better edited, and hopefully more informative piece on power management issues I had on Georges Island this summer.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 05:16PM (-04:00)

New G5RV

Friday, October 13, 2006

My post on the power management on the island will need to wait until tomorrow. I spent the morning shopping at HRO picking up some coax, dacron rope, and a new G5RV to hang here at the condo for the upcoming contests. The antenna needed to be stealthy and I found a nice one that has copper-clad steal arms and is all black in color. I then returned home and spent about 3 hours trying to get it hung in the trees. The center is up about 55 feet and one arm is mostly level and in the clear. The other arm caught under a branch in a nearby tree and needs to be freed. I may get to that tomorrow.

Given that Buffalo got a record setting snowstorm today, I thought it would be best to get this antenna work done before our area succumbs to a similar fate. I know the bad

weather is right around the corner!

The other reason to make the HRO trip was to get coax to put with the new Pelican cases. I have been trying to create complete, ready-to-go setups for each radio but had recently been "borrowing" from different setups to make these Georges Island trips. This is a mistake, and I know it. It almost cost me the day I made that last trip to Georges Island for the season. I didn't mention it the other day but Sandy and I were in the car, ready to go, when I realized I had brought **no** coax with me. That, of course, would have been a disaster! I want to have a run of coax in the bottom of each Pelican case. Today, I bought the coax to make that happen.

I should make a complete inventory of each case. I had made one for the case with the FT-897D, but have not done it for the K2's case or for the new IC-7000's case. Perhaps if I get the G5RV fixed, I'll do this was well.

Finally, I'll be speaking to the Boston Amateur Radio Club on Thursday, October 19th, presenting my talk "The 100 Pound DXpedition". If you are in the Boston area, drop by!
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:31PM (-04:00)

Solar technology

Saturday, October 14, 2006

One of the things I tried this year was alternate ways of powering my radios. I had powered radios from batteries and from the car in the past but this year I added solar and mechanical power to the mix. I'll talk about my experiences with solar power in this post.

There is a great deal of materials on solar cells and solar panels and, of course, I won't attempt to duplicate all of that here. Instead, I would like to talk about some of the things that have impressed me most this summer. The first thing I learned about *photovoltaic power* was there are many different technologies that are available today with different characteristics and efficiencies. A quick overview of these technologies can be found at the Solar Expert site. The efficiencies discussed all fall somewhere below 30%, meaning much less than 1/3 of the energy falling on the material is converted into something useful. That might not sound like very much, but it is! The Sun puts out about 900 to 1000 watts per square meter so even a system that is only 10% efficient is capable of putting out 100 watts. Some of these numbers might be easier to visualize with an actual panel so let's use the one that I bought as an example.

I purchased a 15 watt 12 volt folding panel from The Alternative Energy Store. First, a quick note about these folks: I like them! I placed my order, they processed it promptly, they sent me a tracking number, and it arrived quickly and in good condition. Recommended. Now, back to the math.

The panel folds out to expose 6 areas with solar cells, each area has two arrays measuring approximately 8 cm by 20 cm. So, the total area with cells is about $8 \times 20 \times 12 = 1920$ square cm of power producing material. A square meter is $100 \text{ cm} \times 100 \text{ cm} = 10000 \text{ cm}^2$. Therefore, this panel has about 0.19 square meters of power producing material. If the material was 100% efficient, and if we assume that the Sun puts out 1000 watts per square meter, we would see 190 watts of power coming from this material. That would be handy on a DXpedition!

As mentioned before, these panels are much less than 30% efficient and these flexible panels are probably closer to 10% or even less. If we take a number like 8% efficient and multiply that by the 0.19 square meters, we end up with a number like 15 watts rated output. That's the right answer.

Power ratings for panels are just that: ratings. The two big factors that go into a power rating for a solar panel are (a) the total area of the power generating material, and (b) the efficiency and power producing capability of the materials used to produce the power.

The actual power produced in a given situation, though, depends on many more factors. For example, material efficiency decreases as the operating temperature rises. So, as your panel bakes in the Sun charging your battery, the efficiency of the material slowly goes down as the panel gets hotter and hotter. Also, optimal conditions such as the Sun's light hitting the panel squarely to produce maximum power are not likely to happen in your portable operation. In practice, you'll set up the panel as best you can and then hope it produces enough power for your needs.

The panel will only be part of your system. The power we wish to draw should be at 13.8 volts to run our radios or possibly 14.1 volts to charge our sealed batteries. The voltage from a solar panel can be far below or even far above these values, even producing voltages that would be dangerous for our batteries or equipment. What we would really like to have is a device that would take all the energy produced by the panel, no matter what voltage that energy is presented in, and convert it with a voltage-to-voltage converter into a form that is safe and effective for our operation. Further, we'd like this device to protect us from possible spikes in voltage that might happen when a passing cloud produces a knife-edge effect. There are such devices. They are called *charge controllers*. I purchased a Morningstar SunSaver 6.

The charge controller does a couple of things. First, it does convert the voltage produced by the panel into 13.8 volts (or so) which is useful and safe for our purposes. Secondly, it does protect me from spikes that might be produced which could, if not stopped, destroy my radio. The third thing my particular controller will do is protect my battery from being drawn down too low. Sealed batteries should not be discharged below a certain voltage as they could be permanently damaged. The charge controller will monitor battery voltage and, if the voltage falls below a certain point, disconnect the battery from the load. This *low voltage disconnect* feature means your battery is safe from abuse even if you aren't paying attention to the voltage level.

On some of my previous trips to Georges Island I would just hook up the panel and toss it on the ground to capture the Sun's rays. On this last trip, taken Monday, the Sun was low enough to the horizon (as it was October here in Boston) that this strategy was no longer viable. Now that I have my new Super Whatt Meter it seemed like a good opportunity to see how much difference "aiming" the solar panel would make. With the panel laying on the ground, it produced about 0.7A (about 9.5 watts). Sandy then suggested we use the small cart we'd brought to prop up the panel and have it face the Sun squarely. The power meter now read about 0.9A (12.5 watts). That's a big difference! So, obviously, the better you can position your panel, the more power you will produce.

I had the Super Whatt Meter watching the power coming out of the battery. With the solar panel and charge controller supplementing the power, the battery was being drawn at a rate of about 0.5A from the radio (with the panel producing the rest). I then removed the panel from the circuit and the current rose to 1.33A from the battery. The panel, therefore, was contributing about 0.83A, or more than half, of the operating current. That effectively doubles the life of your battery on receive!

The effectiveness of a solar panel solution gets even more pronounced when you operate QRP. My K2 draws only 35mA on receive. Even with this very modestly sized panel, I could probably operate during the day and fully charge a battery which could then subsequently be used for nighttime operation. If good weather and bright sunshine continued, I could probably operate indefinitely.

Now that I've had some experience with this technology I'm starting to consider larger panels, possibly a 30 or even 45 watt version of the folding panel I have now. Though expensive, they are certainly lighter and smaller than sealed lead acid batteries, and can produce a significant portion of the power needed for a remote operation.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:19PM (-04:00)

G5RV tested

Sunday, October 15, 2006

I spent some time today rehangng one of the arms of my G5RV. Both arms are now *mostly* level and up about 55 feet. The antenna is hidden in some trees near my condo so all I need to do to use it is run some coax out to the feed point and hook up the radio. I gave it a try this afternoon and worked easily into Europe and around the US. After working so many outings this Summer with the compromised antennas on lightweight portable operations, I was surprised how *loud* everybody was on a decent antenna!

I'll be using this antenna for the upcoming contests. While these won't be portable operations, they do provide an opportunity to continue improving my operating skills. If ever I get someplace where I would need to be working the bands continuously for hours at a time, working through QRM, QRN, and other nightmares, I want to have the skills so I can do it well, if not easily. I believe you only get good at something with practice. Contests provide me with the opportunity for that practice. Seriously, one of the biggest skills I need to master is simply *keeping my butt in the chair and working in a focused and effective manner*. Stay put, stay focused, stay effective. My goals for each of these upcoming contests is to make more QSOs than I had in previous years. Given we're at the bottom of the cycle, we'll see how that turns out.

Finally, it has been about a month since I sent off materials to Montserrat and I've not heard anything back from either the licensing authority or the Montserrat Amateur Radio Society. It is probably time to send a follow-up email to see where we are on things.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:25PM (-04:00)

Are you still up working on that computer?

Tuesday, October 17, 2006

This should have been posted last night, but it was well after midnight before I realized it and I decided that sleep was more important than blogging. I'm still considering my options for the logging computer I'll use on Montserrat and other DXpeditions. I had brought my 17-inch PowerBook with me to St. John and Deer Isle and it served me well. It is a beautiful machine and the very large display is very nice, but the machine is really too large and too important to me to tote it everywhere. I'm now considering getting a machine just for ham use. Sandy's already calling it the "Ham Mac", which is pronounced "hammock".

I know I'm going against the grain here when I say this, but I've had great luck with stability, versatility, and ease-of-use with the Macintosh running MacOS X and the MacLoggerDX logging program from Dog Park Software. I'm never worried that the machine won't boot, the computer will suddenly be filled with viruses, or stuff that worked last week will suddenly stop working today. I've used this for contesting, too, and have had reasonably good luck with this setup, though there were times on St. John when the software was having a little trouble keeping up with the high QSO rates. MacLoggerDX isn't a contest logger, after all; it is just a general purpose logging program.

With all that said, I am considering the idea that I should have other alternatives available to me. The new Macintosh computers have an Intel chip in them so I could run Windows simultaneously with MacOS X with the help of Parallels. We purchased a Mac mini computer this weekend to help us organize our considerable music CD collection and I'm using this new machine to give Parallels a test drive. I have a legal copy of Windows 95 that I had purchased when I built a machine *from scratch* many years ago that I could

install on the Mac mini as an experiment. I spent most of last night working out the details of getting that to work. I managed to get Windows 95 running but the networking stuff was problematic. First I had driver nightmares and then, once I got over that hurdle, the configuration that *should* have worked didn't. At this point, though, it was very late and the root cause of the problem was probably fatigue and "pilot error" rather than software. Still, I had convinced myself that this is a good arrangement which gives me both worlds on one machine.

At this point it is my intention to buy the smallest (and cheapest) MacBook and configure it with Parallels and Windows 98. (I just ordered a new copy of Window 98 off eBay for about \$40. There are enough improvements between W95 and W98 that it seemed worth it.) Though I had good intentions of using MacLoggerDX for the upcoming CQ WW contests, I might get this new machine and start familiarizing myself with it. Many of the Yankee Clipper Contest Club members use the N1MM Logger so I would probably try that one first in the CQ WW SSB coming up at the end of this month.

Again, I want to be completely familiar with all my equipment before I attempt to use it in a far away place. That means *reading the manuals* and using the equipment in similar situations if I can. Contest are an excellent training opportunity.

Speaking of contest results, I just looked at the write-up for the results of the CQ WW SSB contest from last year. I placed 8th in the US for QRP ALL BAND behind some other excellent operators. With just 5 watts and a low hanging dipole, I did OK! I had not decided what category to compete in this year, but perhaps a noble goal would be to simply beat my previous year's score. I need to think about this more.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:28PM (-04:00)

Cleaning the shack

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

Time has been flying by and I realized it had been about a month since I sent the materials into the Montserrat licensing authorities. I had hoped that I would have heard something back by now but perhaps I'm just being impatient. I had also sent a letter to the head of the Montserrat Amateur Radio Society (MARS) with a request that our DXpedition group be admitted as members of their society. Knowing that they are doing emergency communication on an island with an active volcano, I also included a bit of a donation in there for their club, too. They are brave souls! Since I have a contact within that group, I mailed the President of the MARS club today and asked if he had received our letter. I hope to hear back from him in the next couple of days.

We had done a great deal of remodeling around the condo this last year and stuff has been piling up. (Crunch time at work didn't help, either, as we were spending very little time at home.) Tonight I turned on the baseball game and started cleaning the room that serves as my shack. There were two reasons for starting in this room: I hope to be working the CQ WW SSB contest at the end of the month and I didn't want to spend most of that 48 hour contest sitting among junk, and, alas, most of the junk was actually *mine*, so I'm the only one that could clean it up anyway. Nobody to blame but myself!

To further add to my excuse list for my messy home, I had been spending lots of time doing volunteer work for some local clubs. I had done some artwork for the New England QRP club this summer and had designed a new logo for the PART club in Westford. That new logo was approved at the general meeting last night! We'll be rolling that out on the web site, badges, and other stuff later this year. I must say, though, it is good to have this behind me. It was *amazing* how time-consuming that stuff was!

I'm speaking at the Boston Amateur Radio Club (BARC) tomorrow night. I need to run all this garbage I've collected to the dumpster so I can fill my car with toys for show-and-tell

tomorrow! If you are in the Boston area and haven't seen the show, I hope you'll drop by. Again, mention this blog and receive a big smile from the blogger. {grin}
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:08PM (-04:00)

Nice map

Thursday, October 19, 2006

I believe good planning helps you have more fun when you travel. Certainly, I've tried to emphasize that notion here and in my modest 100 Pound DXpeditions. Planning relies on data and one excellent source of data can be a good map of the area you plan to visit. Google Earth is a fun tool but it has limited utility when trying to do very detailed planning. To see what I mean, start Google Earth and enter the string "16.7673N 62.2153W", the coordinates of the place our Montserrat group will visit next year. Sure enough, world on your screen will spin and zoom, eventually leading you to a fuzzy image of the terrain on the island. I'm not complaining; I'm just pointing out the strengths, weaknesses, and relative merits of this tool.

For a different presentation of the data you could use topographical map of the area. I have been buying my maps from Omnimap.com and have been pleased so far. I recently ordered the Montserrat Topographical Map from their web site and it is a nicely sized (72x78cm), single sheet map. The survey must have been prior to the eruption of the Soufriere Hills Volcano as it still shows streets, schools, and businesses in Plymouth, the island's former capital now buried under ash and debris. To me, this makes the map even more interesting, though, as the portions of the map I *need* to be accurate (the places I can actually go) are accurate, and the rest of the map serves as a history book, telling me about things that *used* to be. Paper maps also have the advantage that they (a) travel well, (b) are easier to use as a visual aid with a group, (c) have more "dots per inch" so typically contain more detail, and (d) you can use a pencil to add a little something, all while being disconnected from the internet or even far from a computer. I am a software developer by trade and use my computers extensively, but I also recognize a good thing even when it is not on the computer. {grin} Sandy and I obtained similar maps for our St. John trip and we spent quite a bit of time looking them over, not just for antenna strategies, but also as a way to educate ourselves about our surroundings, the names of local landmarks, and even a bit of history about the place.

I've always loved maps so this is just a great excuse to get new ones and look at them. That said, they are also a great source of information about the faraway place you'll be visiting. I strongly recommend that you get your hands on a nice topographical map before that next big trip.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:43PM (-04:00)

Parallels and Win98 up-and-running

Friday, October 20, 2006

I had a wonderful time last night speaking to the Boston Amateur Radio Club in West Newton. That's a fun group! Because I didn't know how close I could park, I only brought the IC-7000 system, the Buddipole, and the Buddistick as my show-and-tell items. There was particular interest in the Buddipole as some of the members run a station for SKYWARN Recognition Day (which will be December 2 this year) and thought the Buddipole would be an excellent choice for the temporary and short-duration operation. I agree!

My copy of Windows 98 that I had bought on eBay came yesterday and I finally got a

chance to open it tonight and try it. It was indeed a fresh, shrink-wrapped copy and it loaded into Parallels easily. After installing a couple of optional things from the Parallels distribution CD, I now have my choice of screen resolutions for the display in the VM, which is really nice. Also, the problem I had the other day with the system not wanting to connect properly to the internet disappeared. The web browser came up immediately and successfully loaded a web page.

I've tried two things so far: Morse Runner and N1MM Logger. Morse Runner failed because, somehow, there wasn't a sound device configured within Windows 98. OK. I'm downloading the driver now. {sigh} N1MM came up immediately and worked fine, though the trick will be to get it to talk to the radio via a USB serial port. It is too late to try that tonight; that will have to be tomorrow's adventure. Still, it is running very smoothly so far. I think the likelihood of getting *hammac* has gone up considerably!

While I was sitting here I noticed the Windows 98 display went black and shrunk down on the Mac Mini. For a moment, I panicked: did it just crash? No. The stupid energy saver kicked in and it "turned off the monitor". This, apparently, forced the window to resize. I'm turning that thing off as soon as I post this! First, it is disconcerting to have the software appear to do something *crazy* when you're not touching it, and, secondly, having Windows "turn off the monitor" in energy saver mode isn't going to save a watt! It was interesting to see how Parallels handled that, though.

I'm helping out at a VE testing session in the morning for the MMRA group. Then, I believe it will be time for more shack cleaning and baseball in the evening. The World Series begins tomorrow!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:58PM (-04:00)

Relevance

Saturday, October 21, 2006



The testing session was a bust this morning. We had no takers. So, naturally, we VEs in attendance began discussing what we need to do to increase interest in the hobby. The word we began fixating upon was *relevance*. How do we make what we love to do (play radio) sound *relevant* in today's world? We did talk about one fellow's idea as discussed on my friend

Dave's web site 99 Hobbies.com. Tom Baker (NC6B) has developed a class in Moorpark High School integrating Amateur Radio within a comprehensive course on emergency preparedness. You can listen to that interview [here](#).

I applaud that effort, but we all agreed it would be nice if we were able to also generate some *pure love* for the hobby, absent of the practical, that many of us feel when we work that DX station, put in that good contesting effort, or just ragchew. I received a compliment that I was very happy to receive in a local club meeting on Tuesday night. One attendee of a recent *100 Pound DXpedition* presentation thought it was a great "sales pitch" that communicates to the public the excitement we can have doing what we do. If



indeed this is true even a little, I'm very glad.

It doesn't seem like it, but a month has passed since I mailed the stuff off to Montserrat. I also realized that it had been a month since I had mailed around a *status report* to my fellow BUMS. Obviously I'm giving myself a failing grade on this assignment! Today's status report, and "punch list" of items we need to follow-up on, should begin to put things back on track. Chris (W6HFP) has picked up lots of this slack by bringing the group several excellent options for travel to-and-from Montserrat. Getting our flights settled, along with some other pressing items, would be good to do in the next few days. Thanks go to Chris for being diligent on this.

Though I swear I read the rules to the ARRL DX contest before going to St. John this Spring, I missed the line that said, "DX entrants making more than 500 QSOs on either mode will receive certificates." So, imagine my surprise when I got a very nice mailing from the ARRL yesterday! See below.

Finally, here's the new **PART** logo recently adopted. I think the group did OK. I hope you agree.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:17PM (-04:00)

Plans for CQ WW SSB

Sunday, October 22, 2006

I did some thinking about the upcoming CQ WW SSB contest and I decided this would be a good time to work on my QRP DXCC award. I've currently logged 62 countries QRP thus far so there is quite a bit of work to do. The CQ WW contest presents an excellent opportunity to snag at least a few new ones. The interesting thing about the QRP DXCC award is that *no QSL cards need be presented* to apply for the certificate. Instead, you make a statement that you indeed made these contacts, and you used QRP power to do it. I guess since they could never confirm your power output, they don't bother with the cards, either.

The CQ WW SSB contest was the first ever radio contest I entered not long after I was licensed. It is difficult for me to convey the excitement I was feeling during that weekend as I had gone from never making an HF contact prior to August of 2002, to making hundreds of contacts all over the world just two months later. To me, it was *magical!* That first year I entered in the 100 watt category. That was before the QRP bug had bitten and since then I have participated in many contests at the QRP-level, as I did in last year's CQ WW SSB effort. Here is my claimed score from last year's effort. Of course, *claimed score* is before all my goof-ups are removed (bad exchanges, busted call signs, etc.)

Band QSOs Pts Cty ZN 3.5 5 11 3 3 7 11 32 9 5 14 26 58 15 10 21 38 90 23 9 Total 80
191 50 27 Score 14707

I would like to beat that score this year. Even with the solar cycle down here in the basement, I should be able to accomplish that. Certainly my antenna system is about as good as it has been in the last couple of years (since my first *stealth* antenna was torn down by the *condo police*). I put the finishing touches on my G5RV, now a "flat-top" up about 55 feet, this afternoon. This is still a very modest station, but as I've been trying to emphasize in this blog all along: it isn't about the equipment; it is about having fun with the stuff you've got, in the place you're operating, for as long as you can do it!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:30PM (-04:00)

Propagation book

Monday, October 23, 2006

One of the things that I would like to understand better is the theories and application of shortwave propagation. I am currently reading The NEW Shortwave Propagation Handbook by George Jacobs (W3ASK), Theodore J. Cohen (N4XX), and Robert B. Rose (K6GKU). While I've not gotten far in the book, I've read enough to recommend it. I know I've learned some things already and will likely go back and reread some of the material before proceeding. When I have finished the book, I'll post a full review of it here.

In the mean time, if you wanted to have some guess about what the conditions will be like for, say, this weekend, you could look 26-28 days prior to your desired date and check out those conditions. Since the Sun's rotation is about 28 days, it makes sense that the same stuff that may be spraying at us last month would be spraying at us again this month when that portion of the Sun spins around and faces us again. Sure, the rest of the stuff in all these books is interesting and helpful, but small, very practical tidbits like that take a lot of the mystery out of things.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:23PM (-04:00)

Corrected NA-148 QSL cards on their way

Tuesday, October 24, 2006

In a previous post I discussed the problem I had caused myself and others by not putting the island name on the QSL cards I had sent out. I made amends tonight by spending the last couple of hours going back through the log and cards I had received to replace those erroneous QSL cards sent previously with new ones, this time with the island name shown prominently.

The little rubber stamp I had ordered from The Sign Man worked great. I put the "Georges Island NE1RD/1" stamp and the "Verify by NE1RD" on the cards and the bright red ink stood out nicely against the black and white card backs. Hopefully, folks can now get the IOTA credit they deserve from these cards. If anybody finds that not to be the case, please let me know immediately!

Also in the stack was some cards for KP2/NE1RD, K1P, and my home call. I keep track of QSL information in my logging program so I had to be careful to check, and then update, the correct log while I did this. The reward for keeping track of this electronically is an automatic calculation of how many states, islands, and DXCC entities I have worked from each location. In fact, now that I worked Alaska on that last outing to Georges Island, I'm thinking there might be a Worked All States from that location some time in my future. (I have to work Hawaii to really be close, though.)

We've not decided who will do the QSL work for the Montserrat trip, but I wouldn't mind having the job. It is restful, and fun, to look over the cards, read and write little notes, and take a few moments to *re-experience* the QSO. I know some find the whole business tedious, and for those people I make sure all my QSOs are also uploaded to the Logbook of the World and eQSL, but I enjoy the old-fashioned and traditional QSLing.

So, check your mailbox in a few days if you are one of those few souls that worked NA-148 this summer. The new cards are on their way.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:27PM (-04:00)

Montserrat activity heating up

Thursday, October 26, 2006

I'm taking tomorrow off from work to get ready for the CQ WW SSB contest. The G5RV is already hung so all I need to do is run a feedline to it to have that antenna ready. I may also set up the Force 12 Sigma-5 in the woods so I can quickly check for openings on 15 meters without needing to mess with the antenna tuner.

I received an email message today from a magazine in the UK looking for a high-resolution version of our Monserrat DXpedition logo to accompany an entry in their publication. I returned the message immediately with a copy of the Adobe Illustrator version of the artwork. With that, they can scale it and reproduce it in any resolution they like. I sent out the press release on 22 August and have already seen mention of our trip in WorldRadio magazine and hope to see other announcements in the December or January issues of QST, CQ Magazine, and The DX Magazine.

You may not be familiar with The DX Magazine, but it is a gem! It is published bimonthly and features lots of great stuff on DXing and DXpeditioning. Recommended.

Hearing from this British magazine made me wonder how many places our announcement had *stuck*. So, I did a quick Google search using the string "Montserrat W3FF". A very pleasing number of hits came back! Naturally, I sent that little tidbit around to the group.

One particularly nice spot we landed in was this one: Announced DX Operations on the NG3K site. This seems like a pretty handy site all around!

Finally, my answering machine had a message from Paul. He had talked with our contact on Montserrat and the Montserrat Amateur Radio Society today. From the message, I gathered that our friend on the island will assist us with the paperwork and clearing customs upon our arrival. That is great news indeed. That should help speed us through what could have been a very time-consuming, nightmarish ordeal, and get us on the air that much sooner. I couldn't be more pleased! We will need to send him a complete inventory of our equipment, including serial numbers and estimated value, in order to make this happen. This is something we were going to have ready anyway.

Again, some *legwork* during the trip planning phase may lead to good things later. I know I dwell on this point, but planning is key!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:05PM (-04:00)

CQWW nearly half done

Saturday, October 28, 2006

It isn't quite halfway through the CQ WW SSB contest and I've nearly generated as much score as last year. I just put New Zealand in the log, adding to my QRP DXCC total. I'm now up to 65 DXCC entities with flea power after adding Senegal, Gambia, and New Zealand. I had hoped for more, but I'm pleased that the total is at least increasing.

I'm operating this contest QRP so I'm using the Oak Hills Research WM-2 watt meter to ensure my power out is really only 5 watts. I confess, it is a little exhausting to hear the big guns work a station on the first call when I'm averaging a QSO about every 5 minutes. But, that's the charm of QRP. You would expect to work New Zealand with 1500 watts and stacked monobanders; working New Zealand QRP SSB at the bottom of the cycle is an unexpected thrill!

While I've been going hoarse trying to get the attention of all those far away stations, I've been working on Cab-converter, the freeware utility I make available to Macintosh using contesters. In addition to adding new contests occasionally, I've been adding score

calculation and summary displays for the users suitable for submission to the Contesting 3830 email reflector. I finished the update for this contest and that's why I know I'm at 10,496 points right now with 71 QSOs. (I just worked J3A while typing up this blog entry.) It is starting to get dark so 15m will dry up any minute. I'm going to make one more pass through the band.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:53PM (-04:00)

CQWW SSB 2006 now in the can

Sunday, October 29, 2006

After a contest, many people submit summaries of their adventure to the 3830 list. An easy way to do this is through the on-line web form. Here's the result from my effort this weekend.

Call: NE1RD
Operator(s): NE1RD
Station: NE1RD

Class: SOAB QRP
QTH: EMA
Operating Time (hrs): 24+?

Summary:
Band QSOs Zones Countries

160:
80: 23 6 12
40: 18 9 10
20: 73 15 31
15: 59 14 35
10: 9 4 6

Total: 182 48 94 Total Score = 61,202

Club: Yankee Clipper Contest Club

QRP with just a single G5RV up about 50 feet was about as I expected it to be with a few surprises. I worked Hawaii, New Zealand, and a few other far away places. The bands were reasonably quiet so the trick was to speak (and be heard) when nobody else was talking.

Most QSOs, once I was in the clear, had easy exchanges. Some were tough, and for that I'm grateful to the good ears on the other end. Surprises, if any, where how effective 10 & 15m were even at the bottom of the cycle.

The score above is approximate. I'm still working on the score calculation in Cab-converter. N1MM gives me a slightly higher score.

A couple of funny things always happen in a contest. This time, A fellow from Europe (no, I'm not going to give the callsign) was calling CQ but not hearing any of us here stateside. So, chatter erupted with one station transmitting, "OK. Now switch the antenna to the receiver...", and another saying (after hearing some big guns call with no answer), "I don't feel so badly now." I replied, "I'm QRP: nobody hears me." With that I got a few chuckles. Tomorrow we're back to planning for the Montserrat trip. I really want to be booking

flights, making hotel reservations, and generally getting things finalized within the next few days. I had original hoped to get most of the heavy-lifting done by November 1st. We'll see how close I come to making that date.
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:54PM (-05:00)

QSLing honorably

Monday, October 30, 2006

My QRP DXCC total went up by a few this weekend and now I stand at 70. I also picked up two new DXCC entities that I didn't have at all (Socorro island in the Revilla Gigedo Islands group, and San Marino). Of course, the Socorro island is also an IOTA prize. Working a cool place is only half the battle. If you want to get credit for DXCC, IOTA awards, or nearly any other piece of wall-paper, you need to get the QSL card from that cool place. If you are working *from* that cool place (and that's the plan, right?), the you need to make sure you fulfill that role yourself. Don't second-guess why they want your card; they just want it. And, it wouldn't do to go someplace interesting, work a bunch of people who would be excited to get your card, and then stiff 'em once you get back home.

If you detect a little edge in my prose today, you're correct. I spent a little time with my log tonight looking to see what I might have in the way of 5 band Worked All States, DXCC, etc., in the log but not yet confirmed by card. My logging program, MacLoggerDX, like most good programs, helps keep track of what you've worked, QSLs you've sent, QSL cards received, and so on. I knew I had sent a lot of cards out without receiving a reply, but the magnitude of the problem wasn't apparent until I started collecting some statistics. Here's what I found. I have sent out cards but received no replies for:

- **76 DXCC entities** - 3/4ths of a DXCC award.
- **21 Zones** - half the world.
- **36 States** - half a WAS award.
- **22 IOTAs** - some pretty rare.
- **Hawaii** - on 20 & 40m. Yeah, I need 'em.
- **Alaska** - on 10m. My only AK 10m contact.

I'm working towards my 5 band Worked All States (5BWAS) and I've been stiffed on cards for my 5th band for NC, ND, NY, NJ, and NC. I could go on, but you get the point. I've read about people who brag about throwing QSL card requests into the trash because they can't be bothered with things that don't interest them. I can't understand that mentality. To me, it is counter to the Amateur Radio Code's first item: "The amateur is considerate.... He never knowingly uses the air in such a way as to lessen the pleasure of others." If you're going to make the contact, be prepared to send the card. Disappointing folks later is, in my view, unconscionable.

I hope you'll use these trips, and the time you spend planning for these trips, as a way to have fun and spread joy. Everybody, you and the people you work on the air, deserve no less.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:30PM (-05:00)

Montserrat flight reservations

Tuesday, October 31, 2006

I made a couple of phone calls today to California to see if I could get the ball rolling on flights. It worked! Email messages have been pouring in from members of the group with their flight information and seat assignments.

The current plan is for us to rendezvous in Orlando on Sunday, January 28th and head out first thing in the morning for San Juan and then on to Antigua. There is a small airline that shuttles between Antigua and Montserrat that will take us the rest of the way.

The return trip is just as circuitous, plus there is that whole business about getting to Orlando in the first place, and then getting home again. Still, now that I've actually booked my flights this whole thing is starting to feel more "real" to me. I'm sure that feeling will become even more prevalent once the credit card bill for all these flights arrives! {grin} We're still working out that last leg of the flight. The bag weight restrictions all the way to Antigua conform nicely to all my prattling about 2 bags, 50 pounds each, 100 pounds total, plus a little carry on bag (thank you). The little puddle-jumper airline that makes that last leg is a bit more restrictive. We hope to work out those last details in the next couple of days. When we do, and when we book that last flight, we'll have everything we need (except licenses) to get there, stay there, and work the world from there.

I had said that I wanted to have most of this settled before November 1st and it looks as though we made that goal (mostly). Once all this logistical stuff is taken care of, we'll need to turn our attention back to the details of actually operating on the island (and planning for it). We've got about 89 days before we leave. Let the countdown begin!
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:41PM (-05:00)

Montserrat team finalized

Wednesday, November 01, 2006

I have more exciting news about the Montserrat DXpedition trip. We had kept it under wraps for a while but one team member, Dan Gagnon (WZ1P), had to drop out because of a conflict. Dan has provided valuable input during the trip's planning process and will continue to be an active team member, though he won't be going to the island with us in January. We had hoped to go with seven operators so a careful search was made to complete the team. That search ended this week.

Bob Follett (AB7ST) and Tom Clarke (W4OKW) have agreed to join us on the adventure. You can read about our newest team members on the biography page of the VP2M Dxpediton web site. Their additions bring the team up to *lucky seven* members.

Our villas in Gingerbread Hill will comfortably house our team, though we'll be bunking together even before we arrive. Most of us need to rendezvous in Orlando for our very early flight Monday morning (29 Jan), we've decided to fly in Sunday afternoon and split some hotel rooms in the Hyatt that night. This will also give us one last chance for an equipment check (and that last trip to Radio Shack if we've goofed up something). And, since our flights arrive so late on the return trip, we've decided to bunk there again on Tuesday, February 6th.

The last step is to book the charter from Antigua to the island. We hope to get a Twin Otter that will comfortably haul all of us, and our equipment (100 pounds each, remember?) with a little room and luxury. Perhaps that will be settled tomorrow.
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:23PM (-05:00)

Montserrat trip planning moving to next phase

Saturday, November 04, 2006

This week brought about lots of activity within the Buddipole Users on Montserrat group. The web site was updated with a new logo and biographies for the two new operators, plane tickets were purchased for all but the last leg of the journey, and we've agreed on a hotel in Orlando for the staging both going to, and coming from, the island. Whew!

Hopefully Chris (W6HFP) will get that charter flight booked early next week and we can declare the logistics part of this planning completed.

As I stated in one of the mail messages I sent to our group this week, I'd like to now start the discussion regarding equipment we will all be bringing. I look for that process to begin as soon as this weekend. All the things you can think of immediately (transceivers, power supplies, microphones, paddles, feed lines, antennas) will most certainly make the list, but there are other things less obvious that also need to be taken. For example, we should have at least one tool set with soldering iron, an antenna analyzer, and SLA battery charger. There are seven operators. We don't need seven antenna analyzers. Nor do we need seven tool sets. We should plan ahead so that everything we need is taken, duplication is minimized, and the weight of those items is distributed among the seven members. That way we can have what we need yet still live (collectively) within the 100 pound limit imposed upon us.

The other thing I mentioned in a message to our group was my desire to begin adding content to the web site. Here are some things I'm considering:

- Descriptions of potential operating locations. We hope to work from beach, volcano observatory, etc. Describe our goals and current plans (Battery? Solar? 100W? QRP? Overnight? High bands? Low bands?)
- I'd like to get some pictures and descriptions of the Gingerbread Hill villas on the site to show people where we'll be staying.
- More information about Montserrat. I have raw materials for this section but have not yet had time to create it.
- A whole section will be made available upon our arrival for the on-line log. I'm working out those details now.
- A whole section should be made regarding our equipment. We might even have one page per operator describing what they brought, what it weighed, and why they made that decision.

Finally, I only tonight learned that the long anticipated Low Band Coil option for the Buddipole was made available the middle of last month. I knew that it was in the works (and had been for some time) but I had been so busy with other things that I'd completely missed the announcement. I ordered it immediately upon seeing it, of course. {grin} I'll try it out during the ARRL November Sweepstakes contest (November 18-20). I should be able to do some A/B comparisons between the 80m Buddipole vertical and my G5RV. Of course I'll report my results here!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:20AM (-05:00)

CQ WW DX SSB 2006 analysis

Sunday, November 05, 2006

I just finished the *status report* for the Montserrat group. This is nothing more than a mail message that gets sent to the group highlighting what has been done, what is left to do, and issues we still have to resolve. I find that having a single *punch list* to work from makes planning, and assessment of our current state, easier to do.

After I finished that task, I decided to give last weekend's contesting effort one last look. The 3830 reflector, which provides a place for contesters to dump their estimated scores so we can all compare notes, provided a summary for the various categories. I was in the "single operator, all band, QRP" category. A few other folks also dumped their score on the rumors list, so we can now do a little analysis. (Remember, this isn't official; this is just data from those who decided to contribute to the list.) Here's the raw data for this year:

Call QSOs Zones Cntry hr Score Club
 USA SOAB QRP
 K8ZT 350 70 184 28.5 231,902 Cuyahoga Falls ARC
 N1TM 268 51 142 131,819 YCCC
 N7IR 210 54 88 79,094 CADXA
 NE1RD 182 48 94 24+? 61,202 YCCC
 K7HBN 212 37 67 20 60,320 WWDXC
 K4JAF 110 35 63 4 28,714 FCG
 KR1ST 100 25 52 a few 20,750

I put in a better effort this year (over last), but many others did as well. Here are the top 9 from last year. Note that 2005 scores are 'official' and 2006 scores are estimated.

Last year we had:
 # Call 2005 score 2006 score DELTA
 1 KO1H 649,399
 2 KA1LMR 495,818
 3 K8ZT 193,048 231,902 +38,854
 4 N1TM 108,100 131,819 +23,719
 5 K3GM/1 50,700
 6 N8XA 18,853
 7 N3HU 18,679
 8 NE1RD 13,275 60,320 +47,045
 9 W4DEC 5,408

I clearly win 'most improved' of the three I know about. If I my score from this year in 2005, I would have slid up to 5th (up from 8th). That's cool.
 The band-by-band analysis is interesting.

USA SOAB QRP
 Call 160m Q/Z/C 80m Q/Z/C 40m Q/Z/C 20m Q/Z/C 15m Q/Z/C 10m Q/Z/C

~~~~~  
 ~~~~~  
 K8ZT 6/ 2/ 2 16/ 7/ 8 20/ 9/ 15 162/24/ 80 106/16/ 54 40/12/ 25
 N1TM 2/ 2/ 2 2/ 2/ 2 49/12/ 28 123/17/ 60 57/ 8/ 18 34/ 8/ 18
 N7IR 3/ 2/ 3 7/ 5/ 4 4/ 4/ 3 44/16/ 22 108/20/ 38 44/ 7/ 18
 NE1RD / / 23/ 6/ 12 18/ 9/ 10 73/15/ 31 59/14/ 35 9/ 4/ 6
 K7HBN 0/ 0/ 0 0/ 0/ 0 0/ 0/ 0 108/19/ 30 103/17/ 36 1/ 1/ 1
 K4JAF / / / / / 32/12/ 21 77/22/ 41 1/ 1/ 1
 KR1ST 1/ 1/ 1 / / / 39/10/ 23 41/10/ 24 19/ 4/ 4

I appear to be pretty competitive on 80 and 40. It is the *tribander* bands where I get ravaged. In fact, K7HBN, K4JAF, and KR1ST worked those bands exclusively (save 1 QSO on topband). The advantages of having some gain on 10m was especially pronounced. The top 3 had 34-44 QSOs; I had 9.
 I competed in this contest with just a single G5RV antenna. What this data tells me is: I'm probably performing adequately from an *operator skills* point of view. It is lack of an antenna with gain on the top 3 contesting bands that is preventing me from scoring more points; it isn't that I'm not making good use of what I have.
 This last point is the important one. I love operating QRP because I love the challenge. I also believe that it is an excellent way to hone your operating skills. These are skills I'll

need if I go to some faraway and exotic place!

The other point to make is for all of you with great stations at home: if you go on one of these 100 Pound DXpeditions, you won't be bringing *your "A" game*. You won't have a tower, tribander, stacked monobanders, or even amplifiers. You'll need to perform well with limited equipment, and limited antenna options. I believe operating in these contests with just wire antennas and low power (or even QRP) are great practice for the kinds of working conditions you'll likely have on your lightweight DXpedition. You can't bring more (and live within the weight budget) so you have to make the most of what you *do* have.

The ARRL November Sweepstakes SSB is November 18-20. I have an opportunity to do a couple of things for that contest. I could operate low power (100w) and work on my 5 band Worked All States award. I might also try the N1MM logger running under Parallels to see if that is a viable alternative to MacLoggerDX. My intention is still to run with MacLoggerDX while on Montserrat, but I'd like a second option should the QSO rate go too high. This contest gives me an opportunity to try this second option.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:33PM (-05:00)

Paradise (licensing applications) Lost

Monday, November 06, 2006

With apologies to Milton, we've hit something of a *bump in the road* in the Montserrat planning. The licensing applications we had sent to the island in September have yet to produce any results. We're now concerned that the address we'd gotten off of the ARRL web site might not get the package to the right offices on the island after all. If that's the case, this is my screw-up. Drat.

Luckily, I was able to come up with another resource familiar with the island. Art Blank (WA7NB) was working the CQ WW DX contest and I was able to work him while he was VP2MDY on the island of Montserrat. After we did the exchange, Art said, "Aren't you the Buddipole DXpedition guy?" I cranked up the power from 5 watts to 100 so we could have an easier time talking and told him, "Yes!" We then chatted for just a moment and he said he would be happy to answer any questions we might have about the island. Boy do I have questions!

I wrote to him the other night and he replied almost immediately with lots of good information, including some new contacts on the island that might help us get our licensing approved (or at least be able to help us assess the status of our applications). A couple of guys in the group are now working through these new channels to discover the fate of our paperwork. That's the great thing about this group: guys just see something needs to be done and they pick up the task and run with it. This trip is really going to be fun!

I know I am repeating myself, but, one of the best assets you can have is somebody local to the place you are visiting. Talking to people who have visited there in the past can also be a boon. Though it is hard work and sometimes depends on a little luck (as with my chance meeting with Art on 15m), it can mean the difference between guessing and asking somebody who knows. That is, it makes all the difference in the world.

When I learn something either way on the licenses I'll post it right here. I sure hope I didn't goof up and send that package of applications to some administrative black hole someplace... {sigh}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:56PM (-05:00)

RIGtalk work-in-progress

Wednesday, November 08, 2006

Some time ago I wrote that I had purchased some RIGtalk USB rig control interface devices from West Mountain Radio. The device comes complete with a cable for your particular radio (choose that when you buy the particular model) and a CDROM with the drivers for Windows.

I normally run MacOS X on my Macintosh, not Windows. So, one of the challenges I have is locating drivers for the device. When I first got the package, I used a strong magnifying glass to peek into the device and read the part number off the main interfacing chip. So far, so good. It was then an easy task to use Google to find the manufacturer and locate the drivers they had posted on their web site. Sure enough, there were Macintosh MacOS X drivers. Well, that's the end of the good news. I have tried and tried but I just can't make it work. That is, the operating system doesn't present a serial device that can be opened by a program.

Just to make sure the device itself wasn't broken, I got this idea a couple of weeks ago to test the device on my new Mac mini running Parallels with N1MM logger (though any rig control software should work). After getting Windows 98 loaded on to the machine, I was able to install the drivers from the provided CDROM, plug the RIGtalk device into an available USB port on the Mac mini, and *voila!*, it worked! **Note to Windows users:** this works great right out of the box with the drivers shipped with the device.

So, I know the hardware works. And, if I decide that it would be better to use a PC/DOS logger on Montserrat (just for speed reasons, certainly not because they have a better interface!), this part of the system is tested. I would still like to make this work with MacOS X and MacLoggerDX, my primary logging program. There was some chatter on the email support list for MLDX over the last couple of days and it was suggested that somebody contact West Mountain Radio and volunteer to be a guinea pig for any new drivers they might have for this device. I will likely do that in the next day or so.

The extra work I might have to do to make this happen is well worth it. The RIGtalk interface is mind-bogglingly small, which would save both weight and precious space within my Pelican case. I would really like to make this work! We'll see if I can between now and departure time for the Montserrat trip.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:38AM (-05:00)

T-shirts ordered

Thursday, November 09, 2006

I just finished the T-shirt design for the Montserrat group. I've been doing my custom T-shirts through Cafe Press. Their *build a custom product* interface is pretty easy and the results are OK. You just upload some graphics images to their site, select the products you wish to customize, and set a quantity to buy. The site even gives you a picture of your proposed product that you can review before you finalize your order. The order for these new shirts for each team member was just placed a few minutes ago. I love the web.

I made a big batch of shirts with the 100 Pound DXpedition designs this summer and they've stood up pretty well. The original Montserrat team members have already received one of these shirts. The two new fellows will get one, too, when this order ships. Cafe Press offers two types of printing: direct printing and heat transfer. The first batch of shirts I bought used the direct printing method and the colors were a little faded. That said, they've been through the washer a number of times now and they still look pretty



good.

Later in the summer I decided to order a shirt (and some other stuff) and I tried the heat transfer method. Those shirts had images with much better color saturation but I can see how they might not be as durable through many laundry cycles. If you decide to use these guys, I recommend ordering one shirt with each printing technology and assess for yourself which works best for your purposes.

Here's the shirt design (back):

The new Montserrat shirts look even more cool, sporting the Montserrat team logo and our new slogan: **Not rare, but well done!** As

soon as those shirts arrive I'll repackage them and send them off to the team members. I can't wait to do our group picture on the island. That will look great on the QSL card!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:57AM (-05:00)

The plane! The plane!

Friday, November 10, 2006

A small wrinkle in our Montserrat plans has cropped up. It seems Gerald's Airport on Montserrat closed for some time in October. An article in *The Montserrat Reporter* said the airport closed for a couple days and had cancelled flights a couple more. This disquieting quote from that article has certainly gotten our attention:

The situation is aggravated by the many complaints of the lack of information regarding cancelled flights where the public is left in limbo after check-in, both in Antigua and Montserrat, and not being told very little or nothing about what steps are being taken to get them to their destination.

Our plan is still to get an airplane ride from Antigua to Montserrat, but this revelation has made us start to consider other options such as a boat charter. There are seven of us so even \$1000 round trip for the group would be under \$150 a head. Of course we'd like to do it for less, but at this point we've got to find a reliable way to get on, and off, the island. I was monstrously busy at work this week (hence the skimpy postings to the blog) but I think I might make a phone call down to the Montserrat Tourist Board and ask, "just what the heck is going on down there?!"

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:23PM (-05:00)

HamMac

Sunday, November 12, 2006

I wanted to do computer-based logging while on Montserrat but was a little nervous hauling my 17" PowerBook on the trip. What I needed was a smaller, lighter, and, to be honest, cheaper alternative so I could cut down on my weight, and risk, but still have a reliable computer. Having more *options* would also be nice. Being able to run some version of Windows directly on the machine (in addition to MacOS X) would mean I would have the ability to do anything that was supported by either operating system.

I had done some experimentation with parallels last month and found it ran Windows 98

quite nicely. You can find that post here. I was able to do rig control, run Ham Radio Deluxe and N1MM logger, and even use the RIGTalk to make the connection between the radio and the computer.

With these experiments a success, I took the plunge today and purchased a new MacBook now dubbed **HamMac** (pronounced like "hammock"). I got the stock, low-end model with the 13-inch screen and 1.83 GHz processor. The unit performs well and it only took me a few minutes to transfer the work I had done on the Mac mini to the new machine and get things up-and-running.

I'll be trying some other stuff between now and departure, but I think I'm in pretty good shape on this part of the equipment planning. Of course, the thing I need to do next is put it on the scale (it should come in at about 5 pounds + the charger).

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:43AM (-05:00)

Weekly status Nov 12

Monday, November 13, 2006

I just finished the status report for the VP2M group, something I try to do about once a week. With a little over two months to go, we've got lots to do!

Our issues are:

- **Transportation:** We all have flights that get us to Antigua but the last leg, from Antigua to Montserrat, has yet to be booked. Carib Aviation is the only carrier that goes there. Chris is working out those details.
- **Licenses:** The instructions on the ARRL web site are out of date. Bob has tracked down the new offices that handle this: the Ministry of Communications & Works. (Sounds like something from Monty Python to me, but it is a British colony, I guess). Bob is going to figure out if they have received our materials. If they have, then fine. If they have not, we need to resubmit them {sigh}. We'll try to have a ham on the island walk through all this paperwork if we do resubmit.
- **Power:** It sounds mundane after the stuff above, but we need to know the shape of the power outlets on the island so we can bring the right adapters.
- **HTs:** It was suggested by Paul that we all bring HTs to the island. Just from a safety point-of-view, this is an excellent idea. It was something I was going to put into the DXpedition manual (if I ever had time to work on it).

We've got a good group and we've now split up most of the outstanding work. I'm still pulling together stuff for the web site, working on the legal forms, and just finished the very cool DXpedition T-shirts (that I talked about the other night).

We've still not discussed equipment, specific plans for activities on the island, or worked out all the other details on our *wish list*. For example, Chris and I spoke on the phone just a few minutes ago about doing audio recordings of as much on-air activity we can manage. I've already looked into some MP3 recording units such as the EDIROL R-09 WAVE MP3 recorder and the Zoom Audio H4. A small mixer is also not out of the question. All this will make great additions to the web site when we are done.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:06AM (-05:00)

Licensing - part deux

Monday, November 13, 2006

The group made the decision today to resubmit our licensing applications to the island. Just so we're clear: this is my fault. I sent the original applications to the address found on the ARRL web site here using this application. I knew that the capital city Plymouth had been buried under many meters of ash and debris from the Soufriere Hills Volcano eruption in 1995, but I had assumed that the mail would be redirected to the new capital offices. I was wrong.

So, today we agreed to collect all the materials again. In the mean time, our contacts on the island will be nailing down the correct mailing address for this stuff so I don't send this next batch into oblivion, too. With luck, and perhaps the correct address and postage, we'll have our licenses in a few weeks.

In the mean time, it looks like Chris has nearly secured our flights on that last leg of the journey. Carib Aviation will be providing us with a charter. Because we will be taking one of Carib's larger aircraft, we'll have plenty of room for the seven of us, and the pile of equipment we'll all be bringing. I think we'll all feel better once this very last step in our travel plans is finally settled.

Assuming we get the licenses and the flights finalized soon, we will have done all the travel planning we can do for now. Actually getting to the island will then depend on the weather, and to some degree, the volcano.

The Montserrat Volcano Observatory has an alert level indicator for the public. It has been at "3" for a while but that could change quickly, and we all know it. Here's what "3" means:

"Confined dome growing rapidly, or growing to the west or north; or, unconfined dome growing towards the east or south. Dome may be changing its direction of growth, or there may be high levels of gas or long-period seismicity, or moderate levels of swarms or tremor. May be moderate to high levels of rockfalls and pyroclastic flows with associated light to moderate ash fall.

"This level of activity could include pyroclastic flows and light to moderate ash falls. There will be increased Government public information on the situation. Government will also be reviewing their evacuation procedures and plans. Continued testing of the siren system. *Read your Guide to Volcanic Hazards.* **YOU SHOULD BE LISTENING TO RADIO ZJB FOR REGULAR UPDATES AND ADVICE.**"

While I've got about a pile of radio books that need to be read (or reread), I think I'd like to read a little about volcanos before I leave for this wonderful place. There aren't many places on the Earth where there are active volcanos and I'll be near one of them. This will be my second volcano (my first was the big island of Hawaii) and I confess I'm fascinated by them. This is going to be a great trip!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:04PM (-05:00)

HamMac test drive

Wednesday, November 15, 2006

I got a call from Paul tonight. He's on his way to a faraway place for the last half of November to participate in the CQ WW DX CW contest, and to soak up some sun, I'm sure. Very nice, indeed!

Another thing we discussed is the possibility of organizing conference calls for the group beginning in early December. Assuming we get the flights, licenses, and remainder of the logistics managed, we've still got lots of things to resolve as a group. For example, many

(all?) of us are likely going to bring our Buddipole systems, but they are an awkward size for carrying on an airplane. The systems with the 16-foot masts collapse down to about 41 inches when packed, too long for a typical piece of luggage.

Instead of having everybody try to manage this themselves, it might be better to have one or two of us bring hard-sided golf cases like The Vault which can easily hold several antenna systems. Two of these would likely hold all of the antennas, masts, tripods, coax, rope, and other antenna materials we might have. That seems like a reasonable plan, but we should work this out as a team. This might be agenda item one when conference calls begin.

I spent this evening installing software and otherwise familiarizing myself with my new MacBook affectionately named "HamMac". HamMac seems solid, is very good on batteries, and has, so far, been able to run everything I've installed on it without incident. Tonight I installed:

- FireFox - browser
- MacDoppler - Ham radio satellite tracking software
- DX Toolbox - solar and geomagnetic conditions and propagation software
- MultiMode - Digital interface software
- CocoaModem - Digital interface software
- uH Router - MicroHam USB routing software
- BBEdit - Context sensitive editor (for HTML, C, C++, etc.)
- QRZ Rom - Ham database which works great with MacLoggerDX

Finally, I decided it would be right and fitting if tonight's post were made from HamMac, and so it is. Easy as pie.

I believe the accommodations on Montserrat have Internet access so I'll be posting each day while on the island (along with making updates to the DXpedition web site). Of course a few pictures will probably make their way to the blog and the web site, too!
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:00AM (-05:00)

Conference call

Thursday, November 16, 2006

Things are heating up on the Montserrat trip planning front. I received two packages of licensing materials today and I know other packages are on their way. Once I've received all six (mine makes seven), I'll send them off to the island. (We're working out the details of who to send them to now.)

I also received a big bag of T-shirts from Cafe Press today, and the new shirts look great! I'll send those shirts to the team in the morning.

Finally, I made the suggestion to the group that we have a conference call once a week to get some of these details nailed down. There is a service called Free Conference that seems to work well, and it is free.

In our first call I've suggested we discuss:

1. **Status updates on the big stuff** -- Flights, licenses.
2. **Radio equipment selection** -- each of us give some indication of what you're bringing.
3. **Packing options** -- How do you expect to pack it and get it there? Who wants to share a golf case?
4. **Buddipole "mystery" stuff** -- How much experimental stuff will be brought?
5. **Alternative power options for portable operation** -- Bring rechargeable batteries? Buy batteries (car/boat) while there? Solar panels to supplement operation?
6. **Recording our adventure** -- Audio recording options? Video recording options
7. **Marketing** -- Web site plans and updates. DVD/video planning. Dayton planning.

Thoughts on magazine articles to be written.

8. **On-island communication plan** -- Safety planning. General coordination.

I'm sure once we get going there will be lots more to talk about. Plus, it will be the first time I will have spoken with some team members! With about two months to go, this seemed like the next logical step.

(By the way faithful readers, tonight marks the 150th blog entry. I hope you are finding at least some of this helpful!)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:40PM (-05:00)

Thinking vertically

Friday, November 17, 2006

My plans to try out the new low band coil for the Buddipole this weekend might need to be put on hold. Some pressing business at work will likely keep me out of the ARRL November Sweepstakes as well. So, I will have to content myself with just doing a little reading and researching over the next couple of days when I'm not in the office.

I only purchased one of the low band coils. With this single coil I should be able to make a shorted vertical antenna for 80 meters. How shortened? Consider the parts we'll be using:

- **2 "arms"** -- The Buddipole uses 22-inch aluminum rods that are about an inch in diameter. Two arms come with a standard Buddipole package. That gives us four feet.
- **7 section shock-cord whip** -- From the Buddipole accessories section you can purchase 3, 4, 5, 6, or even 7 section shock-cord whips. In my *big* Buddipole system I use the 5 section whips when operating in the dipole configuration. When constructing a vertical, I typically use my single 7 section whip which is over 12 feet in length.

A full sized vertical would be

$234 / 3.5 = 66.8$ feet high

We only have 16 feet of radiator between the arms and the whip. The rest will need to be made up with the coil. That might sound like a bad deal but keep in mind that this whole package weighs only a few pounds, breaks down into a small bundle, and can travel with you to faraway places. Plus, there is a lot of gray area between a dummy load and a near 100% efficient antenna. On these 100 pound DXpedition you need to give these *compromised* antennas a chance to surprise you.

The other problem you're going to have is, well, the other half of the antenna: the radial system. This is a little easier since the radials for the vertical can be made with very, very lightweight wire such as The Wire Man model #534 copper-clad steel which the vendor claims weighs less than one pound per 1000 feet!

Finally, you want these little wires to be the radials, not the outside of your coax. The Triple Ratio Switch Balun plays an important role here. This is from a note from the Buddipole User's Group on Yahoo! "The TRSB is 50:50, 50:25 and 50:12 ohms (nominal). It is designed specifically to match low impedance antennas, and to provide very high isolation (equivalent to approximately 80 beads)." I believe this little accessory is very helpful for use on the higher bands (40-10), but it is essential on 80 meters.

For now, though, the parts sit in the box awaiting their first experiments. Perhaps I'll get a little time over the Thanksgiving holiday.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:45PM (-05:00)

10 pound DXpedition?

Sunday, November 19, 2006

My mailbox has been overflowing with big envelopes from the Montserrat crew this week. We agreed to resubmit our licensing materials and everybody has sent me their passport-style pictures and paperwork. I'll bundle them up and get them off to the island... as soon as we figure out where. We're hoping to get some local hams on the island to walk the paperwork through for us since time is so tight. We hope to have that settled in the next couple of days.

In other news, I got a note from a good friend Greg (NE1OB) today with a pointer to this blog* from K0NR. Robert Witte writes about making a satellite contact from Bonaire. Greg's comment in his note was, "looks like a 10 pound DXpedition!" Sure does! And, it looks like fun. Congratulations to Robert!

* Normally I won't go back and fix a broken URL when things move, but this was interesting enough to make the effort. Enjoy.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:05AM (-05:00)

Our man on Montserrat

Sunday, November 19, 2006

I received a message from a Montserrat team member this morning with some great news. We have found a ham on the island who is willing to do all the legwork for expediting our licenses. We just send him the packet and a money order in his name and he'll use local currency to walk the paperwork through the system. Outstanding! Because we're starting to get into the Christmas season and the post office is feeling the pressure of the associated extra load, he suggested we use Federal Express or another express carrier to ensure that this envelope doesn't get lost in the shuffle. Good idea.

We do have some questions that need to be answered before we finalize our licensing materials. It was suggested on our group's email reflector that we hold our first conference call tomorrow night to work that out those last details. The agenda will be essentially what I posted the other night, though we did come up with a couple of extra questions today such as , "*most big-time DXpeditions have a single call sign and manage all QSLing that way... should we?*"

I confess I'm very excited about this first call. It will be the first time I will have spoken with most of these guys. We've exchanged hundreds of emails, but I've only talked with Budd, Chris, and Paul in person or by telephone.

With just two months (or so) to go, there are many, many things left to do. I'll try to keep up the postings here so you can see it come together, or at least learn from my mistakes.

{grin}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:54PM (-05:00)

First conference call

Monday, November 20, 2006

We just finished up our first conference call for the group. I must say, this was a very useful exercise! Not everybody could attend, but those who did got a lot out of it, I think. Here are the big things we discussed and decided:

- **No club call** -- We had discussed on our email reflector the possibility of getting one call that would be used by the group (like the *big DXpeditions* do). In the end, we decided it didn't add much. Sure, it would mean we would be able to upload just one log with all contacts to LoTW, eQSL, etc., but it probably caused as many problems as it fixed. So, we'll all have separate callsigns. I even suggested there might be some who would wish to work *all seven* of us. Why not?!
- **Flights are all set** -- Chris seems to have nailed down that last leg from Antigua to Montserrat. He will let us know how much we owe him and each of us will give him a check to cover this expense. This, and the licenses, were the last two big hurdles that were making us nervous.
- **Equipment database** -- I had asked everybody to give a quick synopsis of the kinds of equipment they were going to bring to the island. There is going to be lots of interesting stuff going! To sort all this out, and remove duplication, we're going to start a planning area within our Yahoo! group to identify what equipment each of us will bring. I'll work on that over the next few days.
- **Model release forms** -- We agreed that the one I had made looked good. I've already received one (though I didn't know it as I had not opened the envelope yet). Everybody else agreed to sign theirs and get it to me. Since Buddipole antennas will likely need it more than me, I'll just collect them all and give them to Budd and Chris once this is over. (Let them be responsible for them!)
- **Baggage won't be a problem** -- There had been some concern early on that we might be facing a 20 Kg (44 pound) limit on baggage going to Montserrat. That would have been almost a deal-breaker for many of us. Now, it appears that Chris has negotiated at least the full *100 pounds* for our *100 Pound DXpedition*.
- **Golf bags** -- I had posed the question, "Who wants to share a golf bag?" The Buddipole 16 foot masts break down to 41 inches, but that doesn't fit in most luggage. I had planned on bringing my golf bag and thought others who would also be bringing long masts might wish to share it. Now, because of the kinds of activities we're anticipating, many on the call thought they might not even be bringing the big mast. If it is true we are bringing no long pieces, we might not need the golf bag.

Well, I'm bringing the golf bag anyway. I want to bring my *Big* Buddipole system (described here), small Buddipole system, and some other long stuff, too. So, I'll have the golf case. (It will be interesting to see how they get it on to that twin otter. {grin})

So, I declare this first call a success. It is a good group! The free conference call system worked fine, except that Budd couldn't get in because "all circuits are busy". We hope moving to Sunday night will fix that, too.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:36PM (-05:00)

Kerguelen video at local club

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

Tonight was a local radio club meeting night and the entertainment portion was a video from DXvideos.com on Kerguelen island. All of these videos are great (I own them all), but this one seems especially good. The group loved it.

I think I'll give these videos another viewing over the long Thanksgiving weekend. These videos feature some of the best amateur radio operators alive doing what they do best. If you have one of these videos, check out how they pack their gear, get the antennas erected, and how much coax they bring. Even little things I've noticed will be added to my planning list. For example, bringing some red plastic ribbon or tape for marking coax or guy wires as tripping hazards is a great idea. Sure, it sounds obvious when I say it, but there are dozens of little tidbits like that in these videos that I would have a tough time

conjuring on my own.

I got my passport picture taken (again) today. I will assemble the new licensing package in the morning. Well, that was my plan. Then I got a message today that it is *possible* that our original package may have been located in the licensing offices on Montserrat... maybe. {sigh} Another team member is tracking this down. Perhaps we'll know more tomorrow.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:54PM (-05:00)

Cleaning out the old mail box

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

I've got a nice, four-day weekend coming up and I plan on making the most of it. This evening, though, I'm just relaxing and going through my email, which had stacked up considerably. One note from a friend in a local club asked if I had a good translation for *Soufriere Hills*, the name of the volcano on Montserrat. Well, I'm sure there is a better way to get a translation for the name than this, but I entered *Soufriere* into Altavista's Babelfish language translation program and got *Sulphur mine*. Sounds reasonable!

This nugget is courtesy of Don Argo and the Dogpark Software email reflector. If you've spent too much of your life pulling wires between your computer and radio, here's a thought: a Bluetooth Serial Adapter from IOGear. According to Don's account, "I've tried it on the Intel Mac Pro and the older G4 Power PC on MacOS X. No extra drivers are required -- you just use the OS X *Set up Bluetooth Device*. Set the baud rate and set it to a slave device with the dip switches. It does require the supplied wall wart to be plugged in to supply power but the range will allow you to control your radio in one part of the house from your bluetooth equipped computer in another." Don talks about the Macintosh because that is what he supports, but this thing should work on PCs or Macs. The street price for this is about \$65 and is available from Amazon, PCConnection, to name a few. I do not own one of these, but it does look interesting. And, if Don says it works, it works. Sandy found this clock which shows the current time and the world map with terminator. Sure, maybe it isn't as sexy as one of these, but you can't beat the price (free).

I mentioned DXpedition videos in last night's post. They are certainly great fun but there are lots of things to be learned from them, too. The latest one from the 3Y0X DXpedition will be shipping soon according to DXpedition team leader Bob Allphin (K4UEE). Over 600 man-hours of editing time were invested and they have produced an excellent video according to Bob and his crew. I hope to have it in my hands the first week in December. Of course I'll post my review here.

Finally, today is November 22nd and our country lost our President 43 years ago today. Rest in peace, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 35th President of the United States of America.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:59PM (-05:00)

The reappearance of our applications?

Thursday, November 23, 2006

I had posted recently about our efforts to obtain licenses from the Montserrat authorities. I had abandoned all hope that the envelope full of application forms and pictures would be found and processed by the authorities on the island and so I had collected a new set of materials from the members. The pile now sits on my dining room table nearly ready for mailing.

Imagine my surprise to hear from Bob Follett (AB7ST) that our wayward envelope may not be so lost after all. Word has filtered back that our application may be on the desk of the

Licensing officer on Montserrat. Of course, that envelope only contains the forms for the first five members of the crew and not the latest two (Bob, AB7ST and Tom Clarke, W4OKW). So, there is still work to do.

I sent around a mail message today asking for advice from the group on how to proceed. The consensus was to go ahead and send the second package of materials to our contact on Montserrat and let him work out the details, including any duplicate applications. That sounds reasonable to me.

So, my plan is to complete *my* application in the morning, write a letter to accompany the package, and get it to Federal Express for shipment to the island. Even by Federal Express, it will be a couple of days before the package is received on the island. Sigh. I should have started this much earlier.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:21PM (-05:00)

Audio capture with TuneTalk

Saturday, November 25, 2006

Word came through today that our charter flight between Antigua and Montserrat has been officially booked. This nagging detail was finally put to rest by Chris (W6HFP) and he notified the group my email tonight. That was one of the last big details; the other big detail is licensing.

I am nearly done packaging up all the materials everybody sent me for the licensing. I'm enclosing a letter for our friend on Montserrat and another letter for the licensing authority, just in case there is confusion from *two* applications possibly being submitted (if, indeed, they found the other one from September). The materials will be bundled up and sent via Federal Express first thing Monday morning. I was able to get the street address of our contact on the island confirmed by email tonight (I didn't want to have the second package become wayward, too!) so I now have nearly everything I need. Just a quick stop by the Post Office in the morning to get an international postal money order (or something similar) and it should be ready to go.

One of the little *side projects* I've had planned is to figure out a way to record lots of audio from the QSOs during the DXpedition. The idea was to find some digital audio recorder that was capable of storing dozens or hundreds of hours of audio and then just record everything. I believe Sandy found something today that will address most of this. We were in the Apple Store and she spotted one of these: TuneTalk Stereo for iPod video. The device connects to an iPod and turns it into an audio recorder. It produces .wav files and, according to Belkin, the unit can record up to about 350 hours of audio on a 60GB iPod. I bought the 80GB today. Quick tests tonight with the built-in microphones on the device produced good results. I plan on capturing audio from the Icom 7000 tomorrow. There is still a missing piece: I'd like to be able to record my side of the QSO directly with a microphone mounted on the headset boom. I found a wireless microphone system, lapel microphone, and some other audio stuff in an old video accessories bag last night and should be able to make something out of all that. I still need a set of cables, or maybe even a mixer, to make this work out just right. I'll try everything separately, then solve the integration problem.

By capturing every moment of audio I can with this system, I'll be able to have lots of great sound clips for presentations or videos I produce after the trip. It also gives me a second way to capture audio while doing videotaping. If you've already got a video iPod, check out the Belkin unit.

Finally, a little goodie I spotted in an email reflector this week. MacOS X has a *dashboard* that can run lots of little utilities. These utilities are called *widgets* (not to be confused with the X-Windows and Motif concept of widget). Here's a widget called SunClock 1.0.1 that

gives you a nice map of the Earth with the terminator. Nothing fancy, just a fun little software add-on. Macintosh users enjoy.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:09AM (-05:00)

Video and a lazy day

Saturday, November 25, 2006

As you might guess, living on an island with a major volcano can be *interesting*. Monserrat, with its Soufriere Hills Volcano, has gone through quite a bit in the last decade or so as vulcanism has destroyed much of the southern half of the island, including Plymouth, the (now former) capital. I have read about some of these events, but we live in the era of video and visual images. So, I ordered the DVD Price of Paradise "Memories of Montserrat 2005 Edition" some time ago hoping to get a better understanding of the volcano and the geography of the island.

The video is excellent with a combination of firsthand accounts of the many events leading up to the *big one*, and many aerial shots from helicopters giving you the perspective you need to understand the rapid changes imposed on the landscape by this monster. I had purchased a topographical map of the island from OmniMap.com (this one, in fact) allowing us to find the cities and other landmarks mentioned in the video. One term kept cropping up: *ghaut*. The narrator on the video mentioned Mosquito *Ghaut*, Tuitts *Ghaut*, and Whites *Ghaut*. Not having any idea what a *ghaut* was, I looked it up. Here's a definition from the Volcano World: "A *ghaut* (which is derived from India) is a mountain pass or a valley between two mountain ranges." So, kids at home, when you run into a new word you don't know, stop and look it up. {grin}

As you might expect, the volcano did not have one eruption but had, instead, a long series of ever escalating events the culminated in the final evacuation of the island's southern half. The video does an excellent job of showing how this long transition affected the landscape, economics, and people of the island. This was no travel video; it was an excellent documentary. Highly recommended.

I was lazy today. I had intentions of doing lots of things to prepare for this trip, and to finish some stuff for a local radio club that I had promised to do. I did neither (and nearly nothing). I even took a little nap this afternoon. I think I needed it.

Tomorrow, though, it is back to the *to do* list. I've got audio testing to do, preparation for the conference call with the rest of the BUMS scheduled for tomorrow night, and, yes, I need to do my laundry.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:01PM (-05:00)

Concall and spreadsheets

Monday, November 27, 2006

The four day weekend wasn't quite enough to finish all that I had put out in front of me. There are so many things that need to be tested, organized, and arranged, I'm starting to think I should have started this much earlier than I have!

I made copies of all of the licensing materials and now have them organized and ready to go in the morning. I just need to stop by the Post Office, get the money order, and head off to Federal Express. What a relief that will be!

Our second conference call was scheduled for this evening. Five of seven made the call, including Paul from Puerto Rico. We covered a lot of ground in the 75 minutes. Here is the agenda for the con-call:

1. Status updates on the big stuff (flights, licenses)

2. Equipment organization
3. Recording our adventure (Still photography, Audio recording options, Video recording options)
 - Marketing Web site plans and updates
 - DVD/video planning
 - Dayton planning
 - Thoughts on magazine articles to be written
- Alternative power options for portable operation
- Logging (QSL collection and record keeping, Web site updates, Paper QSLing, eQSL, LoTW)

We also covered some other stuff as the discussion proceeded. Here are some of those thoughts presented in no particular order:

- Clothing: No dress up stuff. Casual only.
- PowerPoles: We should standardize on PowerPoles for all 12v connections. Everybody put PowerPoles on their stuff.
- Can we wash clothes while at the villa? Probably. We should plan on it, even it means doing it in the bath tub.
- Can we locate a hardware store on the island? How much use of local materials can be made?

We then covered again the general list of equipment we're considering for the trip. For the long items, like the long masts bundled with the Buddipole, a golf bag might be best. This is the one I have: The Vault. The current thought is I might be able to bring the case from Boston and use it to hold all the long pieces for the group (the other long pieces are likely going to be supplied by the Buddipole guys, and they'll already have them staged in Florida for a ham fest they're attending).

One other point: I'm taking Southwest Airlines from Manchester, New Hampshire down to Florida. Southwest allows three checked bags. Some of the other guys are traveling very light (perhaps one bag plus carryon), so my third bag, the golf bag, could be handed-off to another member of the group when we leave Florida.

We decided that the best way to organize all this stuff is for each of us to create an Excel spreadsheet with a complete inventory of each bag. The columns in the spreadsheet are name, bag identifier, item description, weight, and serial number. Here is a portion of my spreadsheet that I began pulling together tonight (only showing the first bag and omitting some information):

BSA Weight	Description
bag-1	
13	Pelican 1510 case
4	Alinco DM-330MV 32A Power Supply
0.5	Super Whatt Meter
2	LDG AT-7000 autotuner
5	Icom 7000 transciever
1	Icom CT-17 level converter
0.5	Icom HM-151 hand microphone
1	RIGrunner 4005 Power distribution
2	Red accessory box
# (2)	CT-17 power connectors
#	LDG autotuner to radio cable
#	Heil traveler adapter cable

- # Heil ProSet adapter cable
- # (2) 1/8 inch patch cables
- # one foot PL259 patch cable
- # PL-259 to BNC adapter
- # Keyspan USA-19HS serial
- # USB patch cord

- 0.5 Radio Shack Cat.no. 22-820 VOM
- 0.5 Power cord spades / PowerPoles
- 1.5 Power cord PowerPoles / Molex
- 0.5 Power cord Cigarette / PowerPoles
- 0.5 2/440 magmount antenna
- Alinco manual and service manual
- Minilog book
- Icom 7000 Nifty mini-manual
- 0.5 Radio Amateurs World Atlas
- Small screwdriver
- (2) ferrite blocks
- 33 Estimated total
- 30 Scale shows weight at

The other bags will need to contain the Heil headsets, antennas, coax, tools, antenna analyzer, etc. I will try to complete my spreadsheet before our next conference call.

These detailed lists serve a couple of purposes. First, it helps ensure we don't leave some critical piece of equipment at home. If we all review these lists, the chances of forgetting something important is small. Second, making these lists help coordinate between the group members. We all don't need to bring, say, an MFJ-259B antenna analyzer. One should be sufficient for the group. As we go through these lists, we can eliminate unnecessary duplication and its associated weight. Third, the government of Montserrat will be checking all of the stuff we bring on to the island and will wish to either collect duty on it, or at least a deposit. Similarly, we need to have a complete list to get back out. These spreadsheets can go a long way towards helping organize that detail. We covered more stuff in this call (it was a very good call!). I'll try to cover more in the next blog entry. It is getting late here on the East Coast and tomorrow is a work day. Plus, I just noticed how long *this* entry had become. My, I'm long winded! {grin}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:15AM (-05:00)

Licenses have arrived!

Monday, November 27, 2006

I arrived home this evening and found a large envelope in the mail box with the words, "ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE" printed on it. At first, I thought it was some weird promotion for the new James Bond film. Then I realized the new movie is *Casino Royale*, not *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. Huh? Then I spotted the exotic stamps with the name **Montserrat** in bold type. The licenses from Montserrat are here!

I ripped open the envelope to find five licenses for the original five group members, me, Paul, Mike, Budd, and Chris, along with a letter from the licensing authority indicating we have a valid license for calendar years 2007 and 2008. Hooray!

In an evil twist of fate, I had only hours before come from the Federal Express office in Burlington where I had dropped of another whole set of materials to the island. {sigh} I will drop our friend down there a note and tell him that only the materials for the last two guys, Tom and Bob, should be submitted.

The time to process the materials was about 2 1/2 months (September 12th to November 27th). Figuring it spent about a week each way, that means the offices down on Montserrat processed the request in about two months. That is a pretty good response time for stuff like this, I suspect. The panic we had been feeling in the group was entirely self-inflicted: we should have had these materials mailed to the island in June, not September.

If you are planning on visiting a far away place, get your licensing materials in very, very early. In this case, the license for operating on Montserrat was only about \$10 US. Even if you don't actually go, you're only out ten bucks. If you are even *considering* going to some far away place, apply for the license early in your planning process. We did not do this and it caused all sorts of commotion and concern.

Enough of that! Here are the new call signs:

B. Scott Andersen (NE1RD) == **VP2MRD**

Budd Drummond (W3FF) == **VP2MFF**

Chris Drummond (W6HFP) == **VP2MHF**

Mike Greenwood (KC4VG) == **VP2MVG**

Paul Van Dyke (KB9AVO) == **VP2MVO**

There is lots more to talk about from last night's conference call. I'll try to pick up that thread tomorrow. In the mean time, please join me in a big sigh of relief! The license are here!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:47PM (-05:00)

Hard drive failure and log processing tools

Tuesday, November 28, 2006

I didn't mention in last night's blog that I was experiencing some *technical difficulties*. The hard drive in my trusty 17-inch PowerBook crashed hard yesterday afternoon. I was up until about 4AM this morning attempting to Resuscitate it without success. So, I formatted the drive and tried to reinstall everything. At that point, the disk diagnostics program indicated it was a hardware fault reported by the drive (or its driver) and refused to budge.

I do have good backups of nearly everything. I've lost some mail, of course, and probably a few other odds-and-ends, but for the most part I'm in good shape. The computer is still covered by AppleCare so the repair will be free. I drove down to the Burlington (MA) store this morning and dropped it off. The service guy said it should be back in my hands soon, possibly by the end of the week.

While I was doing all this diagnostic work last night, there was a great deal of *waiting* and more *waiting*. I used TechTool, a diagnostic utility that came bundled with the AppleCare agreement to attempt to scan the disk and rebuild all the pointers. Scanning a large disk, especially one with problems, takes a long time. So, I would take a glance at the screen every half-hour or so, but otherwise left it to work. Waiting. Waiting.

While I was waiting I got a start on the log processing tools I hope to use while on Montserrat. The idea is this: each operator has their own call sign. We'll keep computer logs for each operator in a separate file. Once a day, I will collect all those logs and produce an ADIF file with all the QSO information for each operator. My tools will then read in all those ADIF files and create a large set of HTML pages that can be uploaded to the DXpedition web site.

The programs are being written in C and will be likely be portable to other platforms when I'm finished. Perhaps I'll bundle them up and make them available at the end of this adventure.

In the mean time, I'm now using *HamMac* as my main computer. Except that the screen

is a bit small (I'm really spoiled by the 17-inch screen on the other laptop), this is a very fine machine! I believe it will serve us well down on Montserrat.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:40PM (-05:00)

Recovering from the disk crash

Wednesday, November 29, 2006

More on DXpedition adventures tomorrow. Tonight, I'm just trying to recover from the disk crash in my laptop Monday afternoon.

Apple repaired my laptop in record time. The new drive was installed along with the latest OS and was as clean as the day I bought it. At first, I thought I would just restore from the latest backup, patch up other stuff as best I could, and continue as though nothing happened. Then, I thought this might be a good time to clean up a bit and only selectively restore what I *really* needed. (It is hard to believe the magnitude of junk that accumulates on your disk over time!)

As of this writing, I still in the middle of that exercise. Except for a couple of months of archived email, I didn't really lose anything from this misadventure. Even so, I've convinced myself that I really do need to be more deliberate and careful about backups. This could have been a very messy problem.

The other thing I noticed is how all these serial numbers and registration codes are a complete pain in the neck when you're trying to get your applications running again! If I were away from home, I'd be completely helpless if I needed, for whatever reason, to reinstall an application. Even if I had internet access, could download the installer, and get the program reinstalled on my disk, I'd still be hosed if I couldn't locate the stupid registration code/unlock code/magic number/please-don't-steal-software/nobody-trusts-anybody-anymore code. {sigh}

So, along with manuals, I think I'll collect all my stupid registration codes into a document and make sure that goes on to *hammac*, too. I should have done this a long time ago, but now I'm motivated. Oh, yeah, and I'm starting a backup before I go to bed, too! I'm not getting bit by this twice in one week!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:53PM (-05:00)

Mixer has arrived

Friday, December 01, 2006



If any of you have read the Harry Potter book series, you'll know what I'm talking about when I tell you that I need a *time turner*. It is after midnight again and I am still up (again). The good news is: my laptop is now fully recovered and healthy. The couple of files that I had actually lost were easy to recreate and I did that work this evening (hence the late hour).

I did two other things that should make future catastrophes less exciting: as promised in yesterday's blog entry, I created a file with all the important software serial numbers and unlock codes. There weren't that many; I just needed to make a deliberate effort to get them organized. The other thing I did was create *tar*

files of the “dot” directories in my account. Unix (which is the underpinnings of MacOS X) has a cool rule that directory names that begin with a period (dot) are not made visible when you inspect the directory, unless you specifically ask to see *everything*. There are two programs that I run that make little directories like this: the Logbook of The World software, and the GNU Privacy Guard utilities. Just to be sure that these directories, and their contents, don't get lost in the shuffle, I've made a special effort to create an easily restorable *tar* file for each of them and put them in a safe place.

I spent a whole lot of money on disk drives this week, and I'm feeling pretty good about it. I bought three of the SmartDisk FireLite drives: one for my laptop, one for Sandy's laptop, and one for *HamMac*. They are small, reasonably fast, and super-easy to use as they require no external power. Just connect them to your machine and run the backup program. Voila! Now each laptop has a dedicated backup device with a recent backup on it. I'll still back up to the other drives occasionally, but this one can be used weekly or even a couple of times a week. The backup of my 17-inch PowerBook took about 90 minutes in today's exercise. I plan on setting this up and letting it run over lunch a couple of times a week. Easy.

The drive I bought for *HamMac* was a little bigger. I might do a little video editing while down on the island (just to play) and I thought the extra space might be handy. It isn't exactly that I'm looking forward to my next disk crash, but I'm not fearing it, either. While all this excitement with the computer was going on, I was receiving packages from orders I'd been placing over the last week. I received 15 blank video tapes for my video camera in one box. Another box held my new audio mixer that I'll be using on Montserrat to capture on-air QSO audio. It is a Eurorack UB502 from Behringer. Here's a picture.

The unit can take up to 5 inputs. I'll bring in a microphone that will be attached to the boom of my headset in one channel. Two other channels will take the audio from the radio (do I need both?). That still leaves me with two other channels, possibly a second receiver or another microphone in the room. I've got a wireless microphone setup that might be good for one of those remaining channels. I had read the manual before buying the unit (every manufacturer should put their manuals on the web!) so setup only took a few minutes. I'll try to capture some audio *exactly* like the setup I'll use on Montserrat this weekend. Maybe I'll even post a clip.

Finally, I got word from our friend on the island that he'll be arranging for the last two licenses to be processed in the next few days. Things are coming together! And, that's good as there are only about 58 days (it is after midnight here now) until I leave. I'm pretty sure that time will go very, very quickly.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:42AM (-05:00)

Mast repaired

Sunday, December 03, 2006



Last weekend I attempted to set up the Buddipole with the new large coil to see if I could get it to work on 80m. Of course, since it was just “temporary”, I didn't bother guying it. Stupid, stupid me. A gust of wind came along and blew the whole thing over, tripod, 16-foot mast, coil, and 7-section shock-cord whip. Of course it fell across the

sidewalk, too, ensuring the most damage would be done.

When I saw the antenna fall in what looked like slow motion, I feared the worst. Amazingly, only one small piece was damaged. The very top of the 16-foot mast had a

plastic threaded piece used to mount the "tee". This small piece snapped unceremoniously. {sigh}

I dropped Budd Drummond a note explaining the situation. Apparently, I was a very early adopter on this mast because Budd told me they had stopped using that plastic part only months after the mast began shipping. What they replaced it with is pictured below:

The replacement part is a solid metal piece shaped just like the old plastic one, only much, much stronger. Mind you, I'm not *happy* I dumped my antenna like that, but the result was a system with a much more rugged mast system and top mount. It was better that I goofed this up here, at home, with a couple of months to go before the big trip, than on the island. The pictures above is my system for securing the threaded piece to the mast. Budd said that a good epoxy will also do the trick nicely, but I like the idea of a nice solid screw holding it. I goofed up the head on the screw a little (it is a tight fit), but otherwise I think it looks great. Certainly it feels solid.

The Buddipole repair project only took a few minutes. I spent a few hours working on Cab-converter, a utility I maintain for radio contesters that use Macintosh computers and MacLoggerDX. I received a note from a user who discovered the program performed very badly on large data sets (large numbers of QSOs). Actually, he had a number of excellent observations and suggestions for the program. The performance problem is fixed along with a few other rough edges. Actually, that work took some of last night and half of today to complete (time really flies when you're programming!) Cab-converter is free (as in free as in beer).

What I *didn't* get to today was the log processing software for the Montserrat trip. I hope to complete at least a first version of it tomorrow. If I do, I'll process some test data as though they were QSOs from the island and put those pages up on the dxpedition web site so the group can discuss it in tomorrow night's conference call.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:55AM (-05:00)

Online log with sample data available

Monday, December 04, 2006

With five of the licenses now in hand and the final two forthcoming (we hope to have them this week), the group is much more relaxed. Tonight's conference call was more about equipment and logistics than the previous couple of calls. We are now worrying about meals, renting a van, and finding good scuba diving places instead of plane tickets and licenses.

There are still lots of things left undone. We decided last week that everybody should begin putting their equipment list into a spreadsheet and upload to the Yahoo! group file area. I put mine up there Monday night but, so far, nobody else has followed suit. I'll start pushing for closure on some of these things this week.

I spent nearly the entire day working on the log processing software we will be using while on the island. The software takes log files from each of the operators and produces HTML pages that can be uploaded directly to the web site. I have created a bunch of pages with sample data and put it on the DXpedition web site. Just go to the front page and click on the ONLINE LOG link. Comments are welcome. Note that this is very much a work-in-progress. I have (conservatively) another two or three days of work on this software before it is ready.

It is late again, coming up on 1 AM. I should have gone to bed, but I really wanted to get this online log stuff working at least well enough to evaluate it. I believe, after playing with it a bit, this is going to work just fine.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:46AM (-05:00)

Flares, solar rotation, and licenses

Tuesday, December 05, 2006

After several really late nights in a row, I crashed pretty early last night. It is funny how sometimes you go to bed with a problem on your mind and wake up with the answer. There were bugs in the log processing software that I've been working on (you can see it on the DXpedition website) and I was puzzled by some of its behavior. I went to bed thinking about it; I woke up this morning with the solution. It's weird how that works. Tonight I sat down at the computer and looked at the code to see if my analysis was correct. Sure enough, the problems were right where I thought they would be. Sleep walking is called somnambulism. I wonder what *sleep programming* is called?

This software still needs a *lot* of testing before we can rely on it while on Montserrat. But, I do feel good that the framework is in place.

While on the island I plan to do lots of video taping and audio capture so I can make a DVD of my trip. It won't be anything as slick as the ones put out by dxvideos, but it should be fun to make, and hopefully fun to watch. I've created smaller movies in the past with Adobe Premiere and iMovie, but this will be more than just home videos or 3 minute short films. I hope to have enough (interesting) material for a full one hour production. If I manage this, my *100 Pound DXpedition* talks might be a little more exciting than just me with a slide show.

If you visited spaceweather.com today you may have noticed that the Sun emitted a major flare. Luckily, the flare was not directed towards the Earth or HF would have been affected, probably severely. This reminds me of something that we should be watching: the Sun rotates once every 27 days or so from our perspective on the Earth. So, whatever is going on today may also be happening 27 days from today. For example, the sunspot (number 930) that spawned that flare today will be roughly in that position again in 27 days.

I leave for Orlando on Sunday, January 28th and then for Montserrat the next day, Monday, January 29th. You can bet that I'll be paying lots of attention to solar activity 27 days prior to those days (January 1st and 2nd). If conditions are nice and quiet just after the first of the year, chances are they'll be nice for our trip, too. If conditions are a little wild, with flares and CMEs, HF might be tough 27 days later.

This stuff isn't a 100% accurate predictor, but it does give you some idea of what might happen. The great thing about stuff like this is you can go back and review historical data to see how these 27 day cycles relate to HF propagation. I find it fascinating!

One last note, and this is a big one, the last two licenses were issued today. Hooray! The good fellow in the licensing office on Montserrat heard that we were getting nervous up here and he made a special effort to email me with electronic copies of the license. That was really nice of him! So, we have flights, we have our villa rented, we have licenses. All that's left is to plan, pack, and go. I don't think I can fully convey how excited I am!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:01PM (-05:00)

Status report 6 December 2006

Wednesday, December 06, 2006

I sent around a status report today to all Montserrat DXpedition members (us *BUMS*). I hope the team members find them as helpful as I do. The correspondences within the group is private to the group (and should be), but sharing portions of it here will show the kinds of things I'm worried about at this stage of our planning. I edited this a bit, excising things that should remain private.

Status Report
December 6, 2006

Team members

NE1RD - B. Scott Andersen
AB7ST - Bob Follett
W3FF - Budd Drummond
W6HFP - Chris Drummond
WZ1P - Dan Gagnon (not traveling)
KB9AVO - Paul Van Dyke
KC4VG - Mike Greenwood
W4OKW - Tom Clarke

GENERAL STATUS

Last status report was November 5, 2006.

- * All flights and hotels are booked.
- * Licenses received via email, 5 of 7 received via post.
- * Slogan "Not rare, but well done!" adopted.
- * DXpedition "official T-shirts" distributed (magnet, too).
- * Weekly conference calls established: {details followed}

We have completed all the stuff that is "out of our control": flights, hotels, island rentals, and licensing. Now, we have a long list of stuff that is within our control (that is, we can complete it as quickly as we like because we need not depend on anybody else to get it done).

The big things, as I see them, fall into these categories:

- [1] Log file and QSLing strategy (computers, log programs).
- [2] Ham equipment planning (radios, antennas, power needs).
- [3] Non-ham equipment planning (scuba, video, etc.)
- [4] On-island logistics: vans, cars, bikes, etc.
- [5] On-island excursion planning: helicopter, MVO, scuba, etc.

I would like everybody to continue to work on their ham equipment list spreadsheet, but I would really like to complete the logging and QSLing strategy THIS WEEK. I have software to write and would like to test it with the log files produced by the programs we will actually use on the island. Also, Budd, let's finalize the QSL manager so I can put that information on the web site ASAP.

==> LET'S FINISH THIS STUFF BEFORE OUR NEXT CONFERENCE CALL.

Actions since last status report

-
- * Slogan adopted (complete).
 - * Second license application package sent (complete).
 - * Final flights obtained (complete).

OPEN ISSUES - HOT

There are a number of hot issue. Please look down this list and take actions that have your name or ALL next to them. If there are questions or problems, please notify the group immediately.

- * ACTION: Chris: Bio + picture for web site.
- * ACTION: Budd: picture for web site
- * ACTION: ALL: Plans for computer logging to Scott.
- * ACTION: ALL: Pay Chris \$xxx for share of flights.
- * ACTION: ALL: Send Scott signed Model Release form.
- * ACTION: Scott: Finish web site QSO log processing tools
- * ACTION: Budd: Finalize paper QSL manager stuff and tell Scott.
- * ACTION: Scott: Make QSL information page on web site.
- * ACTION: ALL: Create eQSL account for your VP2M call sign.
- * ACTION: ALL: Create LoTW account for your VP2M call sign.

Open issues - not critical

-
- * DXpedition manual
 - * Marketing and Public Relations
 - * Legal Documents: general agreement
 - * Equipment inventory
 - * Pay Chris for flights and resort
 - * Power voltage and connector shape
 - * Renting a van while on the island.
 - * MARS membership...

The rest of the message provided addition details on each of the “open issues - not critical” list, inventoried the “closed issues” from the last few rounds of status, and documented the group’s itinerary again (for convenience).

For my part, I added my new call sign **vp2mrd** to my Logbook of the World account. It was easy. You can find a link with details of how to add a new call sign to an existing account on my home page www.bsandersen.com. (I’ve had this domain for a while but only recently made it point to my home page.) The only extra step I needed to take was to supply the ARRL with proof that I had actually received that call sign officially. I followed the directions on the LoTW pages and emailed an electronic copy of the license to the email address listed with a nice note. Within a couple of hours, I received a message from Wayne Mills (N7NG) with a file containing my new credentials. By the way, if you recognize the name or call sign from Wayne Mills, don’t be surprised. I’ve been telling you to read his DXpeditioning BASICS white paper for some time now!

I also set up a new call sign on eQSL, though that process isn’t complete yet. The eQSL service allows you to have your account marked as Authenticity Guaranteed, meaning the service has made reasonable steps to ensure the cards produced by this user will be authentic. You can gain this status four different ways, but the easiest way is to have eQSL *ping* the LoTW service. If you’re good on LoTW, they give you the nod on eQSL. It is quick and easy to do it this way. Unfortunately, you need at least one QSO in the LoTW account for this to work. It ends up being a bit of a chicken-and-egg problem, really. I’ll likely just wait until my first upload to LoTW on the island to make this final step on eQSL. Finally, the blogging service you are reading now, Blogger, has had some major changes of late. I’m now converted over to the *beta* version of the service and, I must admit, it has given me fits. I write my blog entry within an editor on my Macintosh, spell check it (at

least occasionally {grin}), and then paste it into an editing window at the blogger web site. That's been working for me since the beginning, until Sunday evening. Now, with this new software, my HTML links within my posts are mangled when I paste them into the service's editor. Once I discovered the problem, it was a matter of updating my browser to the latest version of Firefox, and then repairing one-by-one each of the broken links. If you notice a broken link, please let me know. It just means that one more was mangled than was found by me during review. I suspect this little problem will be resolved by the Blogger people in good time, but for now it is quite irritating.
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:25PM (-05:00)

An excellent idea!

Thursday, December 07, 2006

Just got a note from Greg (NE1OB), a good friend who shares my intrigue with QRP among other things. Here's what he said:

Scott,
Maybe you have already thought of this. While reading your blog tonight concerning creating eQSL and LotW accounts for your VP2 calls, it occurred to me you might want to create QRZ.com pages for them as well. A lot of people will probably be trying to look you up on QRZ.com.

73,
Greg

Now that is an *excellent* idea, one that had not crossed my mind, yet obvious to me once he mentioned it. Well, part of this exercise is to have a better idea of all the steps necessary to pull off one of these DXpeditions. This item, ensuring we are "good on QRZ", will now be added to the list.

For my part, I entered the data for my listing VP2MRD just minutes ago. I uploaded the logo for the DXpedition for my picture, though it probably won't appear for a few days since the QRZ folks screen all the artwork.

Thanks, Greg!
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:03AM (-05:00)

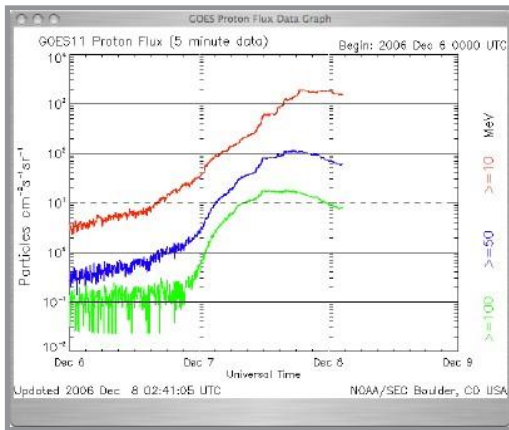
Solar events and legalese

Thursday, December 07, 2006

spaceweather.com reports that strong radiation storm is raging and that a rush of protons detected by satellites might be the leading edge of a CME. That won't be good for HF communication!

One of the nice things about this site is the fabulous images of the Sun shown right on the front page. I'm a sucker for pretty pictures. Of course, there are desktop tools that help you get a sense of all this, too. I own DX Toolbox which gives me all sorts of images, graphs, and data. It is basically a data aggregator and presentation tool, collecting images and data from NOAA and other places. Here's a graph that shows that rush of protons. A picture certainly is worth a thousand words.

Needless to say, I'm happy this is happening now and not while we're on the island. I've already had something like that happen to me once. My buddy Dave and I ran a special



event station in Maine this year. I got started on Wednesday, he joined me on Friday morning just as a major solar event hit. Ugly. As I've mentioned in previous posts, we'll be looking 27 days in advance of the trip to see what conditions are like. I made a few updates to the DXpedition web site today and have more planned. I also completed a draft of the *General Agreement* for all DXpedition team members. This is a single page document that outlines the legal obligations and responsibilities we all have (pay your fair

share, etc.). The group should review this in the next few days.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:58PM (-05:00)

3Y0X DXpedition video and con-call agenda

Friday, December 08, 2006

The 3Y0X DXpedition video came today. Hooray! I just finished watching it. Those guys are my heroes. Really. It took courage, amazing skills, and even more amazing planning and dedication to pull off such a feat. I would dearly love to someday gather enough expertise to even be considered for such an adventure.

In the mean time, planning and preparation for the Montserrat trip continues. I wrote a four page overview of the log processing strategy for the trip today including a description of how the data flows through the system to produce the daily online log updates. After the group has had a chance to look it over and comment, I'll likely post it to my home page so everybody can see the plan.

I also worked up the agenda for Sunday night's conference call. Of course, the team might make changes to it between now and Sunday, but here it is (with some details stricken that are private to the group). Again, I hope this sort of posting gives any would-be DXpedition planner some idea of the kinds of planning that go into a trip such as this (even if it isn't Antarctica!)

AGENDA for December 10, 2006 Conference Call
Version 1

CALL IN DETAILS

{snip}

1. Assessment of state

The status report from December 6th declared there are five areas of planning for the actual trip as shown below.

Does anybody believe we've missed a whole category of stuff?

- [1] Log file and QSLing strategy (computers, log programs).
- [2] Ham equipment planning (radios, antennas, power needs).
- [3] Non-ham equipment planning (scuba, video, etc.)
- [4] On-island logistics: vans, cars, bikes, etc.

[5] On-island excursion planning: helicopter, MVO, scuba, etc.

2. HOT ISSUES

[a] Web site

* ACTION: Chris: Bio + picture for web site.

* ACTION: Budd: picture for web site

[b] Logging

* ACTION: ALL: Plans for computer logging to Scott.

* ACTION: Scott: Finish web site QSO log processing tools.

(Discussed below.)

[c] Financial

* ACTION: ALL: Pay Chris \$XXX for share of flights.

[d] Legal

* ACTION: ALL: Send Scott signed Model Release form.

* ACTION: ALL: Send Scott signed General Agreement form.

[e] QSL management

* ACTION: Budd: Finalize paper QSL manager stuff and tell Scott.

* ACTION: Scott: Make QSL information page on web site.

* ACTION: ALL: Create eQSL account for your VP2M call sign.

* ACTION: ALL: Create LoTW account for your VP2M call sign.

* ACTION: ALL: Create QRZ entry for your new call sign.

3. Logging strategies and processing

Overview of log management. Please read the logprocessing.doc file uploaded Friday (Dec 8) prior to the meeting.

Also please identify:

* If you are bringing a computer.

* Which logging program you will use.

* If you are not bringing a computer, identify which computer brought by another member you'll be using.

* Please provide a sample ADIF exported file to Scott ASAP.

4. Open issues

* BUDD: Power at the villa. Voltage 120v. Cycles 50 or 60?

* BUDD: Van rental while on the island?

* BUDD: Inventory of equipment already at the villa.

==> Does anybody have anything to add here?

5. VOLUNTEERS SOUGHT:

[a] Equipment Coordinator (EC)

The Equipment Coordinator will be responsible for identifying all equipment, baggage allocations, checklists, serial numbers, etc. Let's put one person in charge of this and have the EC ensure we bring at least one of everything we need, and no more than one of things that are really heavy ({grin}).

[b] Activities coordinator (AC)
Scuba Diving, visit to the Monserrat Volcano Observatory,
Helicopter Ride (image in the video you could take), visit
to Plymouth to see what's left of the city. All of these
ideas sound like fun trips. Let's get an Activities Coordinator
responsible for finding out how these things are arranged,
booked, scheduled, etc.

Other leadership positions are probably going to open up/
become obvious as we think about it. Other suggestions?

Respectfully submitted,

-- Scott (NE1RD)

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That's a lot to cover in an hour. Plus, I'm sure the guys would rather talk about equipment selection and antennas! It is getting to the point where we're going to need to break up the remaining work into subgroups. I've identified two such tasks (EC & AC). I'm sure we'll come up with a few more in the next week.

As of today there were only 51 days until I leave for Orlando. Just a couple of days after that I should be QRV as VP2MRD. So little time and so much to do!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:45PM (-05:00)

Band pass filters

Sunday, December 10, 2006

Some time ago Greg wrote me and asked if I had considered obtaining band-pass filters for the Montserrat trip since this was my first multi-op DXpedition. Actually, this is my second, Dave and I operated simultaneously in Maine at the K1P special event last Spring. Even then, with just two of us, it would have been very helpful. Of course Field Day is another multi-operator event (not a DXpedition, though) and it would have been very helpful last summer to have had these things!

In Greg's message he said, "Maybe this is already on your radar..." Well, it should have been. I was thinking about researching this topic not long after the K1P trip, but I forgot. I just plain forgot. Which brings me to a recommendation I should make: even if you're not considering a DXpedition right now, start a notebook to capture all of the questions and ideas you might have. I didn't start this notebook until early in the Montserrat planning and I clearly lost interesting ideas and questions because of it, this being one of them. So, I'm thinking about it now! Greg sent two links that are very interesting. The first is an article on band-pass filters. The other link points to the Array Solutions site where you can purchase these critters.

Greg wondered in his mail message if it wouldn't be worth it to build them. I spent some *quality time* in the ARRL Handbook looking over the details and decided the actual assembly wouldn't be that hard, if I only had all the parts. I don't. Nor do I have a lot of time to put something together. As of this writing, I've got 49 days until I leave for Orlando, the first stop on the trip.

As a side note, all you clubs out there, here's a chance for you: buying all the toroids in bulk, getting the right lengths of magnet wire, bulk buying the capacitors, boxes, and

hardware, might just make a great club kit! But I digress...

At this point I'm looking into buying a complete set of these filters. They are about \$100 each. For the 6 contesting bands, there is a deal where, as a bundle, you can get the 6 filters (10/15/20/40/80/160) for about \$540. Then there are the WARC bands: 12/17/30. They, again, are \$100 each. I'm looking at nearly \$1000 worth of filters! That's a lot of money (duh).

There is a Yankee Clipper Contest Club meeting this afternoon and some of the brightest hams in the hobby will be there. I'm planning on throwing out a *cry for help* to see if I can get some free advice. Of course, I'll report back here what I find out.

Finally, there is a conference call tonight with the group. I put out a sanitized agenda earlier. I'll let you know how that goes.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:03AM (-05:00)

ICE filters

Sunday, December 10, 2006

I went to the Yankee Clipper Contest Club meeting this afternoon. There are some really amazing people in this club! At the break, I stood and shamelessly solicited help with my band-pass filter problem. Did anybody have some knowledge that they'd like to share? Several rose quickly to my aid.

The offerings from Array Solutions, the W3NQN filters, were thought to be fine filters. But, the fact that I'm only running low power and perhaps not in the highest level of competitive station setups (no 12 station multi-multis), that those filters might be overkill. Instead, I received several recommendations for the Industrial Communication Engineers, Ltd. (ICE) filter designs. These filters are thought to be very good, have traveled with several YCCC members on various DXpeditions without incident, and happen to be about 1/3 the cost of the W3NQN filters.

The ICE folks also make a box with 6 filters inside for quick band switching. The Combination Band-pass Filter weighs in at 5 pounds, but the weight seems worth it to me. I received a pointer to this product from fellow Montserrat team member Paul, too. Paul owns this box and it has served him well. If you want one more recommendation, here's one: upon careful review of the 3Y0X DXpedition video, you can see these boxes prominently perched on each of the transceivers. Good enough for them, good enough for me!

I am going to place my order for this six filter box in the morning, which will cover the contest bands 160/80/40/20/15/10, and will also order three other filters for the WARC bands 30/17/12. The whole thing should be about \$400.

Two other ideas were tossed about during the YCCC meeting. The first was to use stubs, especially on 15m and 40m, to reject the other band. Stubs could be "tee-ed" into the line and it might be a cheap (and lightweight) way to effectively reject those "other band" signals.

Idea two was to see how much the automatic antenna tuner serves as a band-pass filter. I hadn't really thought of it this way, but it is an interesting idea. I need to think about it more.

Tonight's conference call with the group was extremely productive. We covered my agenda in about 45 minutes, then picked up new business. Band-pass filters (the above discussion) was one topic. Two other topics were scuba diving plans, and other island activity plans. I think these seven days are going to pass quite quickly. Too many great ideas, too little time!

It is back to work in the morning for me. This week is going to be quite busy. Several team members indicated they would be largely unavailable between now and the end of

the year. That was to be expected (which was why we were pushing to get so much done this week!). The large items are mostly handled: travel plans, lodging plans, and licenses. The group agreed that the *Model Release Form* and *General Agreement* were acceptable, so, once signed, the legal document tasks will also be completed. Everybody is working on their LoTW, eQSL, and QRZ entries for electronic logging. Perhaps it is time to take a breath and relax! Just 49 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:33PM (-05:00)

Filters ordered... maybe

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

Only a brief entry tonight (it is after midnight here) as we just returned from the season opener for the Boston Holiday Pops concerts. A little punch, a little carrot cake, and soon I'll be ankle deep in Boston slush. I know its coming! {grin}

I called Craig at Radioware in Rindge, New Hampshire this morning to order the ICE filters mentioned yesterday. Craig was one of the fellows I spoke with at Sunday's Yankee Clipper Contest Club meeting. As it turns out, the very person I needed to order the filters from was sitting right next to me at the meeting! (I saved this last tidbit for today's blog.) Craig took me aside after I had talked with several other club members and told me what my options were. I agreed to call him this morning.

It isn't clear if the ICE 419B mode is available, or if it could be delivered in time for the trip. (Gee, I really should have thought of this sooner!) Craig will contact ICE for me and determine what options I might have. He also asked, in the event the 6 band 419B model isn't available, if I wanted individual filters. Do I? I'm not sure. I told Craig if the 6 band unit isn't an option, I'll need to reassess.

Finally, I got a quick note late this evening from our contact on Montserrat. He has the physical paper license for the last couple of licenses for the newest team members. We have the electronic version, so this is a little anticlimactic, but it is still very, very good news.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:24AM (-05:00)

Loop repaired

Tuesday, December 12, 2006



I guess you can file tonight's entry under, "I really didn't need any more problems, but..." The MFJ loop I've been using died again. Specifically, the small 1 RPM motor in the unit stopped working. This is the second replacement motor I've installed. The first, luckily, died while the unit was under warranty. And, true to MFJ's word, they sent me a free replacement quickly with no questions asked. This one was, now that the unit is out of warranty, \$40. {sigh}

These small magnetic loops are very interesting antennas. I have compared them to a G5RV at 50 feet and they are surprisingly effective. Plus, with my space-limited situation, I have few alternatives. So, with it now fixed, perhaps I'll get it reinstalled this weekend before the Winter weather befalls us. Here's

Dave has one of the small high efficiency loop tuners like this one (or one similar) on the MFJ site. He used it on Deer Isle last year but conditions were so terrible that it wasn't possible to get a good feeling for how it performed. We're returning to Deer Isle again this year for the Patriots Day celebration. I'd like to really run one of these things through its paces. The weight and size are suitable for a 100 Pound DXpedition. If you could obtain a 10 or 20 foot piece of copper tubing upon your arrival, it might be a fine antenna to have in some remote place!

I guess I'm advocating more "thinking outside the box" here. Sure, the big DXpeditions pack yagis and tower sections and mast. That's not what we do (we 100 Pound DXpeditioners, that is). Instead, we look for alternatives that provide good options with small size and little weight. Don't be afraid to think of, or try, something a little unorthodox. You never know where the next really interesting idea may come from!
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:21PM (-05:00)

Thursday, December 14, 2006

I achieved something of a milestone and thought I would share it. My Logbook of the World account just registered its 1000th QSL. Actually, my total stands at 1003. I have uploaded over 4800 QSO entries into the system including some from Georges Island, the special event station in Maine, St. John USVI, and Hawaii. Of course, there are serious contest operators that do that much in a weekend, but with my modest operating conditions here in the condo, this represents a considerable investment in time.

I got a call from Paul this evening. He and I were having the same concerns about time pressures while on the island. It is easy to start racking up a long list of things you want to do on your vacation (or, in our case, DXpedition), but in our haste and bout of enthusiasm these last few days I'm afraid I've signed up for far too much. Here are the things we've discussed:

- Scuba diving
- Visit to a nearby island with cliffs and a great beach
- Visit to the Montserrat Volcano Observatory (MVO)
- Visit to Plymouth (guided tour)
- Hiking trip
- Helicopter tour of the island
- Cookout with Montserrat Amateur Radio Society members

I'm beginning to realize that I can't do all that and put the QSOs in the log. I'm going to have to start making some choices. Paul and I agreed that the scuba diving trip, while almost certainly spectacular, eats a whole day and then leaves you exhausted. So, no scuba diving. I had tentatively committed to one trip (and was being encouraged to consider multiple trips), but I now think I've overcommitted. In fact, it is probably time to make a prioritized list of things I want from this trip. Here they are (right off the top of my head--don't be surprised if a revised list appears tomorrow!)

1. **Make QSOs** - This is a DXpedition. I have worked very hard to make good plans and execute them as well as any big DXpedition might do. Now, it is time to execute and get on the air. I want to put at least a thousand QSOs in the log on this trip. That might be very difficult, or it might be easy. I have no idea. But, part of the deal on this trip is to learn. You learn by doing (not by screwing off and going on a fishing trip!).
2. **Make a DXpedition Video DVD** - I want to get enough raw footage of interesting stuff while on the island (and before and after, too) so I can pull together a DXpedition video that is fun to watch and that conveys the excitement we had on this trip. I have the entire collection of DXpedition videos from DXVIDEOS.COM and would be honored if the results of my efforts were compared favorably with these

excellent works. To achieve that goal, I know I need raw footage. Lots and lots of raw footage. I have purchased 15 one hour tapes that I fully expect to fill on this trip. Visits to the Montserrat Volcano Observatory, helicopter tours of the island, and hiking, can help me get interesting island footage. Other side trips (like scuba diving) cannot. I should stick with what helps me make my goals.

3. **Execute on the Public Relations tasks** - I have spent a great deal of time publicizing the trip, building tools to provide the world with an online log searching capability, and a web site that can be updated while we are on the island with photographs and stories. Again, I'm trying to make this trip just as *classy* as some of the large DXpeditions. With the simplistic notion, "you only get better by practicing", I'm trying to learn how a smoothly run DXpedition is organized and executed. I'm sure I'll stumble along the way a few times, but I hope to learn from my mistakes and get better as I go. Of course, I'll continue to share what I learn here.

4.

Those are my three goals. Modest in many ways, but important--at least to me. So, I'll send out a message to the fellas telling them that I'm going to bow-out of scuba diving. It isn't that it wouldn't have been really fun; I just have other things I want to do more.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:15AM (-05:00)

QSL manager: me

Thursday, December 14, 2006



This week has passed very quickly. It is hard to believe it will be Friday in a few hours! As mentioned earlier in the week, I ordered the ICE filters from Radioware including the six band model 419B filter. Craig at Radioware called yesterday to tell me that the order is confirmed and I should expect that filter box, and the three WARC band filters, sometime in mid-January. So, that worry is behind me. {whew}

Other aspects of the trip planning are also coming together, though not as I had

expected. We thought we had somebody signed-up to be our QSL manager for the trip. Alas, our candidate decided that he would not volunteer after all. It is very late to begin the search for a new QSL manager candidate so I have stepped up to be the QSL manager. This is not bad news. I volunteered for this role early in the planning cycle but was talked out of it. Well, I'm back in it now! That's OK. I enjoy the work and it means I will get the first glimpse at any cards folks send to us. It should be fun.

I had promised the group that I would get the QSLing information and rules written before our next conference call. They are now up on the DXpedition web site. Just click on the *QSL information* box to see it. This page outlines what we expect to do and how we will handle QSLing during and after the DXpedition. There should be no surprises here: send us a card, make sure the data you send us is correct, we'll send you a card with correct data, make sure you don't stick us with the postage. Simple! {grin} Well, maybe you should give it a read to see if I'm more helpful than that.

Late last night, after I had posted my blog entry, I dropped a note to the group telling them that I had second thoughts about all the non-radio activities that I had planned. The

result of my note telling the guys I was backing out of the scuba diving trip was a flurry of messages about making sure we keep the "fun" balanced with the expectations we've set. Bob put it best. Here's an excerpt from his lengthy but very thoughtful message:

So, what's that mean to the rest of you? I see two thrusts: One, the make as many contacts on as many bands effort at the Villa. To me, that could mean putting in as many hours as possible *without* breaking the fun factor. Being there when the major bands are open, but not going nuts trying to work 5 bands with 5 ops. from the same location... We need to make this fun -- but at the same time -- we will need *some* discipline :-)

The second thrust, is of course operating portable/bike mobile. This, in my mind, is what really demonstrates the "power of the buddipole". I think the videos, photos, write-ups of successful contacts with quickly setup stations is the essence of the uniqueness of our trip -- along with the 100lb carry limit.

I goofed up something on this trip and didn't realize it fully until today. One of the things I push in my *100 Pound DXpedition* presentation that I give to radio clubs is every DXpedition should have specific goals. I made very specific goals for my other trips but had not worked with the guys to work out those goals and common vision for this trip. Luckily, the general goals that everybody understood have been good enough, at least for now, but that was largely because we drew team members from a very specific group: Buddipole users. My mistake, not being pointed about making sure we all agree what we're trying to accomplish here, didn't matter much because all these fine fellows quickly fell into line with the general philosophy. (And, I suspect Budd selected them because they were in-tune with the general idea of the trip.) Still, I should be more deliberate about this next time. It is better to be explicit about the goals you have, and the expectations you have, than to leave such things to chance.

Finally, the **January 2007** QST arrived in today's mail. Page 86, in the "How's DX?" section, has our press release announcing the DXpedition! We were given nearly a whole third of a page including the list of operators (not Bob and Tom, though, as they were added later) and a pointer to our DXpedition web site. Fantastic!

Also, on the same page, was an announcement with the heading **Rare IOTA - NA-219**. A group of Germans will be activating Elbow Cay, part of Cay Sal Bank, early next year. I thought that might be my next stop. {sigh} Well, let's get this one done and I'll reconsider my options. Maybe it will be time to get out the old world map again!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:25PM (-05:00)

Sandy pokes a little fun

Friday, December 15, 2006

As you might guess, I've been spending a lot of time both planning for the Montserrat trip, and working on this blog. She dropped me this comic, just to poke a little fun. I guess I deserve it...

:-)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:17AM (-05:00)

Looking for more volunteers in the group

Friday, December 15, 2006

The BUMS hold a conference call each Sunday evening at 9 PM Eastern Standard Time. The freeconference.com service works very well for this. If you need to organize a conference call, give this a try.

The next couple of Sunday evenings after this weekend fall on holidays: Christmas Eve, and New Year's Eve. So, this will be our last conference call this year. Any work done after Sunday night will be through either email or the group-private web site for the rest of the year. I knew that the last half of December is basically lost when we began planning for this trip in the Summer months. By the time January 1st rolls around, we'll have less than 4 weeks until our departure. That sure isn't much time!

I asked for volunteers for two positions last weekend: Activities Coordinator, and Equipment Coordinator. This week, I'm seeking two more volunteers for the following positions:

- **Propagation and Band Management (PROP)** - There is lots of planning and paperwork that can be done prior to departure to help organize our on-air work. Having a list of sun rise and sun set time for our location and other parts of the world, for example, is very helpful. Knowing the band plans for Montserrat and how they line up with band plans for Japan, Europe, and other places is also helpful. I started working on this, and wanted to include it in my DXpedition manual (which I cannot complete because of time pressures). I'm hoping one volunteer (with helpers, of course) can pull some of this information together.
- **CFO** - We should have one person be "point" on the money matters. This really means creating and maintaining the master spreadsheet of costs, moneys collected from team members, and helping assess who-owes-who-what. This is somebody who wants to hold on to the receipts, enter stuff into a spreadsheet, and help us divide up the bill at the end.

There will likely be other positions opened after the new year: food chairman, motor pool chief, etc. I'll figure that out later. Right now, these two new positions seem important, so we'll fill them. (We also need to fill the Equipment Coordinator... I have taken it temporarily, but my plate is already full with other stuff.)

Truth be told, much of this stuff should have been assigned at least a month ago. I'll know better next time.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:33PM (-05:00)

Watching sky and Earth

Sunday, December 17, 2006

With all the holiday parties, it has been hard to get any real work done. (Who knew I was so popular? {grin}) I was able to attend the Minuteman Repeater Association VE session this morning (more on that below) and get my MFJ loop antenna reinstalled. Testing it was somewhat problematic, though, as the HF bands were heavily affected by the erratic solar activity. Solar flares and coronal holes emitting high energy solar wind particles promise to keep conditions dicey for a while. Of course, I'm looking ahead and wondering if stuff like this will be active during our stay on Montserrat. We'll be paying close attention to the solar conditions and the 27 day solar rotation.

We're also watching conditions at the volcano by monitoring the Montserrat Volcano Observatory. While the Sun has been going a little nuts lately, it looks like the volcano is

actually calming down a bit. That's good news. Again, we'll monitor this right up until we leave for the island (and then really watch it once we get there!).

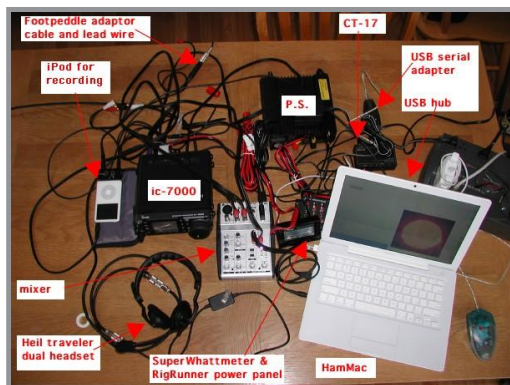
I note something here and would like to give a nod of appreciation. Jeff Davis (KE9V) announced this week that he is suspending his blogging activities. His very popular web site www.ke9v.net and his fantastic podcast series *Long Delayed Echoes* still lives on. In fact, Jeff has removed all of the blogs and replaced it with a simple and elegant directory of his LDE podcasts (now up to number 36). If you have not given these a listen, please do so. I'll miss Jeff's blog. He kept it up for over two years, though, and that's a lot. Jeff wants to move on, and we need to respect that. Just so you know, Jeff, if ever you pick up the blogging habit again, I'll be there to read it! In the mean time, accept my thanks for the work you did. Well done.

One last point, a young man, Matt Williams (W1MAT) passed his Amateur Extra (element 4) test today. I was lucky enough to be working the VE session to see this happen. Matt is 12 years old and is an avid contester and DXer. Eric (KV1J), Matt's proud dad, sat nearby nervously pretending to read the latest QST while Matt worked away on that very long test. No worries! Matt sailed through that test with flying colors. Matt, I hope to work you from Montserrat! Congratulations!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:58AM (-05:00)

Assembling the station

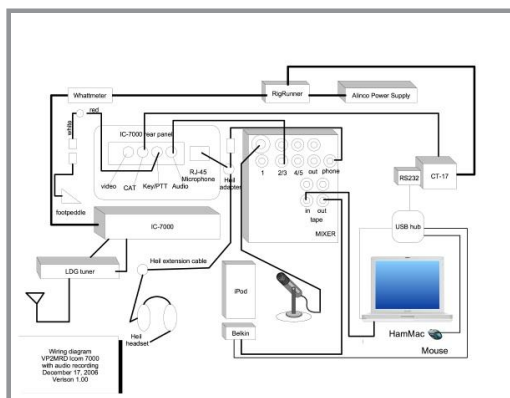
Sunday, December 17, 2006



I assembled the radio, mixer, computer, tuner, power supply, and accessories today just as I hope to have them on Montserrat. You can see the setup below.

This is a tangle of wires, but it need not be. Today, I just wanted to make sure I had every cable I needed, and that everything *talked* nicely to everything else. I was able to record several hours of audio from the IC-7000, confirm that the computer control worked properly, and do some other tests. HF conditions were pretty poor today so I didn't try to make any contacts or record my side of a QSO. Also, I've ordered a desk microphone that should arrive tomorrow to give me another option for picking up audio from my side of the conversation.

This exercise was quite helpful. Other than seeing I'll need to do a better job of organizing the wires, I discovered a few missing cables and adapters I needed to make this work. A quick trip to Radio Shack fixed that. What I need, to ensure I can reproduce this system, is a wiring diagram.



Below is a low resolution version of that diagram.

None of this speaks to the problem of antenna planning, nor have I received (and integrated into this mess) the band pass filters I just ordered. Just what this setup needs: more wires. {grin} Still, it was something of a relief to get everything I did have assembled and working. I'm really quite excited about the on-air recording portion of this. It should

make for some interesting audio clips for the DVD and for future 100 Pound DXpedition presentations.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:36PM (-05:00)

Monday, December 18, 2006

Last night's conference call between team members was brief, mostly reviewing open items we'd like to have completed soon. They include:

- Getting those LoTW accounts established
- Creating eQSL accounts
- Creating QRZ entries for our new call signs
- Executing the model release forms and general agreements, and
- Getting the last of the pictures up on the biography page

There were plenty of other of other things we could have covered, but only four of seven members were able to make the call, and most of us are either traveling or tied up with business or family commitments for the next couple of weeks. That was to be expected, and planned for during my early conversations with Budd Drummond this Summer. The last couple of weeks of the year are always tough.

Our next conference call is scheduled for 7 January 2007. At that point, there will be only 3 weeks until our departure. That's not much time! Hopefully, all the member will have completed their equipment spreadsheets by then so we may begin the process of reviewing the equipment, weeding out duplication, and identifying missing components. We did make one decision last night: I will be bringing my two bags plus the big golf case. Southwest allows three bags for domestic travel so getting it to Orlando should be no problem. Once there, another team member, who is only bringing one personal bag, will count the golf bag as his own (so, on average, we both have 2 bags). The golf bag will be used to ship all the long items such as 16 foot masts, tripods, fishing poles, and other awkwardly-sized pieces. We still need to do the spreadsheets and do this minute planning--but this strategic bit of planning (having at least one case for long items) should help in general.

The microphone mentioned yesterday has arrived. I'll try to test it in the next couple of days. That was one of the last pieces for the audio capture planning.

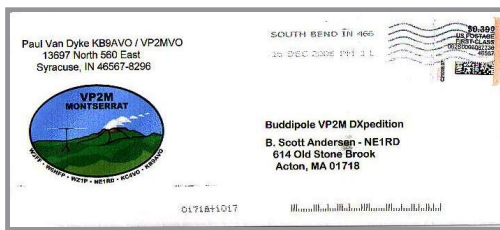
Finally, I made a trip up to Ham Radio Outlet today looking for some of the parts I had listed from yesterday's exercise. I found some, but not all. I was relieved to find one part in particular, though: a spare power cable for the IC-7000. This radio has a four pin molex connector instead of the usual 6 pin harness. I had only one of these (the one that came with the radio) and thought that was probably tempting fate too much. I'll cut this new one relatively short, put power poles on it, and make it be the primary cable. The original cable will now become the spare. I can't bring duplicates or backups of everything, but the light stuff, especially something that would be really difficult to replace or improvise on-island, will get a look.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:26PM (-05:00)

Cards and Cars

Tuesday, December 19, 2006

I'm trying something a little different tonight. I'm editing my blog entry within TextMate, yet another text editor. To be honest, I'm somewhat of a Neanderthal when it comes to blogging tools and HTML creation. My first editor for these things was vi and no matter which editor I've been using I insert all my own HTML tags. No WYSIWYG for me!



Recently I'd been using BBEdit or a simple word processor like AppleWorks, anything that allowed me to enter text and do a quick spellcheck. This color-coded, language-specific, syntax-directed, context-sensitive, high-tech editor stuff seems a little over-the-top for just blogging, but I'll give it a

spin for a few days and see how it works out.

I got an envelope today from Paul (KB9AVO) with his executed Model Release Form and General Agreement. It took me by surprise when I pulled it out of the mail box, though. Check it out:

Paul must have printed up some of these early in the planning stages as it has the old logo. Still it looks pretty good!

Speaking of printing, I exchanged some email messages with Budd (W3FF) today regarding possible QSL card printers. My current off-the cuff estimate is a print run of 5000 cards. Maybe we need fewer (and wouldn't it be nice if we needed more!) Budd suggested LZ1JZ QSL-print. I have used the QSLworks for my cards and have been very pleased. I would like to have a fold-out style card which would give us four panels with the standard 5.5 by 3.5 inches. I figure one panel will have a group picture, one panel would have the QSL information (band, time, etc.), one panel would have some shots of the villa and island, and the last panel would have some product information for Buddipole antennas.

I called QSLworks and talked with Tami, the graphics designer, about these ideas. She's now working up a quote for 5000 cards with full color on both sides. I have no idea if that's how the card will ultimately look, or if indeed we need 5000 cards, but you've got to start somewhere.

Just for kicks, I stopped by the local print shop that has done some work for me on other projects and gave them the same parameters. I suspect the local place will come in just a bit higher than QSLworks but not unreasonably so.

The other interesting tidbit that Budd came up with regards drivers licenses on Montserrat. Specifically, you need a local drivers license to drive on Montserrat; Montserrat does not recognize international drivers licenses! Well, that's a twist! I was going to suggest we appoint a *head of the motor pool* in the next round of assignments. This would be a person principally responsible for securing ground transportation for the group, renting the van, be the designated driver, and so on. Now that we learn that local drivers licenses are required, there is even more reason to consider this idea. We don't need all seven of us to get a Montserrat drivers license!

Finally, Budd was also able to confirm with the hosts at Gingerbread Hill that they have wireless internet available, each villa has lots of 110 volt outlets (and one 220 volt outlet, too), and lots of power strips. Although we've gone to great lengths to ensure that everything we bring is dual voltage (110/220, 50/60 Hz), knowing that the power available will be *just like home* is still a relief.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:54PM (-05:00)

Group signing up for LoTW

Wednesday, December 20, 2006

The guys are getting those Logbook of The World (LoTW) accounts established this week. At risk of being accused of being a "league basher", my goodness this system is not the friendliest system in the world to use! I've got a degree in Computer Science and

understand concepts like digital signatures and public key cryptography systems, but certainly the average ham can't be expected to have the same sorts of intuition about such things. It isn't that the system doesn't work--it does; the problem is that the system is a little opaque to many. Your average ham probably doesn't quite know what going on half the time, not because they're stupid, but because the actual model, the mechanics of what this system is doing, are not obvious from the user interface.

Ward Silver (NOAX) wrote a very nice article for the September 2005 issue of QST magazine attempting to explain this model. I don't think anyone can explain it better than Ward Silver has done in this piece. That's both good news and bad news, I guess. Anyway, if you are interested in LoTW, and you should be, there is no better place to get started than with this article. Once you have an account established for your first call sign, adding another call sign is quite easy. I've added a Hints and Kinks entry to my home page for adding a QTH to the LoTW. I've added NE1RD/1 (Georges Island), KP2/NE1RD (USVI), K1P (special event station), and now VP2MRD (Montserrat) just in the last year. All of the team members are establishing LoTW accounts for their home call (if they didn't have them already) and will then create additional certificates for their VP2M calls in a separate step.

In addition to the LoTW credentials, we're also getting our eQSL accounts, and QRZ entries finalized, too. My goal would be to have all of this stuff completed by year's end. In other news, I got a quote back from QSLworks today. I asked Tami (the graphics artist on staff) to quote me for a card that was 3.5 x 11 (to be folded in half so it makes a booklet shaped regular card 3.5 x 5.5 inches). I asked for two quotes, one full color, full bleed, both sides, and one with full color one side and black-and-white on the other. Here are the quotes. They come out to be about:

Two-sided-color: \$0.18 each (for 5000)
Color/B&W: \$0.16 each (again for 5000)

I have no idea if we need that many cards. (In fact, we probably won't.) But, it is interesting to see that even a very fancy card (four sides instead of just two, full color all sides) wasn't that much more expensive than their standard offering. I've not shopped around; perhaps I could do better. I simply wanted to get a general sense of what such cards would cost.

Finally, there has been some discussion in the group about whether we should use items left behind by another ham for this trip. The subject came up again today in a couple of mail messages. It seems to be a matter of honor, or principle perhaps, to really do a *100 Pound DXpedition* and not, well, *cheat*. {grin} The big stickler appears to be a large tribander that was left from a ham that had done CQWW from that location. Would using it be cheating?

I have a couple of slides in my talk that show you *can* bring a yagi as part of your 100 pounds, if you are willing to trade it off for something else. Specifically, I had a Force-12 C3SS tribander that weighted about 30 pounds. It could go, if I left lots of other stuff behind. There were some situations where this made lots of sense. A yagi isn't inconsistent with my vision of a 100 Pound DXpedition--it is just one flavor. Put another way, I don't care what makes up your 100 pounds of equipment. It could be a K1, mini-straight key, and SteppIR. If it was 100 pounds or less packed, that works for me.

Also, using local materials isn't cheating. If you can locate batteries, mast material, or even antennas (or antenna-making materials) locally, I believe you can use them with a clean conscience. Certainly it is our intent to show that just the equipment carried with us provided ample opportunities for an effective DXpedition. We will do that. I think we should also make the best use of *anything* we find locally, too. So, unless there is a group revolt, I'll be on that tribander (if it is still there)!

Tomorrow I'll talk about some excursion planning that's been done over the last couple of weeks. While I want to put plenty of QSOs in the log, I also want to get to know Montserrat (and capture some great images on videotape as well).
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:52PM (-05:00)

Island tours

Thursday, December 21, 2006

While it is certainly my intention to put a lot of QSOs in the log while on Montserrat, there are other things that can be done on the island as well. We're now carefully looking through our options. I'd like to take a helicopter tour of the Soufriere Hills volcano and get some video of the trip (I believe it would be a great addition to the DXpedition video I am planning), though there has been some chatter on the list that this may be a bit more expensive than I had planned. I need to get that nailed down soon.

There is a dive shop called the The Green Monkey that has some interesting tours we've discussed. (Of course they offer scuba diving trips, too.) There is an island tour by boat which would give me a chance to see the Plymouth, the capital now in ruins under the ash, the old airport, and, of course, the volcano. It blows half a day, but it is one of the only ways to see the parts of the island now in the exclusion zone.

There is a small area call *Rendezvous Bay* that has interesting possibilities. We're considering a trip to that area, located in the Northwest part of the island, for a picnic, maybe a little snorkeling, and a whole lot of right-on-the-salt-water operations.

Returning to dry land, we're also hoping to do a tour at the Montserrat Volcano Observatory where we can learn a great deal of history about the volcano, maybe talk with some of the scientists there, and hopefully do some portable operation from that location as well. Since the volcano, and its observatory, are one of the signature spots on the island, and of the Caribbean itself, this seems like a natural place to soak up the sights and strut our stuff!

There are many more things that could be done on the island, but my emphasis will be on executing on my plans for a successful DXpedition, that is, a successful 100 Pound DXpedition, and capturing enough audio, video, and still photographs so I can convey to others just how much fun we had. If I can manage that, it will be a successful trip indeed.
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:43PM (-05:00)

5A7A video

Friday, December 22, 2006

One of the great things about the explosion of YouTube in the last year is that there is now a central place where you can look for videos corresponding to a special interest you might have. As for me, I'm always on the look-out for cool DXpedition videos. They are fun to watch, of course, but I'm also making a mental list of *do that, don't do that* when I critique them. Here's a very nice video from the 5A7A Libya DXpedition. Thanks to KE9V for the pointer!

There are a number of things you can pick up even from this short clip. There was a discussion of antenna placement early in the video. I'm sure they did some work on that before they left, but the ultimate decisions were made once they were on-site and had complete knowledge of the situation. Notice the orange and white hazard tape at the 2:08 point. I'm looking for stuff like that, too, to mark guy lines and radials as tripping hazards. Video taping the set-up to the group snapshot (probably for the QSL card) is also a good

idea. I'll be sure to do that.

There are plenty of these videos out there and I'm guessing there is at least one interesting idea in each one. Watch them. Enjoy them. Learn from them.

Finally, I got a fortune cookie yesterday that was surprisingly on-point. Mostly, these things contain lame, bland, or English-grammar-challenged snippets that are less like predictions ("You will meet a kind stranger") and more like observations ("You are a kind and generous person"). Still, tradition holds that you read the fortune aloud to the group at the end of the meal, and we did just that at lunch yesterday. Mine read, "I am always doing that which I cannot do in order that I may learn how to do it." If I had to sum up my life on a fortune cookie, I couldn't do better than that!

It takes a little courage, a thick skin, and a willingness to look foolish (often, truth be told) to live this way, but I can think of nothing better, nothing more joyful. I am doing these trips, these *100 Pound DXpeditions* not because I am already well-versed in all that might go into them, but precisely because I am not. I learn by thinking about things and then acting on those thoughts. MIT's motto is *Mens et manus* - "Mind and hand". While I wasn't smart enough, or wealthy enough, to go to a prestigious institution like MIT, I've always lived by that tenant. I hope these brief notes left here will encourage you to try to new things, also. I've found that a willingness to apply your mind, eagerness to use your hands, and perhaps a little heart goes a long way.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:22PM (-05:00)

DXpedition announcements

Saturday, December 23, 2006

Things are pretty quiet around the condo this weekend. I've only been puttering around picking up things and either repairing them, putting them away in their proper place, or both.

I've been checking the web site statistics and noticed people have been visiting from a large variety of places. A quick Google search and I ended up with a long list of people that have picked up our announcements. What is below is by no means complete, but it is a representative collection of places now listing our little adventure.

Ohio/Penn DX Bulletin

Announced DX Operations

Announced DX Operations RSS

UK Six Metre Group

QRP Amateur Radio Club International

radioamatorismului romanesc

JA0XZD XOOPS Site

DX Bulletin of XE1BEF

Radio Society of Great Britain IOTA

VA3RJ Islands, Castles & Portable Operations

Active Hams (Japanese)

INFO-DX par F5NQL (French)

DX Info Clubul Radioamatorilor "ISTRITA" BUZAU

Noticias de el mundo del DX por EA5KY

UBA (Belgium) DX News

One particular announcement, at dxfun.com, was particularly nice as they had brought in our logo, the Buddipole Antennas logo, and my *100 Pound DXpedition* logo. They also created an interesting stylized "VP2M" graphic to accompany the announcement. It looks quite nice!

I would like to thank everybody who has picked up our announcement and encourage

anybody who would like to help publicize our DXpedition contact me directly. (My call sign at ARRL dot net)

Best wishes for the season. I wish everybody good health, safe travel, and happiness. 73!

-- Scott (NE1RD)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 07:26PM (-05:00)

QSLpro announcement

Saturday, December 30, 2006



It has been a week since my last post. Those of you who have followed along with me during this trip planning know how uncharacteristic such a lapse is. I don't anticipate another such lag in posting until after the Montserrat trip has concluded.

While I have not been blogging, I have been working feverishly on software that should help with this coming DXpedition and those that will follow. Let me introduce *QSLpro*.

Cnf 2x QSOs with 6Y1V				
Date	UTC	Band	Mode	RST Operator
29-jan-2005	14:19	20	USB	59 VP2MRD
30-jan-2005	10:20	40	PSK31	59 VP2MFF
02-feb-2005	17:21	15	RTTY	59 VP2MHF
02-feb-2005	12:22	10	SSTY	59 VP2MVG
03-feb-2005	19:23	17	USB	59 VP2MVO

Cnf 2x QSOs with 6Y1V				
Date	UTC	Band	Mode	RST Operator
03-feb-2005	05:24	12	CW	59 VP2MST
03-feb-2005	03:25	80	USB	59 VP2MTC
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This software reads a log file from a special event station or DXpedition and creates QSLcard labels. There are a number of features that I've put into this program that I'm excited about, but let me talk about just one today: the ability to take a log from multiple operators and create the minimum number of QSL card labels (which consequently use the minimum number of cards). Imagine a station 6Y1V worked seven stations QSOs with seven

DXpedition members in 2005. *QSLpro* would create just two labels as pictured below: When you are done, just use the *Save* feature to update your log and each QSO for which a QSL label had been printed will be marked with a *Y* for *QSL sent*. Easy!

The program works directly with MacLoggerDX log files. There is no need to export to ADIF or perform other conversions. I used it today to print a dozen labels for my home call (NE1RD) that I'll send off on Monday to help boost my DXCC total. It was so easy! Just click, click, click, and print. It really does make QSLing fun!

I have written a full manual for the software and will made program and manual available in the next few weeks. (I want to do additional testing before releasing it to the public.) We've not made final plans regarding QSLing for the Montserrat trip. This new program should help make for some interesting discussions! I know I'll be using it for the K1P special event station. I'll let you know what the Montserrat team decides.

Finally, I had ordered two pieces of luggage for the trip. The carry-on sized Pelican case (1510) was, in the end, too small for this trip. It is a lovely case for the ic7000 system, but I need something a bit larger for Monserrat. So, I had ordered a second Pelican 1610 case (the first case contains my 50 pound Yaesu 897D system) to carry the bulk of my equipment. That case arrived this week. I also ordered a nice bag from REI which also arrived this week. I should be able to start backing (and weighing) this weekend. I would like to have everything in the bag, inventoried, weighed, and tested by January 15th. Since it is snowing here today, I certainly won't be needing any shorts or T-shirts here in Massachusetts anytime soon!

I look for my blogging to return to its normal daily pace now that this software is (nearly) finished. With less than a month to go before we depart, these next few weeks should be very interesting!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:05PM (-05:00)

QSL route databases and a lazy day

Sunday, December 31, 2006

I picked up a small case of the sniffles somehow so I'm spending a lazy day around the house, mostly picking up loose ends. There are lots of things I should be doing, I guess, but right now I'm planted firmly in front of the TV watching the game.

I did take a few moments to add the QSL route information for all seven call signs to a couple of databases so it now appears in:

- K4UTE DX QSL Manager
- IK3QAR Qsl Manager lookup
- WWW.QSLINFO.DE
- The Golist

I also added my call to the HamCall web site as you can see here.

New Years Eve means Straight Key Night. I was going to give it a big effort this year, but I think it would be wiser to concentrate on getting over this chest cold than running round in the freezing rain and sleet to hook up my antenna. I'll make a few contacts with my MFJ loop, watch the New Year roll in, then get some sleep.

Happy New Year to all. Best wishes from everybody here in the NE1RD (the "1" is silent) household. See you next year!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:56PM (-05:00)

We leave this month!

Monday, January 01, 2007

Happy New Year. Today is the first of January. There are 27 days until I depart for Orlando and Montserrat. As mentioned before, the solar rotation is about 27 days long so what faces us today will likely face us again at departure. As spaceweather.com said yesterday, "IT'S BACK: Sunspot 930, which unleashed four X-flares and sparked intense auroras in mid-December, is back. It is emerging over the sun's eastern limb following a two-week transit around the far side of the sun. Since we last saw it, the spot has probably decayed and now poses little threat for strong solar flares. Stay tuned for confirmation." Well, not having flares would be a great start.

The Montserrat trip is, my nearly any measure, a very modest endeavor. I learned just a couple days ago of another large DXpedition being planned by the 5 Star DXers Association for St. Brandon. Here's the announcement. Here's what they promise: "As with previous FSDXA expeditions, this will be a major effort, with a target of more than 100,000 QSOs. There will be up to twelve stations on the air, many using amplifiers and monoband beams, 24 hours a day, for almost three weeks, including three weekends, around the autumn equinox when DX propagation on all bands is typically at its best." Wow. Now you can see why I describe my *100 Pound DXpeditions* as modest. Perhaps miniscule would be more appropriate! There are some very famous operators slated to participate including at least one who is also a member of the Yankee Clipper Contest Club. I've possibly got a chance to get a little "behind the scenes" information. Of course I'm going to try to corner approach this fellow after my return from Montserrat.

Finally, Sandy and I realized that this will be the first year in 20 that we will live without cats under our feet. In 1987, a very tiny and very frightened flame point siamese who was small enough to fit in my hand when we first met joined us. It was difficult to understand how such a magnificent creature could be in a shelter. I picked him up, he clawed his way up my shirt toward my shoulder, and he didn't come off again until we were home.

We weren't actually looking to get a cat that day. (I should not be allowed in shelters. I am a complete pushover when it comes to little fuzzy things.) Naming him was our next challenge. We didn't want a name like *Fred* or *Precious*; we wanted something distinctive and unique. I suggested *Pointer* so we could say, "Good Pointer!" or "Bad Pointer!" If you are not a programmer, you won't get that joke. Sandy was firm: we would not be naming him *Pointer*.

My next suggestion got some traction. We would name him *Pion*. Make no mistake, Pion is still a very geeky name. Pion was a joy, but we were spending so much time at work that he became lonely. We got him a couple of new little buddies to keep him company during our daily absences. Muon and Neutrino, sisters (also shelter cats) had a rough start in life, but we made sure that the rest of their days were spent in plush comfort. That was in 1989.

Pion was lost to an autoimmune disease not long after we picked up the sisters. Muon was lost two years ago. Neutrino finally succumbed to kidney failure this year. The last of the particle cats are now gone. We miss them all.

I have this lengthy note at the end of today's blog because I've noticed a surprising number of QSL cards and QRZ images have operators with dogs at their feet or cats curled up warming themselves on the amplifier. It seems many of our ranks also have an affinity for little furry friends. I say enjoy them while they are here, pamper them, and, yes, allow them to put some of that fur into your most delicate equipment. You'll miss them when they're gone, as we do.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:07AM (-05:00)

Goals and packing

Monday, January 01, 2007

I spent a fair amount of time today doing the *big sort* of the equipment to go to Montserrat. This is not the final sorting, as that can only come after the other team members declare what they are bringing, and the full group planning has been done. Still, I thought it would be good to at least see where I stand.

The new Pelican case (model 1610) was filled first. I removed the foam completely except for the piece that fits in the lid. Perhaps I could have even purchased the case without foam, had I been thinking about the problem harder. I wrapped the IC-7000 and Alinco power supply in towels and placed them in the bottom. The bag containing the sound mixer, its power supply, and all necessary patch cords was next. Then came the bag with the Heil headset, foot peddle, new Shure microphone, and a bunch of other stuff. I know it is over 50 pounds. {sigh}

I emptied out the golf bag and started filling it with the long pieces that won't fit in regular luggage.

Even after going through this sorting and weighing exercise several times before, I'm still tempted to fill up every empty place in every bag with something heavy. It usually starts with thinking, "I could use that", or, "that would be handy." I dropped in the *big* Buddipole system, the *small* Buddipole system, and a bunch of other stuff into the golf bag. It only took a few moments to blow my weight budget completely. That's not the way to approach the problem. The way to do this is:

- **Understand your goals** -- I've said this before but it bears repeating. I've not stated

my goals for this trip, at least not here in the blog, and I wasn't using this understanding to help with the equipment selection. That was a mistake.

- **Coordinate with others** -- I'm not the only guy going on this trip. It doesn't make sense for all of use to bring, say, an antenna analyzer or tool kit. I've got a tool kit packed, but it might not be needed if somebody else brings one.
- **Use local materials** -- Using local materials is not cheating! The Buddipole can be mounted on top of a painters pole. It isn't absolutely necessary to bring masts or tripods if we knew we could get long poles on the island. There are also materials left from hams that had done previous DXpeditions to Gingerbread Hill. I received a note from a fellow just this weekend that said he left, "... [a] Kenwood TS-570DG, power supply, Mosley CL-33 tribander, Vibroplex paddle and old Heil headset microphone in the Heavenly Suite at Gingerbread Hill for the use of future visiting hams." While we will wish to make as many contacts as possible with Buddipoles, I'll make use of anything else that helps me make QSOs. I don't need to bring it to use it.

Let's review the goals I stated earlier:

- Make QSOs
- Make a DXpedition Video DVD
- Execute on the Public Relations tasks

The DVD and public relation items are clear enough. The first point, the *Make QSOs* has been a little vague. Let's clear that up now. Here are my goals for the trip (the other group members and the group as a whole will have their own goals):

- **Worked All States (WAS)** -- I'd like to work all states while on the island. Whether or not I actually get QSL confirmation, electronic or paper, is out of my control. I just want to have this in the log.
- **Worked All Continents** -- This seems straightforward and I hope to have this one in the book on the first day.
- **1000 QSOs** -- Even at the bottom of the solar cycle, and without amplifiers or big antennas, I should be able to do this. That would be about 150 QSOs per day during the seven days on the island.

I've also got some *stretch goals*, goals that I might not achieve, but I'll be shooting for anyway.

- **2000 QSOs** -- This means making roughly 300 QSOs per day. That sounds like a lot, and it is, but if conditions are particularly favorable, and if I get a couple of good runs going, this might be possible. Certainly this would go a long way of proving the veracity of our assertions that lightweight operations can also be productive operations with the right planning and execution.
- **DXCC** -- Again, I can't guarantee that I'll get all the cards or electronic confirmation for DXCC, but I can put it in the log. Getting the wall paper, though, would be really sweet!

Today's posts had a lot of lists. Perhaps that's a sign that some of this was overdue. I had waited to finalize some of these goals until I had seen what the Sun might be doing. If solar conditions looked dicey, I may have backed down on some of this, but as of today, things look like they might be OK. I certainly believe that my main goals are possible to achieve, and the stretch goals may be possible as well.

I'll bring home the scale from work tomorrow night, weight everything again, and go down the list of things I know I need. This is an iterative process. Once I've got a set that seems reasonable, I'll update the equipment spreadsheet. We'll begin group discussions with the next conference call on Sunday.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:49PM (-05:00)

Orange Juice

Tuesday, January 02, 2007

Today's entry will be brief as the small head cold I began with just a couple of days ago has been touring around this frame of mine visiting various places: chest, back, nose (again), and has now settled somewhere in the farthest reaches of my head, presumably where the thinking process occurs. It has moved in, and my powers of concentration have moved out. Perhaps there is room only enough for one and not both.

So, here I sit, feet up, wrapped-up, slowly working through my third big glass of orange juice. I'm not sure if the stuff fights a cold, but it sure tastes good, and feels good going down.

Plans for breaking out the scale and messing with the equipment will need to be put on hold. Then again, that's why it is important to get an early start on these things. If something does come up (last minute business trip, or, like me, you catch your winter cold a bit early) you'll still have plenty of time to review and revise your equipment list. Perhaps packing for one of these trips, making the shortest list and lightest load possible for your adventure, is something akin to writing. I'm reminded of a quote attributed to Blaise Pascal, "Je n'ai fait celle-ci plus longue que parce que je n'ai pas eu le loisir de la faire plus courte." Loosely translated, "This letter is long because I didn't have time to make it shorter." In our case, the quote might be, "Sorry I packed so much. I didn't have time to pack less stuff!"

That's it for today. And remember: the phrase of the day is: "Orange juice." {grin}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:44PM (-05:00)

Watching all the little things

Wednesday, January 03, 2007

I've been exchanging emails with George Briggs (K2DM / VP2MDG), a fellow who recently returned from Montserrat's Gingerbread Hill and had left some equipment there. One piece is a Mosley CL-33 tribander as pictured on his QRZ page.

It was this antenna that was mentioned a previous blog entry as a *temptation* for our crew. I had said that I would use the antenna if it were available without guilt or remorse. I'd just count it as *local materials*. As it turns out, this beautiful antenna is disassembled and packed away. While George has graciously offered to allow our group to use it, I think it will likely be left in storage, thereby quashing this dilemma.

It has been nearly three weeks since our last conference call. I knew this period would be idle and had planned for it as best I could. The time between Thanksgiving and the first of the new year (November 25 - January 1) is almost always consumed by commitments to family and friends, as it should be. My goal was to have all the long lead time items and items that are largely out of our control (like licensing) behind us by now. We did that. We still have many activities and tasks to complete, but they are all work we can do on our own. For example, I would like to get our new call signs registered in all the *interesting* places such as QRZ.COM, the Logbook of the World, HamCall.net, and eQSL. I think this is the current state:

Call QRZ LoTW HamCall eQSL VP2MFF Y VP2MHF {old}* VP2MRD Y Y Y Y VP2MVG Y VP2MVO Y Y Y VP2MST Y Y Y VP2MTC Y Y

* There is an entry present but it is for a former owner of this call sign.

I've also made it a point to put the QSL routing information in a number of places. This probably sounds like tedious busywork but it is all part of ensuring that those who work us get the most enjoyment from that experience. They will find our calls in the popular

lookup tools, they will find their QSOs in the popular online QSLing systems, and they will find the QSL routing information in the likely places. In my view, it is consistent with the slogan we've selected for our trip, "No rare, but well done!"

I'm still wrestling with this head cold. I stayed home from work today in hopes that some sleep might turn the tide on this thing. Needless to say, I've not done anything with equipment, packing, weighing, or sorting these last few days. I'll try to pick that bit up again this weekend.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:20PM (-05:00)

Volcano and C programs

Thursday, January 04, 2007

We just returned from the Boston Symphony Orchestra concert and it was a good one. *Violin Concerto No.1* (Bruch), *The Planets* (Holst), and a new piece *Ceres: Asteroid for Orchestra* (Turnage) in its American Premiere. Luckily, my head cold has finally turned the corner and I wasn't sniffing and sneezing the entire time. With seats in the eighth row, I would have been embarrassed to be making all that racket!

On the way in to the concert I talked to Sandy about all the things I've not finished. I'm not worried (yet), but I do need to have a productive weekend. The big item is probably the online log processing software that is only half finished. I need to walk through the code I have, add more comments, and really test it. Here are some details for you programming geeks: I wrote this system in C and it has four and five dimension arrays, linked lists, and does the equivalent of macro expansion by inserting the data into templates for each of the operators. (If none of that made sense to you, don't worry.) The bottom line is: there is plenty of places where I could have goofed up. I want to find those places now; I don't want to find them when I'm on Montserrat.

The other piece of software written recently, QSLpro, had its last piece fall into place today. The Apple developer web site has a facility where you can register a unique code for your application. I didn't want to release this program without this code being registered. Unfortunately, the registration page for this stuff had been down for the last week. It was finally available again today so I registered my *creator code* and can now publish the application. Don Argo of Dog Park Software has graciously offered to host this application download page. I'll see if I can get that set up in the next week or so. Finally, there is some news from Montserrat. Here's one excerpt from the Associated Press:

OLVESTON, Montserrat (AP) -- Hundreds of people living at the base of Montserrat's Soufriere Hills volcano evacuated as a lava dome grew to dangerous levels in the British Caribbean island.

Scientists say that the dome could crumble and send blistering gas and volcanic debris down the slopes of the volcano, potentially destroying homes in the low-lying Belham Valley.

"Residents in these areas are advised not to panic and to start preparations for moving to safe area," Chief Minister Lowell Lewis said after the first siren sounded Wednesday.

The volcanic dome had been building rapidly and has topped the highest part of the 3,000-foot volcano, which coughs up ash and bursts its lava cap every few months. Scientists at the Montserrat Volcano Observatory said some pyroclastic flows already have been observed but that they are at a safe distance. However, the observatory warned that the pyroclastic flows could escalate significantly.

We are obviously watching this situation carefully!
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:55PM (-05:00)

Food

Friday, January 05, 2007

I've been working on the agenda for the conference call to be held Sunday evening. Here's a version of that agenda that has been heavily edited. (The actual agenda has much, much more detail including names associated with each assignment where possible, additional status details, etc.)

BUDDIPOLE USERS ON MONTSERRAT

"Not rare, but well done!"

AGENDA for January 7, 2007 Conference Call
(Just 21 days to go)

*** QUICK STATUS UPDATE ***

- [a] QSL card printing estimates
- [b] QSLing
- [c] Equipment Coordinator (EC) found!
- [d] Pilot and backup Webmaster
- [e] George Briggs (K2DM) email review

1. HOT ISSUES

{List of stuff that's late, basically}

2. VOLUNTEERS SOUGHT:

- [a] CFO
- [b] Motor pool
- [c] Food chairman

3. Open issues

- * Equipment inventory and packing (moves to HOT after this meeting!)
- * Looking for CFO volunteer.
- * Looking for Motor Pool volunteer.
- * Looking for Food chairman.
- * Paper logging format. Group review. Archiving?
- * The volcano.

4. Leader reports

Please be prepared to give a very brief status.

- [a] Webmaster
- [b] Online logging
- [c] QSL card design
- [d] QSL manager
- [e] Propagation guru
- [f] CFO
- [g] Activities coordinator

- [h] Motor pool
- [i] Food chairman

5. Equipment and operating discussion

- [a] Discussion of individual on-air goals for the trip.
- [b] Review of everybody's equipment spreadsheets.
- [c] Identification of missing items.
- [d] Initial baggage allocation discussion.

The *Food Chairman* position is somewhat new. I've only broached the topic once before with a couple of the guys. Here's the idea: It seems to me that there are several really good reasons to do some meal planning. There are seven of us, and we're going to be really busy. If you're on vacation with your wife and you take 3 hours to decide where to have dinner and actually eat, that's fine. That's not appropriate for this trip, IMHO.

We could have dinner brought in (catered) for, say, 5 of the 7 nights we're there. After a long day of hiking, surfing, diving, operating, and otherwise running around the island, the group would rendezvous back at the villa and have a meal together about 7 PM. Somebody brings in a big container of pasta, or chicken, or something with all the trimmings. They cook, we eat, they clean up (or the disposable containers get tossed). Easy, fast, good eating. Then back to the radios!

We could have stuff around for both breakfast and lunch around: fruit, cereal, salad stuff, bread, peanut butter/jelly (I'm still a sucker for PBJs), cold cuts, etc. If you were going to take a hike to a hilltop, pack a lunch. Up all night working Asia and Europe? Fix yourself some cereal or make a sandwich, even a midnight snack.

A couple of team members are vegetarians. Planning ahead will also help accommodate that, too. This doesn't need to be complicated. We just need a meal plan something like:

- **Monday** = steak tips, rice, corn, salad + veggie dish
- **Tuesday** = Spaghetti, bread, salad
- **Wednesday** = hamburgers + veggie dish + fruit salad
- **Thursday** = chicken & rice, beans, salad + veggie dish

Then add the big grocery list for breakfast/lunch stuff like:

- milk, orange juice, cranberry juice, diet coke
- bread, peanut butter, jelly, ham, swiss cheese, mayo, etc.
- lettuce, salad dressings, croutons, carrots, onions, etc.
- cereals, fruit, granola bars
- cookies, chips, other snacks
- good stuff for packing a lunch for hikers and travelers

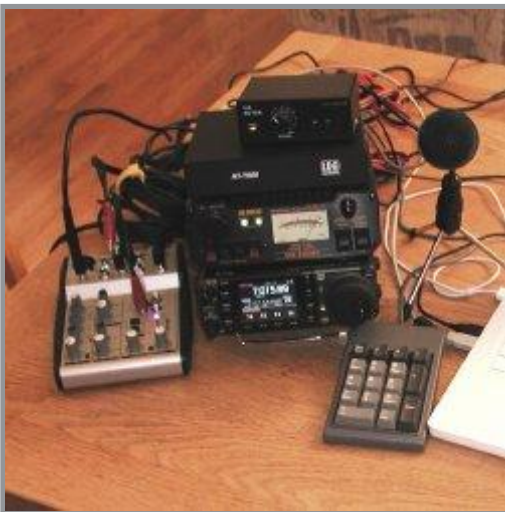
I'd like to really get a plan together on this so we just get the supplies we need when on the island, have somebody else do most of the cooking (and clean up), and generally know that I'll be fed and not spend a lot of time arranging to be fed. Time will be precious there; I don't want to be spending it worried about "what's for dinner?" I want to run QSOs on 20m.

This seems like a good idea to me, but we'll discuss it within the group. Time is precious on the island so I'd love to have this part settled in advance. Then again, most people like to be extemporaneous when they travel, exploring new places, eating at new restaurants, especially the one they just heard about! My approach puts a damper on that stuff. I guess everything is a trade-off. That's another great reason to have the conversations now rather than while on the island!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:14PM (-05:00)

Wiring simplified

Saturday, January 06, 2007



Equipment selection is an iterative process. In a previous post, I showed a complete station assembled and wired. It was a mess, but it everything worked and it gave me a starting point.

I've been thinking about what I wanted to change from that first attempt. I identified a couple of things that either make me nervous or seemed unsatisfactory. Falling squarely into the *made me nervous* category was the power cable for the IC-7000. It is a four pin connector, different from all the other power connectors that I have for my IC-766Pro and FT-897D. I had only one such power connector (the one that came with the radio) and while it is unlikely that it would be damaged or lost, such an event would basically ruin my whole trip. It was irrational, I suppose, but I thought I needed a second (backup) power harness for the radio. I purchased one a few weeks ago and put PowerPole connectors on it last night after cutting the the wires to a more reasonable length. The new cable, with about 6 feet of run, is now the *main* cable with the original one that

came with the radio now serving as my backup. In the *unsatisfactory* category was the Icom level converter. It is large, heavy, and served only one function: linking the computer to the radio. There were two choices, as I saw it: find something smaller that did the same job, or find something did that and more. Since I also wanted to beef up the CW capability of the station, the obvious choice was to substitute a MicroHAM CW keyer for that bulky Icom level converter. The MicroHAM device provides rig control and CW memory keyer capability all through a single USB connection. MacLoggerDX already supports this device. Here is a picture showing the equipment with this new configuration:

The items stack nicely as shown below.

I may change the stacking order putting the tuner between the radio and power supply, or pull it out entirely and move it behind everything. There is some improvement to the wiring mess as shown below:

While not *great*, this is an improvement from last month's configuration. The additional CW capability demanded three additional items: the numeric pad is connected directly to the CW keyer and will play CW keyer memories 0-9 with just a touch of a button, the

Bencher paddles are now off to the right by the mouse, and there is an additional piece of software running on the *HamMac* to make things easier.

The software is called FKeyer, a program I began fooling with about a year ago. The program maps function keys K1-F8 along the top row of the keyboard to convenient CW macros. F1 will send "CQ DE VP2MRD K", F2 will send "*callsign* 5NN BK", F3 sends "TU", and so on. The program works with MacLoggerDX. When you enter a call sign and press *RETURN*, FKeyer sends a message to MacLoggerDX to enter that call sign into its lookup field and perform a lookup on it, thus filling in all the interesting information (name, city, state, country, etc.). When you press "F3", it logs the contact. When you are running CW, your main interface is FKeyer.

The version currently out there (V1.01) does not have the new features I'm talking about. Version 1.02 (with the features) will be published by the end of the weekend. If you have a MicroHAM CW keyer and MacLoggerDX, give it a try. It won't be supported like my other freeware programs (Cab-converter and QSLpro) for a while, but I will get to it eventually.

Tomorrow I'll break out the scale and start weighing everything again. I know I was overweight last time. I also need to budget space and weight for the band pass filters which should arrive in the next week or so. I suspect they'll be light, but bulky. Maybe they'll go in with my clothes. Hmmm.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:32PM (-05:00)

RF suppression

Sunday, January 07, 2007

I recorded my first on-air QSO today using the new audio equipment, but not before I was forced to do some troubleshooting. I had already recorded from the radio to the iPod but had never transmitted while recording. When I tried transmitting today, the noise that came through the headphones was awful. Obviously RF was getting into the mixer.

I had expected this, actually, though I wasn't sure *how* it would be leaking in. (Few things work the first time. You didn't think it would, did you?) Rather than just start "trying stuff", I spent a minute looking over the setup to see what it *might* be. While it could have been the Shure microphone or its long cable, the more likely culprit was the power connection. I snapped three chokes around the power cable right where it enters the mixer and the noise disappeared completely! Here's that first QSO:

MP-3 of NE1RD with EA8BWW

I had similar problems with RF getting into things while on St. John. So, this summer I spent some time looking for chokes and reading up on RF suppression. In a previous post I mentioned Chuck Counselman's piece on common mode chokes (found here) which is excellent reading. The problem I was worried about then was RF getting into the laptop and confusing the power management circuitry (as it had on St. John). While testing has been minimal with *HamMac*, that problem doesn't appear to be happening with this new setup. Still, if it does rear its ugly head, I'm ready for it. I have a whole box of chokes packed for the trip (weighing only about 1 pound, they are *great* insurance against these pesky problems).

Everything is now broken down and repacked again. My mix of stuff still isn't right. The Pelican case weighs in at 49 pounds and the REI bag is now at 47 pounds, but I've not packed any coax, the MFJ analyzer is still sitting out, and only half my clothes are packed. The obvious place to reduce weight is in my selection for tools, though making that adjustment still might not be enough to bring me in under 100 pounds for the two bags.

I am packing both a Buddipole system and a Buddistick system in the REI bag. Together,

they are probably 11 pounds (7 and 4 respectively). I've also got some extra accessories for both the Buddipole and Buddistick packed separately in that same bag. That's why this exercise is iterative: you throw everything you think you might need in bags and weigh them, then reduce the volume of stuff until you make your weight goal. It becomes a long series of trade-offs: "would you rather have *A* or *B*?" I've got about three weeks to make all these trade-offs, though I'll likely finish much earlier.

Finally, our first conference call in three weeks will be tonight in just a couple of hours. Lots has happened, and there is still lots to do. We added a team member officially today. Dave Bushong KZ1O will be helping us as a DXpedition *pilot* and backup Webmaster. The second role, *backup Webmaster* will provide some backup for me during the updates of the online logs. If, for some reason, our internet connection is not solid enough for me to update the web site from Montserrat, I'll try to forward just the log file *deltas* each day to Dave who will do those updates for me. That's the plan, anyway. Now, I just need to get that software finished!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:15PM (-05:00)

I'm a Nervous Nilly(tm)

Monday, January 08, 2007

Last night's conference call covered a lot of ground. Still, with less than three weeks to go, I'm nervous about pulling all the things together that I think should be done. I've tried to be honest in this blog about things that have gone well and things that have not. My belief is that I should have pushed harder, and sooner, on some of this stuff. I think I'll spend at least some of the trip, especially those long plane rides, making long lists of things I'll do better next time.

We still don't have equipment selection anywhere close to finalized. Only two of us have even put draft spreadsheets up on the group's file area so we could compare notes. With a more traditional DXpedition, where weight doesn't really matter so long as you don't forget anything important, you can probably wait on this activity and then just throw in everything, including the kitchen sink, to be sure you'll have what you need when you arrive. If, like us, you're trying to optimize on weight and total equipment carried, I believe you need to work--as a group--to really get things right. This takes time, of course, and time is running out. Again, I'm sure we'll pull things together, but in my view we should be much farther along in this exercise than we are today. More grist for my mill, I guess.

We did agree to drop a note on our private list about our specific antenna plans in an effort to mitigate our lack of progress on the global equipment planning front. I sent this note out this morning:

These plans are preliminary. This is my thinking so far:

1. Buddipole Deluxe Package, 8-foot mast, tripod,
RAK, no low band coils

This is the Buddipole that I will use from my station at the villa for the high bands
(7 pounds)

2. Buddistick Deluxe Package

If I want to try something extemporaneous, I'll bring this and a small rig
(4 pounds)

3. Big dipole. Probably a Cobra UltraLite 160-10.
<http://www.k1jek.com/>

I want to work 160 & 80m. Perhaps the Buddipole will work, perhaps not. This will.
(5 pounds)

4. The Wire Man model#534 "Invisible 26 AWG wire" 1000-foot roll.
<http://thewireman.com/antennap.html>
'Invisible' Toughcoat 'Silky' 26 AWG, 19 strand 40% copper-clad steel (OD 0.020") with the same jacket as 531 (Nominal OD, 0.050" including 0.015" jacket, but super small for that 'low profile' antenna or pocket 'weekender' long wire. Weighs less than one pound per 1000 feet! Not recommended for 160 meters. This wire is great for radials, loops, anything.
(2 pounds)

5. Three or four 20-foot collapsible fishing poles.
Used with the 534 wire above, you can make some amazing wire antennas.
(1 pound ea.)

I'm also bringing center insulators and a couple of baluns for making feed points.

As I said, these plans are preliminary. I might reduce the number of fishing poles I bring, or even leave the Buddistick at home. I'm unlikely to bring more, though, as I'm already skirting close to my weight limit.

We talked about group outings, QSL cards, and food. We currently have three group activities planned: a trip to the Montserrat Volcano Observatory, a boat trip around the island to see Plymouth from the sea (one of the only ways you can see it at all), and a boat trip to Redonda Island where we'll be able to snorkel, scuba dive, and operate. That last place looks like a great place for a group picture for our QSL card!

I know this trip is going to be incredibly fun. I do. I'm just a little nervous about all the stuff that needs to get done between now and the time fun begins. {grin}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 07:25PM (-05:00)

Joe vs. the volcano

Tuesday, January 09, 2007

Yesterday's post, about me being a Nervous Nilly, amused more than one reader. Best summed up by Hershel (W4TMN), "Scott, you're nervous about this stuff and not concerned about that volcano now erupting?" Still other comments came from local club members who, I believe, are actually worried I'll be cooking my hide down there. It is easy to make light of this, but the truth is we are becoming quite concerned about the situation. As Budd Drummond said in a post to the group's private email list, "We should at this point start thinking of worst [case] scenarios."

I was just lamenting that so many things that I had planned to do for this trip either didn't get done, or were barely started. One such activity was a *DXpedition manual* that would have provided a place to put information and collective wisdom ranging from where we might find the closest hospital, to items that should be included in a personal first aid kit such as a dust mask and flashlight. I started making some headway on this, but it was clear that I could not complete such an effort and all the other thing that needed to be done, too, such as the online log processing tools, QSLing tools, and public relations work. The observation made by Paul was representative of the thinking back in October,

"I believe the DXpedition manual is a great idea, but if it was to be made, it should have been started a year ago. We have far better things to do than worry about the manual at this point. In my humble opinion. I believe if Chris/Budd want to do this again next year (or in the future endeavor) it would be a great project keep going on. At this point STOP." I don't know if "a year ago" was the right lead time, but certainly three months prior to departure left too little time to do it well. Here is a very early outline from that effort in PDF form.

Link to DXpedition manual outline as a PDF file.

Meanwhile, back to the volcano. Several soul-searching mail messages were exchanged today, both on our private list, and between various members since stories of the collapse of the volcano's dome and intense pyroclastic flows down the northwestern side of the volcano into Tyres Ghaut and Gages Valley. If that wasn't enough, plumes rose upwards of 5 miles high which were at times traveling north over the part of the island we intend to visit, and even towards Antigua. Local officials call this a "warning call" of what the volcano could do.

What if we go and this thing really blows? In the immortal words of Jimmy Buffet, "Now, I don't know, I don't know where I'm a gonna go when the volcano blow." (By the way, that song was recorded on Montserrat and was written for this very volcano!) Seriously, what if the airport is closed and we are stranded? What if the electricity goes out? Should we stockpile food and water? What if we can't get off the island for 3 weeks? These are all things we should have discussed long ago and did not. (It isn't like this volcano thing is a surprise!)

According to a Radio Jamaica.com story, "The authorities maintained that Montserrat is safe for islanders and visitors despite an evacuation of the northwestern districts following an escalation of activities at the Soufriere Hills Volcano." Right now, at least, this seems right. It seems like the volcano is far enough away, and the landscape shaped in such a way that the northern part of the island should be safe. That's my assessment as of tonight. Of course, every team member will need to decide when the time comes what constitutes *safe enough* for them. Time will tell.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:21PM (-05:00)

Redonda Island is NA-100

Wednesday, January 10, 2007

A small epiphany today: Redonda Island, a side trip we've just begun discussing within the group, is not within the jurisdiction of Montserrat; it belongs to Antigua and is part of the NA-100 group. This complication makes operating from there problematic. There had been a brief discussion early-on about getting licenses for Antigua as well as Montserrat, but there wasn't much interest. Now, we discover, operating from this little island would require just such a license. Some other group members are investigating our options but I confess this is starting to sound like *mission creep*. My plate is already full with planning and execution of our main objective. At this point, if I go to the island, I'm going to swim with the fishies, not worry about how to get on 20 meters.

Paul and I will be spending lots of time at the villa making contacts. He has, or has ordered, a set of band pass filters like the ones I ordered last month. We hope that these filters will be sufficient to keep out of each other's front-ends, but I would feel better if I was a little more knowledgeable about these things. I stumbled across a publication that looked interesting from International Radio called Managing Interstation Interference that looked interesting. On a whim, I ordered it. (I do that sort of thing a lot--ask Sandy...) It came a few days later. While I have only given it a cursory review, I like what I see.

I have programming work to do on the online log processing tools. I made a commitment

to the group in last Sunday night's conference call that I would have this software ready by the end of this coming weekend. That will be a stretch, but that's still my goal. There are a couple of reasons for pushing this: I would like to have some time for testing this software before I leave, I need to give Dave a copy so he can run it for me in the event our internet connection isn't as reliable as advertised, and mostly because I've got lots of other stuff to do, and having this out of the way means I can concentrate on those other tasks such as equipment planning and final logistics.

One last note: this is post number 200 in the 100 Pound DXpedition weblog. After a couple hundred posts, I've made some observations: it is a very strange way to communicate! I receive only occasional feedback via email or posts in the comment section of the blog, yet many who do comment write as though we've know each other since childhood. In short, it has all been wonderful but I have no idea who is reading this stuff. There are no statistic gathered to even let me know if dozens, hundreds, or thousands view my words each day. My philosophy has always been to collect my thoughts in this place, and if it helps even one amateur radio operator muster the courage or gumption to pack their radio and go, I would be very pleased, indeed. I hope it has.

Just 18 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:30PM (-05:00)

Safety first discussion

Thursday, January 11, 2007

Tonight's blog post will simply be a copy of the post I just made to our private email list. We're all thoughtful, careful guys. It is time to have this sober discussion. I'll pick up on all the great planning stuff again beginning tomorrow. In the mean time, here's a glimpse into our private list...

Colleagues,

There have been some interesting events on the island of Montserrat as of late. Some of you may have noticed. {grin} We had always known that we were traveling to an island with an active volcano, but other than simply acknowledging that fact, we had not discussed its possibly profound implications to our travel there. This brief note is intended to begin that discussion.

My mantra in all of my planning for all my trips is safety first. This trip is certainly no different. I will not intentionally put myself, or anyone else, in harms way if it can be avoided. That said, one of the items on the General Agreement states, "I agree that travel, especially international travel, has inherent risks to my person and my belongings..." There are always risks with travel: flying, being away from first-class healthcare facilities, and even being outside of the jurisdiction of US laws. I believe we've all recognized these risks and can live with them.

The big risk, the volcano, is the one that is giving us pause. I just got off the phone with Budd and we were completely in agreement during our discussions. The residents of Montserrat have been living with this volcano for a very long time and have learned to cope. Of course there have been major events within the last two decades, but for the most part, the northern part of the island where we will be visiting is as safe as any other in the Caribbean.

All that said, things can change very quickly. Budd and I agree there are two eventualities that would be cause to immediately cancel plans to travel to the island:

1. The airport on Montserrat was closed due to volcanic activity or threat of same.
2. Gingerbread Hill somehow became unavailable.

If we cannot safely get there, or have no place to stay, we should not go. It is possible there are other reasons why we should not go that will be learned between now and our departure. All but one of us will be at the "staging area" in Orlando on the Sunday before our early Monday departure. Budd has suggested that we contact David Lea at Gingerbread Hill that day and confirm that things are copacetic.

It is still possible that we will get safely to the island and then be plunged into an enormous disaster. If that should happen, we should be prepared to abandon our equipment and evacuate with the other residents as quickly as possible. I believe that is an unlikely event, but we must acknowledge that it is not impossible.

At least a few minutes during our next conference call should be spent discussing this. I also welcome comments on the list, or privately to me if you feel more comfortable with that approach.

That is my thinking on the matter. Thanks for the bandwidth.

-- Scott (NE1RD and VP2MRD)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:23PM (-05:00)

Weight, emergency info, and NEC2GO

Friday, January 12, 2007

I brought home the scale again. I'm still running over my weight allowance, but I'm also packing tools, an antenna analyzer, and other things that are shared resources for the group. I've just sent a message to another group members who mentioned they are far under their weight budget. Perhaps we can do a little burden sharing. This should all be worked out once we get the group spreadsheets collected, but that hasn't happened yet (and it is getting late!)

On the planning front, there are two other things in play right now. A couple of members of the group are still investigating whether it is possible to wrangle a license out of Antigua on short notice. We might be able to email scans of the relevant documents to a contact on Antigua and then pick up our licenses upon arrival at the telecommunications office. I kept copies of all the licensing materials (copies of US licenses, passport pages, etc.) so I would be the logical one to scan all that in and provide electronic versions of everything. No word yet on whether this is going to happen. I guess we'll find out next week.

We're also in the process of collecting emergency contact information for all the group members in case something *inconvenient* happens to somebody during the trip. I'm creating a folder for each operator that has their Monserrat license, backup licensing materials, emergency contact information for all group members, and some other important documents as needed. I'd like to have this completed by the end of the weekend.

All this paperwork probably sounds like overkill, but, again, my premise in all this is that my time on the island is valuable and I would rather spend one or two minutes organizing something here and now, before the trip, than to spend even one minute on the island doing the same thing. Further, the planning exercise, the organizing effort itself, has been very instructive. I've learned things and discovered resources I would not have otherwise found if I had just *winged it*. For me, this planning has provided me with a richer experience than I would have had otherwise, making it all worthwhile.

Assuming my head doesn't turn to cottage cheese the moment I get on the airplane, I am planning to pull of this experience (it seems presumptuous to call it *wisdom*) into a single document. I don't know if this will end up as a book, or booklet, or will be a series of web pages on my website. I do know that at least one person will want to read it though: me,

when I'm ready to do my next trip! I would like to make all new mistakes next time. {grin}
I stumbled across an interesting site today called Logsearch.de. I've only spent a couple minutes on it, but it seems to be a site where they will take anybody's DXpedition (or contest?) log and provide a nice web-based look-up for it. I just found my call (NE1RD) in the DX4DL log. Seems simple enough! Perhaps I'll upload our log to this site, also, when we are done. (Gee, maybe I didn't need to write all that software! Naw! It was fun!)

Filed in the *Don't you have enough to do?!* category is my purchase today of NEC2GO antenna modeling software. While at Dayton last year I ran into the fellow who was working the parking lot hawking the software. I chatted with him and was impressed by the package. I promised to give it a look when I got back home. I discovered that slip of paper with the reminder today (while looking for something else I've still not found, of course). The software is only \$39.95 (for a limited time, whatever that means) and seems worth a look. I'll be modeling various weird Buddipole configuration in my copious spare time. Perhaps there should be a section on the DXpedition web site with pictures of the configurations we used along with the models. Sounds like an interesting discussion to have over a cold drink when we all converge on Orlando!

Just 16 days until Orlando...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:12PM (-05:00)

Equipment inventory -- not done, but close

Saturday, January 13, 2007

My plan was to do a little programming today but that didn't happen. Instead, I spent nearly the whole day with the scale and bags again. I'm still over my weight budget, but things are looking much better.

One of the things I've decided is that it is easier to do one of these things by yourself. No, not because people are difficult to work with. The problem is antenna placement and planning for inter-station interference. When I went to St. John, there was only one transmitter (mine) and all the antennas were mine. I could use a single feed line and connect it to different radiators when I wanted to change bands. I had the whole place to myself. This will not be the case on Montserrat.

Paul will be running QSOs on the digital modes while I'm running SSB (and the occasional CW, should I develop the courage). For this to work properly we both need the proper filters, we need to space our antennas as far apart as possible, and I can't just change bands or steal a piece of coax on a whim. I'll need to coordinate with Paul (and any other operators) on bands, operations, and equipment.

One of the things I like to do prior to arrival is do a survey of the property (with data from photos or experiences from other visitors if possible) to determine where I will place the antennas and how much feed line I might need to support that placement. With multiple operators, these are not just *my* antennas anymore. I'll need to do a site plan that provides for good band coverage for multiple stations, separates the antennas if possible, and reduces the amount of "rewiring" one might need to do to connect a particular antenna to one of our stations. It quickly becomes apparent why some DXpeditions measure the amount of coax they bring in kilometers! I don't have that luxury.

Meanwhile, back to the scale. Below is the rough list of the equipment. It is not complete (I have things missing). It is too much (I am still over-budget on the weight). The spreadsheet we are using for planning purposes has columns for a unique identifier for each detail line (to assist the inevitable discussions), an identifier for the bag containing it, an indication of the item's owner, a serial number for the item (if applicable), and its weight. Weights are also summarized per bag. Here is the list with just the item names.

Pelican 1610 case

Alinco DM-330MV 32A Power Supply
Audio mixer and accessories-Targa Tunda case
LDG AT-7000 autotuner
Icom 7000 transceiver
MicroHAM CW keyer and accessories
Heil Traveler Dual headset in bag with accys

Newton branded accessory bag
ICOM hand microphone
RIGrunner 4005
ICOM 7000 power cord (short)
ICOM 7000 power cord (long, fused)
RCA stereo patch cable
RCA to 1/4 stereo jack patch cable
Power supply feed spades to PowerPoles
Super Whatt Meter
RCA to mono 1/8 patch cable
PL-259 to PL-259 patch cable 3-foot
Pen, pencil, mini-screwdriver

Red accessory box
LDG autotuner to radio cable
Magnetic base for 2/440 antenna (whip in lid)
one foot PL259 patch cable
Stereo RCA patch block
PL-259 to BNC adapter

Radio Amateurs World Atlas
Nifty manuals, guides, logbook
Shure Microphone and cord in zippered case
Two foot peddles
First aid kit
Montserrat flag
P3 Solar Power Pack 15w Model 16009
Bencher paddles
SLA charger 1A
MFJ 259B Analyzer
SunSaver-6 Solar charge controller in Caselogic
Belkin power strip
First aid kit
Power inverter 110v from 12v 100watt
Small photographic tripod

Eddie Bauer red duffle

Sony digital video camera bag
Box of video tapes
Bachman bag w/ 25 and 75 feet coax RG8X
Camera monopod
Buddipole system

Buddistick system
Spinner bag
MFJ-16010 tuner
Buddipole TRSB
Opek coax switch
Car adapter to PowerPole cable
Bag of RF adapters
Numeric keypad
MFJ dual clock
Hat
Hiking shoes

The Northern Face Backpack

First aid kit
Garmin eTrex Vista GPS
Highgeer field compass, therm
Hat
ARRL Repeater Directory
Yaesu VX-5R handheld radio
Olympus digital camera

"The Vault" hard-sided golf bag
Black widow fishing poles (4)
Mast 33 feet
Walking sticks
Document tube with 2 posters and map
Sun bag with dipole and wire spool
ARRL Bag
Bungee cords
Ground stakes (6)
EB 1 Balun
Center insulator
Unidilla balun
Buddipole standard Tee
Buddipole VeraTee with adapter
Two clipclamps
Bag of dacron rope - 300+ feet
Tool bag with...
Radio shack VOM (2)
Rip tie wraps
Stanley 12 foot tape measure
Leatherman knife and tool set
Wire cutters
Electrical tape (2 rolls)
Radio Shack 11 piece tool kit w/ soldering iron

Carry on bag ARRL (black)

Apple MacBook computer
Clothes

In tomorrow's conference call, I'll see if we can't either redistribute some of this weight by having other team members that are traveling light do some bag sharing, or reduce the amount of stuff *I'm* bringing because somebody else stepped up and claimed an equivalent item to their own equipment list.

Just 15 days to go until the staging in Orlando...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:26PM (-05:00)

Bag sharing

Monday, January 15, 2007

Our group had its conference call tonight. All members were able to attend for the first time since they began. With just two weeks to go before our rendezvous in Orlando, it was important that everybody be on the call.

Paul started us out by giving a report on conditions on the island itself. He spoke with our host David Lea from Gingerbread Hill about the volcano. Those on the island are taking the volcano's state, even the recent rather large eruption, in stride. Unless there is a significant change with things down there, I believe it will be safe to go. We'll still follow the guidelines we've put into place (calling two weeks from tonight from Orlando to verify conditions) but at this point, we are all but sure there will be no surprises.

The meeting then proceeded to *hot items*. The run-down of various assignments (creating QRZ entries, etc.) went quickly. Everybody promised to get their paperwork to me ASAP (Model Release Forms and General Agreements). I believe all that should be in place before our next call.

I then led a discussion regarding baggage plans. One-by-one we described our two checked bags, weight (thus far), size, and what else we might need. Budd has lots of extra weight capability in one of his bags but needs some space in a golf bag for long masts. I'm seriously over weight with my stuff, but I'm also packing tools for the group and other items intended to be shared. Perhaps Budd can take some of my overflow. The discussions proceeded along those lines.

Mike is our *Activities Coordinator*. He has three group trips lined up: a day trip on Tuesday to the Montserrat Volcano Observatory and surrounding area, a boat ride on Thursday to see the southern portion of the island, and a trip to Redonda Island on Friday. We've all but given upon the notion of getting a last-minute license from Antigua. I think we're all going to be happy just having a nice day and swimming with the fishies.

Those three activities are the only group activities we've planned. The rest of the time folks are likely going to be spread out, hiking, on a bicycle, on the beach, and operating from various parts of the island. Mike was careful to plan our day trips prior to the weekend as we're sure there will be more people on the air on the two weekend days than during the week. There is also a contest that weekend. The North American Sprint is February 4 from 0000Z-04000Z. I will likely give that a try!

I've got a busy week ahead. There is a local club meeting on Tuesday night and I have another Boston Symphony Orchestra concert on Thursday. That will make it tough to get much done after work this week. Still, after spending all of yesterday morning and afternoon with the scale and bags, I'm feeling better.

This is not to say I am *done*. Quite the contrary. I've still got to address several gaps I've found during my review: I need to bring more coax, I think I'm going to try to bring the FT-817 and/or Elecraft KX1, I need to make room for my band-pass filters (which better

come this week), and a whole host of other small items (spare fuses, iPod charger, diving mask, etc.) that have get to get packed.

I've also started thinking of the things that can be taken out of the bags and left behind. I know I've mentioned this before: packing is an iterative process. I have a few more iterations to go.

So, though I didn't work on the log processing tools (bad nerd!) it was a productive weekend culminating with the conference call tonight. I'm feeling a little less stressed. Just 14 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:28AM (-05:00)

Spare radio and fuses

Monday, January 15, 2007

There was no mail delivery today due to the national holiday. I still waiting on the band-pass filters to be delivered. If they are not in tomorrow's mail, I'll call and inquire about their status. In the mean time, I need to continue to refine the inventory so I've got space and weight budget enough to handle it.

I also needed to make room for a spare radio. Having a backup, even a small backup, is better than nothing when you travel. Consider the possibility of going someplace really interesting and then having your only radio conk out. This is something I preach to anyone traveling alone (or as the only ham), and it probably isn't as crucial for this trip given there are six other guys and five other radios, but I'd still like to have that capability. Perhaps it is just habit at this point. My backup radio will be a Yaesu FT-817. I can also use that if I go off hiking. At 5 watts, I'll not be knocking anybody over with my signal, but it beats not having a working radio at all.

To add stuff, I needed to remove stuff. I removed the tripod for the Buddipole and a couple of other loose parts totaling about five pounds. The FT-817 and all its accessories were nine pounds. I'm now skirting close to 50 in the big REI bag. I'll either need to swap more stuff out or be overweight on this bag, too. I'm seriously overweight on the Pelican case, a fact I'm not happy about at all!

I sat up late last night and started making a list of all the small items I'd not included in the kit. An example of such an item is spare fuses for the radio and PowerPole distribution box. Sure, it is obvious when list it here, but did you think of them? {grin} How about all the other things that are missing from that list I published last night? It is a great exercise to go over such a list and then try to determine what you would add or delete from it. I'll be doing exactly that with the list from my fellow travelers this week.

In order to catch more stuff like this I'm going to haul all the bags into work and set up everything on the big conference room table just as I hope to set it up on the island. I'll check everything against my spreadsheets at that time and scrutinize each item to see if there isn't something else that needs to be done (fixed, included, or removed). I'll also likely run in the North American QSO Party this weekend using the Montserrat gear. It was always my intention to use that contest for a final shake-out of the equipment.

The last piece of public relations material to be packed for the trip was also completed today. I have a 3 foot by 3 foot poster with our DXpedition logo and slogan printed in vivid color. I've just slipped that into the tube along with a similarly sized *100 Pound DXpedition* poster. They will make great backgrounds for still pictures and videos around the villa and will no doubt be used for the big group shot for the QSL card.

Just 13 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:38PM (-05:00)

Antenna plan for the Heavenly Suite

Tuesday, January 16, 2007



There has been precious little antenna planning discussion here. Let me fix that with this post. One of the best ways you can prepare for one of these *100 Pound DXpeditions* is to think carefully about how you will deploy your antennas once you arrive. We did just that before our trip to St. John in the US Virgin Islands last Spring. The Wind Chime villa consisted of a main house plus a separate building that they called the master bedroom. You can see a picture of that structure below:

Sandy and I poured over the pictures from the various web sites describing the property and talked with another couple that had stayed there for a week. Even before I began packing for that trip, I had a very good idea of how I could deploy my various antennas. (You



can see a picture gallery from that trip here.) The results of the planning are as shown below.

Coming off the top of this building was very convenient. The Buddipole worked very well from this perch and the ability to make vertical antennas with very lightweight fishing polls proved both easy to do and very, very effective. A similar plan might be possible on Montserrat, thanks to some help from a ham who was recently there.

George Briggs (VP2MDG) has been very

generous with his time helping us get some idea of what we might have available for our antenna installations. A recent message included this helpful bit: "... When David built the top deck above the heavenly suite, he had steel pipes fitted into each of the blue concrete corner posts of the rooftop railing. You can see a post or two in the pictures on the [Gingerbread Hill] web site. David can provide an 8-foot long steel pipe that nestles inside the pipe in the corner post. I mounted the CL-33 on one of those 8-foot pipes nestled inside a corner post. I used another corner post and 8-foot pipe to elevate the centers of my dipoles..." You can see the villa with those pipes in this shot featured on George's QRZ page.

Paul and I will probably be the "permanent residents" in the villa, making most of our contacts from this place. The building has three floors with the top unit called the *Heavenly Suite*. I think Paul and I should snag that part of the house for our living and operating quarters. We then need to get up on the roof and make good use of those four corners and four pipes. Paul and I are both bringing 33 foot masts and fishing poles which can make excellent low-band verticals. Figure that roof line is up 30 or 40 feet from ground level, plus the 33 feet that mast provides, means the radiator can be 66 feet long easily if held from the top and fed from the ground. I did similar things on St. John and it worked superbly.

The problem I had on St. John was feed line: I had not brought enough. There is some feed line left there from previous hams, but we are not sure how much or what kind. I would like to bring more, but weight (and space) is a problem for me. I'll be thinking more

about this issue over the next day or so.

Finally, I'm bringing a long dipole that covers 160-10m as well. Certainly I can tie off one end on this roof line. I don't know where the other end might go. Nor do I know how much coax I'll need to get the feed all the way back up to the Heavenly Suite. Again, more things to ponder.

Just 12 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:05PM (-05:00)

Testing filters

Wednesday, January 17, 2007



I arrived home late last night after the local radio club meeting and found that the band-pass filters had come in the mail. Hooray! It was too late to mess with them much, but I did dig them out of the box just to make sure they had all arrived safely. Each one was there: the big box with the switch for all the contest bands, and the three individual filters for 30m, 17m, and 12m.

As I was looking them over, Sandy said, "They look nice. How do you know they work?"

Good question! I own an Elecraft Wideband Noise Generator (one of Elecraft's Mini Modules) which puts out a nice signal across all bands. All I needed to do was hook a radio up to the filters, supply a signal from the noise generator, and see if the filters kept that signal to only the band selected. Below is a shot of the test setup:

Connecting the big filter box was easy and it worked flawlessly. I could switch bands on the radio and then use the big switch on the front of the unit to select the corresponding band, hearing a strong signal only when the proper pass-band was selected.

Next, I tried the individual filters. The 30m filter worked fine. I could tune to 40m and 20m and hear little more than a slight hiss (down from the S8 signal on 30m). The other two filters, however, didn't perform as well. The 17m filter let through nearly all of the signal to the radio listening on 15m and above. Similarly, the 12m filter didn't seem as effective as the 10m filter in the big box. Perhaps I did something wrong, or perhaps my experiment is faulty. Or, perhaps the filters don't work. I don't know. Either way, I'll call Industrial Communication Engineers, Ltd. in the morning to get some help. Right now, though, it seems like the 17m and 12m filters are going back to Indiana, and not going to Montserrat.

In other news, I had a good day at work today, figuring out some stuff that had been vexing me. That's the good news. The bad news is I'm too exhausted to work on the log processing software tonight (something I had hoped to do). Tomorrow is my BSO concert and this weekend I've got a VE session and contest on Saturday. There is not a lot of time to get things done! The countdown continues.

Just 11 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:29PM (-05:00)

Morse Runner and those little things

Friday, January 19, 2007

I gave the good folks at Industrial Communication Engineers, Ltd. a call this morning. I had done some (very) preliminary testing on the filters I'd just received and thought that the 17m and 12m filters were not *up to snuff*. Well, they are. They are performing as advertised. The bands 17m and 15m are pretty close together. As the fellow from ICE said, "If we made them any tighter, people wouldn't like them." So, I'm packing them and they are going to Montserrat. I might bring that little Elecraft wide-band noise generator with me to show the other team members what I had done. I thought it was interesting. Maybe they will, too.

There was another burst of activity on the list regarding the possibility of obtaining licenses from Antigua for operation on Redonda Island. It would require somebody making a day trip to Antigua (from Montserrat) to process the paperwork. I'm not interested. After looking over my personal schedule, I believe that time would be better spent hiking over the island and taking video for the DXpedition DVD I hope to make. I had considered taking a helicopter ride to get aerial shots of the island and volcano (which would have probably required a trip to Antigua), but, in the end, I've decided that would be too much to do with too little time to do it. Better to do those things I've already planned well.

Speaking of hiking around the island, Sandy got me an iPod Shuffle tonight (there was an Apple store near where we ate dinner). I'll fill that thing up and listen to it while I traverse the beautiful countryside. These little things are amazing. If you've not ever purchased an Apple product, or if you are in the market for a new (and nearly *disposable*) MP3 player, give this thing a look. As cool as the commercials for it are, they don't do it justice. (I blame my friend Mark Fancher for making me lust over getting one of these, by the way. Hi, Mark!)

One of the 15 or so reasons why I'm currently over my weight budget is because I'm bringing a nice set of paddles for CW work on the island. I was licensed in 2002 and, to be frank, my CW skills are not anywhere close to where I where I would like them to be. Recalling the old joke, "Q: How do you get to Carnegie Hall? A: Practice, practice, practice!" Well, hams might ask, "Q: How do you get to Honor Roll on CW? A: Practice, practice, practice!" There is a fantastic program to help you practice called Morse Runner. This thing emulates on-air conditions so well it is downright scary. Perhaps a better description is *diabolica!* A message was circulated around the Yankee Clipper Contest Club today alerting members (again) to this program. It has a competition mode where you run in a simulated WPX contest for an hour and it computes your score. You may then submit that score to the Morse Runner web site and see how you match up with others. You can see that scoreboard here. I was able to muster 74 QSOs in my best hour. That puts me near the bottom of the list. I don't like that! Well, looks like I need more practice! If you've got an hour, try this. Post your score. Let me know how you did. Finally, I have been carrying around slips of paper with me and writing down things as I remember them. For example, I have to pack one of my knee braces (or those hikes are going to be unbearably painful). That went on the list. The video camera should have a protective filter on its lens if only to keep the dust out. I bought that tonight. These kinds of things will just *dawn* on you during the day. Write them down. Keep a list. Check off items when you solve the problem or obtain and pack the item. Yes, "anal-retentive" is hyphenated. {grin}

Just 10 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:06AM (-05:00)

Small update

Friday, January 19, 2007

Just a quick note tonight. I have weighed and packed the filters, rearranged some of the smaller stuff, and have closed up both the big Pelican case and the REI bag. The Pelican case is now 70 pounds, the REI bag tips the scales at exactly 50 pounds. So, my *100 Pound DXpedition* is now stretched a bit. I have 100 pounds of equipment (if you don't count the weight of the cases).

The other reason why I'm a bit over the 100 pound gross weight limit is that the equipment will be shared among several operators. There are a couple of guys bringing no radios at all! So, if we average the weight across all members, I'm within our 100 pounds per person goal again.

The third case is the big golf bag. Though I am hauling it to Florida, another team member will actually be claiming it as their own from Orlando to Montserrat. This is the bag that holds lots of long pieces such as masts and fishing poles. Right now, it also stuffed with a small bag filled with tools that Budd will transfer to his mostly empty suitcase (if necessary).

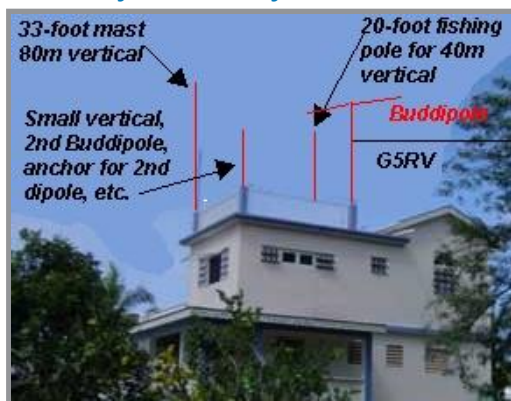
One of the things I'm wondering is how much will I be bringing back? Certainly, the wire that gets turned into radials, verticals, dipoles, etc., will not be repacked. That is only a few ounces, though. The Dacron rope used will likely not be repacked, either. Though I'm not likely to pick up too many souvenirs, it would be nice to have a little more breathing room on the return trip weight-and-space-wise.

I must have passed some milestone tonight if I'm now worried about the return trip! {grin}
Just 9 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:42PM (-05:00)

Audio and some visuals

Sunday, January 21, 2007



I set up a station for the North American QSO Party using only the equipment in the cases today. Because I am so short on time, I only spent about two hours on the air, but it was a useful exercise. I recorded the audio from the this exercise.

Listen to the K5TR QSO

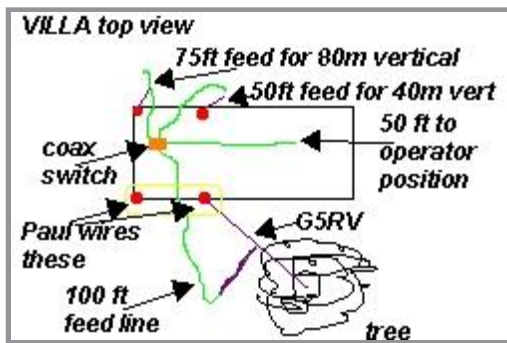
Listen to the K0RH QSO

Listen to the N3BB QSO

That's the point of the iPod and the *record everything* strategy. You can't predict when somebody really interesting will call, or

when someone will make a really interesting comment. Record it all, sort it out later. I'm hoping that at least some of this audio will help make my DVD and future presentations more interesting.

Of course, as soon as I *declared victory* on the packing exercise, I discovered a couple of piles of stuff that had been set aside. Oops. Well, as I have said, the packing exercise is an iterative process. It has always been my plan to be all packed a week before departure. Why so early? Well, imagine what would happen if I were suddenly sent out of town on a business trip. Or, if there was a *crunch* project that required lots of overtime. In the software business, it isn't unusual to have a whole week (or month) of your life



disappear in the wink of an eye because of crunch project. I didn't want to be scrambling the day before departure wondering what would go and what would stay!

I have removed a large number of small things. Weighing that pile showed me how even little things add up quickly. I've also had to make some tough decisions. I had planned on bringing a Cobra UltraLite

Senior antenna to ensure I had something that would cover 160m. But, the antenna in its bag with 4:1 balun was about 6 pounds. I just swapped it for a shortened G5RV from RadioWavz. This antenna is only 67 feet long and weighs about 2 pounds.

We did not create a comprehensive antenna plan prior to the trip. I should have pushed for that. The more I think about it, this should have been done back in July. More fodder for my post-mortem, I guess. In the mean time, here's a notion I've been playing with.

I needed to come up with something like this so I would have *some* idea of how much coax to bring. Here is a sketch of the villa (aerial view) showing feed line lengths for the G5RV, 80m vertical, and 40m vertical. Paul, who will be doing lots of digital modes, will populate and wire the other posts... maybe. This is just one idea.

This will all be discussed in tonight's conference call.

One week from tonight I'll be in Orlando meeting with the team. I'm really getting excited now!

Just 7 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 05:30PM (-05:00)

Aleve

Monday, January 22, 2007

Aleve. I don't know what I did to my back, but it wasn't good. No packing today. No planning today. Just Aleve. Hopefully I'll wake refreshed tomorrow. There is still a lot to do...

Just 6 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:49PM (-05:00)

Back on the mend, time running short

Tuesday, January 23, 2007



This is the second day with my bout of back pain. I don't know what I did yesterday, turned wrong, bent funny, or twisted just so, but it was like a hammer fall in the small of my back. I've had this before, of course, but it usually resulted from me doing something quite *stupid* like forgetting my age and lifting or carrying something more appropriately sized for two men. Not so this time. It came out of the blue and for no reason I can identify.



I don't want this to sound like 75m SSB. I share this bit of discomfort partially to make a point. With just a few days to go, I am nearly finished with all I needed to complete. If I had waited until the last minute to pack, I would be in deep trouble indeed! Even now, I owe the group my final checklist of equipment and it isn't clear if I can complete that today or tomorrow. Perhaps, despite my best efforts, it will be done at the last minute after all.

Dave Bushong (KZ1O) looked over the audio I had posted the other day. When I say *looked over* I mean he put some of it through a spectrum analyzer assessing its quality. He suspected that something was overdriven during recording. He was right. I had the gain turned up a bit high going to the recording gizmo attached to the iPod. I'll need to watch that little "clipping" light on the unit

when I do my next recordings (on Montserrat!). Here are a couple of pictures from Saturday's experiment.

I'll try to get this set up on Monday night after our arrival and hang at least the G5RV so I can be on the air immediately. The other antenna I'd like to get deployed immediately is a 6m antenna so I can get on the *magic band*. The DXers and contesters have probably given out all of the QSOs and QSL cards you could imagine on the contest bands, but I wonder how many have 6m from this island in their log? Paul will be making a similar effort, working the data modes until his fingers are sore, in hopes of handing out a *new one* for those who don't have VP2M with PSK31 or RTTY.

Our motto is "Not rare, but well done!" We know Montserrat leads no *most wanted* lists. This isn't Aves Island or Peter I. I plan on having fun, of course, but also plan to use this trip, and the experiences I'll gain, to help prepare me for one of those rare ones.

Back to the heating pad. Just 5 days to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:59PM (-05:00)

Last minute checklists

Friday, January 26, 2007

It is Friday night. I leave Sunday morning. The math says I have just under two days to go.

I confess that this week was something of a disappointment for me. I had hoped to get a great deal more done than I did. Rather than dwell on what didn't get done, let me outline what *did* get done.

- I sent a note to the Daily DX with a reminder of our trip details. It was published in the the newsletter the next day.
- I created a new page called *Team Update* for the web site with the latest details of the trip and put a large red **NEW!** next to it. You can see that page here. It provided a nice couple of paragraphs that could be snagged by anybody who wanted to help get the word out. If you want people to help you: make it easy for them!
- I also sent a note to the ARRL for inclusion in their DX News email that comes out each Friday. A version of the notice appeared in today's email.
- I completed a version of the log processing software that can take log files from each of the operators and create HTML pages for our DXpedition web site. I had hoped to do a great deal more (and will) but this is all I could get done for this DXpedition. I hope to do a great deal more before the next trip!

- The log processing software has been loaded on to both my *hammac* and another computer that I will loan to Dave Bushong for the duration of the trip. Running the system is easy: drop the log files from the operators in the proper places and type a single command at a prompt. The software creates the HTML files and uploads them to the DXpedition web site automatically. Easy as pie. I finished this automation today.
- I completed a nearly final inventory spreadsheet that identifies all the pieces I'm bringing on the trip. This should have been done sooner (I've had drafts out since mid-December) but wasn't. In fact, this is one of the things I would hope to do much better on future trips. I'm sure we will not have brought all that we could have used, and will inadvertently bring things we won't need. This will be a topic that I think about, and write about, a great deal while on the trip. If I had to identify one area of improvement I would focus on for my next effort, it would be this one.
- I checked the volcano status (looks quiet), the local weather (should be warmer by Sunday for the drive to the airport), the weather in Orlando (Cold?!), the weather in Montserrat (ahhhh), and the space weather (interesting things brewing).

Of course, once on the island I may have 17 other things going wrong which would trump any concerns that I've expressed here. Recognizing this reminds me that there are two excellent reasons for me to be putting effort into writing this blog: I want to remember what I was thinking at this point in the planning process, and so you, the reader, won't have to make all the mistakes I've made. You can make altogether more interesting ones! Tomorrow there are just two things to do: get that computer to Dave and help him set it up, and get packed. Just 48 hours from now I'll be hanging with the boys at the staging area in Orlando!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:09PM (-05:00)

A Loss

Saturday, January 27, 2007

I spent some time late last night catching up on some reading and news. While going through Jeff's Long Delayed Echoes notes I read something quite sad. Mike Caughran, KL7R, has died while on vacation with his family in Hawaii. Mike, along with Bill Meara (M0HBR), created a series of podcasts called SolderSmoke that were a favorite among QRPers and experimenters alike. I am still in shock as I write this.

The *General Agreement* signed by all team members states, "I agree that travel, especially international travel, has inherent risks to my person and my belongings." I wrote those words some months ago with some abstract notion that they were true. Any doubts of that were erased when I learned of Mike's passing.

The Internet, with the various forms of collaboration it supports: email, http and the web, ftp, streaming media, and anything else that can fit into a cascade of packets, seems to many like a cold and distant way to communicate, devoid of the human touch and interaction. I'm convinced by this tragic event that this is not the case. Mike did not know me, but I very much feel like I knew Mike. I knew him through his many hours of conversations with Bill Meara where he spoke of the projects he was doing, problems he was solving, and little tidbits about his family and home in Alaska. Mike had friends, and fans, in places he'd never dreamed. I know because I was one. My thoughts must now be with those he left behind, his family, his friends, and all of us who admired him and the good works he did.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:10AM (-05:00)

Packed

Saturday, January 27, 2007

I am packed. Dave now has the computer that would be used for log processing should my internet connection on the island be insufficient to the task. Everything has been weighed, reweighed, inventoried, and tucked into their respective bags. I am ready. In the end, the FT-817 was left out of the mix. The radio, LDG tuner, and accessories bag weighed upwards of 8-10 pounds. If I was going alone, I would figure out a way to take this backup radio (or *some* backup radio). But, I'm going with 6 other hams, with about 4 or 5 other radios, and there is a radio sitting at Gingerbread Hill left by a previous ham so this need isn't so pressing this time. Of course, the very fact that I'm going with other hams (and we'll have simultaneous operations) means I needed to bring about 8 pounds of band pass filters plus extra coax. So, I guess it all evens out in the end.

Here is what the final tally was for the bags:

- **Pelican 1610** - 68 pounds.
- **REI red duffle** - 48 pounds
- **Vault golf bag** - 63 pounds (to be split up, 13 pounds going to one op, another op to take the bag of coax, another op to check the golf bag as part of his allocation)
- **Carry on bag** - with clothes
- **Backpack** - with lots of gizmos

I am going to leave coax, fishing poles, that spool of wire, dacron rope, the Bencher paddles, and a number of other items behind when I return. If I can get this stuff to the island, I'll have no problem with weight limits on the way back.

My next post should be from the Orlando staging area. Just a few hours to go...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:01PM (-05:00)

MHT to MCO

Sunday, January 28, 2007

I am now sitting in the waiting area of Manchester (NH) airport. A free wireless internet access service is available in the airport, something I wish more airports would adopt. It sure makes waiting more fun and productive!

The final tally on the bags (as measured by the Southwest ticket counter) was 68 pounds for the Pelican case, 48 pounds for the REI bag, and 67 pounds for the golf bag. They charged me \$25 for the overweight Pelican case (which I expected). They also charged me \$25 for the overweight golf bag. I just reviewed the Southwest baggage policies and, while they allow you three checked bags (instead of the traditional 2), they do demand that they all be under 50 pounds to avoid this surcharge. American Airlines policies allow 2 checked bags, but a golf bag can be up to 70 pounds without the surcharge. Always check with the airlines for the specifics before you pack. I didn't follow that advice this time, but as it turns out, I'm not sure knowing the rules ahead of time would have helped me make better packing decisions.

In retrospect, leaving the FT-817 kit behind seems like an obvious choice now that I've seen the final weight tallies. I didn't have an extra 8 pounds of weight budget to spend it, even spread across 3 bags!

From this point on, I start getting lighter. My carry-on bag has paperwork for all seven operators. I will shed all but one of those packets tonight at dinner. Looking ahead, I'll divide up some of the weight among other operators in Orlando going down, and leave some significant amount behind before my return. My goal is to be overweight only on the

Pelican case when I come back.

I mentioned to friends these last few days that this trip has *snuck up* on me. They laughed out loud at this. I've spent most of the last 6 months preparing for this day by creating the web site, log processing tools, doing PR, organizing equipment, and planning logistics. It seemed to them absurd for me to claim "I didn't see this day coming." Well, as absurd as it sounds, I am a bit surprised, and not quite mentally prepared, to be sitting here waiting for that first flight. Perhaps it will register once I'm actually in the seat.

My colleagues have posted some things within our private email list about their desire to get my station on-the-air first, perhaps even within the first hour of our arrival at Gingerbread Hill. I don't know if that is a practical goal, but I sure appreciate the gesture. They are a good bunch of guys.

I meet Bob, my roommate for the night, in Orlando at 4:30. (I just dug out that mail message so I could find his flight number.) It will be the first time that I will have seen Bob face-to-face. In fact, except for Chris and Budd Drummond, I've not met any of these guys in person!

Just a few hours until Orlando and by this time tomorrow I'll be on my way to Montserrat!
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:51AM (-05:00)

We have arrived

Monday, January 29, 2007

Just a very quick note tonight. **We have arrived!** We pulled in just as the Sun was going down so we're only partially up-and-running. Budd is up top with a vertical running CW. Paul is running PSK (or setting it up, I guess). It is too dark to set up much more. Tomorrow we will tour the volcano observatory and some other spots on the island. We'll also snag some food for the next week. Then, it will be time to put some QSOs in the log. So ends day one.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:24PM (-05:00)

Setting up

Tuesday, January 30, 2007

This is our official *Day 1* of the DXpedition. We arrived just in time to view a magnificent sunset here from the villa. Those of you who have spent any time in the Caribbean know that it becomes dark very quickly here on the islands. So, what little antenna work that could be done last night was by flashlight and feel.

Budd erected a 40m vertical with the large coil on the top floor. He ran his FT-857 until the first set of batteries were exhausted. Changed battery packs, and did it again. He's paper logging so it will take a little effort to get those into the computer. We'll try to get all logs up on the web site this evening.

There has been a flurry of activity this morning. An incorrectly polarized set of PowerPole connectors nearly destroyed a radio (Icom 703) last night. A cautionary note should go here: some early PowerPole adopters had selected a configuration backwards from the ARES (and now defacto) standard. It only takes one such mismatched connector to cause a mishap. Luckily, we had brought enough tools, and Bob was clever enough, to find the dead diode in the unit that had shorted. Once the diode was removed, the unit came back to life.

While lots of guys are using Buddipoles (and I brought one, too), I'm also going to use some other antennas. I completed construction of an 80m vertical and 40/15m vertical

this morning. They are wire verticals hung by a 33 foot mast and 20 foot fishing pole respectively.

This is only the morning of the first day, so I hope you'll be patient with us. It will take a bit more work to get all stations on the air. In the mean time, Budd continues to crank out CW contacts (on 17m right now) and Paul is handing out PSK-31 contacts on 20m. Snag those guys (and modes) now while the rest of the equipment is set up.

We're going to take a break from all this *work* in a few minutes. We have a couple of group activities including an island tour and tour of the Montserrat Volcano Observatory. It doesn't put QSOs in the log, but it does help make good DXpedition video footage.

I'll try to get some pictures on up the web site this afternoon or evening.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:08AM (-05:00)

News from VP2M

Tuesday, January 30, 2007

We are on the air with two or three stations. Much of the work we planned on doing on the island was portable work from beaches, hilltops, the volcano observatory, and other interesting places. The equipment we brought for that duty is excellent. Unfortunately, when we set that up at the villa, there isn't a lot of spacing between antennas, causing us to some inter-station interference. Given all these antennas are in each other's near-field, this isn't surprising. The problem solves itself once Chris, Budd, and a couple of other guys take off to do portable operations, leaving only a couple of operators here at the villa.

I'm calling CQ on 80m SSB as I type this. Conditions are not the best, but there have been some nice QSOs with Europe and the East Coast of the US. I came down here so Paul can be on 40m PSK-31, and Budd and Chris can work on 20m and 30m.

The band-pass filters are working very well. I've loaned my 17m and 30m filters to Budd so he can crank out CW contacts. Once he takes off for one of his bicycle mobile excursions I'll grab that filter and work on 17m phone.

The internet connection here at the villa is pretty good. There are occasional service interruptions (the packets stop flowing for no apparent reason), but all-in-all we're very pleased. In fact, the accommodations here at Gingerbread Hill are excellent. David, the owner of the property, spent the day with us showing every corner of this very interesting place. To say this is a *ham friendly* place would be a serious understatement. David and company have provided us with every courtesy and support you could think of to help us get going. This is a great place to do ham radio.

I took a number of pictures today (as did other team members) along with about an hour of video. When I close down this station tonight I'll update the DXpedition web site with some pictures of today's adventure. **Breaking News:** Online logs have been updated! Here is a description of the operating conditions here.

RADIOS:

- **Two "permanent" stations** - Paul and I have twin stations with Icom 7000 transceivers, LDG tuners, ICE band-pass filters, and computerized logging. Paul is 100% digital modes. I am 100% SSB.
- **Two Yaesu FT-857 stations** - Budd and Chris brought matching FT-897 transceivers. Budd is mostly CW (I think I heard him on phone for a short while). Chris will likely be on phone as well. Both stations have been operated as "portable" stations, even while here at the villa. Many of the QSOs generated from the really *interesting* places will be done by Budd and Chris.
- **QRP stations** - Bob brought an Icom 703. I brought an Elecraft KX1 system. Budd used the Icom last night for a time and even 10 watts output produced prodigious

pileups.

- **Backpack radio** - A Vertex 1210 is tucked neatly into a backpack. Mike hopes to do some portable operations with that radio in the next few days.

ANTENNAS:

- **Buddipoles** - Of course... Paul has been on 20m and 40m on one Buddipole. Budd has been using his Buddipole on 40-15m. I now have a Buddipole set up well away from everybody else (fighting that too-many-antennas-in-a-small-space problem) on 20m. Chris was using that antenna this evening.
- **Wire verticals** - I made two wire verticals hung with masts. One is an 80m vertical with the top suspended by a 33-foot mast. The second is a 40/15m antenna with the top suspended by a 20-foot fishing pole.

The team is still pretty tired from the long series of flights yesterday and from the long tour today. We expect to hit our stride tomorrow. Operations last night and this evening were just the warm up.

Thanks to all who have sent word directly (or indirectly) to the team. We're listening. See you on the bands.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:36PM (-05:00)

Sorting things out

Wednesday, January 31, 2007

Band conditions improved today and we were able to put some QSOs in the log at a more reasonable pace. The problems we have now are largely self-inflicted. We had not made a comprehensive antenna plan before we came. I've mentioned this before in this blog and knew it was a mistake not to work out more details before we left. There just wasn't time. Unfortunately, if you don't do it at home, you end up doing it while on the island. Island time is limited and precious.

We've got an array of interesting antennas up and working. The problem isn't the antennas; the problem is the spacing. We have a couple of excellent antennas up that are in each other's near field. Some were spaced only a few feet apart (obviously a mistake) making it impossible to use them simultaneously. Paul's Buddipole on the top deck could be used for 20 or 40m (depending on the taps selected); Budd's monstrous 17m Buddipole delta loop is on the patio below Paul's antenna. Both antennas perform beautifully but cannot be used at the same time.

We had used all but 50 feet of the roughly 350 feet of coax I had brought for the trip. Luckily, another ham that had been here earlier this year left some coax behind on his last trip. Our hosts dug out that storage trunk today and we found another few hundred feet of coax inside. We'll use this to get some distance between these antennas. This will make it easier to keep several stations on the air here at the villa.

Budd spent some time out on his bicycle today making contacts. The contraption is quite a sight: FT-857 with tuner on the back. A head separation kit put the radio's display on the handlebars. A Buddistick was connected with a fantastic clamp to the other side of the handlebars to complete the setup. I've got video. Amazing!

My goals for this trip were to make 1000 QSOs while here on the island. I'm far short of that pace right now. Some of this was conditions being a little noisy. Some of this was because of the antenna separation problems discussed above. When I did get a run going, it was *fantastic*. I hope to be on 17m tomorrow with Paul on 20m RTTY. That's the plan right now.

The list of things that has gone right on this DXpedition is long. The list of things that went

wrong is short, but I'm keeping track of them. We've had one antenna take a tumble off a roof, for example. The Caribbean winds are amazingly strong and even a set-up that would easily survive back home gets tussled about here on the islands. The result of that fall was a broken coil. Luckily, Budd and Chris brought extras. At this point, dacron rope guys and stabilizes everything. Even my Buddipole, set up in the front of the house (and well away from all the others, thank you) was seen earlier today spinning like a propeller. That's not something you see every day! I now have rope tied to the arms and guyed to a couple of fence posts to keep it from spinning.

There are many more observations I could make, both positive and negative, about how well our planning (or, occasionally, lack of planning) has turned out. In the end, we'll put lots of QSOs in the log, have fun, and learn many, many things for the next DXpedition. Perhaps our experiences here, and this blog describing them, will help others have a successful DXpedition experience, too.

Paul and I are searching for our alarm clocks. We're hoping to get up early to work Europeans in the morning. 73 from Montserrat!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:28PM (-05:00)

QSOs are flying into the log

Friday, February 02, 2007

It is late. It is heading towards 2:30 AM local time and I've been up since 6 AM so I'll make this short. (Check me at the bottom for length to see if I kept even this simplest of promises {grin}).

Band conditions have cleared up and antenna arrangements have been solved to the point where I can start putting QSOs into the log at a reasonable pace. The current count is about 550 QSOs with 42 states, 40 DXCC entities, and 13 zones. The zones count is the worrisome data point. I should be reaching more places than I have.

I had several nice runs on 75m, 17m, and 15m today. Note the absence of 20m contacts. Conditions were such that I could have runs off 20m so I worked those other bands. If conditions soften again, I'll go back to 20m.

Not all was managing pile-ups, though. Budd and I were interviewed on *the* FM radio station on Montserrat this morning. It was to just be a 5 minute interview but it turned into something more like 15 minutes. This is a beautiful place and Budd and I couldn't help ourselves. We went on-and-on about it. So, our 15 minutes of fame was on ZJB radio Montserrat. (Woody Allen Andy Worhol would be proud... I've got to stop blogging at 3AM!)

Rueul Hixon (VP2MFH), the local ham that was instrumental in helping us get through some sticky paperwork to get here met us at the radio station after our interview. He had been listing to the station (after all, it is the only one on the island) and thought it would be nice to meet us there. I'm not sure I've mentioned this fellow by name in my blog, but his generosity in helping us get our licenses expedited through the system (among other things) seems to be a hallmark of this island. The people really are friendly; it isn't just some Caribbean tourist gimmick here! So, if you ever run into this fine gentleman on the air, be sure to thank him for helping make this DXpedition possible.

We had high goals for this trip. Seven operators, light equipment budgets, SSB, CW, and data modes, all bands, and an aggressive on-line presence with on-line logs, pictures, and news from the trip available on our DXpedition web site. We've been able to do some of this (maybe even most of this), but certainly not all we had hoped. Paul (VP2MVO) has been working hard on the digital modes. We know that few people have VP2M confirmed on any digital mode and we hope to remedy that. Paul's initial attempts to make contacts with RTTY, however, did not produce any QSOs at all. We intend to have Paul switch

from PSK-31 to RTTY again perhaps even as soon as tomorrow. We'll try to use the packet spotting network to tell people Paul is available on RTTY when he does do the switch.

We've had some compliments--and complaints--so far from our fellow hams. We take all things with a constructive spirit. Here are some things people have asked for that we will try to do:

- **RTTY** - As mentioned above. This is a priority.
- **30 CW** - Budd has made some contacts on 30m but we'll get more in the log in the next day or so.
- **6m** - We have some excellent antenna options for 6m. We'll try to get that going tomorrow. The *Magic Band* always makes for some fun on-air adventures.
- **12m** - The problem with 12 meters is that the opening probably happens during a great run on 15m! Still, we will attempt to sniff for openings on this band (though at this point in the solar cycle, I hope people won't be too disappointed if no reasonable openings appear).
- **160m** - Topband is tough from these locations since there is rarely space to pull it off. Still, we think we've got a shot. It will probably be limited to CW, though.
- **HFPack frequencies** - The HFPack folks would like to work everybody in our group on 17m at 18.15750, their calling frequency (or at least somewhere on 17m). I would like all operators to give these fine folks in HFPack a chance to "collect them all". We'll try to do that.

There are other things that could be going better. On-line logs for all operators except for Budd are mostly up-to-date. I've just taken Budd's down because there appears to be some problems with the transcription between his paper notebooks and the computer logs constructed from those notes. Of course we want everything to be right, so we'll get that reviewed, fixed, and then put his QSOs back up on the web site. Sorry for the delay. I've learned much more in these last few days than I could easily express in this blog. Certainly we were short on some planning activities for the trip. Logging was one such activity that could have used more deliberate discussions and planning. I've already mentioned the antenna plan (or lack thereof) and its cost in time. There are other things, too, but I really don't want to leave the impression that things are not going well. In fact, **things are going quite well!** And, in case you are wondering, we are all having a great time.

See you on the bands. (I knew this wouldn't be short...)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:51AM (-05:00)

6m a bust? But 160m a possibility. Exercises in extremes.

Saturday, February 03, 2007

Just a quick blog entry tonight. We have managed to review and capture all of Budd's contacts from his bicycle (on paper logs). Budd has been quite active and the only means of logging in the field is with paper and pencil. I can attest that any penmanship classes he might have taken in grammar school did not have the desired effect. I spent until 3 AM last night working on the problem. Chris and I worked until after 2 AM tonight finishing up. My new rule: even if you are a *100 Pound DXpedition* you should be doing computer logging at all times. It is far too inefficient to do it with paper and pencil. Plan on budgeting for the weight of the laptop--it is going with you!

We have been doing RTTY! There have been lots of requests for RTTY and we finally

started making QSOs today. Paul would like me to note that his 100 watt station is no match for the 1000 watt stations currently dumping RTTY into the bands. If you want more RTTY from here, please make some room. This might also be a nice time to locate that *RF Power* knob you'd heard about. Note that it turns both clock-wise and counter-clockwise {grin}.

Several hours were spent building 160 meter antennas. We now have 2 antennas for top band. We have a dipole (low hung for this band, obviously) and a vertical constructed from Buddipole parts. Budd will attempting to make contacts on 160m CW over the next couple of days. A New Zealand station heard him tonight but refused to work him because we wasn't in the A-1 Operators club. Nice. (Apparently they are having a contest tonight.) Perhaps we'll be able to make some contacts once the contest is over and "regular" people can work.

We had also constructed a 6m 3-element beam for the *magic band* we listened for openings but heard none. We listened to the beacons and heard the local one on St. Kitts (I think) which was blasting in here... but heard nothing else. I've not given up on 6m yet, but I'm preparing myself for this to be that one aspect of the trip that was a little disappointing. For those of you that wanted us on 6m, please be patient. We are trying. My web site provider has an FTP service that is used to upload new material. That was horribly unreliable today. I don't know if it was the internet connection here on the island (which has not been 100%), or if the service itself is having problems. Anyway, Budd's new (and rehabilitated) log is up and there are updates for most of the operators. I'll try to get the rest tomorrow.

Our hosts took us out for an amazing dinner tonight so no QSOs were put in the log by me. Now that Budd's logging nightmare is over, though, I'm hoping I can go back to working towards my goals of 1000 QSOs, WAS, and WAC. I'm close: 700+ QSOs, 45 states (with the usual suspects missing), and I worked a ZL and ZS today leaving only Asia as the continent unworked. Cross your fingers.

We pack up on Monday for a return flight Tuesday. Not much time left. Work us while you can. 73!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:12AM (-05:00)

There are numbers...

Saturday, February 03, 2007

... and then there are numbers. We'd been paying close attention to solar conditions both before and during our trip to Montserrat. Numbers like the "A" index, "K" index, solar flux, and SSN give you some idea of the kinds of conditions you'll likely see on the HF bands. After a period of slightly elevated numbers and disturbed conditions, we were excited to see what the bands would be like once things calmed down. Today was that day and the results were mediocre. All operators complained about fading on the bands. One moment the station we were working would be strong; the next moment the station would disappear completely.

I have wondered to myself what folks back home must think. I'm sure some might say to themselves, "I gave this bozo my call 3 times. Can't he remember it?" I sure hope that's not the impression we are leaving! I would like to attribute most of this seeming incompetence (at least on my part) to the QSB on all bands we worked today. We do wonder what we sound like on the other end of our QSO. Dave Bushong (KZ1O) was kind enough to send a couple of audio files with off-air recordings of QSOs we've made. I, of course, have been trying to capture many hours of audio recordings at my station, too. I'd like to put sound from both ends into our next presentation so everybody can see what things are like on both sides of the pileup.

I had intended to stay up all night working the low bands. I'm not going to do that. Conditions do not justify the effort. Instead, I'm hoping to sleep fast and wake early to work Europe before North America rises. If Paul is not up yet, I'll start on 20m.

Speaking of Paul, he's been working feverishly on handing out data mode QSOs. It takes a great deal longer to complete a QSO compared to SSB (and especially CW!). So, 200 QSOs for the digital modes is easily equivalent to, say, 500 SSB QSOs. I think Paul will likely make that number. If he does, the DX community owes him a nod and a tip of the hat. I've sat next to him for many hours watching him pour energy into this effort.

More portable operations took place today. Lots of interesting stuff down by beaches, on Budd's bicycle, and all over the island. In fact, the QSO recording Dave did (mentioned above) is of Chris working a few stations from the beach.

I should take just a moment and relate what kind of challenges this takes. You need to get an antenna erected, carry enough power to operate, and then work your stations and log your contacts. This is usually done in high, gusty winds, sometimes under flash rain storms, and almost always with the Sun beating down on you. Equipment is usually put in wind tunnels and under heat lamps. I'm not sure people operating HF should be subjected to the same stress tests!

One of the things we had hoped to show during this trip was these lightweight equipment configurations can produce effective operations. You don't always need an amplifier. You don't always need a tower and yagi. Small works. Simple works. Smart works. Team members like Budd Drummond, who has made hundreds of contacts *bicycle mobile*, has shown that focus and a sense of excitement go a long way.

As I type this I recognize that there are only two more days on this DXpedition, and one day will be spent packing. I'll repeat what I'd said before: time on the island is precious so every thing you can work out prior to departure is a boon to your whole experience. I've got a list of such things started in a notebook which will hopefully make the next trip even smoother.

One last point before I close for this evening: Budd got on 30m with my Elecraft KX-1 tonight and had a ball. His first CQ netted him a return call and full QSO. So, let's check our facts: Buddipole antenna as a shortened vertical, KX-1 pushing out 2.2 watts on 30m CW, and 175 feet of coax between the two. QSO first call. Goodness! If that doesn't make the point that simple works, I don't know what can!

We've got a great bunch of guys and I know it will be a sad thing when we begin breaking down the stations. For those of you who have worked us, thank you. For those of you who have not yet, I sure hope we get the chance. Thank you for your patience and support. 73 from VP2M.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:58PM (-05:00)

1000

Sunday, February 04, 2007

I made my goal of 1000 QSOs. Hooray!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:36PM (-05:00)

Cross mode QSO and more fun

Sunday, February 04, 2007

I have made one of my goals: I have made over 1000 QSOs. The other goals look to be out of reach. Well, I tried.

Conditions were much better today than the previous two. Paul picked up another 30+

contacts today and his count stands at 152. It looks like we'll produce about 200 data mode contacts from this effort.

I was able to work Dave Bushong (one of our pilots) today. We just found a blank spot on 15 and had a nice chat. Of course he's been supporting our efforts behind the scene. My hat's off to you, Dave!

I was making a run on 17m when somebody mentioned that there was a CW station trying to contact me. I had not heard it because I run with the notch filter on half the time (to fight off the tuner-up-ers). Unfortunately, this nice DSP feature also nicely notches out any CW signals.

I removed the notch filter and tried to listen. I don't know if I'm unique here, but when I'm in the middle of a big run my mind is isn't too nimble. In the middle of a pile-up I can pull out three call signs but not answer a simple question like "are you hungry". So, when this CW came in my mind turned to clay. Think Scott! Sit up straight. Tell everybody else to hold off calling me. Listen. **K4TwJ**. OK, I copied K4TWJ, give me a roger if that is correct. **R**. OK. I gave him a signal report, he gave me a signal report, 73, and so on. I'm almost out of my trance at this point but still not awake enough to see the name in the log. It was Dave Ingram (K4TWJ), author and famous QRPer. What fun!

Dave called back later on SSB and we had a quick chat. This quick cross-mode QSO was one of the most fun parts of the trip, probably because it was so unexpected! Thanks, Dave. You really made me smile.

The equipment is holding up quite well down here. The IC-7000s are workhorses. The ICE filters are working very well now that we've got reasonable antenna separation. In fact, we've had no failures here on any equipment that wasn't due to abuse (like falling off a roof!).

The challenge now will be to get everything back into their cases and packed for the return trip. That is tomorrow's assignment. Now, it is Superbowl time. Our hosts here at Gingerbread Hill, who have treated us like kings, have invited us up for a pizza and Superbowl party!

They've made this a very, very ham-friendly place. David, Clover, and company have been very generous and kind. If you ever wished to see this amazing island, stay at Gingerbread Hill.

Just a couple more sessions in front of the radio then back to the cold. I am ready to come home, though. It has been a good trip. 73 from Montserrat.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:07PM (-05:00)

Final hours

Monday, February 05, 2007

The Buddipole Users on Montserrat DXpedition has come to a close. I'll have statistics for the operations in tomorrow's blog, assuming I can get to an internet connection. I personally made 1275 contacts, better than my goal but far beneath my stretch-goal. I think if we had worked out an antenna plan prior to our departure I would have been closer but still fallen short. I'm reasonably pleased with the results.

I had a couple of nice runs on 15m, 17m, and 20m today. Several people mentioned both 6m and 160m and wondered if we had done much to activate those bands. The short answer is yes! Both bands were given a log of energy from operators here, but no openings appeared. I was told by one fellow that he had heard me on 160m but I did not hear him. I'll be thinking about what else I can do for this band over the next few months. Six meters is a different story. If there was an opening, we would have been there making QSOs. We built a 3-element 6m beam aimed at the US and tried to raise a few signals. We tried.

There are several operators who managed to work all seven of us here on the island. The last to do so was W5SAN who was *bicycle mobile* in Texas. We had set up a portable operation at the Montserrat Volcano Observatory and began calling CQ on 17m. Once we had Joe on the line, all seven of us worked him in succession in about 3 minutes. When the last operator was done (me) the band died. Great timing! I have the whole thing on video.

Tear down was quite an exercise. There had been a significant amount of equipment swapping during our stay, much more than I would have thought. I did not have all of my stuff marked and should have. Paul was smart enough to have nice labels on his stuff. There is something for me to remember for next time.

I have uploaded my logs to both eQSL and the Logbook of the World. Other operators have promised to follow-suit. That, of course, is out of my control.

I know that there will be at least one log entry with an error. We have planned for that as best we could prior to departure. If you believe we have a goof-up in our logs, please read the QSLing page on our DXpedition web site and include all the information you believe would verify it was your QSO logged and not somebody else's. If you know the date/time/frequency and your call is remarkably close to the call in question, I will look at it. If it is a QSO to me (VP2MRD), I'll go back and review the audio recordings I made of all my QSOs to listen again for your call. We really want to get this right.

Our flight leaves tomorrow morning. We've got to pass through two customs checkpoints, have a layover in San Juan, and then that long flight back to Orlando. We don't get to our rooms until after 11PM. I will try to have a blog entry ready. If I don't, I'll certainly be there Wednesday evening when I return to Acton.

For the very last time this trip: 73 from the island of Montserrat.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:24PM (-05:00)

Online logs nearly complete

Tuesday, February 06, 2007

Online logs have been updated for all but VP2MFF. There are about 50 QSOs left to go for Budd. We'll see what we can do in the airport on PR.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:39AM (-05:00)

Flight home

Tuesday, February 06, 2007

I am writing tonight's blog entry from the airplane en-route from San Juan to Orlando. I've been chasing Chris and Budd for a couple of days to get the paper notebooks Budd had been using to log transcribed into the computer. It looks like a jumble to me, but Chris and Budd assure me that they've got it all. So, my next update for the on-line log will be the last unless somebody shows good cause we've missed something.

Preliminary statistic on the log show

- 2400 QSOs
- 82 DXCC entities
- 23 zones
- 47 states (missing NV, AK, and HI)
- 271 CW contacts
- 98 PSK31 contacts
- 22 RTTY contacts
- 2042 SSB contacts

I had 1277 contacts on bands from 75m through 15m (with only 1 contact on 40m) and could have had many more if not for the side trips to the volcano observatory, the boat trip tour around the southwestern coast (the only way to see what remains of Plymouth), and, of course, the Superbowl. I could have had more contacts, but would have missed out on some of the beauty of that island. David Lea gave the group a four hour comprehensive tour one day that really opened our eyes as to how much Montserrat still has to offer. I have gladly traded those potential QSOs for the time we spent away from the radio.

I am seriously short on sleep. I was up very late again last night straightening out Budd's log. Of the last few nights, I was up until 4AM, 5:30 AM, and 2:30 AM just trying to keep all this data straight. I hope the work on the web site, on-line log, and pictures have been fun for those on the other end of the pile-ups.

When I return, I must begin the QSL manager duties and I need a good set of log files to do that. Much as I hate to say it, Budd's are a little *iffy*. Finding a better way to log while beach portable, bicycle mobile, and pedestrian mobile is a challenge Budd will have to take up before our next DXpedition. Budd mentioned to me just this morning that he needs to find a better system. It is a very exciting way to operate and really shows off the power of lightweight operation, but it also puts a tremendous burden on the portable operator to capture the data correctly.

In the mean time, all I can do is put up the data I've got and try to fulfill QSL request as best I can. Sandy informed me that yesterday's mail contained 22 envelopes looking for cards. Time to get those cards designed!

I have been scribbling notes into my *100 Pound DXpedition* notebook collecting my thoughts on what went right, what went wrong, and what I need to do next time. It will be a while before I get those in any shape so you can see them here.

On the way back we all asked each other the question, "Where next?!" I've got some ideas... but it is getting late. Perhaps I'll mention something tomorrow night (I'm such a tease!).

Finally, I would like to make a point here of thanking the DX community for treating me with respect and kindness on the air. Conditions were not always great and I needed to ask for more repeats than I would have liked, but everybody helped me work through it. We did not do all we had promised (no 160m, no 6m, though we tried) and nobody sent us a nasty note about it (yet {grin}). And, in general, when I said I wanted to work a particular station, the pile-up let me do it. Thank you. 73 from VP2MRD/NE1RD.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:55PM (-05:00)

Recalling Montserrat

Wednesday, February 07, 2007

I don't often double post but tonight I'll make an exception. I've just been reminiscing the events of the last week and I think I should share them with you before I sleep.

We all piled into the van, with Paul driving, and went to the Monserrat Volcano Observatory yesterday. We wanted to do two things: get a group picture with the volcano in the background and work some DX from that location. The group pictures began with Bob setting his camera on a tripod, setting the self-timer, and then running into formation with the rest of us holding our banners and flags. We were quite the entertainment for the group of tourists looking down at us from the observatory's observation deck. Being the shy and retiring soul I am, I shouted up to the group that one of them should come down and trip the shutter release for us. Sure enough, a young man trundled down the stairs and to our aid. You can see the results on the on-line log web pages.

As for working DX with that magnificent view in the background, we had the best asset we could wish for right in our midst. It wasn't any tool or antenna we brought with us; it was Budd Drummond, W3FF/VP2MFF. The group began referring to this as *The Budd-Factor* and so on. It seemed as though every time he would get on a frequency, folks would come out of the woodwork to talk with him. So, naturally, he was the ideal choice to start warming things up on 18.1575, the HFpack frequency. After working one or two fellas, another famous call, W5SAN, Joe, came on as *bicycle mobile*. Budd was beside himself. It was immediately obvious what should happen next: We would work Joe in succession, one after another. I was last, giving Joe a clean-sweep for all of us. Just as we closed with Joe, the band closed as well. It was almost as though the band stayed open just a little long for us!

Chris and Budd were out most every day, either at the beach, or Budd on his bicycle if Chris went scuba diving. Budd had begun taking his bicycle about 300 feet up a hill near the villa to operate. He was just barely within ear-shot if you were to stand in the drive way. Station-after-station wanted to talk to Budd. After doing some antenna work one afternoon, I returned to see both operating positions at the villa manned by operators leaning back in their chairs, arms folded, with the cans on. They stopped operating and just started listening to Budd work DX. Seeing this, I reached over and pressed *RECORD* on the iPod recorder to capture the spectacle. I'm sure some of that audio will make its way into my DVD mix.

Seven guys meant lots of peanut butter and jelly for lunch. That's OK. Lunch was just the "hold over" until dinner. Also, we ate like kings at breakfast most mornings. Mike (VP2MVG) made amazing eggs with fried potatoes that were soul-restoring. Just another example of how everybody pitched in and did their part.

During the shake-out of the antenna situation early in the week, I had decided I would erect an antenna out in front of the villa, well away from everything else. It began its life on 20m, but quickly moved to 17m. Except for a couple of moments where it had been cannibalized for an experiment, that antenna stood there being the workhorse of this DXpedition. I alone made 615 QSOs on that antenna, one quarter of all QSOs made by the DXpedition!

What kind of antenna does this? It was a simple Buddipole Deluxe Package with a longer (12 foot) whip on it. It was configured as a vertical antenna with the TEE, then two 22-inch aluminum arms on top of that, then the *red* coil with just a few turns tapped, then the whip. Just a single elevated radial sloped down from the feed point. It did have the TRSB on it, a must-have accessory in my opinion, so much so I often forget to mention it!

Simple works. Easy works. This antenna stood there in heavy rain and wicked wind. Nice and simple did the job very well.

The other antennas that I had a ball with were the fishing pole antennas I created on the top of the villa. A 20-foot pole held up my 40/15m antenna; my 33-foot pole held up my 75/80m antenna. Amazingly simple: feed point near ground level with two elevated radials and the radiator going up to the end of the fishing pole. I worked 168 contacts on 15m (at the bottom of the cycle!) with the first antenna, and worked 172 QSOs on the other. It was very gratifying to see these two extremely simple antennas work so well. Tom picked out a quiet spot off between the main area and his bedroom, a little nook filled with old paperbacks and knick-knacks. His 706 and LDG tuner along with some home-brew Buddipole stuff were nestled in there for the first couple of days while Tom hung out and watched the festivities. Again, we should have planned this better (this is partially my fault). Once I saw that he was somewhat stranded in this position with no good antennas and no prospect of finding a place to put one, I ran a short length of coax over to his station and made it possible to patch into the other main antennas as they became available. Tom soon thereafter hit his stride and was putting QSOs into the log quickly and efficiently. Even with this late start, Tom ended up with over 250 QSOs for the trip.

Bob was our resident photographer. Content with taking fabulous pictures, he didn't operate as much the rest of us. Then again, we're all looking forward to the CDs filled with pictures he's promised us!

Paul worked amazingly hard on the digital modes when he was there at the villa. Fortunately for us, but unfortunately for him, he's an excellent driver with experience driving on the left-side of the road. So, one of our best operators, and only digital mode operator, would often need to leave a nice run on 20m to retrieve the guys down at the beach, or grocery store, or volcano observatory. Twisty roads, steep inclines, and hairpin turns never seemed to bother him. Again, guys pitched in to make things work.

I could go on: more about Chris frantically trying to make sure Budd had all he needed, Mike making big runs on an open station, Paul's singular humor, or Budd's unquenchable enthusiasm for *getting on the air*. I could go on, but it would just be more of the same at this point. When it was time to part company first in San Juan and then again in Orlando, there was a genuine feeling of disappointment that it was over. But, I believe we all feel good about what we did, and how we did it.

I'm closing now. Again, it is after midnight. Wake-up call at 6:30 AM so I can catch some breakfast. Thanks for reading. I hope you've found this recounting interesting. 73!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:00AM (-05:00)

NE1RD is back and blogging again

Wednesday, February 14, 2007

It has been roughly one week since my flight landed safely in Manchester, New Hampshire and I was met by Sandy. I was in no hurry to officially *end* my trip by picking up my bags, so we sat down in the restaurant area just outside the gates for a quick bite to eat. It had been about 10 days since I'd seen her and it felt good just to sit and see her smile.

When I finally did get down to the carousel I found my bags were about to be gathered into the pile of unclaimed luggage. "No", I said. "Those are mine." I had begun the trip back on the island of Monserrat with temperatures in the 80's. Now, with single digits (Fahrenheit) outside, I thought it best to change into something more appropriate to the climate. Jeans, hiking boots, and a parka were the fashion of the day. Goodness I'd forgotten what cold weather is like!

Even after the trip I had goals. I had 11 hours of video captured on my little Sony Handicam that I wanted to condense into a DXpedition video. We stopped at CompUSA on the way back from the airport and I purchased a 500GB bare drive to use for the video editing process. I had all the computing power and software necessary to do the job (Macintosh tower, Final Cut Express HD, Garage Band, iDVD), what I needed was space to work. Once I got home (hauling all those bags back into the house!) the drive slipped easily into the bay and I had it ready-to-go in about 8 minutes. I like it when things are easy!

For the next three days or so, the remainder of Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and Saturday, I sat in my small video editing suite and created the video. It was finished around dinner time Saturday night. Whew! Lots and lots of work, but worth it (I hope). Saturday and Sunday were spent making copies of the DVD for the team members and pilots, and creating, printing, and applying nice labels to the discs. They were mailed Monday morning.

As you all know, I had not posted anything to the blog during that time. Sorry about that. I had put all my energy into the video editing and had very little at the end of each day for blogging (or anything else, truth be told).

While I was doing the video stuff, Chris, Chris's wife Inese, and Bob were working hard

on the QSL card design. I've been involved enough to render an opinion occasionally and I must say, it looks fabulous! Inese is a graphic artist and she's come up with something really special. Of course, having the excellent photographs in Bob's collection helped provide lots of good raw material for this exercise, too. We should be getting the artwork off to the printer by the end of the week. Then, perhaps two weeks later, I get that big box of cards and I can start answering those QSL requests.

Speaking of QSL requests: I've got a big pile of envelopes already! Over 100 envelopes are sitting in the DXpedition *in box* right now for places both near and far. Because the operation concentrated on WARC bands, data modes, and portable operations, we knew we would be handing out quite a few *new ones* to operators around the world. We hope to get you confirmed on those bands and modes just as soon as our cards arrive! (Please check our online log before sending a card. If you do not find your call, please email me directly.)

I arrived back and Verocel Monday of this week. It is sure good to see everybody here in the office. I work with a fantastic group of people. Customer meetings all day Monday and Tuesday followed closely by a new, big assignment were something of a shock to the system after 10 days away. But, I'm back, just about to hit my stride again, and I hope to keep blogging about all the stuff that happens after DXpedition operations have been completed. You didn't think we were done, did you? {grin}

For those of you who have written (and there were a number of you), thank you for the notes. And, if you can stand even more of my prattling, I'm going to do an audio podcast with Dave Bushong of 99 Hobbies this weekend where I'll provide a summary of the planning, execution, and aftermath of this whole DXpedition. When that becomes available, I'll post something here. Until then, best wishes from NE1RD.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:17PM (-05:00)

Logging accuracy and diligence

Thursday, February 15, 2007

Marti Lane (OH2BH) famously asked, "Where do we go next?" I have the answer: St. Kitts! I have set the wheels in motion to rent a villa on the island of St. Kitts (NA-104) for the upcoming CQ WW SSB contest in October. So, while I'm still sorting out the final stages of the Montserrat trip, I'm now busily making plans for the next thing. Life is good! Another dozen envelopes came today seeking Montserrat QSL cards (at least I presume that's what they're looking for--I've not opened them {grin}). I've also received one or two emails a day with requests for corrections for the log files. Perhaps this is a good time to talk about logging and accuracy.

I believe there are three different levels of logging diligence you can have. The lowest is that done by means other than directly into a computer. Paper and pencil, or entering data into a PDA while operating portably would be the lowest level of logging diligence. When you log this way (and I've done this a great deal while operating portably on Field Day or from a Boston Harbor Island) you are capturing all data manually: time, date, frequency, mode, call signs of stations you've worked, signal reports, and other QSO information such as operator name and location. The chances for any one of these data points to be inaccurate are relatively high when compared to other logging means. Even if you capture everything correctly at the time of contact, there is still a chance you'll make errors when you transfer that information to your permanent log later. These transcription errors are easy to make and difficult to find.

The next highest level of logging diligence is using a computer to capture some, but not all, of the QSO information. For example, perhaps you have your computer talking nicely to the radio so time, date, frequency, and mode are captured when you log a call, but the

call sign recorded is not checked for validity. It is still possible to get the call sign wrong and not recognize the error immediately. Operators who use computer logging without call sign database lookup (either through the internet or via a resident database such as the QRZ CDROM) operate at this level.

The highest level of logging diligence involves using rig control to capture all the radio's data, and using a call sign database to verify each call sign you work. This is how I try to operate, both in contests, and on a DXpedition. When I hear a call sign, I immediately type it into my logging program and do a lookup. If I get a name back like "Franz" and the operator says his name is "Franz", I'm pretty sure I've got things right. Occasionally, the names will not match--so I ask for a repeat on the call. Often, in these situations, I've got the call logged correctly, but it is worth the time for the second query. And, on those times when I had dropped (or added) a letter or transposed two characters, it was definitely worth the extra time.

Out of the nearly 1300 contacts I made while on Montserrat, I have needed to fix just one of my QSOs (so far). I would be surprised if the number grew much more than this.

I'm not trying to make some point about my operating skill here. Quite the contrary, I worry (obsess?) that I'm not accurate and focused enough. The point I'm trying to make here is accuracy counts and the best way to achieve higher accuracy immediately is to utilize computerized tools that are available. Rig control, when working, eliminates a whole category of errors: forgetting to record when band or mode changes occurred. Computer logging eliminates another whole category of errors: recording incorrect times or dates. Call sign lookup helps eliminate another category of errors: logging non-existent or nonsensical call signs. It can't guarantee you won't log a *busted call*, but it gives you second chances to correct a problem that would otherwise go unnoticed until much later. Those of you who like to contest know the importance of accurate logging. Busted calls cost you that QSO and usually a penalty of a couple more. The penalty points really add up! If you wish to work on your logging accuracy for DXpedition work, I can recommend no better practice than working a big contest and then submitting your log for score. Review the results when they appear. Vow to improve your score the next time. Here, I certainly believe that practice makes perfect.

Again, if you are not logging with rig control and the QRZ ROM or equivalent, I would urge you to try it. This can be one of the best investments you can make. After all, don't you and those you work deserve an accurate and reliable accounting of your fine work on your DXpedition? I think so. I hope you agree.

I'll report back to everybody when the QSL card design is finally off to the printer. That should be by Monday (I hope). I'll also let everybody know where we stand on electronic QSLing for the group. I believe everybody has finally arrived home (except PauL) so it is time to get that buttoned-up. We are coming to a close on the *Buddipole Users on Montserrat*. At this point, we need only finish what we'd begun. Just a few tasks left...
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:57PM (-05:00)

Lodging set for St. Kitts

Friday, February 16, 2007

I just received confirmation that my deposit for the St. Kitts Villa has been received. We are now confirmed for CQ WW DX SSB contest.

There are a number of things that need to happen next. I have now downloaded the information for licensing and will complete that paperwork this weekend. I'll have that in the mail by Tuesday morning (as Monday is a Federal Holiday and no mail moves that day). It would be nice to get something with an "RD" in the suffix. We'll see...

I'll look over flights this weekend, too. Sandy and I will likely take direct flights from

Boston making the logistics for this trip much simpler than the Montserrat trip (no day-before rendezvous, no chartered flights). Just a young (well, maybe *not so young*) couple taking a vacation. That extra bag? That's just some radio gear. {grin}

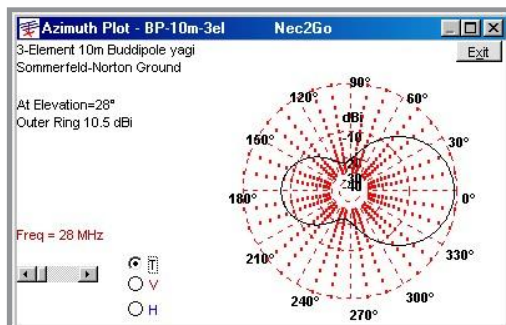
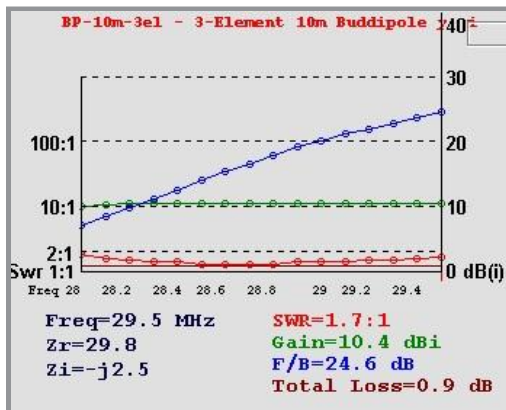
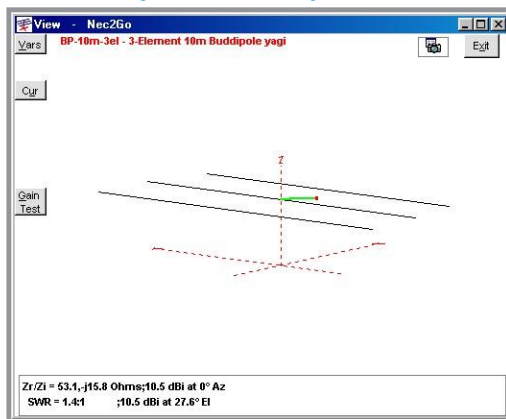
October probably sounds like it is very far away, but if this last trip has taught me anything it is that time flies! I hope to have everything settled for this trip long before the snow melts here in New England. Once licenses, flights, and lodging have all been arranged, I can start obsessing about equipment and antennas. I've already got some ideas cooking that I'll talk about next week.

By the way: Montserrat is NA-103. St. Kitts is NA-104. Maybe I should start doing these islands *in order*. If I did, I guess St. Martin would be next!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:29PM (-05:00)

Replenishing parts and a Buddi-beam

Saturday, February 17, 2007



Today was a very busy day. It began at the Algonquin Amateur Radio Club flea market and a testing session. Anybody who has complained about the hobby dying should have been on today's VE team in Marlboro! An 8 year old passed Element 1 (Morse code test) and several other youngsters took, and passed written exams. And, while Matt Williams (W1MAT) is a little young to be a VE, he helped out the team by getting photocopies and running other errands while the VE team (including Matt's dad) worked about two dozen candidates through the paces. Young and old alike had studied hard and had come to this very crowded and bustling session. Based on the caliber of the candidates seen today, I think we're going to be just fine.

After the testing session was complete I raced through what was left of the flea market to start replenishing my stock. Most vendor were picking up and packing what little was left over from three full hours of scavenging but I was able to pick up 500 feet of dacron rope, some center insulators (for those wonderful fishing pole verticals), and a fist full of connectors. I still need some other stuff, but given the length of the testing session and the lateness of the hour, I was lucky to get what I got.

Though I chewed off some of my *shopping list* today, there are still some things I need to get based on my experiences on Montserrat. The Buddipole systems I used on island performed very, very well. We also did some experimenting with

configurations I had never tried before--not because I hadn't imagined them, but because I didn't have all the parts needed! I've called the Buddipole the *erector set* of ham radio. What I need is more pieces for my erector set!

Here is one idea I've been kicking around for a while. It should be possible to make a 10m 3-element beam from just Buddipole parts. Budd and Chris constructed a 6m beam during our several attempts to activate the magic band while on the island. It shouldn't be that much more to make a 10m beam with the same strategy. The antenna needs 6 long whips, four 22-inch arms, a VersaTee, and three of the aluminum pieces Chris just started selling on the Buddipole web site. You end up with a boom of 88 inches (or so). Here are some outputs I made with NEC2GO to give you an idea.

I dropped Chris a mail message with the long list of stuff I want to buy from him to supplement my already extensive collection of Buddipole parts and accessories. It is good stuff! Perhaps 10m will be open, at least a little, by the time CQ WW comes around in the fall. I can dream, can't I? I'd love to have this little baby tucked up on the veranda of that villa!

I should point out that this design is only preliminary. I've spent a total of one hour actually modeling the thing. I know there are improvements that could be found. Still, what a great starting point. I'll publish the instructions for actual construction and an antenna performance testimonial once I've built it and tested it. Still, even at this very early stage, it is very exciting to be able to build an antenna with these specifications with very, very lightweight parts no longer than 22 inches long. I love this stuff!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:07PM (-05:00)

Finishing strong

Sunday, February 18, 2007

I visited Dave (KZ1O) today and recorded a podcast highlighting the Montserrat trip. Expect that up on his 99 Hobbies web site in the next few days.

I also finished filling out the application for the St. Kitts radio license late this afternoon. I'll put a cover letter in there along with the checks to cover the fees tomorrow. I'm going to call down there to be sure I've got all the latest information on who gets the money and how much they need. With luck, I'll be able to drop that in the mail first thing Tuesday morning.

Finally, it is last call on T-shirts for the Montserrat team. I had designed custom T-shirts for the trip and I've given everybody one last chance to order more. I'll be buying a bunch for the good folks at Gingerbread Hill, too. They treated us like family while we were down there. I'd like to give them all shirts as a thank you for all their fine hospitality.

Our DXpedition team motto was "Not rare, but well done." I'd like to finish strong. We'll do a nice card, send appropriate gifts and "thank yous" to the people who helped make it a success, and make sure nothing is left undone. Its only right.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:01PM (-05:00)

Statistics

Monday, February 19, 2007

I have created some software to support my DXpeditioning needs. The web pages were created by me using some pretty simple off-the-shelf tools, but the online logs were generated by some software I wrote prior to departure. I didn't get a chance to finish that software before I left. I picked up that project again today.

The software generates the static pages allowing visitors to see if they are in the log. That

part works (though it still needs a little polish). I had also intended to create additional pages that showed interesting statistics like the number of QSOs made, the countries worked, bands covered, percentage of QSOs by mode, CQ zones worked, and so on. That's the stuff I was working on today. I've not finished anything yet, but I'm pretty sure those preliminary statistics that I put out at the end of the trip were incomplete (or inaccurate). I'll know more when I've finished this software, and I'll post the results, of course, but we probably had more QSOs than I originally stated. It will be nice to get those final figures.

The other software I'm anxious to try is QSLpro, the QSL card label printing software. I can't use that until the cards arrive, of course, but once I've had a chance to shake out the program on our QSL cards, I'll make it generally available. I'm sure lots of people could make use of that program.

As for the web site log processing software, I'm not sure if I'll publish that stuff. The program(s) are not nearly as polished as the QSLpro program and its utility is not as general. Maybe this is just another way of saying I'm too lazy to finish the software, or hesitant to expose code that is not my best work. Ah, pride goeth before a fall. {grin} I'll try to get that log statistics software finished within the next week or so. It should be fun to really get the final and accurate statistics on this trip finally up on the web site. Of course I'll announce that here when it is complete.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:38PM (-05:00)

St. Kitts license materials sent

Wednesday, February 21, 2007

I made my goal of getting my license request for St. Kitts in the mail today. First, though, I called down to the island of St. Kitts today and verified all the information obtained from the ARRL web site was indeed correct. I'm glad I did.

There was something of a run-around as I wasn't exactly sure which office to call. Once I found the right person it was clear that all the effort would be worthwhile. The young lady on the phone verified that the amounts to send were the same as mentioned on the ARRL web page, but she suggested that I not send a personal check or even cashier's check for the transaction as that almost always triggers a 6 to 8 week delay in processing. {gasp!} Instead, she recommended that I simply send \$30 in cash (US dollars) to cover all the fees.

I know what you're thinking (or should be thinking). Sending cash in the mail is usually a very, very bad idea. Before I could fully form that thought in my head, though, she followed up with a question of her own: would I be using Federal Express to get the materials down to St. Kitts?

This is the second time I've heard that regular postal mail isn't the best way to get things on-and-off these islands. Our (second) set of licensing materials for the Montserrat group was also sent via Federal Express as instructed by our contact there. It seems Federal Express has a reputation of getting things there expeditiously. When I said that I would be using FedEx, there was a note of relief in her voice. I'm sure she's been on the wrong end of a lost license request before and wanted to avoid it here if possible.

So, I took all the materials I'd gathered yesterday, stuffed \$30 and a cover letter in with it, and drove down to the Federal Express office in Burlington. It cost a little more... OK, it cost 40-times the postage of a regular international first class envelope... but I was assured it would be there tomorrow. Whether this translates into me getting this license quickly only time will tell. At this point, though, I like my odds.

Once I get my license, I'll get a web site the call sign as the domain name. It will be something like www.v47rd.com (or something similar). Since it is just little-old-me (and

Sandy) going on the trip, it won't be as elaborate as the VP2M web site, but I'm sure I'll find some interesting stuff to put there. This will have to be deferred until the license comes, of course.

Small steps. A little at a time. That's how these things get planned. I'll start looking into flights over the next few days.

In the mean time, QSL cards keep coming in bunches. Another 15 or so arrived today and I got word from Budd that some folks have sent their QSL request directly to him instead of me (the QSL manager). I guess they're still fooling with the card design so we're not quite ready to send it off to the printer. I can tell you all that the versions I saw last week looked fantastic. I hope you all believe it is worth the wait.

Finally, I also received an envelope full of CDs (DVDs?) with pictures from Bob (AB7ST). I've not had a chance to look them over yet, but I'm sure they will be spectacular. That's tomorrow's project, though, as it is well after midnight here on the East coast. As Mike would say, "The sleep monster has me." Time for bed.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:10AM (-05:00)

Interview on 99 Hobbies now available

Wednesday, February 21, 2007

Dave has published a new podcast on his 99 Hobbies site. It is an interview with me recapping my wonderful trip to Montserrat. Enjoy.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:08PM (-05:00)

QSL cards ordered

Thursday, February 22, 2007

The QSL card design is complete and has been sent to the printer. Chris Drummond's wife Inese, a graphics artist, has done a terrific job of making a design that is visually stunning and an excellent cap to our DXpedition. I couldn't be more pleased. Inese generously donated her time to bring this project to fruition and I, for one, am very thankful for her efforts. I believe anyone lucky enough to have worked us and request a card will be able to see what I mean. Thank you, Inese.

More cards arrived today and I've gotten several requests for BURO routed cards. I promise that I'll fulfill all those QSL requests as soon as the cards arrive.

Budd Drummond reported to the group that he'd received some cards directly (instead of being sent to the QSL manager: me). Please, please, please send your QSL cards and requests to me. I would hate to see any card requests lost because they were sent to the wrong place.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:58PM (-05:00)

RIGtalk on MacOS X

Sunday, February 25, 2007

Now that all the planning for the Montserrat trip has been completed and we've actually made the journey, I've been circling back to revisit some of the small projects I've started but not yet finished. One such project was making the RIGtalk USB serial interfaces work with MacOS X. I did just that tonight. Hooray!

I'll spend some time tomorrow writing up the procedure and getting it published on my

web site. Then, I think I'll write a nice mail message and send it to the good folks at West Mountain Radio echoing those details. They may then include them in a more appropriate place, or actually update their installation process to support the Macintosh directly. In fact, if I've really ironed out this process, there is really no reason why they shouldn't support the Macintosh platform. I'm sure every MacLoggerDX user would be interested in this product.

I have two of these RIGtalk interfaces, one for my Yaesu rigs and one for my ICOM rigs, so I was motivated (so say the least) to get this working. Now that I have, assuming I can repeat today's success in the morning, I'll be swapping out the bulky and heavy rig control stuff out of the IC-7000 Pelican case and replacing it with this little chewing gum-sized device. That will feel good! I'll post to my blog when all of this is accomplished.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:47AM (-05:00)

RIGtalk procedure published for MacOS X

Sunday, February 25, 2007

Yesterday I mentioned a small breakthrough that I'd had getting the RIGtalk USB serial interfaces work with MacOS X. I now have a procedure on my home page that outlines the steps necessary to get this nifty device working with a PowerPC-based Macintosh. Unfortunately, there are no Intel-based Macintosh drivers yet available. {sigh}

I'm going to write to West Mountain Radio in hopes that they will take the baton in this relay race. The next logical step is to have the small fixes I've identified rolled into the existing installers and distributed with the devices. West Mountain Radio could probably do that pretty quickly. After that it gets harder.

Silicon Labs, the maker of the little chip that does the conversion between USB and serial lines used by radios, needs to release an Intel-Macintosh version of this driver. They've had the PPC version out since 2004 (but nothing since). I hope West Mountain Radio will put the request to them to make this happen.

In the mean time, I can use these little devices with my PPC-based 17-inch PowerBook but not *HamMac* (which is Intel-based). Well, that's a step in the right direction. Let's see what happens next. With luck, my next 100 Pound DXpedition will be using these little gems instead of the big clunky things I'm packing now!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:28PM (-05:00)

Heading West next week

Monday, February 26, 2007

I just spent about a half-an-hour scouring the logs looking for a particular QSO. A kind fellow emailed me this weekend telling me he was surprised that his contact was not shown on the web site. Alas, I had to send out my first *not in log* response. Luckily, the fellow had worked another of us on that band and mode so he'll get credit for Montserrat, just not from that one operator.

The cards continue to mount up here at the condo. I think it is time to find a nice box for them. The stack is getting kind of tall and unwieldy. Also, I understand from a conversation with Chris this weekend that Budd has quite the collection at his house now, too. I'm having those forwarded to me. (I mentioned this the other day.)

No word back yet from West Mountain Radio on my note regarding the drivers. I've got quite a lot to do this week and will be traveling next week, so that's just as well, really. Speaking of travel, I need to make a business trip to the West Coast next week. I'll be in the Seattle area arriving Monday night and in meetings through Friday. It isn't clear how

much time I'll have for blogging, but I'll try. With those very long flights between Boston and the Pacific, I collect a pretty sizable batch of random thoughts. Perhaps a couple will be blog-worthy. {grin}

I'm excited to be going on this trip for a couple of reasons. First, this project at work is very interesting and I'll get a chance to see some of the hardware associated with it when I visit the factory in Redmond. I always like to see cool stuff in hardware labs!

The other reason I'm excited is I'll be visiting my friend Henson. There is a photograph kicking around someplace that shows two Cub Scouts just about to board a bus heading for a White Sox game. I was eight years old at the time (I think) and he just one year older. We've been friends ever since. I've not seen Henson for a few years for all the usual reasons: distance, personal commitments, work schedules, and the like. I'll get to visit him after the business portion has concluded. I can't wait!

Of course I'll be bringing a radio. The IC-7000 is already packed into the smaller Pelican case along with the power supply, tuner, and other accessories. I'll bring the smaller Buddipole system, too, and see if I can't add to my DXCC total while on the other coast. Hey! It counts! It is all from the same DXCC entity (continental US). It should be fun to show Henson and his family a little ham radio magic.

Finally, I've signed up to assist at the K1TTT station for the ARRL International DX Contest. There will be some very bright and talented people there this weekend and I hope to learn a great deal. As I've said many times here: practice makes perfect. I should also add that learning from the masters isn't a bad idea, either.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:48PM (-05:00)

Yet another Montserrat DXpedition wrapping up

Tuesday, February 27, 2007

While I was planning my Montserrat trip, a couple of other fellows from the UK wrote to me regarding their plans for a trip to the island. Phil Whitchurch (G3SWH) and Jim Kellaway (G3RTE) have been on the island since the 21st of February. Phil and I exchanged a number of email messages both prior to my trip, and again after my return. I hope that the information I provided helped him prepare for his journey.

If you are planning on a trip to a special place, try to find somebody else who has been there before. Getting advice from somebody who has been there, seen the terrain, met the locals, and navigated through the maze of governmental entanglements, can be valuable input to any planning process. I was certainly thankful for all of the advice I had received from George Briggs (K2DM), who had not only visited Montserrat but had stayed at Gingerbread Hill. I am now absolutely *delighted* to be able to provide this service to others. I've not been many places, but I'm sure happy to talk about those few places I've seen!

I told Phil that I really wanted to work him while he was on the island. I found him on 40m CW last night, but was unable to raise him. About 1AM local time (2AM local time on Montserrat), Phil said he needed to QRT to sleep. Drat! Missed him!

I don't have a set of paddles in the car (I'd be a road hazard if I did), but I did tune around today on my way back from lunch and found Phil again on 20m CW. It was pleasant listening to him work the pile-up.

The schedule I have for Phil's DXpedition shows them packing up and leaving after tomorrow. Alas, it looks like another one slipped through my fingers. But, while I won't have Phil in the log, I believe I still played a small role in his trip. I feel good about that.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:03PM (-05:00)

Progress on the RIGtalk

Thursday, March 01, 2007

It is very late here (after midnight again) so I must be brief. I would like to report that the good folks at West Mountain Radio have been in touch with me and things are progressing on the Macintosh driver issues I identified this weekend with the RIGtalk devices. I am very pleased with the support so far and thought I should say so publicly. We're not out of the woods yet on this issue, but I am very encouraged that we're on the right track. Remember: this issue was opened just a few days ago so it will be a while before the entire thing can be fixed permanently. But, the good folks at West Mountain Radio are making all the right moves so far. I thank them.

Very busy couple of days are ahead for me: I need to plan and pack for my trip to Seattle tomorrow night because I'm taking off some time early Friday to travel to Peru, Massachusetts to work the ARRL DX contest from the contest superstation at K1TTT. I'll report on all of that stuff, of course, thought it might need to wait until I've got some time (probably on that long airplane ride) to get it all written down.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:20AM (-05:00)

eDX

Thursday, March 01, 2007

Something fun happened today. I received the eQSL confirmation of my 25th country and automatically became eligible for the eQSL eDX award. My application for that award (just a click of a button) was approved this evening. I can now print the award certificate. Sure, it isn't DXCC, but it is a nice waypoint along the way. Plus, the eQSL system is fun and easy to use. I'm printing that award and hanging it in the shack. It was fun making all those contacts; it will be fun to have that reminder of all those good times on the wall.

I made it a point to have the team sign up for this service (and Logbook of the World) because it would provide joy to some of those who worked us. I might compare a DXpedition to a dinner party you would throw for a few (thousand) of your closest friends. You want to make sure everybody has a good time, feels wanted, and has memorable experience. A DXpedition web site, online logs, a nice QSL card, and even the support the online QSLing services, are all things you can do to ensure your guests have a good time. It is your party. Throw a nice one.

I've been finding my mail box, and email box, quite full lately. I'm a little behind on the email, but hope to catch up on that long trip to Seattle on Monday. If I owe you a message, please be patient. Thank you.

As a reminder, I'll be at K1TTT operating in the ARRL DX contest for the next couple of days. My next blog entry will be Sunday night.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:20PM (-05:00)

ARRL DX in the bag

Sunday, March 04, 2007

I drove out to the K1TTT contest station on Friday afternoon to help out with the ARRL DX contest effort and put some points in the log for the Yankee Clipper Contest Club. If you've not had a chance to operate at a really big station, take my advice and do it the

very first opportunity you have!

In one sense, this is about as far afield from the minimalistic equipment one of my *100 Pound DXpeditions* might get. Dave Robbins has built an antenna farm that is extremely impressive. The towers are immediately visible when you pull into the property, of course, but there are also beverage antennas extending deep into the woods and four square antennas tucked away out of sight that really pack a wallop. Just learning to run all the equipment, antenna switching, logging software, and radios at each position was an interesting challenge. Then, there was the operating.

Dave and I exchanged email messages last week and he asked me what level of experience I'd had in contesting. Not wanting to get in over my head, I told him that I should probably be assigned roles where I can learn, help, but not jeopardize our score. I also told him I'd need to leave some time Sunday long before the contest was over as I need to drive back home, pack, and make my early flight out of Logan on Monday.

I operated 18 hours out of the roughly 33 hours I was there (I bailed out at 1 AM Sunday morning). In all, I worked all bands during one shift or another except 10m. Of course missing 10m at this point in the sunspot cycle was no great loss!

There were a number of high-points in those 18 hours including working Hawaii on 160m and some QRP stations from very remote places.

Here are the preliminary and unofficial scores for K1TTT:

Band	QSOs	Pts	Cty
1.8	68	168	41
3.5	471	1341	82
7	404	1173	83
14	1885	5607	117
21	541	1593	93
28	31	81	12
Total	3400	9963	428
Score	: 4,264,164		

Now that I've seen some of these antennas in action, I'm going back to all my antenna books and start reading about them again. And, now that I've had a chance to try some of this equipment in a contest situation, I've got some new items on my wish list. The Heil Pro Set Quite Phone headset is tops. It was comfortable, well-built, and of course had that great Heil sound on both transmit and receive. I'll be ordering in that this week. Recommended.

Tomorrow's blog entry will be back on-topic. I also hope to catch up on the rest of the email in my inbox.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:43PM (-05:00)

Long flights and learning

Monday, March 05, 2007

I'm in Seattle (Redmond, actually). The long flights between Boston and Dallas, and then Dallas and Seattle gave me a chance to just sit and think about a whole raft of things. I also had a chance to watch more of the PVRC DVDs of their Contest Seminar held in March 2005. (I looked on the PVRC web site to see if you can still order them, but came up empty.) The discs are in a 6 DVD set from a two day seminar that covered antennas and propagation, tower construction, terrain analysis, contest operating, ergonomics, logging, automation, and much more. The presenters are very experienced contesters. I wish I would have been at the seminar, but these DVDs are the next best thing.

Speaking of contesting seminars, there is a Contesting University seminar that will be held at Dayton this year. If you were already planning to attend Dayton this year, come a day early and take the class. I signed up the moment I heard about it last year.

Contesting and DXpeditioning are complimentary pursuits in my mind. Both efforts seek to get the most out of a limited time period and demand skills and knowledge that a rag-chewer may not need to have. I have found that things I've learned in one arena have led to epiphanies in the other.

The other thing I did on those long flights was read more of ON4UN's Low Band DXing book. This is really a fantastic piece of work. Even if you don't think you need this book, you need this book. Really. Recommended.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:30PM (-05:00)

Other people's DXpeditions

Tuesday, March 06, 2007

I am in Washington state on business but still trying to keep up with things while away. The magic of email allows me to do some of this even when far away from home. Let me tell you about some of the email I've been getting and sending recently.

Phil Whitchurch (G3SWH) and Jim Kellaway (G3RTE) just returned from Montserrat. I'd been exchanging email with Phil for quite some time. Of course, I asked how well they did, what kind of equipment they used, and so on. Here's what Phil had to say in one of his recent messages:

I used a doublet on all bands rigged as an inverted vee with the centre at around 50 feet. Jim used a combination of a doublet, sloping dipoles and inverted vee dipoles. We both used barefoot TS-570D transceivers with switched mode power supplies and laptops for logging. We also have Dunestar filters for minimising inter station QRM, but didn't seem to need them at Alta Loma as we were able to get the antennas sufficiently well separated. It's a formula we have used on several other DX-peditions.

We should have done better, but I was suffering from a viral infection which made me very tired. My antenna wouldn't tune on 80 metres and Jim's wouldn't tune on 17 metres.

160 was very disappointing because of the very high QRN level I did work a few Europeans one morning and could hear a massive pile up, but just couldn't copy any callsigns. The next morning I called CQ for about 30 minutes and worked a solitary W5!

When Phil claims he should have done better, please understand that his two man team outperformed our seven man team when comparing the number of QSOs put in the log! I also mentioned in previous blogs that it was a pleasure listening to Phil work those pile-ups on CW. Very nice.

I've also been exchanging emails with Peter Freiler (W1AIR) who is now in the process of planning a trip to Hawaii and would like to make it a *100 Pound DXpedition*. Peter already has a great start with a package that looks very much like the one I used on St. John last year: FT-897 with built-in power supply, laptop, and some lightweight antennas (though precisely which ones he's not decided on yet).

Peter is also looking for smaller parts to make the portable station complete. He was looking for a foot peddle, for example, and I suggested something like this on eBay. I bought a few foot switches similar to these and they work very well.

As for the antennas, I made some suggestions. I had used an MP-1 while in Hawaii and Peter wondered if that was still a good option. I pointed him to some pictures off my home page that show me holding my MP-1 on that top floor balcony. If you look at those pictures, you'll see that this is not a *stock* MP-1. Quite the contrary, I had made some serious improvements to it by adding Buddipole arms (one or two) to the bottom and a much longer whip on the top. Add to that an elaborate set of radials made from ribbon cable and you can't really compare my set-up to an off-the-shelf version of the MP-1. Those Hawaii photographs were before the advent of the Buddistick and, though I didn't know it at the time, my contraption was more like one of these Buddisticks than an MP-1. And, by the time you add the parts that I added to the MP-1 system, it would be cheaper (and better) to just get the Buddistick, IMHO. I know it seems like I pump these products (the Buddi* stuff) a lot, but it works well, travels well, and is versatile. I praise what works. I don't know what antennas Peter will ultimately select, but he's doing the right thing by exploring his options early. It also helps to ask around, get opinions, and see how other people did with their choices. I am absolutely shameless in this regard, asking people what they did, how they did it, and what they would do differently next time. I learn something every time I do so.

I've been exchanging emails with a few other folks as well, but time and space limit me here. Suffice it to say that I enjoy every message, enjoy helping when I can, and really enjoy hearing about all of these trips people are planning. I think this is an extremely fun thing to do within the hobby. I'm glad others think so, too.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:56PM (-05:00)

Leave the radio at home

Wednesday, March 07, 2007

I recently talked about my contest work at the K1TTT superstation last weekend. One of the nice things about that experience was everything I needed to operate was already there: radios, amplifiers, antennas, computers, headsets, foot peddles, and anything else you could imagine. There are ways to do DXpeditioning this way, too, by renting an existing station in that far-away place.

We've all seen the advertisements in the back of QST, but there are resources on the web, too. One such site is DX Holiday. Some of the information is out-of-date, but overall it is an excellent place to begin looking for some options. Here are just a few:

- Turks & Caicos
- Antiga
- St. Croix
- Croatia
- Australia

There are also places where you can bring your own radio but the antennas are already set-up such as this one in the Bahamas.

As you might expect, rates vary by season and some big contesting weekends might be more expensive than "regular" weekends. The seasonal rate change might actually work in your favor, though. Consider most people do not want to go to the Caribbean during hurricane season, though CQ WW SSB falls at the very end of that season (the last weekend in October). If you can reserve some station in the Caribbean, you may be able to get flights for a deep discount!

Traveling light, or with no equipment at all, is not cheating. When I give my *100 Pound DXpedition* talks, I state up-front that the way I categorize DXpeditions is by the volume and mass of stuff that is taken. Hauling zero equipment is the first category I discuss!

If you're not sure if this kind of thing (DXpeditioning) is for you, perhaps renting one of these places with equipment already there is a good first step. That would let you "try before you buy". Of course if you do try this, please drop me a line and let me know how you liked it!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:54PM (-05:00)

In search of the featherweight tribander

Thursday, March 08, 2007

I've not given up on the idea of a very small, very light-weight tribander (10m/15m/20m) antenna for my *100 Pound DXpeditions*. I had purchased a C3SS from Force-12 for this purpose, and it was a very good performer, but it was just too large (and a bit complicated) for the kind of duty I had intended. I'm still looking. The constraints for my search are these:

- **Under 30 pounds** - Actually, under 25 pounds would be better, and something under 20 pounds would be excellent. Is this possible?
- **Easily assembled** - The C3SS was a fantastic performer, but I wouldn't want to be putting that together on a windy beach on some far-away place. Ideally, I like something that slips together in some obvious way in about 30 minutes or less.
- **Breaks down small** - How small? No piece can be longer than 48 inches in length, the size of my hard-sided golf bag. Even a little shorter would be better (perhaps 40 inches?)
- **Some gain** - I'm going to be realistic here. Gain is achieved by boom length, among other things, and my constraints are going to mean a very short boom. Still, it would be nice to have some significant gain on 15m and 10m, even if the gain on 20m is small.
- **Driven with 50 ohm feed** - I just want to hook my coax directly to the antenna. Whatever matching system is there (hairpin, choke, etc.) should be small and no-fuss.
- **Good front-to-back ratio** - Even if I'm not getting lots of gain, it would be nice if the pattern of the antenna rejected signals I wanted to ignore anyway.
- **Cheap** - I'm not made of money. Gee wizz, it is only aluminum! How much can such a thing cost?!

There are some things I'm willing to give up to help make this happen. Here are a couple of them:

- **Wind survivability** - I don't care. If the wind blows hard, I will take it down. I'm using this for travel. It doesn't need to be strong enough to live on a tower 12 months a year. It could even be a little flimsy, if it meant saving weight and cost.
- **Power rating** - This is a big one. I don't need it to handle full legal limit power. I don't even need it to handle 600 watts of power. It could be rated at 120 watts SSB, 80 watts CW, and 50 watts continuous (for RTTY or PSK-31) and it would be more than sufficient. There aren't many antennas out there for operators who run QRP or low power (100 watts). It seems to me this would be a big savings in the traps, for example.

At this point I believe I have two choices: buy some commercial antenna off-the-shelf and cut it down for travel, or design one from scratch (even if I use some off-the-shelf components). If I had a workshop and a place to work and test such creations, I would be tempted to make my own. Unfortunately, I don't have such facilities in my condominium. So, I think I'll be buying something.

I'm leaning towards the Hy-Gain TH-3JRS which weighs 21 pounds according to the web site. It handles 600 watts and has a 12 foot boom. I would have to hack up the 6 long element tubes (6 foot long each) and the two boom tubes (also 6 foot long). Adding the additional material needed to then join these pieces together would add additional weight, but I don't see another way to do it.

The antenna is about \$360 and there would be additional expenses trying to figure out how to make it smaller. That's a pricey experiment, but I'm considering it. I'll be mulling this over in the next few weeks.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:39PM (-05:00)

Visiting childhood friends and high SWR

Saturday, March 10, 2007

The work week is over and I've made it to my buddy Henson's place. I've known him since I was eight years old and it is amazing how much has changed, and not changed. I'm really glad I came!

I've got the Buddipole set up in the yard but something isn't right. I'm wondering if the piece of coax I've brought is defective. Of course, I did not bring the antenna analyzer with me (or this would be easier to diagnose). It was too late tonight to really figure out what is going on. I'll try again in the morning.

I got some feedback on the yagi musings I had in last night's blog. I'll wait to discuss it, though, as I'm too tired to cover the topic justly this evening. It is after midnight here on the West Coast (and after 3AM Boston time--which my body still clings to). I think I'll sleep. The DX will have to wait until morning.

By the way, Blogger claims that this is my 250th post to this blog. I would like to thank all who have stuck with me this long. I can only hope that some of this has been helpful to you. Thanks for reading!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:17AM (-05:00)

NE1RD/W7 is now QRT

Sunday, March 11, 2007

My time with my friend Henson and his family is coming to a close. I'm a little sad for I've not seen him for many years and less than two days is far too short a time to catch up on all that has happened to both of us. Still, it was an excellent and relaxing way to wrap up this West Coast trip.

My IC-7000 was set up on a family room table for most of the day. I fiddled with the antenna and found the loose connection which allowed me to make a few contacts as NE1RD/W7. I was able to snag Svalbard, Japan, and several special event stations in Oklahoma running 1x1 call signs. Apparently, there were enough of these stations that you could spell "Oklahoma" with them (and if you did be eligible for some certificate). Very nifty idea!

I'm now packing up and preparing for the early morning drive to the airport. There are two long flights ahead of me (I have a stop in Chicago). I've got a couple of things to ponder on the way back. The first one is my reliance upon antenna analyzers for setting up these antennas. I did not bring my MFJ 259B with me on this trip, and it made things much harder than I would have thought! I either need to get more comfortable setting up some of these antennas without the analyzer, or declare that I'll always have such a tool in my bag. (I also admit the solution might be answering "yes" to both.)

I've just glanced at the clock in the corner of my screen. I had left it on Boston time for

this trip. It was comforting somehow to see the time at home while I was so far away. It now reads 3:59 AM. I've got to sleep fast and be up in just a few hours. I'll see all of you on the other end after my long flights!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:15AM (-04:00)

Ours go to 102

Tuesday, March 13, 2007

Somewhere between Seattle and Boston I managed to pick up a nasty chest cold. Needless to say, a 102F temperature is not conducive to clear thinking, or blogging. Sleeping 16 hours a day lets me dream of DX! I should be back on track tomorrow after a liberal application of antibiotics.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:43PM (-04:00)

Featherweight tribander (continued)

Thursday, March 15, 2007

I've gotten some very interesting feedback from my post the other day about my search for a *featherweight tribander*. Dave Murphy (KB1LKE) wrote to me not long after the post to challenge some of my assumptions and make some alternative suggestions.

Even before I get into this, let me say that this is good stuff. Challenge assumptions. Reconsider alternatives. Think hard about your choices and understand why you're making them, what you're getting, and what you're giving up. Dave's message had a healthy dose of all that.

I had said I was looking for a featherweight tribander and listed some reasons why I thought one might be desirable. Dave restated some of my thinking simply: "It is apparent that you want to output a little more power and have some directivity to minimize interference from certain directions. The only questions are how much power and directivity and how much are you willing to sacrifice for them." Exactly. I had also quietly buried an assumption, though, that he picked up on immediately. Do I need 3 elements on this thing? A two element yagi is also a very effective antenna which provides a good front-to-back ratio and some gain, maybe 5 dB, over a dipole. Adding that third element only gives you a small bump from there. Consider a couple of Mosley "mini-beams" suggested by Aston Lee in the comments section of this post. The data below was gleaned from the Mosley web site.

Mini-33-A	Mini-32-A	3 Element	2 Element	Gain dBd	F/B	Gain dBd	F/B	10m	6.1	16	5.1
~17	15m	4.2	13	4.5	~17	20m	3.5	12	3.3	~17	Weight
											10 pounds
											8 pounds
											MSRP \$468.95
											\$347.95

Indeed, as per the table above, that extra element does provide a little more gain on 10m and 20m, but look at 15m. The extra spacing between the elements of the 2-element antenna actually helped on 15m gain!

Why a tribander? Could a reconfigurable antenna that provided different bands be as good? Aston Lee also suggested looking at

Super Antennas (W6MMA) Portable Yagi System. This is a two element antenna that can be configured for any single band 20m-6m. It weighs only 7 pounds and comes in a nice carrying case. I remember seeing this at Dayton last year and being intrigued for a time, but in the end losing interest. The main reason for this is another unstated requirement that should have made the previous list.

When you consider the weight of an antenna system for a *100 Pound DXpedition* you also need to consider the weight and bulk of its feed line. If you need 100 feet of RG8X to

feed a given antenna, that coax run will add 4 pounds to your pack. If you have three mono band antennas that need such a run, that would add 12 pounds. One of the appeals of a tri-band antenna is that I get to feed that single antenna with a single piece of coax, theoretically saving you weight.

The other reason why the collection of configurable mono-banders did not seem like a great deal to me has to do with what I already have in my antenna collection. I have already purchased or designed mono-band antennas, collapsable masts and fishing poles hanging wires for the low bands, Buddipole, Buddistick, or MP-1 for the higher bands, and some other weird things I've picked up along the way just to add to the variety. I don't need any more single-band antennas. Further, if I'm going to add complexity of assembly in the field to the equation, I want to have a significant payback for that. Gain, a nice F/B ratio, and three bands from one wire sounds like a nice trade-off. Anything less does not.

Build or buy? Returning to Dave's message for a moment, he suggested that I look into some articles Cebik has on his web site. (This is always recommended. If you love antennas and haven't been to W4NRL's site, you're missing a lot!) I am a "tinkerer" by nature and can be easily enticed into wandering off into a very interesting distraction. I must not allow that to happen this time. My goal is to have whatever system chosen to be in place this Spring. I would like to have ample experience with it before it makes a trip to St. Kitts.

Will it fit?! I listed "breaks down small" in my criteria in my original post. I could, I guess, find some hard-sided ski bag to haul around 6 foot pieces, but I would rather not. I have a very nice hard sized golf bag that was served me well and would very much like to continue to use that for carrying my antenna parts. Further, even if I get a tri-bander, I will still need to carry other long items such as the DK9SQ mast, fishing poles, and my trusty *big* Buddipole system. This, too, becomes a "build vs. buy" alternative. If I buy an antenna, can I get the manufacturer (or somebody else with the correct tools) to chop it up so it would fit in my bag?

As mentioned before, I was considering the Hy-Gain TH-3JRS. At 21 pounds, it was on the heavy-end of my criteria, but it looked to be a good performer. To be honest, I didn't think anybody made what I was looking for: small, light, and low-power rated (to enable these savings). I was wrong. Look again at the Mosley specifications in the table above. These antennas are 8 and 10 pounds respectively for the 2- and 3-element models!

Intrigued, I **called Mosley** this afternoon and spoke with Gary. There are stories on the Mosley news page about DXpeditioners ordering antennas cut to size. Could he do that for me? Yes! There would be some additional charges (which we discussed and sound reasonable to me), and assembly time would probably be a little longer than the "stock unit", but I could order the antenna the way I wanted it (short pieces, please) and he'd do everything within his power to accommodate me. That's service!

I now need to decide if I'm really ready to drop another big bucket of money on an antenna. Also, do I get the 2-element or 3-element model? In any case, I believe I'm a few steps closer to my featherweight tri-bander.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:41PM (-04:00)

Analyzers considered

Saturday, March 17, 2007

One of the observations that I made on my recent trip to Seattle was that I had become dependent on antenna analyzers for setting up my antennas in the field. I own two analyzers:

- MFJ-259B - I was licensed in 2002 just prior to the ARRL New England Division

Convention held in Boxboro. MFJ had a big booth there and this device was my first big purchase in the hobby--even before I bought my first radio!

- Autek VA1 RX Vector Analyst - I bought this device because it was very small and would travel more easily than the MFJ unit.

The MFJ analyzer has served me well. The Autek unit, not so well. I should give the VA1 another chance, but it almost doesn't seem worth the effort. There's no nice way to say it: the Autek unit has been a very big disappointment. It's junk. There. I said it.

I'm in the market for another analyzer. Well, if it can't be small, let's find one that does more than the MFJ! There was an article in the November issue of QST reviewing two analyzers:

- AEA Via Analyzer - Black and white display. About \$600.
- Timewave TZ-900 AntennaSmith - Color display. About \$1250.

The allure of both units is the ability to see a graph of data resulting from a frequency sweep rather than the single data point presented by a typical analyzer like the MFJ. I have made this point before but it bears repeating: time on the island (or whatever your DX location may be) is limited and precious. If you can plan well on some issue before you leave saving you time on site, it is a big win. Similarly, if you can have a tool that saves you time while on location, that, too, can be a big win. I'm putting these analyzers in that category.

The price difference between the two units is stark: the Timewave device is roughly double the cost of the AEA unit. Either would be a large investment. But, with the kind of antenna work I typically do: improvised antennas, experimental, always in a different location, and compromised on weight, the ability to quickly assess my antennas (especially since I'm always working against the clock) makes this kind of investment worthwhile.

I just window-shopping now but hope to make some decisions on this and the yagi soon. I would very much like to have all of this in place for the St. Kitts trip. The sooner I could get some experience with this stuff, the better.

Finally, I should remind everybody that I'll be running a special event station K1P with my buddy Dave for Patriots Day in April. I'll use that trip as a way of evaluating a bunch of stuff I've collected since the Montserrat trip. If one of these new analyzers were to make the trip, even better! Of course, I'll have a full report here.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:17AM (-04:00)

Visalia on my mind

Sunday, March 18, 2007

Just tying up some loose ends tonight, filing away mail messages and updating my calendar. The local radio club is organizing a trip to ARRL headquarters in the morning. I sure wish I was going. That is a fun place to visit!

I'm also wishing that I could somehow swing going to Visalia this year. Just looking over the DXpeditions program makes my mouth water. DXpeditions to Swains Island, Lakshadweep, Revillagigedo, Iraq and Kermadec are covered Saturday. Wow. Imagine what you could learn in just one afternoon! Alas, after losing a week to this dreaded chest cold, there's no way I can sneak off again. Anyway, I've got a special even station planed for April and Dayton in May. I'm still working for a living! I'm thinking seriously about going out there to the International DX Convention next year, though.

Finally, I got lots of email over the last couple of days on antennas, analyzers, and some other stuff. One message suggested that all us bloggers find a way to meet at Dayton.

What a good idea! I'll see if I can get something organized on that with a couple of other guys and let it grow from there.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:59PM (-04:00)

DXLab suite

Tuesday, March 20, 2007

My local radio club held its monthly meeting tonight. The guest speaker was David Bernstein (AA6YQ), author of the DXLab suite of software tools. The software, which runs on MS Windows-based PCs, is a collection of separate tools which work together. They can be run individually, you can pick-and-choose subsets to run, or run all of them depending on your needs.

The tools in the DXLab suite are:

- **Commander** - *Commander* is a rig control applicatoin that allows you to manage most any modern radio with a serial port. It provides banks of memories, works with *SpotCollector* to show spots in a band-map, and allows you to switch between up to four transceivers.
- **DXKeeper** - *DXKeeper* is a logging program that integrates with callbook CDROMs and services. You can print QSL card images, labels, and envelopes, upload to eQSL and LoTW, and track your awards. It works with most of the other tools in the suite.
- **DXView** - *DXView* gives you instant information when you enter a call sign or call sign fragment. Just enter in the call sign and it pops up the main country prefix, country name, grid square, distance, long path and short path headings, and your progress towards awards for that entity by band, mode, QSL sent, QSL received, and even ARRL credit verified.
- **Launcher** - The *Launcher* isn't really a DX tool. It is a utility that provides the backbone for the other tools to work together. It also serves as the one-stop-shopping place for updating your software with just a push of a button.
- **Pathfinder** - *Pathfinder* locates QSL routing information from a variety of sources.
- **PropView** - *PropView* includes the IonCap engine. It cranks through all the propagation predictions and presents you with graphs that tell you instantly when band openings are likely to occur. If you look at nothing else in this suite, check this one out!
- **SpotCollector** - *SpotCollector* is a data aggregation tool for the DX spotting sources. It can watch up to six different DX spotting resources combining, compressing, and filtering data as necessary. The results are stored in a database allowing you to examine spotting data days or even weeks later to see trends (when is that rare DX station typically on) or even notify you when that one special country (or station) is spotted.
- **WinWarbler** - *WinWarbler* is yet another digital mode interface nicely integrated with the rest of the package.

You can find out more about this program at the supported DXLab Yahoo group. David claims that there are no outstanding defects at this time and that any defects found are fixed within 24 hours if possible. Updates are frequent so you'll want to pay attention. David's talk at tonight's meeting was wonderful. Though he emphasized that this work was a hobby, you can tell that there is lots of polish on these programs. I've not used them (yet), but was very impressed by the presentation and demos. Give them a look. Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:57PM (-04:00)

NCDXF

Wednesday, March 21, 2007

I finally joined the Northern California DX Foundation today. Well, I sent them the money anyway. {grin} This is something I've been meaning to do for a while. The NCDXF is one of the premiere DX organizations in the world sponsoring DXpeditions, maintaining a beacon network, and providing scholarships. Last night's speaker mentioned he was a member of the NCDXF and I made it a point today of finally getting my application submitted. I wish I could give more. They do great work.

Today is the first day of Spring. Hooray! It won't be long until the boats are running again in Boston Harbor. Last year I made more than a few trips out to Georges Island and I hope to make even more this year. That will begin in May.

In the mean time, I can begin planning for the RSGB IOTA contest to be held July 28th and 29th of this year. Last year I was only able to put in a six hour effort because I needed to catch the last ferry off Georges Island. This year I'm hoping to put in a full 12 or even 24 hour effort by camping on one of these islands. I submitted my camping request this evening which should get me a spot on Lovells Island for the night. With luck, my biggest problem will be managing the batteries! July seems like a very long way off right now, but I'm sure it will be here before I know it.

Finally, I'm still wrestling with the idea of getting a lightweight yagi. I guess I'll make my final decision in the next few days.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:36PM (-04:00)

1:1 baluns

Thursday, March 22, 2007

I've been very fond of using vertical antennas on my little island excursions. The nice thing about these antennas is their simplicity. Just a few wires held up by a fishing pole or fiberglass mast and you've got your radiator. The last remaining problems that I've got with this approach is keeping the RF out there at the antenna instead of following the coax back into the radio. Usually, a few turns of coax will provide enough of an impediment to keep the problem manageable, but I been thinking I could do better. The Buddipole systems each have a Triple Ratio Switched Balun (TRSB). This device serves two purposes: (1) it has an isolation transformer to keep the RF off the coax, and (2) it has a tapped second transformer that allows you to match your 50 ohm feed to an antenna with a lower impedance such as 25 ohms or 12.5 ohms. (It also has a switch position for a 50 ohm load, too.) Since the Buddipoles are shortened verticals for the lower bands, being able to match these lower impedances is very helpful and, as such, I believe the TRSB is a *must have* accessory for any serious Buddipole user. I should also have something similar (but simpler) for my fishing-pole verticals.

What I need is just a simple box with a 1:1 balun wound around a toroid. There are lots of simple designs in popular books like Understanding, Building, and Using Baluns and Ununs. All you need are the parts and a little patience.

I purchased from The Wireman kit 836 that has the following description:

CQ "Lew McCoy" heavy duty balun kit for balanced line to coax, heavy load. Kit contains 3-T200-2 or 1 T300A-2 iron powder core, fiber glass tape, #635 polyimide wire, instructions.

My kit contained 3 of these toroids--though I dropped one on my new kitchen floor and now I have only 2 {sigh}. Of course, you can get better prices for some of this stuff. Check out the prices at PartsAndKits.com on their

Toroid page. Looks like I can get three of these T200-2 toroids for \$12!

I plan on making two 1:1 baluns around the two toroids I have left (assuming I don't drop any more on the kitchen floor) and put them in small boxes that I can place at the feed point of these fishing-pole verticals. Hopefully, I'll have some time between now and my trip to Maine in April so I can try them out at the K1P special event station.

In other news, there has been some progress on our plans for a Dayton get-together for ham bloggers. The tentative plan is for anybody interested (bloggers or those who read us) to meet at 6 PM in the lobby of the Crowne Plaza Hotel on Thursday, May 17th. This will be immediately after the conclusion of the Contest University event. So far Steve Weinert (K9ZW), Jeff Davis (KE9V), and yours truly are planning on meeting at that time. This is the first "official" announcement for this. Pass the word!

Finally, assuming my cough will subside enough (I'm still fighting this stupid cold! Can you believe it?!), I'll be in the CQ WW WPX contest this weekend working on my QRP DXCC total. Of course, if QRP at the very bottom of the sunspot cycle becomes too depressing, I'll either hang it up, or switch to 100 watts. This is a contest where everybody-can-work-everybody. Even if you're not keen on contesting, this is a fun one. Just use a signal report (59, of course) and a sequential serial number for the exchange. See you on the air!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:50PM (-04:00)

WPX and statistics

Sunday, March 25, 2007

I finally finished the statistics for the VP2M DXpedition today. You can view them here. I know I reported something like 2400 QSOs back in February but I hadn't fully processed all the logs. The total is really closer to 3000 QSOs, 120 digital contacts, 270 CW contacts, and 2588 on SSB. We worked 85 DXCC entities and *nearly* did a Worked All States.

The software still needs work, but I've got enough working that I can get it finished in plenty of time before my trip in October. I might even have time to work on it before the K1P trip in April.

The CQ WW WPX SSB contest was this weekend and I was able to play a bit in between yesterday's VE session and working on the DXpedition statistics. I decided to do the contest QRP so I could work on my DXCC (QRP) total. I was able to put four more countries in the log! Here's the results from my half-hearted effort.

Summary:

Band QSOs

160:

80: 37

40: 25

20: 90

15:

10:

Total: 152 Prefixes = 123 Total Score = 36,162

Note how high the percentage is for new prefixes vs. total QSOs. When you work QRP, you expect to invest a lot of time for each QSO. So, I don't work for 5 minute to get a prefix I already have; I spend that time tuning around and looking for a prefix I don't have! Not bad for a little K2 and a G5RV.

Another busy week ahead. I'm still thinking about the beam and analyzer...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:54PM (-04:00)

TZ-900S

Monday, March 26, 2007

I took the plunge today and ordered the Timewave AntennaSmith today. This is a rather expensive piece of equipment and I didn't make this decision lightly. Certainly you can do well on these trips without such a device. I have! But, I have a tendency to try new things, experiment, and push limits. Evaluating some new contraption with on-air tests is good, but I'd like to report back more in this blog about some of these antenna ideas. So, I'll try to use this device and antenna modeling software over the next year to provide a better description of, and justification for, my lightweight antenna approaches. I hope to have the unit by the end of the week. I'll relay first impressions then.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:18PM (-04:00)

Off-topic: Kathy Sierra

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

This is an off-topic post.

I spend a great deal of time on this blog. The act of writing helps me clarify things in my mind and, of course, I hope that those who take the time to read it also benefit. There are many, many blogs out there and I know that everyone's time is precious. Please believe me when I say that I feel honored by the number of people who take time out of their lives a couple of times a week to drop by and check up on my exploits.

I also feel lucky that the community, the ham radio community, the DX community, and those of us who love the idea of DXpeditioning, is largely comprised of gentle, thoughtful, and generous people. It is rare that I run into anybody mean-spirited (and those few occasions were confined to one particular web site).

Why am I saying all this now? You know I blog about ham radio stuff but I've also blogged about computer science topics on java.net and Artima. I've not spent much time on the *professional* blogging stuff recently (this blog and my DXpedition planning has been very time consuming!) but I still read and follow other people's professional blogs. It is about these blogs that has prompted me to write today. Something dreadful has happened in that other arena.

Kathy Sierra, a long time force in the computer industry and one of the big brains behind the Head First books published by O'Reilly, has received death threats on her blog. I am appalled, saddened, and angry. This is ugly, ugly stuff. Ms. Sierra was forced to cancel a public appearance for fear of her safety. We're talking about educated professionals threatening other educated professionals in ways so heinous I dare not describe them here.

Words matter. If you have the stomach for it, and if you can tolerate exceptionally coarse, hateful, and violent language, take a moment and read her account. **Be warned:** her description and recounting is deeply disturbing with language equally shocking.

This new medium where anybody can publish and collaboration is pervasive and immediate is amazing. We can shape it in any way we like and hold it to standards we set. And, it is up to us to reject the kind of savagery shown to Ms. Sierra. Just as we should "police" ourselves on the ham bands, we should hold each other to the highest standards here in the blogosphere. We must not cede our civilization to barbarians on our streets, or our screens.

My rule-of-thumb on these things is simple: I won't accept behavior on-line that would be unacceptable face-to-face. Again, I am incredibly thankful that everyone in my corner of the world is civilized, thoughtful, and helpful. Let's keep it that way! And, if you are a computer professional, take a moment to send a message of hope and support to Kathy. Thank you.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:41AM (-04:00)

Mosley mini beam ordered

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

My St. Kitt license has arrived! That's the good news. The bad news is I was not specific enough about wanting a genuine St. Kitts call sign from their pool so they "gave me" the call *V4/NE1RD*. {sigh} The call *V44RD* is available so I'll see if I can get this straightened out tomorrow by sending a FAX down there. The lesson in all this? When you're sending in requests such as this to some licensing authority be as specific as possible about what you want. I did that with the license requests for Montserrat; I didn't do that for this request to St. Kitts. My mistake. We'll see if I can fix it.

I ordered the Mosley Mini-32-A mini-beam today. I spoke again with Gary Sr. at Mosley and reviewed the requirements we discussed a couple of weeks ago. I need this antenna to have no piece longer than 48 inches so it can travel easily in my golf bag. He'll have his team build the antenna to these specifications, though the traps will need to be partially disassembled during travel. He assured me this won't be a problem.

Two things about my discussion today are noteworthy. The first one is practical: the lead time for this antenna is now upwards of 40 days. Mosley is busy filling commercial and military orders. (Good for them!) Like so many things discussed in this blog, planning ahead is always key for these lightweight DXpeditions. In this case, planning ahead means ordering what you need long before you think you need it as lead times on some of these items could be as long as 6 months! I should have the antenna about the time the weather turns warm here in Boston. I can get some experience with the thing here before carting it to St. Kitts in October.

The second noteworthy thing about my call to Mosley was Gary. It was a pleasure to speak with him and work out the details of what I needed, what those design decisions implied, how long it would take, and how much it might cost. He was patient, personable, helpful, knowledgeable, and a pleasure to work with. All too rare these days and definitely welcome.

That's two big expenses in two days. I think that's enough for a while! Of course, I'll report back here on what I learn once these things arrive.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:54PM (-04:00)

Nice to be thanked

Wednesday, March 28, 2007

I sent a letter via FAX down to St. Kitts today asking for help straightening out my call sign. I've asked if they would issue me *V44RD*. Again, this was my goof-up for not being more specific in my initial request. We'll see how long this takes to fix.

I just got home from a nice dinner with local club members where we discussed our Field Day plans. This year our club is going to do things a little differently than we'd done before. Our goal is to have Field Day be an *Elmering event* with a concentration on members helping other members try new things and learn new skills. We're not worried about our score, we aren't worried about QSO rates or scheduling operators. Instead, we're pulling together lists of interesting topics for hands-on demonstrations and mini-talks (perhaps 15 minutes or less). I'll have more on this as we get closer to that last weekend in June.

Finally, I help with testing sessions for hams once a month (or so). This is always rewarding but this last session held Saturday had a man bringing his grandson. Both were sitting for the Extra exam. Last night I received a mail message forwarded by Bill, the session organizer, originally from that gentleman. Here's what he had to say:

Just wanted to drop a line and say Thank You to you and your group of volunteers for their time. It was a great experience being able to upgrade at the same time with [my grandson]. I always asked myself why I didn't upgrade years ago? I guess there was a reason. I'm glad I waited. Thanks again for a great experience for both of us.

It was fun having these two fellows in our session. Both had studied hard and had done well. It is also nice to be thanked for our efforts. Congratulations, guys!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:52PM (-04:00)

AntennaSmith first impressions

Thursday, March 29, 2007

The TZ-900 AntennaSmith arrived today. My first impressions of the unit can be summed up as wow!

I only played with it for about a half hour this evening but the results were very pleasing. Here's what I did: I set up a Buddipole right in the middle of the living room, hooked up the analyzer, and turned it on. It immediately plotted from 1 MHz to 30 MHz the SWR for the antenna. You can see the trough of green where the SWR is less than 2:1. Nice.

There are four buttons on the side of the unit to select features and change options. These buttons are labeled by notations on the right side of the screen. It all made sense to me. After going through all the different plots, changing the range of the frequency sweep, walking through the points plotted in the Smith chart, and playing with some other features, I realized that I'd not even opened the manual yet! In fact, at this point at least, I can't even tell you if the manual is any good because I've barely skimmed it!

The unit is smaller, lighter, and easier to work than my trusty MFJ-259B. I will try to take a picture of the two units side-by-side for comparison this weekend.

I was nervous about this purchase. It was big bucks and could have been a big disappointment... or a disaster. It was neither. I am very pleased so far.

Obviously, first impressions are just that. I'll have much more to say once I have

experience with the unit. And, of course, I'll post that here.
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:55PM (-04:00)

VP2M Cards -- worth the wait

Friday, March 30, 2007

My previous post declaring that QSL cards had been ordered was, at the time, premature. I thought they had been ordered, but no. The order wasn't actually placed until later. (Why am I always the last to know?!) Sorry about that. I got a note today that the cards may be shipped from the printer either today or some time early next week. I will post here the moment I have those new cards in hand. The good news in all this is these cards are gorgeous! They are worth the wait. Really.

This weekend is Atlanticon. I had attended this gathering the last couple of years and had a great time. This year, though, I was too busy. My friend Greg (NE1OB) will be there. Take a look at his blog later this weekend or early next week to see how things went. Drive safely, Greg!

On a final note, Today is Stop Cyberbullying Day. I posted an off-topic entry the other day on this issue and I won't belabor the point here. Suffice it to say that I believe that words matter. Let's use them to build something worthwhile together. Thanks.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:29PM (-04:00)

Problem solving with the AntennaSmith

Sunday, April 01, 2007



I got a chance to work with the AntennaSmith today and I used it to solve a problem I alluded to during my Seattle trip. I had packed my *little* Buddipole system for that trip but had some trouble getting it tuned while I was there. The first problem was caused because I was stupid. This particular Buddipole system was purchased a very long time ago, long before Chris's latest coil design. I was using a small

laminated card Chris had given me on Montserrat for all the coil and whip settings. Unfortunately, those directions are for the new coils, not the ones in my little Buddipole system. Stupid me. OK, I figured that out (after an hour's wasted efforts) and I dug out the nicely printed directions for that antenna that I had carefully packed with the unit. Lesson: use the directions that came with the unit or directions that have been proven to be correct.

Sheepishly, I begin trying to tune the antenna again. Now I'm using the correct settings (for this version of the coils) but it still isn't tuning up nicely. My buddy Henson is now wondering if I know what I'm doing. "This is usually very easy", I said unconvincingly. In the end, I gave up trying to figure it out and decided to let the tuner do the work. I would figure it out when I got home.

Today was the day I decided to figure this out. It seemed like a perfect assignment for the new analyzer. I set up the antenna for 20m in the front yard with the feed line running over to Sandy who was sitting on the stoop. "It's high", she reports. Indeed it was running high with resonance running about 500 KHz above the end of the band. OK. That

explains a great deal. Now, why would this be?

I looked at the "black" coil, and it was set up properly. I then looked at the "red" coil and saw it was also set up properly. Then I spotted the rework Chris had done. Eureka!

It happened a very long time ago. I was experimenting with this system one day about a year ago and a gust of wind blew over the antenna. One coil, the "red" coil, hit the driveway pavement and shattered. I had sent this back to Chris to have him either repair it or replace it. (I was prepared to purchase a new coil but Chris was able to salvage the broken one.) This was the first time I'd used the little Buddipole system as a dipole since that accident.

For whatever reason, this coil, when tapped at the appropriate turn, was "too short". It was obvious from the AntennaSmiths display. I moved the tap back one turn. Now it was too long. I shortened the whip about 6 inches and it was just right!

The SWR display showed a nice curve with a 2:1 match over about 250 KHz of the 20m band. The Smith chart display showed that much of that was at or near resonance (with X either zero or close to zero). The interface for this feature of the analyzer is very clever: each sample point appears within the Smith chart display and the knob on the side of the unit lets you walk point-by-point through those samples. Each click of the knob moves the cursor to a new highlighted point and the corners of the display show the frequency associated with that sample, the R, and the X (including sign of X).

With this new magic formula (move the tap in a turn, shorten the whip 5 inches), I was able to set up the antenna for 15m, 17m, 20m, and 40m easily. Each time the AntennaSmith gave me a great view of 2:1 bandwidth, the real resistance, and reactance across the band.

I don't want to knock the MFJ 259B here as this trusty device has served me very well over the years. Further, I don't anticipate parting with it anytime soon (or ever!). That said, it would have been much harder to do what I did today with the MFJ 259B. The AntennaSmith's graphs, especially the Smith chart graph, were tremendous time savers. It was for this reason, the time-saving prospects, that I was interested in this unit. Today's experience working through this little problem has convinced me this was a good decision and a good purchase.

There are plenty of other things I'd like to check with this analyzer when I get some time. For example, the rotating arm kit allows you to put the Buddipole into many different configurations (horizontal dipole, vertical dipole, vee, inverted v, one arm up and one down, etc.). I would like to see how the antenna characteristics are affected by these altered configurations. Now that the Spring has finally arrived in New England, perhaps I'll be able to spend a Sunday afternoon in the near future doing just that.

In the mean time, I solved my problem. I can't wait to take my little Buddipole system on another trip!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:41PM (-04:00)

I don't fit

Monday, April 02, 2007

A recent article featured the headline **Getting There is Half the Fun**. Whoever wrote that article didn't have the seats I had on my last trip. The 2007 Airline Quality Rating Report has been released and according to this story on Yahoo!, things have gone downhill this last year. The quote from the article worth mentioning is, "They just don't get it yet."

One of the metrics used in this report was complaints per 100,000 passengers. Southwest airlines had the fewest; United and US Airways had the most according to this report. I'm going to make a bold statement here: I believe that we are not complaining *enough*. (I know it is rare that Americans could be so accused!) Airlines claim to listen to

their customers. If you want your voice heard, it seems like a good start to actually *spea*k! I have a particular axe to grind here. At 6 foot 7 inches tall, I'm far beyond anything "typical". Below is a chart I lifted from here which illustrates this nicely.

The 50th percentile, the thick red line, delineates the point where half of men will be taller than this height and half of men will be shorter. Similarly, the 75th percentile line shows the height where only a quarter of men are taller and three quarters are shorter.

Life out at the 3 standard deviation point is interesting enough in any day-to-day activity, but it gets especially interesting when getting on an airliner.

On the last set of flights the seat pitch was so short that I had to sit diagonally in my seat for the cross country flight because my legs were too long. Scoff as you will at the person too fat for the seat, but I could diet from now until the cows come home and my legs won't get any shorter. Granted, I'm off the scale (as per the above diagram) but the fellow sitting next to me on that last leg of the trip was only about 6 foot tall and he fit in his seat with only about an inch to spare. That's the 75th percentile point on that graph.

My Seattle trip included four flights on American Airlines MD80/83 airplanes. BOS to DFW (flight 1113), DFW to SEA (1587), and returning with SEA to ORD (1956), and ORD to BOS (874). Each of these airplanes seat about 142 people in two classes (coach and business). If American is arranging these seats to accommodate the 75th or 85th percentile, then a full 15% of the passengers (perhaps 20 people per flight) are uncomfortable. Several, like me, probably didn't fit in their seat at all. Nobody (I hope) had as much trouble as I had.

I just measured myself from the back of the seat to the end of my knees. That distance is about 28.5 inches. On these flights, the coach seats had something approximating 27 or even 26 inches. I sat diagonally coast-to-coast on every flight but one (when I managed to get the exit row... by begging).

I'm never taking these flights again. I'll never fly on an MD80 again if I can help it. I'm also thinking about writing to American Airlines. If I can sit comfortably on a Southwest flight, why can I not find an AA flight with reasonable seating? Again, airlines claim to listen to their customers. We'll see.

For more information on this topic, check out [The Shrinking Airline Seat](#).

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:05PM (-04:00)

QSL cards enroute

Tuesday, April 03, 2007

QSL cards are now enroute and are due to be here 6 April. Looks like this weekend will bring a QSLing party! I'll drop a note here when the cards arrive and when the first batch of return cards are in the mail. You're gonna love them!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:27AM (-04:00)

A score and the joy of hands-on do-it-yourself

Tuesday, April 03, 2007

Contesters often submit their unofficial scores and summaries to the 3830 list so they can get some idea of how their efforts stacked up against the competition. (Official results won't appear for as long as a year.) Here is a snapshot for the WPX contest recently held for my category (single operator, all band, QRP).

USA SOAB QRP

Call 160m 80m 40m 20m 15m 10m Tot Score

~~~~~  
NY6DX 19 94 207 507 93 3 923 1,265,331

K3WW 4 22 28 212 46 0 312 192,517

**NE1RD 37 25 90 152 36,162**

N6WG 4 30 28 56 25 3 146 22,442

NA4BW 7 51 13 71 5,684

Not bad. Mostly, I was trying out my new Heil Pro Set Quiet Phone headset, (re)verifying the performance of the K2, and adding to my QRP DXCC total. Still, I'm pleased with my score.

I operated in this contest with a radio I had built myself. There is something special about getting on the air with something you built with your own two hands. I first used this K2 on my trip to Hawaii and each QSO was a joy. I also used the radio on Georges Island in Boston Harbor last Summer for the IOTA contest, and I plan on using that radio for that contest again this year when I camp out on Lovells Island and try to work a whole 12 hour shift. (I was only able to put in 6 hours last year in order to make the last ferry home).

I was speaking with Dave (KZ1O) today about the PART Field Day plans. The club is going to try something different this year: we're trying to turn the event into an *Elmering* event. I mentioned this the other day. I'm hoping that, just as I have found joy in using a radio I built myself, others will get some joy from, say, a 20 meter dipole antenna they made with their own hands (a project idea Ron came up with), or new skills that they gained by working a satellite (Dave's idea). Dave had a bunch of other really great hands-on ideas for *tool talks*, too.

The funny thing is, I often find that I have learned something whenever I teach somebody else. If that holds true for this year's Field Day, I expect to learn a great deal. I know I'll be having fun.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:32PM (-04:00)

## More power Mr. Scott!

Thursday, April 05, 2007

I'm having lunch with my friend and his daughter tomorrow. My buddy's daughter just got her degree in Physics and is working for a company doing research for solar cell-related semiconductors. So, for the price of a really good Chinese food meal, I'm going to get an education on the latest in this technology. That sounds like a tremendous deal!

Though it is very far away (almost 4 months) we have been talking about our plans for the Lovell's Island excursion and the RSGB IOTA contest. We have radios. We have antennas. We're a bit puzzled about power sources. Last year I was able to run 6 hours in the bright sunshine with my 15 watt solar panel and a couple of batteries. This year I'd like to run for 12 hours, with some of the operation after dark (or at least after the Sun has set low enough that the solar panel will be useless). What are my options?

If I run QRP with my K2, I draw about 35mA on receive. I can run practically forever on any reasonable battery if I never transmit. Transmitting draws about 2.5 amps (a rough estimate). So, a 7Ah battery may last 2-3 hours under those conditions. For planning purposes, I'll use the 2 hour figure. I have two such batteries providing 4 full hours, perhaps 5, of operation. That's not enough for a 12 hour effort.

I had this problem last year which is why I opted for a solar panel to supplement my power. Not knowing how much this would get used, how effective the approach would be, and feeling uncharacteristically unadventurous, I selected a modestly-sized panel that I

discussed in a previous blog entry. The 15 watt Global Solar unit purchased from The Alternative Energy Store provided enough juice that I could run all day on the island without fear of running out of juice before I needed to run to catch the last ferry. That was enough for last year's 6 hour effort. Though I was drawing down the batteries, the solar panel provided enough energy that the batteries were not exhausted.

This year's effort of 12 hours requires a rethink of this approach. Once the Sun sets, I'll have nothing but batteries for power. Ideally, I would like to have two fully-charged batteries to start the night shift. That means generating enough power during the day shift through solar panels to not only power the radio but to ensure that the batteries are "topped off" as well.

I have by no means made any decisions, but I'm looking closely at the 48 watt "big brother" of the panel I currently own. This offering is also from Global Solar and sold by *The Alternative Energy Store*. The panel provides 12 volts and approximately 2.5 amps. (Of course, these specifications are for optimal conditions.) I am speculating that this would be enough to run the K2 and keep the battery fully charged during daylight hours. Consider the alternative in weight to accomplish the same thing with batteries. Let's say the panel does a good job and produces 2 amps of continuous current during the day. Every hour that passes is another 2Ah "in the bank". Four hours later, I've generated more energy than is stored in one of those 7Ah batteries. Eight hours later, and I've matched the energy I've brought in both my 7Ah batteries. The solar panel weighs under 4 pounds. Those batteries weigh 7 pounds each!

Chris Drummond had purchased a Brunton Solaris 26 panel for the Montserrat trip and had made contacts on an IC-703 using only the panel (no battery). This is possible, of course, but not recommended. I'd use a charge controller in there to ensure spikes didn't fry my radio. Still, it was an interesting experiment. One of many that we did while down there!

Again, no decisions on all this yet. The panel under consideration is expensive (and haven't I spent enough money lately?!) and I won't be making any decision for a while. I need to think about this a little more. But, operating portably for many hours at a time for either a contest like the RSGB IOTA event, for Field Day, or indeed for a weekend sounds like lots of fun. Like I said, I've got the radios, I've got the antennas, now I need to solve the power problem in a way that doesn't cost me too much money or too much weight in the backpack.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:14AM (-04:00)

## A couple of quick notes

Thursday, April 05, 2007

My solar technology transfer lunch mentioned yesterday was postponed. My buddy's daughter was tied up in meetings but promises her calendar next week is essentially clear. I'll provide all the details of what I learn (as best I can) next week after we meet.

The Daily DX reported today that the big brains at NOAA have a new prediction that claims the very bottom of the cycle will be in July of this year. The bad news: that's the month of the RSGB IOTA contest. The good news: things will be picking up when I'm on St. Kitts in October for the CQ WW DX contest.

Finally, QSL cards for the Montserrat trip are due here tomorrow. I'll be spending some time this weekend QSLing. Thank you for your patience.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:18PM (-04:00)

## No K1P or Deer Isle this year

Friday, April 06, 2007

They are here! The QSL cards for the Montserrat trip have arrive and they are gorgeous! When you get your card and see the beautiful pictures, you might ask yourself, "Could it really be that beautiful there?" The answer is, "YES!" I've got a lot of work ahead of me to get all these QSL card requests fulfilled. I'll start that this weekend. It will take a while. Please be patient. Also, now would be a good time to verify that you're really in the on-line log. Problems? Email me.

I had to cancel my trip to Deer Isle this year. We had reserved the call sign K1P for our special event station commemorating Patriots Day. Alas, deadline pressures at work forced me to nix the trip. It really is a beautiful place (check out the pictures) and Carol Avery has been a wonderful host, but the *responsible* thing to do is skip it this year and make my deadline.

Though I won't be going to Maine this year, I still have a number of experiments I'd like to perform before both the IOTA contest in July and my St. Kitts trip. I guess I'll be doing these a little at a time, rather than in bunches as I would have done in Maine. The other thing that I had hoped to do while in Maine was finally assemble my K1. Sandy gave me this kit for Valentine's Day last year (she really knows the way to my heart!) and I've been trying to find a nice chunk of time where I can sit quietly and assemble it. If you've never built an Elecraft kit, let me tell you: it is a joy to build it and then operate it. It still waits for me...

Finally, where are my copies of QST and CQ Magazine? I never received last month's copy of CQ and now both magazines are missing. Normally, I would get the April issue of both magazines in late March. This is already the end of the first week in April. Is anybody else missing their copies?

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:04PM (-04:00)

## QSLing in-progress

Saturday, April 07, 2007

Busy day today. I was to attend the Yankee Clipper Contest Club meeting today, but felt guilty leaving that big box of fresh QSL cards and that pile of QSL requests behind. I know folks have been waiting a long time to get their cards. So, I stayed home and started cranking through the pile. I've got over 130 envelopes stuffed with return QSL cards so far. I will make every effort to do the rest (another 100?) tomorrow so they can all be mailed on Monday morning.

This is all I have here. It includes those sent to me directly (thank you!) and those that were sent to Gingerbread Hill on Montserrat. (If you mailed yours to the island, fear not. David Lea bundled up all that had arrived there and forwarded them on to me.) There is allegedly another pile with Budd (W3FF) that will also be forwarded to me for processing. I'll work on those as soon as they arrive.

QSLpro has been working very, very well. I process 14 cards at a time, printing a single sheet of labels from those cards, then stuffing the envelopes. I will make this program available (for free) once I've finished the QSLing for the VP2M trip (and found those last remaining really embarrassing bugs). If you use MacLoggerDX, I think you're going to love this program.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:15PM (-04:00)

# QSL cards ready for the Post Office

Sunday, April 08, 2007

Done. It took all of yesterday afternoon and all of today but I've now completed all of the QSL card requests that I've received for the Montserrat trip. I've got 185 envelopes for US stations and 60 envelopes for the rest of the world. Whew!

Included in the big pile are just a couple of *not in log* notices. I had hoped that perhaps with the on-line log and careful logging we might avoid any such problems but that was not to be. I wrote a note for each unsatisfied request expressing my disappointment that I could not send them a card. As I say, there are only a few, but I sure wish there had been none.

Also in the pile were some SWL (shortwave listening) requests. These require a little extra effort but I don't mind. I hope that each card I send to an SWL will eventually lead that person to get their license and join us on HF. I hope all of you would take the time to help these folks, too.

I've now got 6 piles of cards destined for the other team members. All those cards you sent to me, I'm now forwarding on to the operator who worked you. I sure enjoyed reading these cards (many personal notes were included) and I'm sure the other guys will have fun with them, too. Perhaps I'll spend some time tomorrow and relate some of what was written to us.

Finally, there are a few fellows who managed to work all of us. Here's the list:

- W5SAN
- K4KAL
- KI4MZS
- AB4PM
- W0RW

Congratulations, guys!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:30PM (-04:00)

## IRCs

Monday, April 09, 2007

Many of the QSL card requests from Europeans were accompanied by an IRC (International Reply Coupon). I had thus far been able to avoid taking such things to my local post office by simply *recycling* ones I had received into my own international QSL card requests. I'd receive one of these things, hold on to it until I made my next mailing, then stick whatever IRCs I had collected in with my outgoing cards.

The influx of IRCs from this weekend's exercise, however, was larger than could be comfortably managed by that strategy. So, today's trip to the Post Office included the task of converting these things into actual postage.

I guess the horror stories I'd heard from other hams had convinced me this was going to be a problem. Those stories usually included the ham handing a pile of IRCs to the person behind the counter after which the clerk would stare blankly. I just didn't want to go through all that, but at this point I didn't have any other good options.

To my surprise, Tina (the postal clerk) knew exactly what these things were and was happy to help me get these things converted. It took her a couple of minutes to figure out how to get the computer to recognize the IRCs (the computer system had changed, apparently, and the IRC stuff had been moved), but she was pleasant and cheerful throughout the process. In the end, I walked out with another mitt-full of stamps.

The value of an IRC is \$1.85 right now, far exceeding the postage needed to send an

envelope anywhere in the world (currently at 84 cents). I used to dread receiving these things, but at this point (now that I know Tina can help me!) I'm happy to see them. The extra value of these things can help offset the other postal costs I have.

I would like to state for the record my view of QSL card postage. I asked in the QSL information for the VP2M trip for either an SASE (US stations) or one \$1 bill (non-US stations). Lots of folks sent me two or even three dollars in their request. I kept only \$1 and returned the rest. For those poor guys that got the "not in log" note, I sent back all their postage money. Nobody should have to pay for a "not in log" note!

I had threatened to return things via the BURO if no money was enclosed by DX stations. Luckily, I've not had any of those yet. And, I made out an envelope and applied postage to those few requests that didn't arrive with an SASE. Shucks, I'm a soft touch. {grin} I just want everybody to get the card and be happy.

Finally, in with all these VP2M cards were a few requests for NE1RD, K1P, KP2/NE1RD, and NE1RD/1. I didn't want to open any envelopes until I had the Montserrat cards so these have been waiting for a long time. Sorry. I'll try to get to them this weekend.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:41PM (-04:00)

## Other QSLs now caught up, too

Tuesday, April 10, 2007

The original plan did not have me in the role of QSL manager for the Montserrat trip. We thought we had somebody lined up for that job, but that fell through. I stepped up sort of at the last minute. So, without thinking too much about it, I had all these cards come directly to me and to my home address.

The problem with this is that I can't tell the difference between an envelope and request associated with the Montserrat trip, one associated with my K1P special event station, one associated with my Boston Harbor Islands trips, my home call, or even some random piece of mail with my name on it. I had been throwing each pile of envelopes into a big box (unopened) as that was the safest way to ensure that return SASEs would remain with their requests, the money wouldn't get mixed up, and that nothing would be lost. This system kept those requests safe, but it also delayed my personal QSLing (as those requests were mixed in with all those Montserrat requests.)

Sure enough, I found QSL requests for NE1RD, NE1RD/1, KP2/NE1RD, and K1P in with the Montserrat cards. To those of you who were waiting for those cards, I apologize. I have fully caught up on all those tonight. {whew!}

Upon further thought, it might make sense to set up a separate PO box to handle all this traffic. If I do this again, I might set up a such a PO box. It would be a good way to keep my QSL manager-associated mail separate from my personal mail.

Finally, in with this pile was one other noteworthy piece of mail. It was a form letter from Benny Neal, a former high school classmate, who is running for the Clerk of Court in Harrisonberg, Virginia. I don't remember much of Benny. I do remember he was an aspiring singer who had gone to Nashville to record some records and *be discovered*. Oh, yeah, and one other thing discussed here. His letter, again, lost in with all those QSL card requests, was looking for campaign contributions. Um. Pass, thanks.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:47PM (-04:00)

## NEQP results in

Wednesday, April 11, 2007

Results are in for the New England QSO Party held in 2006. The contest is held in the first full weekend of May (May 5-6 this year) and is lots of fun. Here are the scores from the single operator QRP category from last year.

Single Operator QRP  
Call County State Score  
K1ESE Oxford ME 35,226  
AA4AK Cumberland ME 29,376  
KA1LMR Merrimack NH 29,312  
W1KX Kennebec ME 12,600  
**NE1RD Middlesex MA 2,322**  
K1RV Plymouth MA 1,776  
WB1HGA Bristol MA 1,722  
K1QW Norfolk MA 1,590  
KA1VGM Cheshire NH 1,575  
N1AIA York ME 1,332  
K3IU Newport RI 462  
W1OH Barnstable MA 144

I was in the middle of the pack with my little G5RV and K2. I did have the high score in Massachusetts, but that seems like a weak claim. {grin}

Still, if you want to be better at something, practice, practice, practice. Oh, and have fun, too!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:50AM (-04:00)

## Declare your QSL routine on the air

Thursday, April 12, 2007

I received some QSL cards that were misdirected to Tom today. I'll process those along with the ones that were sent to Budd as soon as I receive those. As much as I had tried to get the word out, there was still some (just a little) confusion on the QSL route for the Montserrat trip.

In retrospect, I think we should have all been more diligent about advertising the QSL route while on the air. Perhaps every 5 or 10 minutes we should have just reminded everybody that QSL cards are welcomed and the QSL manager is NE1RD.

We did have a couple of team meetings while on the island and one of those meetings discussed what we should, and should not, say while on the air. The trip was officially organized by Buddipole Antennas, but we didn't want to break the rules of doing commercial advertising while on the air. So, we came up with these guidelines: we would tell people we were using small, portable antennas for our radiators. If people asked us specifically if we were using Buddipoles, we would answer their question honestly (which was usually "yes").

I should have put more thought into these kinds of guidelines prior to the trip. I'll certainly do that before the next trip. How often should we mention the QSL route? How and when should we point people to the DXpedition web site and the on-line log? Should we tell people to look in the on-line log on the air? Or, should we just assume that people will find it on their own? I will be thinking about things like this before my next group

adventure.

That said, I have no immediate plans for another such trip. I've got some Boston Harbor Islands trips planned for this summer, and I've begun making arrangements for a trip to St. Kitts for CQ WW (just Sandy and me), but there are no plans for another team DXpedition. At least none are planned for this year.

Finally, I should have been up on Deer Isle, Maine this week. Work deadline pressures nixed that trip. The weather is horrible here (snow and sleet, cold and dreary). The weather in Maine is roughly the same. Sandy and I joked this evening at dinner how terrible it would have been to be up there right now. Imagine it: stranded in a beautiful house, all by ourselves (or with Dave and his wife Carol), with nothing but good books, good food, and complete peace and quiet. She would have read her pile of books. I would have assembled my K1. We would have ate like kings. Terrible indeed! (Maybe we'll be able to return next year!)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:34PM (-04:00)

## Slow news day

Friday, April 13, 2007

I've updated the links along the side of my blog's page. There are now "Blog roll and podcasts", "web sites", "equipment", and "software". It is still skimpy, but at least I've got an organization to things now. I'll be adding to it over time.

Finally, here is a little something I heard this evening. I liked it a lot.

"At every crossroads on the path that leads to the future, tradition has placed 10,000 men to guard the past."

-- Count Maurice Maeterlink

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:55PM (-04:00)

## Show and tell this week

Sunday, April 15, 2007

I was able to meet with my friend's daughter Carolyn this week. She's recently finished her degree in physics and is now working for a local company developing photovoltaic technology. I met her for lunch this week to talk about solar technology.

The first thing I did was confirm with her that the posting I'd made last year on my folding panel was accurate. I didn't have a copy of the posting, but I was able to recreate some of the numbers by scribbling on a napkin. She nodded at all the right times. {whew!} I then showed her the folding panel.

The technology she's developing is still on wafers so the CIGS technology employed by my panel was new to her. So, while I wasn't able to get any new insight into my portable panels, she was able to give me a grand tour of the kinds of things we can expect from the wafer-style cells in the near future. It should be very exciting!

I've not made any decisions on obtaining a new *big* panel. Certainly it would be a boon for the overnight stay for the RSGB IOTA contest in July, but it would also help a great deal for those day trips. Looking back on a previous post I had determined that my IC-7000 drew about 1.3 amps on receive. (Compare that with the 35-45 milliamps that the K2 draws!) Transmitting at 20 watts drew upwards of 5-7 amps (estimated). The extra power helps on transmit, of course (that should be about an S-unit worth of increase) but it is brutal on the batteries. Supplementing the power from the batteries with an extra 3 or

4 amps from the panels would make a tremendous difference. It would mean I could operate most of a day on Georges Island even at 20 watts output without exhausting the batteries.

Tuesday night is the local club meeting and is *show-and-tell* night. I haven't decided what to bring yet, but the current ideas are:

- **Buddipole beam** - I've ordered enough stuff from Chris to be able to make either a 6m or 10m beam just from Buddipole parts. The trouble is: I don't think the stuff will arrive in time for the meeting.
- **Buddipole low band coil** - I have one such coil (with another on order... see above). I have been able to make a nice vertical from my *small* Buddipole system that can be tuned for 80m, 40m, and 20m by just moving the tap on the coil and lengthening or shortening the radial(s). I assume 60m and 30m are also possible. I just didn't try that yet. If I could only bring one antenna for the RSGB IOTA contest, I would be hard pressed not to pick this system.
- **AntennaSmith** - You can't resist bringing a new toy to *show-and-tell*. I bought it a nice Pelican case yesterday at HRO, too.
- **Masts and fishing poles** - I've talked about these things at club meetings, but I'm not sure I've actually showed how light (and versatile) these things are.

I don't need to decide tonight. And, even if I bring a bunch of stuff, I don't need to show everything I bring during the meeting. I can always *hold court* afterwards and show off more toys!

Finally, I received a message from Carol, the owner of the beautiful home in Maine we were to be visiting this week. She's graciously offered to let us pick another week in the off-season, or apply what we've paid to another week at the on-season rate. That was very generous! As far as I'm concerned, she was under no obligation at all to refund anything given how late we cancelled. But, that's why we like staying there. These folks are great. Anyway, I think Sandy and I will just ask her if we can't reserve next year's Patriot's day week. With luck, both our work schedules, and the weather, will be more accommodating.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:02PM (-04:00)

## Solar panel ordered

Monday, April 16, 2007

I had written last night that I'd not made up my mind on whether to get that big solar panel or not. I don't usually have a decision-making disorder, but I think the money already spent this year (on the Montserrat trip, a big order to Buddipole antennas, Mosely, and the AntennaSmith, and so on) has made me cautious about spending more.

There was something of a breakthrough at breakfast this morning. After some discussion, Sandy and I agreed it made sense to do it. Further, I should probably look into it soon. If, for some reason, the thing was backordered for 3 months, that would screw up all my Summer plans!

I called The Alternative Energy Store this morning and talked to Ben. After some hand-wringing, I decided to get the Global Solar P3-48 48W 12V Portable Power Pack Desert panel. There was one bigger, the 55 watt version, but it ran at a nominal 16 volts, not 12 volts. Not knowing all the implications of this, I decided to be conservative and get the 48 Watt panel.

I also picked up a larger charge controller to go with this system. I have the smaller 6 amp Morningstar Sunsaver SS6-sL that I've been using with the 15 watt panel. This new



controller, the SS-20L handles a load up to 20 amps. The "L" in the part description means "low voltage disconnect". So, the controller sits between the battery, solar panel(s), and load (my radio, in this case). When the battery voltage falls below a safe level, the load is disconnected from the circuit thereby avoiding permanent battery damage. Very nice! My original controller has this feature, as does the new one on order. I had tried to use the SS-6L controller with the IC-7000 last summer but quickly discovered that the unit could be *swamped* by excessive current from the radio. I could back the power down until this no longer happened, but I wanted the option of cranking the power up. Of course, I could always by pass the low voltage disconnect feature by connecting the radio directly to the batteries, but that means I need to watch the battery voltage. I'd rather have the box do that.

So, I now have two charge controllers. I can either use the two panels together to generate more current for the radio, or use the big controller for the radio with the new panel, and use the smaller controller just for charging a second battery.

Finally, a note about The Alternative Energy Store: when I called their toll-free number this morning I was connected to a very helpful sales representative (Ben). He made sure all my questions were answered. He gave me an immediate indication on the stock status (both items were immediately available). Within 30 minutes of placing my order I received an email with confirmation of the order with a PDF invoice attached. An hour after that I was given estimated shipping dates (the charge controller ships today, the panel tomorrow). I am promised UPS tracking numbers when they ship. That's the way to do business.

My expectations of things are pretty simple: if I've given you money for a product, please keep me informed about your progress in getting me that product. The Alternative Energy Store does this well. Other folks I've dealt with (and blogged about) do it not-so-well. These folks are good guys. Need solar stuff? Check them out.

I can't wait to see the new panel! {grin}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:46PM (-04:00)

## Thoughts on logging

Tuesday, April 17, 2007

"Not in log." Nobody wants to receive an answer to a QSL card request with those words. I can tell you firsthand that no QSL manager wants to send a note with the dreaded "not in log" notation, either. I've thought about logging a great deal over the last few weeks. I'll try to compress that thinking into this post.

I answered the first batch of QSL card requests about a week ago and they should have arrived at their destination by now. Nearly all who asked for a card got one, but, alas, a few did not. I've received email from some who were disappointed. One wrote to say,

I would say you are going to have some unhappy people with the "not in the log" contacts. I received mine back and my friend, {callsign}, received his back too. He and I both worked VP2MTC within 5 minutes of each other. We both live in {city} and work DX while talking on 440. But thanks for sending my SASE back.

If I were these guys, I'd be angry, too. In this specific case, I think it very likely that the fellows sending us the card may have worked Tom in those early hours. In those first few hours of the DXpedition, we did have some goof-ups. I believe I remember Tom coming to me sheepishly admitting that he may have accidentally deleted (or otherwise lost) a small handful of contacts in his computer log. My response to him at the time was, to paraphrase, "stuff happens." What else could be said when Murphy comes to visit?

The above was an isolated incident. I have expressed my remorse and disappointment to these fellows. It really was a very unfortunate turn of events. But, if you make a few thousand contacts (or tens of thousands of contacts, as the big DXpeditions do) there are bound to be at least a few of them that don't line up. Some will be logged incorrectly. Some may even be deleted. All you can do is try to minimize errors through planning and try to spot troublesome situations on the trip before they cause damage.

As for the planning, we did a great deal. First, we created a planning document (I am making the first 2 pages available through this link) which described in great detail how the logging system would work on the island and after the trip. I had also worked hard to develop tools to put our log on the web at the end of each day. Both of these efforts, I now see, fell short. Let me elaborate.

The planning document was a very good start. It covered much of the mechanical aspects of logging well, but failed to cover the organizational aspects sufficiently. Here are some examples of things I should have included (and will next time):

- **Valid call sign check** - With tools like the QRZ ROM and the web-based call sign look-up services, it is inexcusable to hand off a log for daily consolidation without at least checking to see if all the QSOs are with valid call signs. Further, there were (and still are!) some call signs that were logged that are malformed. I'm not picking on anybody in particular here. In fact, I've been known to log a bizarre call sign once in a while! But, there should have been a mandatory review by the operator of all their logged QSOs before I accepted that log for consolidation.
- **Consolidation should not be at end-of-day** - This was probably my biggest mistake. There were late night operations and the last thing people wanted to do at the end of a very long day was fight with me over logging. I'm not sure if there is a better time, but I'm convinced there is no worse time! I think I might suggest that operators give me a clean log in the morning before they either start operating again, or before they take off for a portable operation. Perhaps things would go smoother if folks were rested and not bleary-eyed when they did their checks and log exports.
- **Computer logging should be mandatory** - unless it is a portable operation where it is impossible. There were probably hundreds of QSOs logged at the villa on paper that should have gone directly into a computer. This would have helped ensure times, dates, bands, and modes were accurate. We had trouble with errors in all these categories. Even if it can't necessarily help with broken call signs, computer logging solves many, many other problems.
- **There should be peer reviews on logs** - Chris and I actually did a great deal of this while on the island. He was tired, and I was pushy. He was patient, and I was, well, impatient. But we got it done and it was easier because we did lots of log checking as a team. One reads, one checks, make things go much faster and reduces errors. Given that I've advocated log review above, I believe it makes sense to assign "logging buddies" as part of team assignments. Now when you catch something stupid in the log, you can make fun of two people for being careless. {grin}
- **There should be an explicit backup strategy** - I took on this task myself, ensuring that the data collected was protected with backups (in multiple places). In retrospect, while this worked fine, I should have documented this process so it was part of the group planning and not just a personal assignment.

This particular trip was problematic with regards to logging for a couple of reasons. First, there were a large number of QSOs made from portable locations resulting in many pages of paper logs. Transcription from paper to the computer is rife with opportunities for error. My experience from paper logging on Georges Island and Field Day from NARA (just to name a few) has taught me that this is the most likely place to make a logging error (in the transcription).

Finally, the aspects of our planning that you might have thought would be problematic were not. There were four or five different computer logging programs used on the island by the team. All these program were able to export to ADIF and did so without incident. MacLoggerDX consumed those ADIF files easily. Interchange between computer programs was a breeze. The errors in our log were data entry errors by the operators, or accidental deletions. To paraphrase a common saying, "to really screw things up requires a human."

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:09AM (-04:00)

## New mitt-full of QSL card requests has arrived

Tuesday, April 17, 2007

I received another 75 (or so) envelopes with QSL card requests for the Montserrat trip. A whole bunch were included from the boys in California in a box containing some new Buddipole parts I had ordered (talk about *good news/bad news!*). This is a solid evening's worth of work. I'll try to get to it this weekend.

To the best of my knowledge, this means that I now have in my hands the very last of the QSL cards sent directly to one of the team members.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:27PM (-04:00)

## Farewell, Kurt

Wednesday, April 18, 2007

I got a very nice certificate in the mail yesterday from Tom Frenaye proclaiming me the high score for Massachusetts (QRP) for the New England QSO Party for 2006. It is very nice and I am very pleased. I'll need to find a little wall space in the shack for it.

I'm under a bit of deadline pressure at work so there hasn't been a lot of time for personal activities. Nonetheless, my dentist appointment today gave me some time while sitting in the waiting room to read most of Kurt Vonnegut's latest work *A Man Without a Country*. Vonnegut's passing just a few days ago saddened me. While I've not read many of his books, I've always enjoyed his staccato delivery and crisp, short sentences. Many of my sentences, by contrast, seems to meander and seem like they don't quite know where they're going. Sometimes they don't.

We in ham radio are *communicators* at our root. I sometimes cringe after reading a previous post because, as a communicator, I've not done well. Writing when I'm tired, writing when there is little time or energy to proofread my work, and writing when I've not fully formed my thoughts are but a few sins. Like somebody who is perpetually promising to go on that diet, I'll promise to work harder to polish these posts before I press the *submit* button.

For those who might question my taste (literary or otherwise), I would like to point out that appreciating an artist for their art doesn't necessarily imply sympathy for, or antipathy to, any particular belief or opinion that artist may have held. You can enjoy Hemingway even if you don't like to fish.

Finally, the art of amateur radio is like any other. There are rules, and the very brightest among us know when to break them. There is much to learn from others. There are some things, it seems, that you can only learn by yourself. We practice this art. Vonnegut says what I'm thinking, only better:

Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake. Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories. Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem. Do it as well as you possibly can. You will get an enormous

reward. You will have created something.

Try. Do. Create. That's what I, through this blog, am saying!

Hi-Ho.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:18PM (-04:00)

## Fun with anagrams

Thursday, April 19, 2007



Did I tell you I like to contest?

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:40PM (-04:00)

## Buddi-beams

Sunday, April 22, 2007

The weather has finally improved here in New England bringing clear skies and temperatures into the 70's. This, after a week of cold and rain, was very welcome indeed. Time to go outside, soak up some sunshine, and play with antennas!

I had blogged earlier about making a 10m beam from Buddipole parts and had promised myself that I would give it a try on the first really nice day. So, Saturday afternoon Sandy and I pulled my *big buddipole* along with the new parts that had arrived recently out to the front steps. It only took a few minutes to build the yagi as I had designed it and hook up the AntennaSmith analyzer. The SWR curve was as predicted. The antenna appeared to be mechanically sound. This last point wasn't surprising as these Buddipole parts are robust, one of the reasons I like this stuff so much. The thing was so solid Sandy suggested we build another version with six arms on the boom instead of four giving it a total length of 11 feet.

The new version of the antenna also seemed solid. The long telescopic whips extend to 9.5 feet but are lightweight so even with three lengths of arms between the VersaTee and the IT adapter holding the whips, there was very little sag along this lengthened boom.

I've not had time to model this new version (3-element beam with 11-foot boom) but I'm pretty sure it would be a good performer. The only exigent problem was matching the antenna to 50 ohms. The analyzer showed a real resistance of about 120 ohms at resonance for a large chunk of the band. A balun stepping this down by 2:1 would be just about right. I'll see what the computer model says before I do any more work on this.

With the Mosley Mini-32-A on order, you might be wondering why I'd be fooling with this antenna. Imagine a trip specifically for the ARRL 10 meter contest. A three element yagi with an 11 foot boom will likely outperform a two element yagi with a 6 foot boom like the Mosley. Gee, I wonder if I could put any more arms in this thing without breaking something?

Content with my progress on the 10m investigation, we then moved to 6m. Carl Gosselin KG6WTF has a page describing a 6m 3 element yagi that uses four arms, six whips, and 3 IT adapters. We built that antenna as per those directions, then built another version with six arms instead of four again giving the antenna an 11 foot boom.

We had built something similar on Montserrat but had no 6m openings. I'm pretty sure I'll get some business during the CQ WW VHF Contest this Summer. So, I'll give this thing a try first at Field Day then again during that contest.

Finally, one of the cool things in my shipment from Chris was a new antenna mast bag. The original bag that was used to carry my *big Buddipole* system was just a little too small. The newly designed bag is big and roomy. I love it! Recommended.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:14PM (-04:00)

## 48 Watt Solar Panel Arrives

Monday, April 23, 2007

My 48 watt solar panel arrived today. Hooray! I need to make a power harness terminated with an Anderson Power Pole but other than that, it is ready for action. The unit is well-built and seems rugged, much like my 15 watt panel.

I had walked through the mathematics of these panels in a post back in October of last year, but it might be fun to quickly crank through the calculations again with the new panel. Here goes.

The panel has 12 areas with photo voltaic (PV) cells. Each area is approximately 31.5 cm wide by 18.5 cm high. Multiplying height by width we see that each PV cell area is 582.75 cm<sup>2</sup>. There are twelve such areas so  $12 \times 582.75 = 6993$ . We'll round that off to 7000 cm<sup>2</sup> of active area for this panel.

There are  $100 \times 100 = 10000$  cm<sup>2</sup> in a square meter. Converting our area to square meters is done by dividing the active area (7000 cm<sup>2</sup>) by 10000 giving us 0.7 m<sup>2</sup>.

Assume that 1000 watts fall on each square meter of Earth on a nice day. The amount of power falling on the active area of the panel is  $1000 \text{ w/m}^2 \times 0.7 \text{ m}^2 = 700$  watts.

It would be great if we could convert all that sunshine into electricity, but the panel is not 100% efficient. In fact, panels of this sort are only about 7% efficient. If we multiply the total power falling on the active elements of the panel (700 watts) by our efficiency (7%) we get 49 watts. Close enough!

What will I do with all this power? Operate portably a very long time. Certainly there will be some Georges Island operations. I also like to operate portably from hilltops and picnic tables. I managed a few QSOs from atop Mount Washington last July (though it seemed more like January up there!). This power means I can operate QRP all day with my K2, or operate most of a day at 25 watts with the IC7000.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:04PM (-04:00)

## 3B7C

Thursday, April 26, 2007

Sorry for the dearth in posts this week. I have been writing an architecture document for a piece of software at work and this week was that big push at the end. I find I've only got so many words in me each day. I had used them all at the office.

The Five Star DXers Association (FSDXA) is at it again. This time the crew is heading to St. Brandon. These folks are a very polished bunch who had activated 3B9C (Rodrigues Island) in 2004. Take a moment to visit their DXpedition web site. The layout is clean. They have all the right stuff. It is easy to navigate. This is the way to organize a web presence.

Just to make a point about how good these guys are, check out this blurb from a recent edition of the The Daily DX:

## FSDXA APPROACH TO DXPEDITIONING

Having now QSLed nearly 100,000 3B9C QSOs we calculate we achieved an average busted call rate of 0.5%. We believe this to be a good figure although we shall try to improve on it at 3B7C.

Five busted calls per thousand worked. Think for a moment what that means. Through all the weak signals, all the lids in the pile-up, the sheer number of signals present at any given time, these guys can work hundreds of calls without an error. Now imagine the fatigue that must set in after a group has operated ten or even fifteen days. Does that error rate begin to sound amazing?

This DXpedition promises to be an interesting one. They have a brochure. They have a series of press releases. They have a plan for online logs and QSLing rules. They have plan. Watch and learn. I will.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:58PM (-04:00)

## Scarborough Reef and things closer to home

Friday, April 27, 2007

An intrepid group of travelers is heading towards Scarborough Reef as I type this. Situated in the South China Sea these small clumps of land are claimed by the Philippines, mainland China, and Taiwan. The Philippines seem to have the most vigorous claim at the moment.

This DXpedition was tricky to put together (it took three years to get landing permission) and will no doubt be monstrously expensive. If you do work these folks, put some money in the envelope when you beg for your QSL card. Of course, giving directly isn't a bad idea, either.

In a story a little closer to home, Steve Weinert (K9ZW) has written about his efforts to activate an island for the United States Islands Awards Program. The operation is planned to commence May 5th at 1400Z. Check out the details in his blog for more information. If you can, give Steve and his crew a little help. Of course, I'll be following along with Steve's blog before and after.

Finally, I picked up this pointer from Geoff Arnold's blog for the Bookblog Gender Genie, a web-based program that will examine a chunk of text and attempt to determine the author's gender. I cannot vouch for the algorithm's accuracy or utility but using it did provide a few minutes of entertainment. I ran the last 10 significant blog entries through the program. Each posting's numerical score for male and female gender are shown. I will leave it to you, gentle reader, to ascribe meaning to this, if indeed there is any. Enjoy.

### Male

3b9c (male 424 vs. female 83)

Fairwell, Kurt (male 605 vs. female 414)

New mitt-full of QSL card requests has arrived (male 82 vs. female 52)

Slow news day (male 129 vs. female 25)

### Female

48 Watt Solar Panel Arrives (male 397 vs. female 532)

Buddi-beams (male 677 vs. 839 female)

Thoughts on logging (male 1128 vs. female 1636)

Solar panel ordered (male 637 vs. female 795)

Show and tell this week (male 858 vs. female 1122)  
Declare your QSL routine on the air (male 552 vs. female 696)

By the way, this post (this very post) was a boy post. Go figure.  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:24PM (-04:00)

## K3... oh my!

Saturday, April 28, 2007



I've been reading blogs with a program called Newsfire since the first of the year. It is a nice program which helps me keep track of what I've read and what I've not. I fired it up this morning and noticed Long Delayed Echoes had a new entry. I took a peek and have been unsettled since.

Jeff's post had a heads-up about the new

Elecraft K3. It is a beauty. It is also a full-featured, no compromise radio that should stand toe-to-toe with others in its class including the FT-2000 and IC-756ProIII. It will be fun to watch the reviews roll in.

I love my K2 and had talked seriously about building another with the 100 watt PA option. Needless to say, I've got other plans now!

I spent some time today crimping connectors for the new solar panel and charge controller. The rain held off long enough for me to get all these pieces outside with a VOM, battery, and radio. Everything appears to work properly. I'm now ready for Field Day and trips to the Boston Harbor Islands.

Another stack of QSL cards has grown while I wasn't looking including a drop from the QSL Bureau. Surprisingly, there were no Montserrat cards in with the pile from the BURO. I guess either everybody sent their card directly, or I'll start seeing VP2M requests in the next drop. Either way, I should turn around all the requests I've received by the end of the weekend and have them back in the mail Monday. So, if you're waiting on a card expect it soon.

I received the *official* invitation for my nieces high school graduation today. Like her elder sister, she is an exceptional student and wonderful human being, bright, articulate, and charming. (Hard to believe she's a relative of mine, huh!) Anyway, her graduation is the Sunday of Hamvention meaning I'll need to cut my trip to Dayton short so I can drive to Chicago Saturday morning. It is a little sad to be missing most of the show but I wouldn't miss Katie's graduation for the world!

So, my schedule has me arriving on Wednesday evening and spending all day Thursday in Contesting University. After classes conclude there will be a gathering of ham radio bloggers (and those who have the stomach to read us!) in the Crowne Plaza Hotel in the lobby about 6 PM on May 17th. Food and drink will follow shortly afterwards. I hope you'll join us!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:19PM (-04:00)

## SLAs and K3s

Sunday, April 29, 2007

Both Sandy and I had made major deliveries at work on Thursday and we both used those small victories as an excuse to take a long-overdue three day weekend. Friday was spent at Boston's Museum of Science where we took in a couple of IMAX films, an astronomy show, and caught the last day of a traveling exhibit chronicling Charles Darwin's life and work. All were spectacular and put us in a relaxed mood that lasted the weekend.

These last two days we have pattered around the house doing some Spring cleaning and fixing things that needed mending. I noticed that my two 18Ah sealed lead acid (SLA) cells had not been charged in a very long time. So, I dug out a couple of 1 amp smart chargers and started pumping energy back into them. These little two-stage wall-wart-style units only cost about \$15 or \$20 and can be found at most well-stocked ham fests. If I had the room to do it, I would have a shelf set up where each of my SLAs would be lovingly trickled charged whenever they were not in use. If you have the space to do it consider such an arrangement for your batteries. Check out this page for some common sense guidelines for SLAs (and for some fun animal pictures).

The other really nice thing about this weekend was that Sandy and I got to spend some time together without that looming work deadline pressure lurking in the background. As it turned out, one subject kept coming up: the new Elecraft K3 radio I mentioned yesterday. I am considering getting a K3 for my St. Kitts trip this Fall. Of course, I would get it long before our departure for the islands so I could study the device, practice with the device, and become comfortable with it. And, of course, if I purchased the radio as a kit, I would also have to assemble it! That would no doubt be half the fun. I have told people that assembling my K2 was one of the most rewarding experiences I've had in the hobby. I'm certain that building the K3 would exceed even that. And, when I'm finished, I'll have what will probably be the best lightweight DXpeditioning radio available. Sandy and I have discussed this a great deal.

There are some other interesting things happening around this radio's announcement that I hope to share later this week...

In the mean time, I hope all of you planning your next DXpedition!  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:05PM (-04:00)

## A message from Elecraft

Monday, April 30, 2007

It seems like every blog I read regularly is talking about the new Elecraft K3 radio. I'm an unabashed Elecraft fan and always thought that these radios were made with me in mind: low power, low profile, portable, simple, and elegant. My beliefs in this regard were confirmed in a very unusual way this weekend by an email message from Wayne Burdick as shown below.

Hi Scott,



your blog ("100 pound DXpedition"). I didn't realize it until now, but we designed the K3 specifically with you in mind :)

I like your concept of lightweight DXpeditions so much that I'd like to help promote your site somehow. Perhaps the feeling might be mutual?

My partner Eric and I could do a guest posting to your blog, or we could do a brief interview on the design philosophy of the new radio. I haven't ever asked about such a possibility, so my apologies if I'm way off base in how I might approach you about this.

I previously designed the Norcal rigs and the K2/K1/KX1, so "lightweight" is my thing. But this time we tried to design a high-performance rig for the masses -- one that we think of as the only "Affordable and Portable" dream rig. The idea is that, at only 8 pounds, you'd take it with you on trips -- not just leave it at home on the desk. A \*serious\* lightweight DXpedition rig, in other words.

Let me know if I can answer any questions for you.

73,  
Wayne Burdick, N6KR  
CTO, Elecraft, Inc.

Well, first let me say that I was thrilled to receive the message. I've since exchanged some mail with Mr. Burdick and I hope to either give the Elecraft guys a guest blogging spot here or do a brief interview--whatever they want. I agree completely with his assessment: this radio does look like a 100 Pound DXpeditioner's dream. If I can get information directly from the source (Elecraft) to the reader (you) I'll gladly eliminate the middleman (me!). Realistically, nothing will likely happen until after Dayton. I can't imagine how busy these guys are with a new radio announced and the national convention right around the corner!

In the mean time, I've pointed the Elecraft guys to Dave and the 99 Hobbies site and hope there is a podcast in our future. It would be fantastic, I'm sure! Watch the 99 Hobbies web site for more (and I'll post here when it happens).

By the way, WA5ZNU has a clever K3 Budget Planner page to give you a quick tally of the kind of wallet-damage this new radio will cause. Act soon if you want one of those low serial number units!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:18PM (-04:00)

## Scarborough ... aghast

Tuesday, May 01, 2007

I quote occasionally from the Daily DX. It is about a buck a week to get the EMail subscription. I won my first year's subscription from a drawing at Boxboro (the ARRL New England Division Convention) a couple of years ago and have been hooked ever since. If you want to know what is happening in the DX world *today* this is your best source.

When there is a big DXpedition in progress there are additional mailings to keep you apprised of the unfolding events. In a message just received Bernie McClenny passed

along some status of the Scarborough Reef DXpedition including descriptions of the treacherous conditions on the jagged rocks and surrounding razor-sharp coral. Day shifts are 6 hours in blistering heat and night shifts are 13 hours in the darkest night imaginable. Make no mistake, these are brave souls.

Now for the aghast part. Below in the block quote is *fan mail* (their term, not mine) received by this team. I lifted it directly from the Daily DX message with capitalization problems, spelling errors, and punctuation exactly as it was presented there. My head hangs in shame to think that this kind of bile comes from our amateur radio community. {sigh}

"fIVE YEARS PLAnning you did a %&\*@# job we cant hear you on the east coast you shoud have gotton info from n8s they did a great job at least you heard them you guys keep working ja's and w6's thats all your going to get the east coast i guess is off limmits you wount get any donation from me or any one else on the east coast you guys are the worst go to 11 meters you might have better lush"

I'll have a nice post tonight about pleasant things and planning for my St. Kitts trip. In the mean time, get those courageous BS7H fellows in your log. Good luck!  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:19PM (-04:00)

## How not to QSL

Tuesday, May 01, 2007

I was going to write about some thinking I've been doing for my St. Kitts trip but that will need to wait. I just finished processing another batch of QSL cards and I have some observations to make.

Let me first say that I've apologized in previous posts like this one that there were certainly things we could have done better to ensure accurate logs were kept. I will not reiterate those ideas here. The DXpedition has the responsibility to ensure that QSOs are recorded properly. After that, though, the remaining responsibilities rest largely with the operator at home to get a QSL card request together, in the format requested by the DXpedition team, to the proper QSL manager, and bundled with the correct self addressed stamped envelope or postage. We were quite specific about how QSLing would be done and what operators must do to receive a card. (The guidelines were published nearly two months before the trip.)

Most QSL card requests for the Montserrat trip were made by operators who could follow directions. For the rest, well, allow me to provide a (partial) list of ways not to QSL to a DXpedition. Here are ten easy steps to be a bad QSLer.

1. **Never visit the DXpedition web site.** If you visit the web site you might see a link like *QSL information*. What fun would that be?
2. **Never visit QRZ.com\*** - Going there would point you to the correct QSL manager.
3. **Don't include postage** - The DXpedition may be dedicating hundreds of hours to the planning and execution of their trip. Why not make them pay hundreds of dollars in postage costs so you and your friends can get a souvenir QSL card for free?
4. **Don't bother with an envelope** - QSL managers have lots of time (and envelopes).

They can fill one out for you.

5. **Don't bother double checking your card's data** - Guess. Put a band and time down. See if the QSL manager will spend that few minutes searching through the logs for you.
6. **Design your card so it is pretty, but impossible to read** - If your card is confusing, or your penmanship is horrific, that just means the QSL manager will spend that much more time admiring your handiwork!
7. **Design your card without your name and address on it and leave out the SASE** - The envelope you sent the request in has your return address, of course, but make sure it appears nowhere else. Since QSL card requests and the envelopes are quickly separated during processing, this insures a nightmare for the QSL manager. Imagine the fun the QSL manager will have on his hands-and-knees searching through that huge pile of freshly opened envelopes for the one that matches your very special card!
8. **Send your card to the wrong QSL manager** - Yup. This is tons of fun. A nice QSL manager will then need to stop what he's doing, figure out where you should have sent your request, make a new envelope for the correct QSL manager, and forward your request (with your SASE or postage) so you've got a chance of getting that card, too.
9. **Send the wrong amount of postage** - Too much or too little are both good ideas! Just make sure it is wrong. Sending expired IRCs is also a good move.
10. **Pack and tape your materials so they are guaranteed to tear upon opening** - This is one of the best ways to trip up your QSL adversary. It takes a little extra effort to ensure that even the most careful opening of your QSL request will result in a shredded, unreadable mess, but if that's the effect you're looking for, it will be worth it!

Obviously the above is all *tongue-in-cheek*, but I assure you that I saw, or handled, at least one of every category above in this effort. My system is pretty good. I can fulfill about 25 QSL card requests per hour of effort assuming there are no data errors (not in log) and everybody provides an SASE or self-addressed envelope. The exceptions, the "not in log" problems, wrong band, wrong mode, and the myriad of problems listed above really gum-up the process, though.

Being a QSL manager will be, even for a modestly sized DXpedition, a tremendous amount of work. The work is enjoyable and rewarding. It is also extremely time consuming. Certainly, no one should undertake this responsibility unless they are patient, thorough, and willing to do the work over a long period of time. Request may come in years after the event.

I'll return to my St. Kitts planning and some thoughts about Dayton tomorrow.

\* Actually, VP2MST had "QSL via AB7ST" in his QRZ entry. Oops. I didn't notice that until tonight.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:22PM (-04:00)

## Making lists

Thursday, May 03, 2007

It got late again, nearly midnight. It is too late for me to post anything significant tonight. So, rather than put up a lengthy discussion on any one thing, let me just put up a list of things I'm thinking about.

- **V4 license** - I goofed up my license request and they "gave me" V4/NE1RD. Should I fight it? I've sent one FAX and one email with no response to either. Maybe I'll just live with it. {sigh}
- **Elecraft K3** - I did the exercise of pricing this radio with the options I wanted. \$3300. Wow. The words "not in this months budget" don't begin to cover it. Of course, I just blew money on an IC-7000, a trip to Montserrat, a new portable Yagi, Buddipole parts, \$1300 antenna analyzer, and a 48 watt solar panel. So, it isn't like I'm *deprived*. Still thinking...
- **NEQP this weekend** - I need to rearrange my schedule to put some serious operating time in. This is a fun contest.
- **Hazardous waste day** - Here's my chance to safely and appropriately dispose of all these dead gel cell batteries I have stacked up. Recycling is a beautiful thing.
- **Deer Isle** - Oh yeah, I need to send off some mail to the woman that rents us that house in Maine. We're going to reschedule our lease for Patriots Day 2008.
- **Dayton** - More email I'd forgotten to send. Macintosh users had a small get-together at Dayton last year with Don Argo of Dog Park Software organizing the rendezvous. Some guys were trying to do that again. One fellow suggested Saturday morning. I countered with Thursday evening during our blogging dinner and drinks event. We'll see what the reaction is. If they keep it the Saturday of Dayton, I'll miss it. I'll be on my way to Chicago.
- **St. Kitts airfare** - Drat. I still haven't booked that. I need to make a check list before I start forgetting stuff!

... and so on. It really is time to start making some lists! But, that will need to wait until tomorrow.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:00AM (-04:00)

## Preliminary thinking and planning for St. Kitts

Thursday, May 03, 2007



We flew over the islands of St. Kitts and Nevis (NA-104) on the way back from Montserrat. It was the island of Nevis with its enormous volcanic crater that captivated me. Stupidly, I did not have my camera out or I would have eagerly snapped a picture. Hence, I can only provide an approximation of that glorious view through the miracle of Google Earth.

If you have not been using Google Earth begin now. This is an incredibly powerful system that allows you to get a very clear idea about the area you will be visiting. For example, if you visit the web site for our villa on St. Kitts you will see terrific pictures of the property both inside and out. Using just a few hints from the picture I was able to precisely identify the villa in the satellite view.

I now know where my neighbors will be (behind me, mostly) and even have a general idea about the topography of the area. The last step is to obtain a topographical map of the area to fill in all the details. I have been buying my maps from Omnimap.com. The St. Kitts and Nevis maps can be found here. I ordered both maps in early March but thus far only one has arrived (the other is backordered). Again, start your planning early. Order things you need early.

Every 100 Pound DXpedition should have goals and I've been thinking about my goals for this trip. As I've said before, goals help focus the planning process for everything from the selection of your destination to the equipment you'll bring. Having goals and a good plan also helps ensure that you won't have regrets about missing an opportunity. Of course, once you've made your goals you can relax!

I've not decided on goals for this trips yet. The point of the trip is to participate in the CQ World Wide DX Contest but beyond that I've not decided anything regarding the number of QSOs I hope to make, or awards I might qualify for such as WAS, DXCC, or even WPX. There are also contest-specific records that I could consider chasing. The North America SSB Records page has the following for low power and QRP entries (the only two categories I would be interested in competing):

L Low Power | Q QRP  
Category | Call | Score |  
QSO's | Zones | Countries | Year record set

L V44NK 127,566 857 33 81 95

L28 V47TV(OH3VV) 857,934 3284 31 95 91

L21 V47NK 67,320 660 16 35 96

L14 NC2N/V44 7,595 127 14 35 04

L7 V49A(EW1AR) 135,408 705 18 75 05

L3.7 V49A(EW1AR) 40,227 298 16 53 04

Q21 V44/EW1AR(NC2N) 15,708 117 14 37 04

The low power single band record for 20m looks pretty low. I believe I could easily break that. Also check out the QRP entries. There is only one! Only the single band (15m) entry from 2004 is there. Any QRP entry this year would set the record.

Working the contest QRP would be fun, but would make all my other goals difficult to achieve. Further, the right way to approach a serious QRP effort is with a big antenna with lots of gain on a nice tower with a rotator. I have none of that. So, I guess the QRP record will need to be set by somebody else!

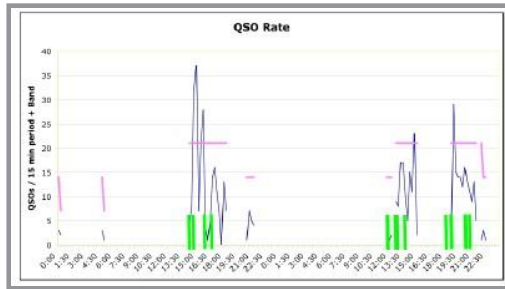
Note that a couple of these scores put up by V44NK, including the top score for low power, were done at low points in the solar cycle. Could I beat the top low-power score? That is something to consider.

Finally, I'm still mulling over the equipment selection for the trip. The Mosley Mini-32-A was ordered 5 weeks ago (that might be arriving soon!) and I still plan on bringing that, but little else has been finalized. With the new Elecraft announcement I'm not even sure what radio will be going. (Jeff (KE9V) is certainly cheering me on to buy the new rig.) There are lots of reasons to strongly consider it. I will defer that discussion until tomorrow's entry.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:21PM (-04:00)

# What's the Frequency, Kenneth?

Friday, May 04, 2007



One of the questions I'm always asked by friends when I'm packing my gear is, "what frequency will you be on?" The short answer is, "I have no idea." I thought it might be good to spend a few minutes in today's blog entry talking about operating from that far away place.

Using common ham radio contesting terminology, there are two ways to obtain a

series of contacts: *search & pounce* and *running*. The idea of *running* is to sit on one frequency and call CQ. You work somebody, close that QSO, and immediately solicit for another. The big DXpeditions (and contest stations) do this.

*Search & pounce* is precisely what it sounds like. You look for a promising signal on the band calling CQ and you respond (pounce on it) and hopefully they work you. Stations with smaller signals (called *little pistols* in contesting parlance) often do this and for good reason. Since a small signal is not heard everywhere, the ability to hold the frequency is compromised. If a small station tries to *run* it is likely that a *big gun* station (that doesn't hear the little signal) will eventually start using the frequency, pushing the smaller station aside.

Operating with this lightweight equipment, no amplifiers, smallish antennas, and often with temporary (and non-optimized) configurations means you will not be a *big gun* signal on the bands. The fellows with the 1500 watts (or more) and the stacked monobanders at 50 meters are going to always be louder. The question is really, "are you loud enough?"

I was worried about being loud enough while planning my trip to St. John in 2006. I had only a 100 watt transmitter and a very simple set of antennas. Let's examine just one of those antennas. It was a wire vertical 33 feet in length suspended from a fishing pole fed from the ground with just a single radial. Such an antenna works well on both 40m (quarter wave) and 15m (three-quarter wave). On this particular trip I made many 15 meter contacts. But how *loud* was I?

The 15 meter band is large enough that even a small station can *run* and I did just that. I called CQ. Sometimes I would make many calls of CQ without a taker. Minutes would go by and I would work just a handful. Other times I was working people quickly in a short-lived but intense pile-ups. Why? Was I loud sometimes but not others? That seemed unlikely. Nor was there any pattern geographically that I could discern. I worked stations in these states and provinces in one very brief burst: PA, TX, OH, MA, TN, DE, MD, PA, ON, CA, MA, NY, OR, and PA. Something else was going on.

That "something else" was the packet spotting network. Upon my return home I fished out the spots made for my operation and plotted them against the QSO rate. A graph with that information appears below.

The graph plots time across the bottom and QSOs per 15 minute period vertically in dark blue lines. The green markers approximately mark the times when my operation appeared on the spotting network. The picture was now clear. When somebody would spot me on the DX spotting network there would be a flurry of activity. Operators were relying on the spotting network to tell them where to tune. Once they tuned to my frequency they worked me easily. I was loud enough. They just didn't know to listen for me until the DX spotting network told them to do so.

Aside from the comments we could make about the possible over-reliance on the spotting network, the interesting point here is this: when people found me, I was loud enough.

Sure, I could have had a better signal with a better antenna or an amplifier, but even with the very simple, temporary, lightweight, and hastily constructed setup I was plenty loud enough.

Prior to the Montserrat trip I was asked, as always, "what frequency will you be using?" My response this time was, "watch the DX spotting network." This approach worked very well. The villa at Gingerbread Hill had an internet connection reliable enough to send mail, surf the web, and work the DX spotting network. I would begin each operating session by finding an empty frequency and calling CQ. After about a minute, I would spot myself. Then the floodgates opened. Usually, it took only one spot to "prime the pump". After that, everybody could hear the pile-up.

Self-spotting in a contest is bad form. I'm not advocating any bad behavior during contests. (In fact, except for my work at K1TTT recently, I've never used the spotting network in a contest and have no plans to do so in the future.) Self-spotting on a DXpedition is a fine idea. It worked exceptionally well for the VP2M effort and is an excellent alternative to trying to pick a frequency (or set of frequencies) prior to the trip.

All of the above is the precursor to a discussion I'll post about the mechanics of operating on the other end of the pile-up. In the mean time, look for me in the New England QSO Party this weekend. Oh, and don't forget to look for Steve (K9ZW) and his island activation this weekend.

One last thing: For the story behind "What's the Frequency, Kenneth?" see this. We live in a weird world.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:40PM (-04:00)

## Noise

Monday, May 07, 2007

I have talked about *island time* occasionally in this blog. That phrase can mean two different things, of course, depending on the context. The first meaning is the pejorative term describing how bureaucracies in some of these small, faraway places move at a glacial pace for the simplest of requests. Mañana doesn't just mean "tomorrow". The second meaning is the one I most often use here. *Island time* describes those limited number of hours you have to operate on your DXpedition. Each hour is precious. You can spend that time chasing problems or you can put contacts in the log. There are a number of things that can help, or hurt, in this regard. Tonight I'll cover some of those things that can impede your efforts.

Noise. While on St. John we had an exceptionally quiet location. I was able to hear signals that didn't move the meter and that was very nice indeed. This was not the case on Montserrat. I'm not sure if the problem was extant that first night but certainly by the second day there was this buzzing noise that would walk through the bands occasionally. My guess: one of us had some device, a battery charger, charger for our shaver, clock radio, something, that was generating this noise. I never figured it out but it vexed me for most of the time I operated at the villa.

When I first noticed this irritating S9+ signal through my headphones I started looking for suspects. My first thought was the fancy battery chargers used to charge the packs used by Budd, Chris, and the other fellows during their portable operation. These units were set up on the table next to our operating position and, well, it seemed like a good bet that they were making *some* noise. We unplugged them. The noise remained.

We should have had a plan for noise location and abatement. We didn't. Again, we had a

hole in our planning process. Here are some guidelines I have for next time:

1. **Check gizmos for noise before you leave** - This probably sounds obvious, but I'll list it anyway. If you are planning on taking something on a trip, check it out before you leave. Don't just make sure it works. Make sure it works without generating all sorts of HF hash. Put a receiver next to the device and power it. Does it buzz? Make sure, if the device has different "modes", that each mode is quiet. Perhaps a two-stage SLA charger will be quiet during the main charging cycle but noisy during the trickle charge, for example.
2. **Unpack and deploy electric devices systematically** - I can't be sure if the noise problem on Montserrat was something preexisting in the villa or if it was something we brought with us. Seven guys unpacked and started plugging in every manner of device imaginable: battery chargers for radios, cameras, camcorders, iPods, cell phones, and who knows what else. I tried to organize an "unplug this thing and see if the problem goes away" search, but it was only half-heartedly executed. It is better to narrow your list of suspects by plugging in a few items then seeing if you have a problem rather than plugging in *everything* and hunting for the problem afterwards.
3. **Ferrite** - If you do manage to discover, for example, that a particular *wall wart* is the culprit, it would be nice to be able to do something about it! I brought a small bag of snap-on ferrite for that purpose. Even on a 100 pound DXpedition, the benefits of having these things outweighs the costs in, well, *weight*. They are worth bringing.
4. **Time shift** - If you have some device that generates RF hash that you can't live without, see if you can use it when you are *not* operating. If this is for you, the ham, then that's probably easy. If this is something near-and-dear to somebody else on your excursion (such as your XYL), you'll need to be diplomatic and negotiate something. Hopefully, you can minimize the time overlap between the hash generator and your DXing.

Sometimes the noise is outside your area of control. Dave sent me a pointer to this article discussion noise problems with overhead lines on St. Kitts. I certainly hope this sort of things won't affect me this fall!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:21AM (-04:00)

## Your operating position

Monday, May 07, 2007

Once you have your antennas set up, coax feeds run, and your operating position set up, it will be down to you and your radio. The selection of the particular radio to use is a very personal decision, of course, based on the collection of preferred features, its interface, size, or even just a sense of trustworthiness and reliability.

In my view, the main interface to your radio is not the front panel with all the knobs. I believe the primary interface is the sound going in, and going out of it. The DSP, compression circuitry, filters, and other mechanisms inside the radio all work together to render the HF signal to AF. What happens next is up to you.

I am an unabashed Heil Sound fan. I had been using either the Pro-Set Plus or Traveler Dual headsets exclusively. I've added a new headset to the mix recently after trying it at the K1TTT superstation. The Pro-Set Quiet Phone is a headset with all the great stuff in Pro-Set Plus like a superb microphone element and a comfortable feel on the head. It also has noise-canceling circuitry that was very impressive in the K1TTT multi-operator environment. It only took about 15 minutes of operating with these beauties to convince me I needed a set for myself.



I used my Pro-Set Quiet Phone headset in last weekend's New England QSO Party. Like last year, I was using my Elecraft K2 running just 5 watts so having good audio is very, very important. In fact, out of the 39 contacts I made the contest (I was preoccupied this weekend) no fewer than 5 guys complimented me on my audio.

What my K2 is missing is a voice keyer. One of the reasons I didn't put more hours into the contest was because I was losing my voice. The internal voice keyer inside the IC-7000 had spoiled me! Keyers, both voice keyers and CW keyers, are indispensable tools for an extended operation. Of course you can say your call sign. Of course you can squeeze the paddles and send your call sign. The trick isn't to do it once or even 50 times; the trick is to do it 5000 times over an extended period.

For CW I have the microHam CW keyer which provides both CW keyer functions and rig control function with its USB to serial / CAT interface. The best feature on this unit is the big, round knob on the front for the speed control. You know, sometimes the best interface is the big knob that just *does the right thing*. I brought this unit to Montserrat and it performed very well. Most logging programs have some facilities for triggering the keyer memory. I developed an add-on for MacLoggerDX called FKeyer for this purpose. Yes. Being a programmer does occasionally have its advantages {grin}.

Voice keyers seem more complicated, but they shouldn't be. I have owned the MFJ 434B Voice Keyer for a while but have not set it up yet. After this weekend's wear-and-tear on my voice, I'm now motivated to get this device working with the K2. I wonder how much current it draws? It would be very nice to have a voice keyer on Georges Island (and Lovells Island for the IOTA contest). The new Elecraft K3 offers a voice keyer option, too. In my view, if you operate SSB, this is a mandatory component.

Finally, you need some way to key the transmitter. I have tried and tried but I just can't find the right combinations of VOX settings that make VOX usable for me. I prefer keying the transmitter though mechanical means. If at all possible, I'll use a foot switch. I've posted previously on how to find a nice lightweight (and cheap) foot switch for this purpose. I found that there are times, though, when using a foot switch isn't the best option. When operating portably with nothing but dirt (or sand) beneath my feet, the foot switch can be difficult to locate with your foot and even harder to trigger. I had built a hand-switch from junk box parts and it worked. But, Paul "Lava" Van Dyke (VP2MVO) had a Heil HS-2 hand-switch on Montserrat and I was foolish enough to give it a go. It felt very nice in my hand and was rock solid (like the rest of the Heil offerings). So, I now own that, too. It lives with the noise-canceling headset and will be used for all my portable operations.

It is less important to have the foot switch if I am not computer logging. If I am paper logging, I can write with one hand and use the hand-switch with the other. (Of course, using that strategy, I should really learn to manage the paddles with my left hand so I could write with my right. I'll put that on my New Year's Resolution list next year!)

Your operating position, your radio, headset, foot switch, keyers, and even rig control all combine to give you your presence on the air. If these elements work together and are comfortable to use then you'll be able to operate for hours at a time, days on end, and fill your log book with lots of nice QSOs. But, if you've not thought through these things, if the operating position is uncomfortable, or unoptimal, you will expend energy to overcome that deficiency while you operate. Eventually, you'll tire (or your voice will tire) and that ever valuable *Island Time* will be wasted.

My advice, obviously, is to consider all these things the next time you evaluate your equipment. To use a running analogy, you can't run a marathon with a rock in your shoe. Work out all these things prior to your trip so operating is a pleasure--and a breeze--on your DXpedition.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:10PM (-04:00)

300

Tuesday, May 08, 2007

Tonight marks my three hundredth post. I began with this blog nearly a year ago with this:

I've just begun planning several DXpeditions and thought it might be fun to keep track of the kinds of research, thinking, and planning that goes into a successful personal DXpedition. I plan on posting what I learn, when I learn it. You'll see it all: insights, wrong turns, goof ups, and epiphanies. If it helps you plan your next DXpedition, I'll be very pleased indeed.

I have certainly had goof-ups and wrong turns! Mistakes made by me during planning or execution of these small DXpeditions have been highlighted here in the hopes that they will not be repeated (by me or by my readers) and that the lessons learned from those mistakes will lead to better planning, better execution, and better DXpeditions. Since I am no expert in any of this, I was (and continue to be) worried that my small observations, sometimes obvious, would not provide sufficient value to warrant the time readers must invest to follow my blog. Indeed, even now I go back through previous entries and wonder if I'm simply stating the obvious.

Perhaps that is the case, but the reason why such entries were made in the first place is that those *obvious* things were not *obvious* to me at the time! The aphorism "hindsight is 20/20" seems apt here. Frequently (especially after a particularly embarrassing lapse in judgement) I wonder if my particular screw-up was due to a pitfall that could victimize anyone, or if it was due to reasons peculiar to me. Perhaps one person's *insightful observation* is another's *mundane recollection*. These small observations made throughout these 300 entries probably fall somewhere between those two extremes. There are some big observations I've made during all this, too. One of the biggest is a personal note that I may not have yet shared. My recollections on the Montserrat trip have solidified an idea that I had even before the trip began: it is better to be labor than management. Specifically, I spent many hours on the island in a role other than HF radio operator. I was updating the web site, updating the on-line logs, and struggling (along with Chris) to get the paper logs converted to computer logs so QSLing would be possible later. (Being the QSL manager, too, I had a vested interest in making sure this was done properly.) Every hour I spent on these administrative tasks was time and energy I could have spent on the air--and working on the air from this idyllic location was the reason for going!

Don't get me wrong, I don't have any regrets. Well, maybe a few {grin}, but along with these choices came new knowledge and opportunities. At risk of being glib, my fortune cookie from lunch the other day read, "Experience is what you get when you don't get what you want." To some extent, the Montserrat trip gave me experience in lieu of DXCC, 2500 QSOs, WAS, or even just more chances to work my friends on 20m from paradise. Instead of those things, I returned from the trip with ideas, insights, and a deep respect for those who organize the big DXpeditions. I've tried to pass some of this along in this blog and hope sincerely that you can take some of my *experience* and get *what you want*.

So, here's to 300. I had no idea if I would stick with it this long. I still have no idea who (if anybody) is actually reading this. Hello?! Is anybody out there? I don't know whether I

have 300 more in me, but I'll keep posting so long as I believe what I have to say might help somebody have fun with their radio in a faraway place. Until next time, 73 from NE1RD!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:07PM (-04:00)

## BURO cards for Montserrat have arrived

Thursday, May 10, 2007

I received a drop from the W1 QSL bureau today. The following cards were received for QSOs with the Montserrat DXpedition:

CU2JT, PY4OY, F4EZD, EI2CR, EI3GYB, F5TJC, HB9SLO, SM7UZB, SM5CAK, SK3BG, SM3NXS (2), and K0TTT(!).

I also received a similarly sized pile of cards for NE1RD, NE1RD/1, etc. I will try to get these turned around before I leave for Dayton Tuesday afternoon. Failing that, I will get them out the moment I return.

I learned this week that I'll be traveling to Tampa, Florida for the Systems & Software Technology Conference (SSTC) in June. This is a trade show and I'll be one of the *booth babes* (absurdity intentional). The other two attendees from Verocel will be bringing family so I'll be on my own during the evenings. Naturally, the Devil Rays are playing in Arizona so there is no baseball in town during my stay. How on Earth will I fill my time? Maybe I could bring a... radio?

The supplies for the show will be shipped via carrier from the office to our booth on the show floor. I asked if I could slip an extra radio-filled Pelican case (or two) into the mix. My colleagues said, "Yes! Of course!" I just need to schlep it to the hotel and at the end of the trip roll back to the booth. Easy! I just need to be careful that I not pack anything I might need for Field Day (because it wouldn't be back in time).

Speaking of Field Day, those plans are coming along nicely for the PART club. Our goal this year is to have fun, teach, and learn. We are organizing a series of *Toolbox Talks*, 15-30 minute impromptu discussions about a particular topic. I'm participating in several of these where I will talk about portable operations, contesting, and antenna analyzers. I'll also give demonstrations of items you can't see in stores like the Buddipole and Buddistick, the AntennaSmith antenna analyzer, and the Force-12 Sigma 5 antenna. This is going to be a very hands-on event. If you happen to be near Westford, Massachusetts come Field Day, stop by!

Finally, blogging over the next 10 days is going to be difficult. I leave for Dayton on Tuesday, will be in Contest University on Thursday, attending the show Friday, then driving to Chicago (actually, far West of Chicago) on Saturday to attend my niece's High School Graduation on Sunday. So, if I miss a couple of days, just expect some especially fat posts thereafter!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:20PM (-04:00)

## Generate some buzz, and the YCCC at 30

Friday, May 11, 2007

Packing up your gear and getting to your destination is only the beginning of the adventure. It would be nice to also make some QSOs! Though contests can be a productive way to get those QSOs in the log, I know many reading this do not enjoy contesting. Many find the "you are 59 QRZ!" exchange is unsatisfying.

I enjoy contesting. I especially enjoy working in the major contests. Knowing that the airwaves will be filled with operators who may only operate three or four times a year is a thrill for me. Contests also provide a *target rich environment*. With all this activity, somebody will want to talk to me!

You can create your own excitement. We tried to do that for the Montserrat trip by publicizing the details of our trip in advance. There were many who found us on the air who sounded as excited to make the contact as we were.

Creating a special event station is also an excellent way to generate some buzz for your operation. Anyone with a license can apply for a special event station and a special 1-by-1 call sign once per year. You don't need much of an excuse. I'm waiting for a special event celebrating the operator's own birthday. It could happen.

Here's another example of buzz: The Yankee Clipper Contest Club is celebrating its 30th Anniversary. Look for YCCC members operating on the air for the remainder of this year signing /30. I will be doing a little of this myself! And, I promise to give you a little more than "you are 59". {grin}

Let's put some in the log. See you on the bands!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:49PM (-04:00)

## RF ground and the answer to "how many?"

Sunday, May 13, 2007

Last summer a fellow in a large truck had a lapse of concentration and slammed into the back of my Honda Element. Sandy and I were unhurt but the car was lost. That was unfortunate, of course, but it gave me a chance to reevaluate the radio installation. I bought another Element and this time I did the job right. Well, mostly right.

I use a Yaesu ATAS-120 antenna for HF in the car. It is small and inconspicuous (though opinions on this particular point vary) and covers 40m-6m. The device is only half of the antenna, of course, just like with any vertical antenna design. The other half of the antenna is the frame of the car capacitively coupled to the ground. Coax from the radio leads to the antenna mount on the roof rack feeding the antenna but the ground path, the RF ground path, needs some help.

In my original installation on the first Element I was careful to provide a good RF ground path by connecting a piece of braid between the SO-239 mount for the antenna to the bolts holding the roof rack (and to the frame of the car). I worked into Europe easily with just 100 watts from my ICOM IC-70611mg and even worked Australia one Saturday morning on 20m.

When I replaced the car, I was careful to make sure roof racks were installed before I drove it off the lot. I had the two mounts (one for the ATAS and one for the 2m/440 antenna) on the back rack within 30 minutes of arriving home and the radios were installed within a few days. All was just as it was before except that little piece of braid. I had cracked the plastic on the roof rack of the first Element and I was determined not to screw things up this time with the new car.

I was too careful. The weather turned cold and I didn't have that *perfect piece of braid* in

hand yet. I was still looking. I then found that *perfect piece of braid*. By then it was dark by 4 o'clock in the afternoon (it does that in the Winter here in New England) and who wants to try to figure out stuff like this in the cold and the dark?

In a sense, I ran this experiment backwards. If I had a problem tuning the antenna or generating a good signal I would have suspected a poor RF ground. On the first installation, I had no such problems as I had that piece of braid in place. In the new installation that braid was missing--and I had all the problems you might imagine because of it. The antenna was difficult or impossible to tune on 40m. My signal strength reported by other stations was significantly lower when compared to the reports I had received from the first car. I even believe I was picking up more noise.

I put a very nice piece of braid back in this special place today. As you might expect, things improved dramatically. Duh.

This story points to one of the complaints frequently heard about vertical antennas. The question "How many radials do I need?" is really the question "what do I need to do to have a sufficient RF ground?" The answer is not necessarily obvious. The placement of the feed point and height of the radials off the ground can make a big difference, for example.

My advice is to do some of these experiments with those verticals you deploy on your portable expeditions. But, don't just add radials and see what happens. Run the experiment "backwards", too. If you've run four radials and have pretty good luck, try three or two. Locate the knee in the curve by adding and subtracting radials so you understand the trade-offs. You know zero radials is almost certainly the wrong number and 100 radials would be over-kill. But, where is that (hopefully) low number where adding more radials isn't worth the trouble? That is knee in the curve. That is the interesting number. Of course, it goes without saying that you do all these experiments long before you leave for your adventure. Island time is no time to be fooling with such things!

Now outfitted with a newly well-RF-grounded antenna, I'll be leaving for Dayton on Tuesday. If propagation conditions permit I will be signing NE1RD/30 mobile celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Yankee Clipper Contest Club. I hope to work 17m and 20m SSB. Meet you on the air!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:08AM (-04:00)

## This is why we practice

Sunday, May 13, 2007

It was a beautiful day today. The sun was shining with a cool breeze and it had not rained for several days so the ground was firm and dry. In other words, it was a perfect Spring day in New England.

I live in Acton, Massachusetts, a town seeped in American history and filled with trees and winding roads. The North Acton Recreation Area (NARA) is only a few minutes away and it seemed like the perfect place to set up a radio for the afternoon. I gathered together my QRP setup including:

- Elecraft K2 and accessories in its Pelican case
- Backpack with solar panel and charge controller
- Small Buddipole system
- One 17Ah battery
- Hammac
- Coax

- Heil Headset

I planned on setting up for 17m and, failing to find good propagation there, would switch to 20m. Honestly, I didn't really care if I made many contacts today. I wanted to be outside and to check out the performance of the new 48 watt solar panel.

Things did not go smoothly. This is why we practice.

I have mentioned before that it is best not to cannibalize parts from one system to outfit another. Even if it means having some small amount of duplication it is better to have each system (antenna, radio, test equipment, etc.) be complete. I have tried to do this with each of the systems I have constructed: the two Buddipole systems, the Buddistick system, and the radios each in their own Pelican cases with all they need for a complete station.

The alternative, of course, is to own a large, loosely organized collection of parts from which you would coalesce bundles for a particular mission. I believe that way lies madness. The chances of omitting something important are great with this piecemeal strategy. A forgotten part like a connector or adapter might sound inconsequential but its absence might hamper or completely scuttle an operation.

I recently ordered a bundle of Buddipole parts and had carefully repacked my big and small Buddipole systems so each system was complete. Everything one would need for that particular system was in the bag. At least that was my plan. I did not do a good job in that organization. In fact, many things went wrong today. Allow me to enumerate them:

1. **Rotating Arm Kit (RAK)** - I had packed the knobs for the rotating arm kit but the aluminum brackets were missing. I had forgot to pack them.
2. **Coax problems** - I brought a 25 foot piece of coax to run between the bottom of the TRSB and the radio. The PL259 connector on one end of the cable must have been crushed at some point. It was no longer round and would not screw on to the SO239-BNC adapter necessary to fit either the TRSB or the K2.
3. **Solar panel problems** - The panel works very well... when it is face up. Unfortunately, the panel has a great deal more surface area than the smaller (15w) panel I own. Gusty winds kept flipping the panel closed. The corners of the panel have eyelets. I will run some dacron rope through them so the panel can be staked out.
4. **Connector failure** - One of the SO239-BNC adapters came apart in my hand. I used to think I had too many connectors. I now believe that I should go through my kits and ensure that there are sufficient spares for all types of connectors in each kit.
5. **RF got into my noise canceling circuitry** - I brought the Heil Noise canceling headset with me today. The Buddipole was lashed to the picnic table and was only a few feet over my operating position. This was far too close for that delicate signal processing. Turning off that feature allowed me to use the headset today but I now know that this is a problem. If I want to use this headset with the noise canceling feature I'll need to move the antenna well away from the operating position.

The above description makes it sound like today's exercise was a *bust*. No. On the contrary, I learned a great deal and even with these distraction I was able to make a contact. Here are some things that went well:

1. **My settings for the Buddipole setup are good** - I had mentioned in a previous post that my small Buddipole system had a slightly different setup than the documentation indicated. I need to tap in one coil turn and shorten the whip slightly from the documented directions for each band. My new guidelines work like a charm.

2. **The AntennaSmith works well** - I used the new analyzer today and it worked superbly. The internal batteries also appears to have held the last charge I gave it well. I should probably tuck a PL259-BNC connector in with the analyzer, though.
3. **The solar panel works** - I used the new panel to charge the 17 Ah battery. The panel powered the radio and kept the battery at nearly a full charge for the entire time I operated. This is very good news as I'll need every ounce of power on Georges and Lovells Islands this Summer.
4. **England could hear me** - I had a QSO with GB400AA this afternoon. This is a special event station celebrating the founding of the Jamestown settlement here in America. (I worked the Jamestown station last weekend). The station was set up near the place where the ships departed on that long journey to the New World. The operator at the special event station recognized my call. He knew me! As it turns out, he is a Cab-converter user. What a small world!
5. **Calgary could (almost) hear me** - I tried to call VE6AO and another station in Alberta but band conditions changed before they could work me. It was a little frustrating hearing these two stations discuss how I was there, above the noise, and then buried in the noise. Alas, that's the fortunes of operating at QRP levels.

Practice, practice, practice! Today's drill was good because it allowed me to test some new equipment (the solar panel and charge controller) and evaluate my efforts packing some existing equipment (the small Buddipole system). It was also good to get some fresh air and sunshine on this old bag of bones. {grin} Seriously, the only way to become more proficient at things is to practice. I would like to have my routine so honed and equipment organization so solid that I could just grab a few bags and know I could mount a successful portable operation. Practice, think, plan, repeat. I believe that's the way.

Speaking of packing, I will be packing for my long trip to Dayton, then Chicago tonight and tomorrow. My trip West begins Tuesday afternoon.  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:07PM (-04:00)

## Shameless plug department

Monday, May 14, 2007

Welcome to the shameless plug department. I will not be blogging for a few days while I travel to Dayton and attend Contest University. So, please consider spending some of your valuable time catching up on the wonderful audio programs by

99 Hobbies - which features interviews with people just like you and me who are doing fun things with the hobby. Dave Bushong (KZ1O) believes that amateur radio is a very large umbrella under which many different interests and disciplines lie. One of the fan favorites is his interview with Diana Morse, descendent of another Morse that you might recognize!

Long Delayed Echoes - Jeff Davis (KE9V) produced a series of audio programs discussing ham radio during the Second World War. They are magnificent.

I have roughly 40 hours of driving ahead of me in the next week. I head to Dayton tomorrow afternoon and will stop somewhere between here and there to sleep. I'll complete the trip on Wednesday and rest before my class Thursday. What will I do to fill all that time? I have filled an iPod with all the 99 Hobbies and Long Delayed Echoes podcasts. I believe they will be every bit as fun the second time around.

A quick reminder: I will be meeting some other bloggers and those who read us at 6 PM in the Crowne Plaza Hotel lobby on Thursday evening. See you there!  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:24PM (-04:00)

## Dayton retrospective

Wednesday, May 23, 2007



I am back home after my tour of the country. I left home here in Massachusetts last Tuesday and returned last night. In that week I had driven to Dayton, rural Illinois, Bloomington, Illinois (to take my niece back to college), and back home again. In all, I put nearly 2500 miles on the Element.

There was a wireless access point in the Crowne Plaza Hotel, and I tried to post a blog entry after Contest University. Unfortunately, the folks at Blogger (who host this blog) had made some changes to the posting software that made it impossible for me to work as I normally do editing my post offline then posting the resulting HTML. I was hoping that the problem would be fixed by the time I returned home. It was.

Here is the picture I was hoping to post last Thursday night.

This is some of the staff from Contest University. I wish I could have corralled all the instructors from this event but, truth be told, I was lucky to have gotten a group this big. You'll recognize some of the biggest names in Amateur Radio in this picture (not counting me, of course!). This picture is just one of the collection that has augmented my cool people page on my web site.

Contest University was fantastic. There were 150 pupils filling two conference rooms for most of the day. We were served an excellent breakfast and lunch as part of the deal and received a large binder containing all the slides from all the presentations. At \$70 it was the deal of the show, in my opinion. I could recommend something like this for anyone interested in learning more about the hobby. Even if you absolutely hate contesting (and contesters) there was enough theory and DXing strategy presented that any HF operator would benefit from the material. Highly recommended.

Since I had only one day to peruse the show I took in most of it on a run. Upon entering Hara I made a beeline to the Buddipole booth to catch up with my fellow VP2M DXpeditioners. Chris, Budd, and Mike (and a couple of others) were in the booth surrounded by an enormous crowd. It was the first time I had seen these guys since we parted ways in Orlando after the trip. Chris and his wife are expecting their first child. He looked wrung out but happy. Budd was dashing around explaining ten things to twenty people and Mike was fulfilling orders one-after-another. Once I made it to the front of the pack, I exchanged handshakes and pleasantries with each in turn. All three were sporting a badge depicting our DXpedition logo with a small embellishment: lava running down the volcano. This was obviously the work of Paul "Lava" Van Dyke. I was informed that Paul had a badge for me as well, and he would be looking for me. (Again, at 6' 8", it was easier for him to spot me in the crowd than vice-versa!)

Just a few minutes later I did run into Paul. Sure enough, he had a beautiful badge with my name and call. Paul plans to return to Gingerbread Hill and continue his digital mode work. I hope all the RTTY and PSK31 operators around the world appreciate his efforts.



After saying goodbye to Paul I wandered over to the Elecraft booth and spoke with Wayne Burdick (N6KR). Wayne had written to me about the new K3 after finding my blog. At 8 pounds, it certainly does look to be a 100 pound DXpeditioner's dream! I told him that I knew he would be far too busy before Dayton to chat and that I would call him in the weeks after the show. I have missed the first production run for the new radio but will likely get one before the end of the year (perhaps after returning from St. Kitts).

Finally, the dinner and drinks for "bloggers and those who read us" Thursday was a fun time. I had dinner with Steve (K9ZW) and five others at the Spaghetti Factory. Hopefully, Jeff (KE9V) will be able to join us next year.

I expect to get back-on-track now that I'm home again. The week away was not a week off. I learned a great deal on the trip (and thought of a great deal more). I'll try to share all of it starting with tomorrow's post.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:57PM (-04:00)

## Stay in the seat

Thursday, May 24, 2007

I will be relating items from Contest University for a while as that event was crammed with information that I'm only now fully processing. One of the things emphasized by all the instructors at CU was "stay in the seat." You can't make QSOs (or points) if you are not in the seat. Ideally, you should be in the seat all 48 hours of a big contest. The top scoring operators do that, and you must do that, too, if you hope to compete with them. Students asked the obvious question: how can you stay seated in front of the operating position for 48 straight hours?

The answers varied slightly but came down to these points:

- Sleep - do it before and after the contest but not during. How? What is the secret for getting your sleep schedule aligned with the contest? The answer was Ambien, a sleep medication. After a rush of horror passed over me at the mere thought of this, I confess I see the point. I am not tempted to try this, but neither am I likely to attempt a full 48 hour stint.
- Nature's call - People eat. Later, people need to deal with the consequences. So, how does one deal with 48 hours without that bowel clearing exercise? The answer was to avoid fiber in the days prior to the contest in hopes that nothing would need to be moved. This idea was introduced as delicately as possible during discussions and raised more than a few chuckles. Given the sleep remedy suggested, I had wondered if there would be a suggestion of Imodium or other medication that would slow the digestive system. It never was. (I wonder if they've not thought of it, or if it wouldn't work as I hypothesize?)
- Water - You need to drink water to stay alert. The suggested remedy is just as simple as you might imagine, and it includes a bucket. This idea drew far fewer laughs than the fiber idea, and it seems many in the audience had already given this a try. For the record, I did not rank among them (yet).
- Caffeine - It was strongly suggested that you give up any stimulants in the week before the contest. That way, when you really need that kick late in the contest, the big cup of coffee, tea, or soft drink will do the trick. Of course, I was also thinking that caffeine, being a diuretic, also contributes to one of the problems mentioned above and should be avoided for that reason, too.

I was not particularly ambitious during my 2006 trip to St. John seeking only 500 contacts in the contest. Neither were we particularly hard-core on Montserrat (I made fewer than 1300 QSOs from there). I am planning on pushing hard during my St. Kitts trip this Fall. While a 48 hour effort during the CQ WW DX SSB is almost certainly out of the question, I may attempt something approaching a 36 hour effort. I've not formalized my goals for this trip, but that level of effort is intriguing--especially after being energized by Contest University. I'll have much more about this as the departure date for this trip draws near.

It seems to me that there is a significant overlap between contesting and DXpeditioning. It is not unusual, for example, to see famous contesters also on big DXpeditions. The crossover of experience is often mentioned. This message was recently passed on the Yankee Clipper Contest Club email reflector in response to the plethora of hyper-expensive radio offerings in recent years.

Date: Mon, 21 May 2007 13:46:28 +0000  
From: "Donald J. Toman"  
Subject: Re: [YCCC] Megabuck Radios  
To: "Jordan, David"

Dave,

It should be added that, with the experience of one DXpedition under an operator's belt, with that \$1000 radio, small amp AND G5RV, he may perform at least as well as he did with the \$3000 antenna system.

The missing ingredient in any station setup is the operator. There is no substitute for experience and training in developing an operator.

A DXpedition pushes the learning curve better than any other training I know, and it doesn't need to be a large investment.

Cheers,  
Don

I couldn't agree more.  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:25PM (-04:00)

## Sleep

Friday, May 25, 2007

DXpeditions are to contesting as marathons are to sprints. Both can be intensive, but each requires that they be run at their own pace. In yesterday's post, I briefly mentioned some of the things that are required to stay in the seat including getting your sleep schedule aligned with your operating plan. Waking up at the right time to start the endeavor is one thing, but how do you manage your sleep schedule going forward? There is an excellent article on the contesting.com web site describing *A Sleep Strategy for DX Contests*. The beauty of this article is you can start experimenting with some of the claims immediately (assuming you plan to sleep tonight). For example, the article states, "Researchers have found that sleep is structured into approximately 90-minute cycles." I have tested this hypothesis on myself by paying attention to the doze and wake times from a pleasant Sunday afternoon nap. Sure enough, I'll find myself sleeping either 90

minutes or some multiple of 90 minutes if I'm allowed to awaken on my own. If I set an alarm clock to wake me at some multiple other than 90 minutes, I do tend to be groggier when I rise. This is completely unscientific. The effects might all be in my head. But this 90 minute cycle seems to describe my sleep pattern.

I have made a point in those contests in which I have applied a significant effort to sleep in 90 minute (or 180 minute) chunks and have found that I am reasonably alert at the end of each sleep period. Though counter-intuitive, I believe that I feel less rested after a 120 minute nap than a 90 minute one. Again, this might be all in my head.

Contesters concern themselves with getting the most out of a 24, 36, or even 48 hour period. DXpeditioners typically do not have such constraints, though there are exceptions. If you have an opportunity to operate from some isolated island or other difficult to reach place and can only do so for a limited time, you'll want to get the most of every minute. Here, you'll be working the same game as a contester by trying to *stay in the seat*. Similarly, if you have only 24 or 36 hours left before you need to start packing and you've not met your goals, you may wish to put in that "last push" to fill your log. In either case, understanding your sleep needs (even if you cannot fulfill them) can be very valuable. With Field Day fast approaching, there is a ready-made laboratory for this research awaiting many of us.

I traveled to Illinois this last weekend to see my niece Katie graduate She was Salutatorian. She received one "B" in all her years of schooling (K-12) and that kept her from the highest honor. Mind you, nobody was quibbling about the grade this weekend!

While visiting my parents I noticed my Father's Icom IC-R2 was looking a bit worn. He is a retired airplane pilot and still enjoys listening to aircraft traffic, weather, and other things. So, with Father's Day coming up Sandy and I thought a nice new Icom IC-R20 might be just the thing. Thankfully, the manual for the radio is on the Icom web site. I have just downloaded it. I am sure there will be questions. He should get it tomorrow.

By the way, the radio is a surprise so don't tell him. Shhhh! {grin}  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:40PM (-04:00)

## Propagation planning

Saturday, May 26, 2007

Oct., Virgin Islands, for SSN = Low, Signs in S-Units. By N6BV, ARRL.

| 40 Meters |    |    |    | 30 Meters |    |    |    | 20 Meters |    |    |    | 15 Meters |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |    |
|-----------|----|----|----|-----------|----|----|----|-----------|----|----|----|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|----|
| UTC       | FT | EA | AP | AS        | OC | NA | EU | FE        | SA | AF | AS | OC        | NA | EU | FE | SA | AF | AS | OC | NA | UTC |    |
| 0         | 9  | -  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 0  |
| 1         | 9  | -  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 1  |
| 2         | 9  | -  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 2  |
| 3         | 9  | -  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 3  |
| 4         | 9  | -  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 4  |
| 5         | 9  | -  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 5  |
| 6         | 9  | -  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 6  |
| 7         | 9  | -  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 7  |
| 8         | 5  | -  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 8  |
| 9         | 2  | 5  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 9  |
| 10        | -  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 10 |
| 11        | -  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 11 |
| 12        | -  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 12 |
| 13        | -  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 13 |
| 14        | -  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 14 |
| 15        | -  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 15 |
| 16        | -  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 16 |
| 17        | -  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 17 |
| 18        | -  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 18 |
| 19        | -  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 19 |
| 20        | 1  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 20 |
| 21        | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 21 |
| 22        | 8  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 22 |
| 23        | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9         | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9   | 23 |

Contest University was organized by Tim Duffy (K3LR) and a handful of other top contesters. Tim's accomplishments are well known. You can get a glimpse of his efforts on his web site. In addition to all this planning, Tim also pulled moderator duty for the Friday Hamvention Antenna Forum. Even if the term *hero* doesn't seem apt, I believe his efforts, and the efforts of those he worked with, can easily be characterized

as heroic. Thank you, guys.

Check in at Contest University was Wednesday evening with the activities scheduled to begin bright and shiny Thursday morning. Each of the 150 students received a sizable bundle of materials and collateral including a binder containing slides for all presentations, an Icom shirt, and a cloth bag stuffed with magazines, catalogs, and other

gifts. Each student was also presented with their personalized schedule. Just as with regular college classes, Contest University filled classes on a first-come-first-served basis. Those who responded to the class selection email quickly were likely to receive the class assignments they wanted; those who waited may not have. It seemed like the fairest way to accomplish seat assignments. I received the message requesting me to complete this form at 11:15 PM and had made my choices ten minutes later. I took some ribbing from Tim Duffy for this. My late night diligence resulted in me being the very first of the students to respond thereby winning me first dibs on all the classes I selected. Those who waited were not so lucky. Just as with contests, you snooze you lose. {grin} Classes were held in three rooms: the banquet room, and two nearby meeting rooms. Breakfast was served in the banquet room while Tim Duffy briefed attendees on the schedule. Based on the selection process described above, students would split into the two smaller meeting rooms for morning classes. We would reconvene in the banquet room for lunch and more classes. After lunch, we would split again receiving the remainder of our instruction in those smaller meeting rooms.

Dean Straw (N6BV), Senior Assistant Technical Editor for the ARRL, was top of my schedule with *Propagation: What To Look Forward To*. Though I had done very little propagation planning for previous trips, I was quite keen to hear this presentation. Allow me to explain.

Most the the antennas I have used on 100 Pound DXpeditions have been verticals or dipoles, neither with any appreciable gain in a particular direction. (The notable exception to this was my trip to Deer Isle, Maine (NA-055) where Dave Bushong (KZ1O) and I deployed a Force-12 C3SS tribander atop a rugged military mast.) Because I do not typically have a directional antenna, there is no need to have a plan for where to point it. On Montserrat, for example, we erected the 17m vertical and just worked everybody we could hear. There was no plan to turn it to the East for European sunrise or to later turn it West for a different opening. Propagation planning was limited to band selection.

Things are about to change for me. I have ordered a small Mosley beam which I intend to use on my St. Kitts trip for CQ WW SSB in October. With a 17 dB front-to-back ratio, I must now point the antenna if I hope to hear anybody. If there is an opening to Europe and I am pointing towards South America, I'll miss it. So, I must now know (a) which band should I be on, and (b) where should the antenna be pointed?

Dean Straw's presentation focused on the propagation tables included with the ARRL Antenna Book (which he helps edit). If you don't already own this book, buy it now. Highly recommended. Anyway, the tables are published as pages within PDF files on the CD bundled with the book. There are two files for each covered geographic region: one for summary predictions between that place and Europe, the Far East, South America, Africa, Asia, Oceania, and North America, and one for detailed predictions between that spot and another covered region such as W1, W6, KL7, and so on.

In addition to this division by geography, the tables are also organized by month, sunspot activity, and band. For example, there is a page in the summary document for KP2, in October, and a low sunspot count.

Yes. The numbers are small in the snapshot above.

The numbers in the table represent anticipated S-unit readings. It is assumed that both stations are running 1500 watts and have 3-element yagis at 100 feet. You then discount values from there. I am running only 100 watts so I subtract 3 S-units from each value in the table. Additionally, I must subtract more S-units because I am not using a 3-element yagi, nor is it at 100 feet. Dean Straw presented a whole page of rules for discounting these table values to match them to different operating conditions.

I have begun doing the planning for St. Kitts with these tables by dropping the published

values into a spreadsheet and discounting the numbers using Dean's rules. It has been time-consuming to create a model for this, but I hope to work out a solid operating plan for the whole contest over the next few weeks. Of course, I'll publish it in a place where it can be viewed once I am finished.

This was just one of the classes (the very first one!) at CU. I will try to discuss more of them in future blog entries.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:13PM (-04:00)

## What the Prefix, Kenneth?

Sunday, May 27, 2007

Contest University had 11 professors and 21 different classes. Each student was limited to about a dozen sessions but the binders distributed had slides and notes from all classes so we could see what we missed. Since I had been assigned all of the classes I had listed as highest priority, it wouldn't do for me to complain about not seeing one session or another, but I confess that there were some I thought would have been fun to see had their been time. One such class was the *Basic Contesting* taught by Doug Grant (K1DG).

It isn't that I expect to find any dramatic revelations in the class notes. On the contrary, I hope I do not. Instead, I am looking for validation that I am studying the right things, am worried about the right issues, and am honing the right skills. There is value in hearing, "that's right. Keep working on that." For example, the slides provided the results from a survey of the some of the top operators. When asked what factors are likely to improve skills most they replied:

- Operating at a Multi-Op station (biggest factor)
- Joining a contest club
- Going on a DXpedition
- and Getting on the air between contests

There were other factors weighted as well. Note that *Buying a better radio* ranked at the bottom of the list. No surprise there.

There were other factors mentioned as important in becoming a better operator. One was *Studying old logs and scores*. This is just one aspect of improving your logging accuracy, something I know I've harped about in this blog. It does a disservice to everyone if you travel to an interesting place, work a station, then fail to log the contact properly. In a contest such a goof will cost you points; for a DXpedition it will cost the QSL manager time, and possibly a worthy operator a QSL card with all of the hard feelings you might imagine. UBN reports are sometimes available from contest sponsors which report QSOs that are Unique (a valid call sign that nobody else happened to have worked), Bad, or Not-in-log. Seeing where mistakes were made may help prevent future ones.

Not surprisingly, many of the most effective changes you can make to your station is in that area between your ears. Learning the difference between valid and invalid prefixes and call signs, for example, can help eliminate logging errors. In contesting, there are a few stations (and call signs) that are famous. Running across them even if you get a partial copy should trigger instant recognition. Examples include\* (from the slides) ZD\_Z, G3\_XW, TF3\_RA, V\_1JA, and P\_2T. Can you fill in the blanks?

I was occasionally able to recognize when something rare would pop up in a pile-up while on Montserrat. I was able to work New Caledonia, San Marino, Ascension Island, and Cape Verde because I recognized that the call signs (prefixes) were from an "interesting" place. If I hadn't been aware of this, if I had just continued working the strong stations, I

would have likely missed these more rare QSOs.

Believe me: I'm not patting myself on the back here. Though I happened to have spotted these, I now shutter to think of all the ones I missed. I am only now realizing how much work I have to do to really learn and internalize all these prefixes and their associated geography. As I glance through the call sign lists like those found in the Nifty DX Field Reference I am embarrassed at the number of prefixes I do not immediately recognize. I'm sensing another software development project in my future. I'm imagining a drill-and-practice program to test me on my call sign and prefix knowledge. Hmmm. In the mean time, I will continue to page through the big binder of slides from CU and try to pick up more tips.

\* Answers are ZD8Z, G3SXW, TF3IRA, VO1JA, PJ2T. I confess I knew only half of them. Obviously, I need more study.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:48PM (-04:00)

## DXpedition contesting class

Monday, May 28, 2007

One of the sessions I was most anticipating during Contest University was *DXpedition Contesting*. This session was headed by Jeff Steinman (N5TJ) just one hour into the event and he did not disappoint.

I traveled to St. John (pictures here) in 2006 for the ARRL DX contest believing that the proximity to the US and general temperament of the contest would make for a low-stress way to explore this kind of DXpeditioning. Sure enough, Jeff agreed listing the ARRL DX and WPX contests as great "starter" events where you could "have fun and run a lot of guys." Working the ARRL DX contest from the Caribbean means fewer hardware demands than contests like CQ WW since you only need to work US stations. Being right off the coast of the US surrounded by saltwater doesn't hurt, either.

Here is some of what was listed for *Ingredients for Success* as presented during this class:

- Pre-contest planning (months ahead of time)
  - Local ham/host/station at location (rental or not) Existing antennas / equipment a big plus
  - Better ability to deal with issues once on site
- Optimal location
  - Basic propagation / station location and antennas
  - "Demographic" Propagation (e.g., Maximizing points per QSO and multipliers across bands)
- Operator(s) experience and skill

Let's take a look at these things one-at-a-time. Pre-contest planning corresponds closely to everything I've been saying here. Good planning can help ensure you make your goals and you don't miss opportunities that might present themselves. Most of us need to do some planning in our lives, either at work or for projects at home. Why skimp on planning for this?

Jeff's second point, finding a local ham or host station with existing antennas and equipment is also well taken. My idea of a *100 Pound DXpedition* is that you bring the minimum equipment you need with you to accomplish your goals. If you are able to bring nothing and do all you seek to do, then that constitutes a successful trip! There are contest station rentals that are available, and I believe that is a fine alternative to hauling your own gear. I may do that someday, but right now I'm enjoying packing my own stuff and marveling about how much can be done with so little.

The location bullet points relate to particular contest rules. For example, in CQ WW you get more points for a QSO with a different continent than with a QSO to the same continent. Since most stations are in either the US or Europe, one strategy for maximizing your points per QSO is to locate your station in either Africa or South America. That's why you'll find the VooDudes led by Roger Western (G3SXW) operating the CQ WW CW contest from equatorial Africa and the Caribbean Contesting Consortium (PJ2T) group running from South America on the island of Curacao. Just as in real estate, the three most important things are location, location, location!

This isn't to say that you can't do well or have fun from North America in the Caribbean, or on Hawaii, or from Scotland. You can, of course. But, it would be very difficult to win the top slot from one of those places because of the way this contest is scored. That's just a fact, and that is what Jeff is pointing out in his slides.

There are things cited in the talk that seemed obvious but are worth listing. If you want to win or even set a world record you need to have a 3 point location (like Africa or South America), a good (loud) signal to NA/EU on all bands, a great receive antennas on the low bands. For a 100 Pound DXpedition that involves carrying your own equipment, this is probably out of reach. If you were to team up with a multi-multi operation from one of these prime locations, though, it is likely that all of these things are already in place. Now all that is left is to stay in the chair and log accurately (Jeff's emphasis--and mine).

Here is the thing that was a surprise to me: a significant improvement for station operation is a Single Operator 2Radio setup. The SO2R operations run pile-ups with the first radio while looking for multipliers or S&P with the other. This is the single biggest way to boost your score.

I would have bet money that the "assisted" guys (those who use the packet spotting network) would have beaten unassisted operators, but this is not the case. I would have especially thought that assisted category operators would have beaten the SO2R guys. Statistics show just the opposite. The DX spotting network does not provide a boost to the score as much as adding the second radio. In fact, the second radio (in the hands of an operator capable of using it) can add up to 15% to the score when compare to a single radio operation. That is huge!

I have been recently convinced of the utility of a second full receiver in a radio. I pitched in at the K1TTT and used a Yaesu FT-1000 during the 2007 ARRL DX contest. It isn't quite like having a full second radio, but the additional receiver allowed me to call CQ on the main tuner while doing S&P on the other.

The FT-1000 weighs about the same as a sack of bricks so it isn't a great "portable" radio. The new Elecraft K3, on the other hand, is about 8 pounds (3.6 Kg). I really want one of these!

I cannot relate the full contents on this session here, but I can say that the speaker emphasized some of the things in his discussions that I have mentioned here. Specifically, "Planning + Good QTH + Motivated Team = Results" (right from Jeff's slides). Well said.

My three-day weekend is nearly over and I'm finally starting to feel rejuvenated from my trip. I need to catch up on QSLing and start planning my St. Kitts trip in earnest. I'll drop a note here on the progress I make on both those fronts.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:16PM (-04:00)

## Build a kit

Tuesday, May 29, 2007

With all this talk of planning, classes, and work, one might forget that this is supposed to be fun. I've not forgotten. I'm having fun!

I ordered a kit from HamGadgets.com on Friday and it arrived today (fast service!). The PicoKeyer is a full-featured CW keyer on a 1.3 by 2.0 inch circuit board. Assembly was a snap. It worked first time. Highly recommended.

I'm sure some of the *old timers* are pining for the glory days of Heathkit and home-brewing. I believe Elecraft, Small Wonder Labs, and the thriving QRP community provide plenty of fun offerings that would give those old Heathkits a run for their money.

If you aren't building things I think you're missing out on half the hobby. Seriously. And, don't think that stuff you build is a compromise from the stuff you might buy. Small, inexpensive, low-power processors have become ubiquitous providing even simple, easy to assemble kits like the PicoKeyer powerful features found in products costing 5 times as much. There are plenty of clever kit producers out there making great kits.

Although I don't need a reason to buy a kit (other than wanting some fun, of course), this particular purchase had a purpose. I've been working on my code skills, especially pulling out call signs from a pile-up, with Morse Runner, but my code sending skills are also dreadful. So, I am using the newly-assembled kit as a practice keyer to go with the new paddles I bought at Dayton. I feel like I've got ten thumbs when I try to send CW. I'd like to get that number down to eight by the end of the Summer. {grin}

I'll be back to more Contest University retrospective tomorrow. Again, that experience was exceptional with lots of great information for contesters and DXpeditioners alike. Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:55PM (-04:00)

## XP on Parallels

Wednesday, May 30, 2007

I did something this week I said I would never do again. I have given Microsoft money for an operating system. {sigh}

I took a degree in Computer Science over a quarter of a century ago. Even before graduation I have been doing professional software development on a wide variety of platforms, including the many flavors of DOS and Windows that have come and gone. I have even worked on projects where we poked around in the *guts* of Windows. As Han Solo said to Luke Skywalker, "You think these things smell bad on the outside?!"

So, why would I do this? Obviously, the answer is because I need to run some software that only runs on Windows. These include:

- **N1MM logger** - This is the most popular logging program out there for contesters (at least according to the Contest University survey). It is used by the K1TTT contest station, and by many YCCC members. In fact, the author of the program is a YCCC club member! I would like to become more familiar with this software so I won't feel so vulnerable when guest operating at a big station. The only way I can do that is practice with it.
- **Antenna modeling software** - There are antenna modeling packages for MacOS X, but it doesn't look like it is ready for the kind of activity I'll be doing. I'm a developer-- why don't I fix it?! Because, I've only got so many hours in my life for software and this is not how I want to spend them. So, I'll use one of the Windows off-the-shelf packages to do this work.



- **Propagation software** - Contest University professors (and many who have written to me here) have pointed me to this software. It only runs on Windows.

There are probably other packages, too, but this is a representative sample.

I had loaded Parallels with a copy of Windows 98, but it wasn't very stable. Given my (now aging) knowledge of Windows 98, I'm not surprised. So, I ordered a copy of XP Home from Amazon which arrived this afternoon.

As I type this my XP Home Edition is loading security updates. Not just a few. A bunch. It is loading 79 security updates, to be precise. I'm not kidding. Really. 79. Sheesh. Of course, after it finishes with these, who knows what else it will need.

*Hamac* has provided a solid platform for doing my DXpedition work so far. It held up wonderfully on Montserrat and I've given it some abuse since returning. Parallels seems solid (though it was difficult to tell with Windows 98). So far, discounting the disturbing number of security updates being presently loaded, the XP installation and configuration has been smooth. With luck, I will have a dual OS laptop by the end of the evening.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:45PM (-04:00)

## My to do list

Thursday, May 31, 2007

Things are starting to pile up again. I just noticed that I have not done my QSLing (that I had hoped to finish before leaving for Dayton). I will get to those this weekend.

I had also planned to publish my QSLpro utility that I've been using for the Montserrat cards, and now for my personal cards, too. Don Argo of Dog Park Software has offered to host the download page, so long as I don't stick him with the support calls. After feigning surprise (a private joke between the two of us), I gladly accepted his offer. Again, Don comes through for the Macintosh-hamming community. I now need to make good on my offer and package this up for his web site.

Not to pile on even more stuff, I had made commitments to write some articles on my recent exploits and have not typed a word yet. Not a letter. Goodness. It is time to get organized!

With thunderstorms in the forecast for the weekend I won't be tempted to head out to Georges Island. Perhaps this is a good time to finish up these tasks.

I had lunch with my good friend Greg O'Brien (NE1OB) today. Greg and I have a couple of things in common including our prefix ("NE1") {grin} and a love of all things QRP. As with my 100 Pound DXpeditions, I love seeing how much you can do with just the bare minimum of equipment. Plus, the QRP world gives me an excuse to build stuff--my first love. If you are not reading his blog, start. Recommended.

Summer is here and I'm wearing lots of cargo shorts these days. The extra pockets called out for some kind of gadget so I began stuffing my VX-5R in the front left pouch. It is a little bulky for this duty and the wear was beginning to abrade the stenciling from the front of the radio. Obviously I *need* a new HT!

I had been considering both the Yaesu VX-2R and Icom IC-P7A when I noticed Yaesu is releasing the VX-3R. I'm not sure when this thing is shipping (or how much it will cost) but it seems worth a look. Certainly, it would fit nicely in these pockets.

Finally, I'm heading to Florida in June for a trade show. My company is kind enough to let

me throw a couple of extra Pelican cases in the booth shipment meaning I can travel light and still operate HF at night. That reminds me: I have to get that stuff ready to ship, too. Looks like I have one more thing on the list for the weekend.  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:29PM (-04:00)

## My first piece of HF gear

Friday, June 01, 2007

I had lunch with my buddy Ron (WQ1Z) today. We covered a review of Contest University and Dayton, all over Peking Raviolis and noodles. There was one other piece of business as Ron had borrowed my Buddistick and wanted to return it.

Though it is pretty easy to set up the Buddistick without an antenna analyzer, having this tool makes it a breeze. I didn't realize Ron didn't have one or I would have loaned him my MFJ-259B.

I was licensed in 2002 and installed a dual-band radio in my car not long afterwards. I kept hearing chatter about "Boxboro", the name of the town adjacent to my home town (Acton) and, for the life of me, couldn't figure out what they were talking about! Boxboro is nice, but sleepy little community where nothing happens. Why was everybody talking about it?!

The answer was the Boxboro ARRL New England Division Convention held every other year in, well, Boxboro. After that was cleared up, I signed up. It was my first hamfest or convention.

It was there that I bought my first piece of HF equipment: an MFJ-259B analyzer. I had told Ron today it was my first piece of ham gear, but that wasn't correct. I had outfitted my car with an Icom IC-2800H. So, officially, it was my second major piece of ham equipment. It never even occurred to me that Ron wouldn't have one.

Long before I got this crazy DXpeditioning fever, I had been treating all my activities like something to be studied. I bought my analyzer even before I had bought a radio! I love to measure, study, and understand. That probably comes through in my posts. I've still got plenty to learn, but I believe that understanding leads to better decisions, and better decisions lead to more fun. It has for me.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:41PM (-04:00)

## SO2R

Sunday, June 03, 2007

I keep returning to my experience at Contest University because (a) it was exceptionally well done, taught by some of the top contesters and DXers in the hobby, and (b) I believe there is a significant overlap between DXpeditioning and contesting. Both activities require that QSOs be made during a fixed period. Both activities encourage working stations quickly.

Randy Thompson (K5ZD) covered the Single Operator 2Radio (SO2R) subject mid-morning at CTU. Like most of the instructors, Randy began with a quick review of his accomplishments (which are considerable). Just a quick peek at his QRZ page and you'll see he makes an average of 20000 QSOs per year. I have not made even half that many in the last four years!

What is SO2R? It is a single operator seated in front of two radios. Ideally, there is additional hardware that helps route audio from both radios to your headset with options

like one-radio-per-ear, or mixed to both ears. The extra hardware might also help route various antenna feed lines to the two radios and lock out transmission of one radio if the other radio is already transmitting. Fully automating such a system becomes quite a complex problem. Examination of products such as the MicroHAM MK2R provide some insight as to how hard this problem is to manage.

What problem are we trying to solve? Reviewing the DXpedition statistics for the VP2M DXpedition, you can see we made no contacts on 10m or 12m. It isn't that we didn't try. We did. But, if there was an opening, we missed it. One of the problems that a second radio (or at least a second receiver) can solve is identifying irregular band openings. The Northern California DX Foundation maintains a world-wide beacon network that makes it very easy to see if there is a band opening interesting to you. If you have one receiver, you need to make a choice. Should you stop making QSOs on your current band to check for openings on the other band? Or, should you ignore the other band, perhaps missing an interesting opening in the process? A radio with a single receiver gives you only these choices.

A radio with a second receiver like the FT-1000 or new Elecraft K3 gives you a second option: listening on the second band *while* you continue to work on your primary band. This option is one of the reasons why I am so interested in the K3. In a contest, that means you can look for multipliers on the second receiver while continuing to *run* on the main one. In a DXpedition, you can look for band openings either by hearing beacons, or even QSOs, on another band.

A second full radio, with full transmit capabilities, allows you to call CQ on two bands at once. This is illegal in a contest, but nothing precludes it on a regular DXpedition! Who knows, if we had been calling CQ on 10m all day while on Montserrat, *we* may have been the signal alerting others that the band was open! I believe lots of openings come-and-go because nobody bothers to call CQ. With automatic CW and voice keyers, good band-pass filters, and an alert operator listening on two bands, there is an opportunity to work many more QSOs than the single radio operator. Randy Thompson confirmed many of these claims in his presentation.

Bringing a separate radio when you are carrying your own gear (and trying to live within the 100 pound weight budget) may not be possible. If you are shopping around for a DX location already stocked with great ham gear, you might start with DX Holiday with their *Rent-a-QTH* program. There may already be an SO2R system there, or enough stuff you could cobble together one during your visit. Note that the very best SO2R stations are not cobbled together! They are carefully crafted with filters and stubs to manage inter-radio interference, and have an SO2R hardware system that routes audio, microphone lines, and antennas. Trying to build something like this on your DXpedition violates one of my main rules: *keep it simple!* All that said, I believe that if you can do simple things that can achieve some of these goals, it would likely be worth the effort.

My recommendation (and Randy's) is to become effective and comfortable with one radio before you attempt adding a second one to the mix. But, when you are ready to "graduate" to that second signal source, it would be best to begin with a second receiver. Listen for band openings. Listen to other signals on the band you are working. Don't lose your calling frequency, but be aware of other things going on. Since this capability adds nearly no weight to the DXpedition (a second receiver inside your radio probably weighs ounces), it is an excellent way to try this approach without blowing your weight budget. Finally, and I make this point about most things, you should work out all the details of a particular approach or practice before you go on your trip. Practice. Practice. Practice. If you believe you'd like to try using a radio with a second receiver on your trip, try using it

at home first. Don't spend your precious *island time* working out skills you should have mastered at home.

Subject change: June is Field Day month. Field Day can be a great opportunity to practice packing, deploying, and using equipment away from home. I'll be working with my local club putting up some antennas and sharing other tidbits. Plan ahead. See you on the air!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:03PM (-04:00)

## Finances

### Wednesday, June 06, 2007

Sorry for the sparsity of posts this week. Alas, other commitments have kept me away. One such distraction was a meeting of the board for my local club. For the past 16 months (or so) I have been the Secretary for the PART club in Westford, Massachusetts. The club was started 30 years ago by a bunch of hams who wanted to extend the emergency communications capabilities of the town. One of the founders of the club is our President today: Bo Buddinger (WA1QYM).

The club has experienced some growth over the last few years. Sure, the character of the club is largely the same with its monthly meetings (with great speakers), Field Day, and "Pumpkin Patrol" on Halloween. But the influx of new members, new ideas, and lots of energy to go along with those fresh faces, has pushed the club leadership a bit. Change is good.

Last night, in a marathon session that lasted nearly three hours, we created the club's first ever budget. We have money allocated for club activities, a plan to put some in savings for future equipment acquisition, and also a little pile of money to be put away for "a rainy day." I believe we did a very good thing.

In all the posts I've made about DXpedition planning I cannot remember any that specifically addressed the financial aspect of these endeavors. If you are planning a vacation and the radio is simply going along for the ride, then perhaps no additional financial planning needs to be made. But, if you are planning a trip like the one I made to Montserrat with a group, there will need to be a financial plan, a budget, accounting, and record keeping.

There was precious little enthusiasm for this work among the BUMS so I handled most of it. Still, from the very first teleconference held in August of 2006, I pressed other team members to assist in the record keeping for all our financial dealings to ensure we had a good accounting of the money spent, where it went, and which pocket was picked. There are a couple of reasons for this. Firstly, you want to make sure that bills are paid on time so the trip can proceed as planned. Secondly, team members should pay their fair share, no more, no less. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, you want all team members to know that the financial burdens were shared fairly. It would hardly do to have rock-solid planning for your trip scuttled by bad feelings over money due to bad accounting!

Creating a budget wasn't easy for our group last night. One of the things we wrestled with was articulating, and then justifying, the club goals for the next fiscal year. Just as we did last night, a DXpedition team should also have definitive goals. One way of making sure everybody shares the same vision for those goals is to put a dollar figure on it!

You do not need to have a college degree in accounting to do a good job tracking the finances of even a relatively large DXpedition. I happen to believe that anybody who can get an amateur radio license and organize the other aspects of such a trip can use a

spreadsheet, or even paper and pencil, well enough to track the finances for an excursion. Even if you are "all friends" and "we don't need to keep track of things so closely" and "it will all work out in the end", there are good, solid reasons why you should be a little nit-picky on this anyway. As I have stated for other aspects of trip planning, anything that averts trouble or avoids wasting *island time* is worthwhile. This is worthwhile.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:51PM (-04:00)

## Field Day planning set

Thursday, June 14, 2007

This last week has been a blur. Field Day is just around the corner and I have been doing lots of planning and work for our local club. This project, and a couple of others (also club-related) have kept me busy every waking hour. I just noticed it has been a week since my last post. My how time flies!

The big project this week was the completion of the *Field Day Guide*, a document over 20 pages in length covering all aspects of the Field Day planning from the antenna and radio setups to where to park. We covered it all! Also in the *Guide* are supplemental materials for the 22 *Toolbox talks*, brief hands-on, practical presentations given by members, for members. This is promising to be a great day!

I'm going to repeat myself: Field Day is a great opportunity to hone your planning skills. Develop an antenna plan. Figure out how you will manage inter-station interference. Did you remember to watch the solar activity 27 days before Field Day weekend?

I'm leaving for Florida on Sunday morning. I was going to send a bunch of radio equipment ahead and operate from down there, but I'm so backlogged on other things that would be irresponsible. So, I'll be brining my KX1, my Buddistick, and a whole bunch of stuff I have been neglecting. There is writing to do. I have several books to read.

I have a VE testing session Saturday morning. I believe this next one will be my 36th, all, or nearly all, for the MMRA club under Bill Wade. Bill (K1IJ) has almost exactly 100 more sessions to his total than I do. That's quite a record of service! Greg O'Brien (NE1OB) has been filling in when Bill is away. Between the two of them we are in good hands.

Again, sorry for the long silence. With Field Day preparations now in good shape, I should be returning back to my normal (daily) pace. By the way, during my week-long absence, an anniversary date quietly passed. It was one year ago on 12 June 2006 when I posted my first entry to this blog. So, *Happy Birthday* to 100 Pound DXpeditioners everywhere. Here's to all of you who have taken up the cause, packed a suitcase, and taken your love of amateur radio on the road. I salute you! And, I'll see you on the air!  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:36PM (-04:00)

## Youtube video

Friday, June 15, 2007

Video from the Monsterrat trip. Enjoy.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:16PM (-04:00)

## 40m vertical

Saturday, June 16, 2007

This afternoon I built and tested the 40m vertical that our club will be using on Field day. It used the 10m DK9SQ 10m mast from Kanga to hold up the vertical wire and used two elevated verticals radials to complete the design. This is actually the first time I had used the mast in a ground-mounted configuration. The other times I had deployed an antenna with it we were able to find a roof or upper-story deck to mount it. In those cases, I would just *bungie* the mast to a railing or post and not guy it. Today, I used three pieces of dacron rope fixed to the mast about 10-feet from the bottom to hold it in place. The ropes were held to the mast by a single cable tie. The nice thing about that arrangement was breakdown of the system was a breeze. One *snip* and the guy ropes were freed.

The exercise was to build a 40m vertical antenna for the local club's Field Day outing next weekend, but I also wanted to make something that could be taken to St. Kitts this fall. So, rather than use heavy or stiff wire, I used some of my magic #534 from The Wire Man which is claimed to weigh less than one pound per 1000 feet. It *is* light!

Here are the details of the construction: The mast is 10m long. I needed 10m lengths of wire to make the 40m quarter-wave lengths. So, I used the mast as my ruler to cut the three pieces of wire to the correct length (adding a generous amount of wire in each segment as it is easier to make wires shorter than "cut them longer"). I then cut a 2-foot length of 3/32 Dacron rope and tied the end of one of those lengths of wires to this rope. Some masts have enough carbon in them that they are conductive and could couple with our vertical wire element. The Dacron rope allows us to attach to the top of the mast without creating any coupling complications.

The Dacron rope is attached to the top of the mast by wrapping it around the very thin top section six or eight times, then taping it with regular electrical tape. It is a fine way to do it if your antenna needs to only last a day or a week. I'm sure it would not last a year that way. But, luckily, we 100 Pound DXpeditioners can take a few shortcuts!

The vertical element, now tied to the Dacron rope (which is in turn afixed to the top section of mast) should be run to a point well away from the bottom of the mast. When we erect the mast we will run the wire down at an angle to ensure it will not couple with the mast.

The vertical element and two radials terminate in a small, inexpensive center insulator normally used for dipole construction. These have an SO-239 connector and two wires coming out: one which connects to the center pin, and the other which connects to the shield. Use your multimeter to determine which side is the "hot" and which is the shield. Connect the vertical wire element to the "hot" wire of the insulator. I like to make a good mechanical connection by crimping on a butt splice or some other physical connector. Soldering is OK, too, but this seems easier in the field. Since the 26 AWG antenna wire is so small, I just wrapped it around the bigger wire from the center insulator and honked on one of these splicers. The radials were attached the same way to the other side of the insulator.

The beauty of this antenna system is (1) it is very light, (2) it can be erected by one person, (3) if you already have the wires cut, ropes cut, and all the connections made, it can be up-and-running in 15 minutes. We'll try to make that time on the Saturday morning of Field Day as this is one of my *Toolbox Talks!*

I am off to Florida in the morning. I will be blogging on the trip assuming there is good Internet access in the hotel. Though I have plenty to do, I am taking the KX1 with me on the trip along with a Buddistick. I might try to make a couple of contacts from the hotel room... assuming I can get the window open!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:37PM (-04:00)

## In Tampa

Sunday, June 17, 2007



I'm here in Tampa, Florida. I brought the Elecraft KX1 and Buddipole with the hopes of doing a little CW to South America. I asked for, and got, a room near the top floor, facing south, with a balcony. What a view! I called CQ, but there were no takers. I'll set it up tomorrow and try again.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:11PM (-04:00)

## Buddistick radials

Tuesday, June 19, 2007



David (K2DBK) asked: "Scott -- When you have your buddistick mounted like that, do you just let the counterpoise wire hang straight down?"

The radials for a balcony vertical are run as far as I can without causing a nuisance. If I can drop a radial off the balcony and let it drape down two, three, or even four floors I will do it. Usually, this will be late at night so I don't attract attention to myself. If I am doing daytime operation, I'll usually try to keep the radials confined to my balcony or the area immediately adjacent to the balcony.

I don't just have one radial if I can avoid it, though. I made this set of wires that are packed with the Buddistick that serves as a set of radials. The wire is the really small stuff I keep talking about from *The Wireman* (though Jeff, KE9V, points out there may be cheaper alternatives that should be investigated). Each radial wire is terminated with a male spade connector.

I created a single eye connector with a bunch of short wires, each terminated with a female spade connector.

Here is a close-up of the ends of this bunch.

I connect the eye to the Buddistick mount for the radial and then plug in as many radial wires as I like. I'll usually add 3 or 4 to start for a quick operation and run them around the balcony. If I know I can leave the antenna up for a few days, I'll add more. I also add the



long radial on the kite-winder and drop it off the balcony straight down if I can get away with it.

This whole arrangement only weighs a few ounces, fits easily into the Buddistick case (a very nice case!), and makes adding a good set of radials to this sweet little antenna very easy.

The last day of the show is tomorrow. Then, I've got a very early flight on Thursday and back home early afternoon. The Lowell Spinners had their opening night tonight (and I missed it!), but I'll be going Thursday. I can't wait!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:54PM (-04:00)



## Field Day retrospective

Wednesday, June 27, 2007



I was traveling immediately before, and then immediately after, Field Day which put a serious crimp in my blogging. Luckily, almost nobody noticed. {grin}

I was part of the planning team for the local club's Field Day effort this year. I wrote and printed the Field Day manuals passed out to participants, made the poster which greeted visitors to our site, and led the Toolbox Talks. The weekend

was a tremendous success, IMHO, though exhausting. Here are a couple of pictures from the event.



This is the poster and stack of manuals. Thanks go to my colleagues at Verocel who gave me time on Thursday (all day Thursday) to get the manuals copied, collated, and bound. I expect the manual to be on the PART web site either tonight or tomorrow.

The club raffled off an Icom 718 transceiver.

Here I am, right in the middle of things. That's my military mast with a 20m monobander on top. It was up 16 feet by the time we finished.





Here I am doing a Toolbox Talk on the Buddipole. We had 22 Toolbox Talks in all over the weekend. All talks were very well received and made the event one to remember.

Here I am with Tom Frenaye (K1KI), the New England Division Director of the ARRL. I guess he should go on the cool people page on my web site!



This is me on the left with Bo (WA1QYM) listening in on the second headset. This was a headset-only event which made for a very relaxing, and comfortable operating environment.

Most of my Toolbox Talks covered items that I've already covered in my blog. That said, I might go back over some of this material over the next couple of days.



I hope everybody had a great Field Day!  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:48PM (-04:00)



## Try some antennas

Thursday, June 28, 2007

One of my Toolbox Talks was on the 40m vertical antenna I discussed previously. There were two really fun aspects of this talk. The first was the look on everybody's face when I popped up that 10m mast. I forget how big and imposing this thing is when it is extended. The second thing fun about this talk was that we were able to use the antenna when we finished setting it up. Of course, it is good on both 40m and 15m!

Field Day has some funny rules for a contest. Each SSB QSO is worth one point. Getting a member of the local fire department to visit is worth 100 points. Do you know how long you have to work on SSB to get 100 contacts in these solar conditions?! So, at least in my view, if you do a little experimentation on the SSB station you don't really put that many points at risk.

We built this antenna and then used it. Looking back, this is a really great idea! We should have built about four antennas and had them all available to the SSB station so people could do a little "compare and contrast" between them. I should have put up

- **The Buddipole** - The one on the 16 foot mast with the long arms and large coils
- **The Sigma-5** - Force-12 vertical dipole
- **A 15m vertical** - a 1/4 wave 15 meter full-size vertical to compare with the 3/4 wave version on the 40m vertical
- **Buddistick** - just to show that even a small antenna with a few radials can do a good job if deployed well

It would have been fun to have a 5-way switch so we could switch between all these

antennas and hear the difference. We could listen to a strong signal, look at the S-meter, and then *click, click, click* to see how the different antennas stacked up.

I think I'll suggest that for next year's event. Field Day is a really great chance to try out new stuff, train fellow club members, and learn how to set up stuff *in the field* and make it work. Forget about points! Learn!

Our club is going to have a Field Day retrospective at the next meeting. We'll go over what went right, what went wrong, and what we might wish to change in next year's planning. Of course, I think this is a great idea. Even if you go on a 100 Pound DXpedition alone, go through the exercise of reviewing what you did and how you did. That's the first step in improving your operation and having more fun.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:06PM (-04:00)

## Toolbox Talk: Dipoles

Monday, July 02, 2007

I gave a number of Toolbox Talks over Field Day weekend. One was done with Ron (WQ1Z) on dipole basics. I did a little write-up to go with the talk that discussed the "magic" formulas cited by all the radio books. The point of the talk was: use the formulas, but understand they are guidelines and not absolute recipes. Enjoy.

There are standard formulas for computing the length of a dipole or dipole arm. A typical one is length (in feet) = 234 / frequency (in megahertz). Why 234? Let's see where they got that number:

Light speed (c) is 3 x 10<sup>8</sup> meters per second. Let's convert that into feet per second. Multiplying by 3 x 10<sup>8</sup> meters per second by 3.28 (feet per meter) to get 9.8 x 10<sup>8</sup> feet per second. Since we know we are interested in frequencies as megahertz, it would be convenient to get rid of all these zeros and talk about feet per microsecond (and we'll toss the MHz part of our frequency later to make up for it). So, light travels about 980 feet per microsecond. A wavelength is related to the speed of light and frequency with the following familiar formula:

**$\nu = c / \lambda$**  meaning **frequency = speed of light / wavelength**  
also **wavelength = speed of light / frequency**

Let's test what we have so far with a 20m signal. We know the frequency (14 MHz). We know the speed of light in feet per microsecond (980). We can compute the wavelength (in feet) by dividing 980 by 14 to get 70 feet. A full wave of a 14 MHz signal is about 70 feet long. That seems about right!

We don't want to cut a full wavelength of wire, though. We want to cut only 1/4 of that. So, we divide 980 by 4 to get how far light goes in a quarter microsecond, 980/4 = 245 feet. So, 245/frequency gives us the size of a quarter wave of light at that frequency in feet. That is pretty close to the "magic" 234/f. Why the difference?

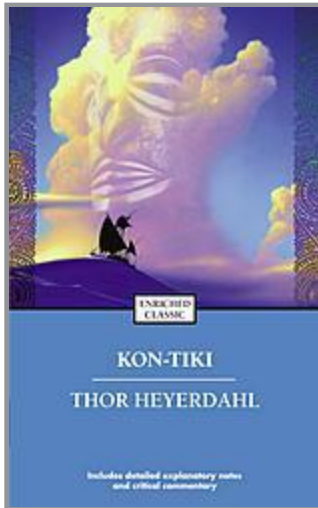
All of the above was for light traveling in a vacuum. But, our signal is going in a wire, where the shockwave of the electrons travels a little slower than light. We call this reduction in speed the *velocity factor of the wire*. This value can vary widely. Ladder line has a velocity factor of 95% of c. RG-58 has a velocity factor of only 66% of c!

Let's assume that the speed needs to be reduced to only 95% of  $c$  to account for the velocity factor of the wire we are using. That would change our formula to be  $(245 \cdot 0.95)/\text{frequency}$  which is  $233/\text{frequency} = \text{length of wire}$  for a quarter wave. That is suspiciously close to our  $234/\text{frequency}$  cited by all the books you've read!

Of course, we had a horse-sized assumption in here: the velocity factor of the wire. This is why this formula  $234/f$  is just a guideline. If the velocity factor is lower, you'll need to make the wire shorter (as the signal doesn't travel so far). The formula  $234/f$  actually provides a worst-case length and a dipole arm will often be shorter than the size you compute. Then again, it is easier to make a wire shorter than longer! The  $234/f$  is no "magic formula" and "234" is no "magic number". They are guidelines. Use them as such.  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:07PM (-04:00)

## What I'm reading: Kon-Tiki

Tuesday, July 03, 2007



I am totally engrossed in this book right now so don't expect any substantive posts here until I'm finished. Luckily, it is so good I can't put it down. Looks like it will be a late night. Highly Recommended.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:44PM (-04:00)

## The To Do list

Wednesday, July 04, 2007

I finished Kon-Tiki late last night. Wonderful!

Today was spent catching up on some unfinished projects. To catch up completely I would need about 40 such days, so progress was modest to say the least! Prioritizing the list was too daunting to consider so I just picked a few and tried to get them off the list.

My niece graduated from High School in May and, being the extremely proud uncle, I video taped the ceremony. I was able to edit that footage down to something of reasonable length, create a nice DVD with menus and previews, and make ten copies for parents, grandparents, siblings, etc. Final Cut Express HD made the work easy and the final rendering was done with iDVD. It was the first movie made with the new Sony HDR-HC7, a purchase I made upon my return from Montserrat. The combination of camera, computer, and software worked well for me and I hope to take some great video while on St. Kitts this Fall. (There may even be a little taken on Lovell's Island at the end of the month. We'll see...)

I've still got Field Day logs to go through so we can post our club's entry. I have promised

the Cab-converter community that I would make an update to that software to support Field Day. I'll try to get to that by the end of this coming weekend.

My *To Do* list is still too long but a couple of important things came off today. Like Aesop's fable of The Tortoise and the Hare, slow and steady wins the race!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:45PM (-04:00)

## Just a couple of kits

Thursday, July 05, 2007

LobsterCon 2007 begins this weekend. I will miss it yet again this year, though it has been fun watching the email traffic between those who are attending. If you love QRP, kit building, or great people, this is a fun event from all reports. So, instead of driving up to Maine to buy more kits, I thought it might be interesting to inventory the kits I already own but have not built. Here goes:

- **RockMite 40** - from Small Wonder Labs (Dave Benson, K1SWL). I have the 40m radio kit, the connectors kit, and even the nice anodized *Mity Box* case from American Morse Equipment/San Luis Machine Company. I completed the 20m version (with case) not long after being licensed.
- **Frequency counter/Digital Dial** - This is an offering from Steve "Melt Solder" Weber (KD1JV) purchased in October 2005. Steve always has great stuff on his web site. As with most kits in the QRP community, if you see something you want, order it immediately as kits sell out quickly. While this particular kit is no longer available, it looks like some of it is now rolled into his QRP Base Station Accessory kit.
- **Crystalizer** - This was the give-away at Atlanticon in 2005. I didn't have time to assemble it, or participate in the interesting contest they had that year, unfortunately.
- **Signal Quality Monitor** - This was the give-away at Atlanticon in 2006. Same story.
- **FT-817 VocalMaster** - This is an offering from KG4JJH in 2006 accompanying his QST article. I like the idea. I've just not had time to get the kit together. (Actually, I only see the board. Hmmm. I wonder if I got the parts around here someplace...)
- **Tenna Dipper** - Another Steve Webber offering. Read about it here.
- **Signal Quality Meter** - Honestly, I had to do a little research to figure out what this bag of parts was! Oh boy. Where's the circuit board for it?
- **SoftRock-40** - Software defined radios are a very interesting advance in the hobby. This one (details here) is about as minimal as you can get. But it works! (Or, would work if I were to actually assemble it.)
- **ALT Tuner** - from QRP Kits.
- **Marker Generator** - Another NorCal kit. This one is a version of the VE3DNL Marker Generator. Why I need one, I cannot say. But, it was on the table at FDIM and I had to have it, apparently. (\$7.50)
- **NorCal Keyer** - This looks suspiciously like the keyer kit I just bought. Of course, I didn't realize I had this kit when I ordered the other one. Oops.
- **NEQRP SCAF** - This is the SCAF filter from the New England QRP Club. I actually have *two* of these. I intend to build one as a stand-alone unit, and have the other available for integration into a radio I plan to design.
- **FCC-1** - Frequency counter kit from NorCal QRP Club. Looks great even in the bag. {grin}

Deserving of its own special place is my Elecraft K1 kit bought by Sandy last year as a Valentine's Day present. I am waiting until I have a nice block of time so I can really enjoy building this, perhaps after my St. Kitts trip.

So, there you have it. Lots of kits. Lots of fun still in bags. I wish the folks going to LobsterCon all the best, but it looks like I've got plenty of fun stacked up here!  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 07:20PM (-04:00)

## QSLing and a trip to NA-148 for a look-see

Friday, July 06, 2007

I spent some time this evening QSLing. Quite a pile had built up since just before Dayton. So, if you are waiting on a card from me, fear not: it will likely be in the mail come morning.

I'm hoping to head out to Lovells Island in the morning with Sandy to look over the camp site and locate possible operating positions for the RSGB IOTA contest held at month's end. Last year I spent six hours on Georges Island (also NA-148) and put about 100 QSOs in the log QRP. I'd like to more than double that this year. The new 48-watt solar panel, bigger batteries, and an overnight stay on Lovells should give me the full 12 hours of operation. I'll report back tomorrow on my findings.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:53PM (-04:00)

## Rethinking

Saturday, July 07, 2007

Sandy and I were able to make it out to Lovells Island today. We took the ferry from Boston to Georges Island, then took a boat from Georges to Lovells arriving in the early afternoon. Lovells island is covered in much denser vegetation that I had expected. There are some tall trees near the camp sites, tall enough to hang a dipole should I be ambitious enough.

The IOTA contest is still three weeks away so I have some time to do additional planning. The current thinking is to bring the 33-foot mast to hang a vertical for 40/15m, bring the "big" Buddipole system for 20m, and then use either the 40-foot mast as the basis for an 80m inverted-L antenna, or use the Buddipole with the big coils for 80m. That is still a lot of stuff to get on (and off) the islands. Since I am staying overnight, I'll need a tent, sleeping bag, food, water (there is no fresh water on Lovells Island), and other supplies in addition to the radio equipment. Even with Sandy's help, I'll still need to plan this carefully.

I have been thinking a great deal about the future of this blog of late. Though there are a few of you who appear to be frequent readers, the truth is there are only a few. Web traffic numbers identifying visitors, return visits, search strings, and other measurements have not been sufficient to justify the amount of effort I am investing in this outlet. Don't get me wrong! I love to write. I love to write about what I've learned and even mistakes I've made. But, it is no longer clear to me if this is the best forum for expressing these ideas. Perhaps the topic is too narrow to attract a significant web audience, and a blog format is too unfocused to provide a meaningful organization for a single topic.

I am considering writing magazine articles or even a book. In many ways, it would be far less pressure than keeping a daily blog, especially since many of my blog entries are the length of a short magazine article! (Imagine writing a magazine article each day. I become exhausted just thinking about it!) While the output in those other forms may not have the personal and intimate feel my blog entries (hopefully) have, there may actually

be more information conveyed within a more sensible organization. No final decision has been made. And, even if I decide to refocus most of my energy elsewhere, I will still use this outlet when it makes sense to do so.

For the other bloggers out there, I would like to thank you for your work and inspiration. My list of blogs checked each day keeps getting longer but here is my list: K9JY, K9ZW, KE9V, The DX World of Amateur Radio, KA3DRR, 99 Hobbies, K3OQ, ADXO, K2DBK, KB6NU, K0NR, N9PUZ, SolderSmoke, NE1OB, VK4VCC, W2IJ, W4TMN, WA1LOU, WA5ZNU, and I probably forgot a couple. As my post rate decreases, I hope all who visit my blog will check out these others. There is some good stuff out there.

-- Scott  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:21PM (-04:00)

## Thank you

Wednesday, July 11, 2007

Thank you. I have received several email messages in addition to the comments posted here on the blog with many kind words. I do appreciate it.

As I said, I've been rethinking things of late. I am still very much committed to the concept of the *100 Pound DXpedition*. Truth be told, I am more enthusiastic than ever! Just thinking about the return of sunspots gives me goose-bumps! {grin}

There are only so many hours in the day, though, and I have been concerned that efforts put into the blog, especially at the daily entry pace, detract from other long-term goals that I'd been setting... and not making. It was the realization that I had been tending to things day-to-day without spending much time at all on those long-term goals that brought me to the decision to rethink this blog in the first place.

And, not to stress the point, traffic to the blog has not been high enough to justify this level of effort. If I would like to reach more people I need to be more creative than just dumping a few paragraphs in this lonely place each day. I am open to ideas on this. If you believe this concept is interesting, if you believe that traveling with lightweight gear to far-away places and working the world is cool, how can we better *sell* this to our fellow hams? That's one of the things I'll be thinking about when I'm not blogging here.

I look for this blog to be reduced to an entry or two a week for the Summer and lead-up to St. Kitts planned for late October. I hope that will still be enough to make this an interesting place for all of you to visit. I'll end as I began: thank you. Seriously. I am deeply grateful for the messages I've received and the posts to the comment section of the blog. I only hope I can live up to the high-praise you've given me. Thank you.

73 de NE1RD  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:52PM (-04:00)

## Phantom QSOs

Thursday, July 12, 2007

Two nights ago I was able to work through the enormous pile of QSL cards that had accumulated over the last few months. As of Tuesday, I have no outstanding QSL requests. Additionally, cards for my fellow Montserrat DXpeditioners have also been

forwarded to their respective final destinations in California, Maryland, Iowa, Indiana, and so on. Whew!

For all those contacts that are in the log, have matching times, dates, bands, and modes, the work is easy. My program QSLpro (which I've still not published...alas) works superbly printing 14 stickers per sheet with QSL information for up to five contacts per call sign. Just print, stick, stamp, and stuff. Easy!

It is the ones that don't match that are the problem. I had made a small pile of these miscreants in hopes, I guess, that they would be easier to handle if I just "looked at them later". Well, later came. When I was down to just those malformed QSL requests I had no choice but to figure out each in turn.

Some were easy. For example, one QSLed to NE1RD for the 2006 ARRL DX contest. Fine, except I was on St. John as KP2/NE1RD so there is no way that could have been me. Perhaps it was NE1R? Not my problem.

Another was much more puzzling. I will not give the call or country of this QSL request, but it cited two QSOs with me as VP2MRD, neither of which was in my log. My computer logging is pretty accurate (not perfect, but pretty good). It is possible I missed one. The chances of me missing two are astronomical. Something else is going on.

I purposely did not research this. If true, I don't want to know. But, I have a conjecture: a fellow watched the packet spotting network, saw my call, saw the frequency, never worked me, but filled out the card anyway to see if I would just send one back without checking my log. I'm sure this works some of the time. Obviously, it isn't going to work with me.

I don't know if this is what happened, but it is possible, I guess. It is also a bit sad, really, if true. I guess that's why I didn't research it. Like I said, I don't want to confirm this is what happened.

Let this be a lesson to all of you who perform QSL management duties: not every card will have a QSO that is in the log. And, perhaps, not every request will be a simple misunderstanding or honest mistake. Be on your guard. Protect your integrity as a QSL manager and, by doing so, protect the integrity of the DXCC and IOTA awards.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:55AM (-04:00)

## Wednesday, July 18, 2007

I have released two new programs today. QSLpro is now finally released as version 1.01. I have had good luck with it producing QSL card labels for my personal operations and for the VP2M group. A permanent home for the distribution of this software needs to be found, but for right now I have posted it to the Yahoo! group for Cab-converter.

Additionally, I have begun packaging up a program called QSOstats. The small skeleton of the program has been uploaded to the Cab-converter file area to support Macintosh users producing Field Day summaries. Here is the summary of our very casual effort for PART.

Summary:

Band CW Qs Dig Qs Ph Qs

-----

160m 0 0 0

80m 0 0 0

60m 0 0 0

40m 0 9 0

30m 0 0 0  
20m 0 6 30  
17m 0 0 0  
15m 0 0 3  
12m 0 0 0  
10m 0 0 0  
6m 0 0 11  
2m 0 0 4  
220 0 0 0  
440 0 0 0

-----  
TOTAL 0 15 48  
TOTAL ALL MODES 63

There is still a great deal to do around here. I'm planning on participating in the CQ VHF contest this weekend. Then, next weekend is the IOTA contest. I'll be staying overnight on Lovells Island so I can work a full 12 hours. That should be interesting! I've already got QSL cards for NA-148 but needed a red rubber stamp to *officially* put the name of the island on the cards. The Sign Man offers a very nice round stamp for this purpose. It is ordered and on its way. It should arrive right around the time of the contest so I'll be able to send out QSL cards from the operation immediately.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:14PM (-04:00)

## Prepping for Lovells

Thursday, July 19, 2007

Just a few things to report. My Mosley beam has arrived. Hooray! Unfortunately, I've not had time to even open the box yet. I will try to work with it this weekend. If I can, and if all goes well, it will go with me to Lovells Island for the IOTA contest. But, I really need to be comfortable with the antenna before I attempt to travel with it. The last thing I want to do is trying to work out problems with a new, strange piece of hardware on an island with few tools and no electricity.

Speaking of the island, I'm not much for camping so I needed to make a trip to REI today to pick up a couple of very lightweight sleeping bags, two self-inflating pads, two compact pillows, and a couple of flashlights, and a couple of other cool items. The bad news: this came to nearly \$500. The good news (and it better be *really* good): all this stuff is amazingly small and compact. We had been worrying about how we were going to get all this stuff on-and-off the island. This new stuff has reduced the problem significantly.

Lovells Island is fairly isolated. There is no fresh water on the island. There is no electricity. There are no lights. There are trees. There are remnants of an abandoned fort. There are paved paths, slightly eroded by the elements. Whatever you may need you must bring with you: water, food, fuel, batteries, shelter, and first aid supplies. The island is long and narrow with nearly a half-mile hike from the dock to the camp site. Those coming just to camp probably manage the logistics easily. I'm bringing HF gear, antennas, feedline, batteries, tools, and other equipment. Something with wheels to help haul the mound of loose stuff would be a big help.

I settled on a folding grocery cart to do the job. I should be able to stick the batteries in the bottom along with the large bottles of water we'll need. The 33-foot mast and Buddipole system can go in there, too, along with all the other stuff I bought today. Hopefully, the tent will also fit there. That will leave only the Pelican case with the K2 and



the separate shelter for the picnic table to be hand carried. (My backpack should be able to hold the food and miscellaneous smaller items.) That's the plan, anyway. Unfortunately, my first attempt to order the shopping cart failed (out-of-stock). I've cancelled that order and tried again from another vendor. I did not plan the details of this trip early enough. We'll see if my goof-up costs me.

Finally, I received my copy of the National Contest Journal today. In it was the results of the January NAQP contest where I found I had only made 50 QSOs for some small number of points. Plus, I had entered as 100 watts (not QRP). That's unusual! What was I thinking?! Oh. Now I remember. I used the contest as a way of doing the final shakeout of the equipment going to Montserrat. Contests are a great way to give all of your equipment a good workout prior to your departure. They're also a ton of fun. See you all on the air this weekend for the CQ VHF contest. I plan on going to the top of Mount Wachusett either Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning (depending on weather and a number of other factors). I'll try to post here when I leave for the mountain.  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:46PM (-04:00)

## CQ VHF Contest

Saturday, July 21, 2007

I traveled to the top of Mount Wachusett just 30 minutes from my home to work the CQ Magazine VHF contest. I had to skip this last year, so I can only compare my effort to the 2005 contest. I made 62 QSOs in about 5 hours for about 1400 points (claimed). We'll see what the total is after adjudication. Anyway, this is about twice what I did in 2005 so I'm very pleased.

The Buddipole 6m beam worked very well. I set it up as described here and it worked like a charm. After assembly I put the AntennaSmith on it just to make sure I had not goofed anything up. I knew within 20 seconds that I had not. I bought this analyzer as a time saving device and boy does it save time! I set it to sweep the 6m band and plot the SWR. In an instant I could see the range of frequencies where the match was 2:1 or better, and could see the roll off from there. The match was fine but I'm sure I could have made whatever adjustments necessary in just minutes. Having a tool like this is a big confidence builder. I'm fearless with this thing! Show me a goofed-up antenna and I'll debug it!

We had attempted some 6m work while on Montserrat but with no luck. I will likely be active on 6m while on St. Kitts before and after the CQ WW SSB contest in October. So, this was good practice for that deployment. Perhaps I'll even be able to find a few moments to go out to Georges Island before the end of the Summer and play on the Magic Band.

My log is updated. I have generated my Cabrillo file for the contest with Cab-converter and have even emailed it into the contest robot. Now that my "chores" are done, it is time to get back to more important things. I'm on page 115 of "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows". No. Don't tell me how it ends. {grin}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:37PM (-04:00)

## CQ WW VHF contest wrap-up

Sunday, July 22, 2007



Below are the totals from the CQ WW VHF contest this weekend along with a snapshot of the operating position taken late in the day with the camera in my iPhone. (It was pretty badly backlit so I cranked up the brightness.) The top antenna is a 6m Buddipole beam with an eight foot boom and three elements. The bottom antenna is an Arrow handheld antenna with the optional mount clamped to the Buddipole mast. Both antennas performed very well.

The big help was the location. Mount Wachusett is approximately 2000 feet high with a great view of Boston, Western Massachusetts, the Connecticut valley to the South, and New Hampshire to the North. The top is relatively flat and a favorite for hikers,

tourists, and, for some reason, wedding parties. Seriously, lots of people drag their wedding party up their for a group picture with the Boston skyline in the background. (When this happens, I'm no longer the weirdest guy on the top of the mountain, IMHO!)

The Army Corp of Engineers has a relay station on top of the mountain. Apparently, LoJack (the car recovery system) also has facilities there as a fellow from LoJack dropped by to talk to me. Actually, quite a few people came by and chatted just as they had done two years ago when I had last been there.

The most gratifying visit was near the end of the day. I was just about to begin packing (you need to be off the mountain before sunset) when a fellow, a ham, introduced himself. He had never contested so I told him to take a seat and I would walk him through it. This was about the time that a very nice opening to the South appeared and we (first he, then I) worked into North Carolina, Georgia, DC and Virginia. He called and made the contact, then handed the microphone to me and I snagged a QSO, too. We worked about five people that way and by the end I believe he was hooked! Contesting is great fun and it looks like I've brought another young fellow into the fold. It was a very good day indeed.

Summary:

Band QSOs Mults

-----  
6: 51 15

2: 11 5  
-----

Total: 62 20 Total Score = 1,460

By the way, check out the nice rock at the base of the tripod. No guying necessary that day. I just bungied the rock to the base of the tripod and it was solid.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:08PM (-04:00)

## I love when a plan comes together

Monday, July 23, 2007

I really do love when a plan comes together. Unfortunately, this is not one of those times. Sandy and I had planned on making our way to Lovells Island (NA-148) this weekend for the RSGB IOTA contest. With two of us pulling and carrying, it would have been no problem for us to get the tent, rig, antennas, water, food, sleeping bags, and all of the rest of the stuff to the ferries and on to the camp site. That was the plan before Sandy caught a very nasty summer cold. She's been down now since late last week and there is no way we could in good conscience drag her out to an ocean island this weekend.

This presents something of a problem for me logistically. Going solo, I now have nearly as much stuff as I did for the two of us, and one fewer person hauling it. Two items came off the list immediately: the Mosley beam and my picnic table shelter that I normally use while on these islands. This has changed my chances of success from *clearly impossible* to *improbable*. I still have my big Buddipole system (for 20m and 80m), a 33-foot mast (for 15m and 40m), feed line, batteries, and the Pelican case with the rig, plus my backpack full of accessories on top of the tent, sleeping bag, etc. I plan on spending time this week working through the problem until either (a) I have paired down the gear to a manageable size, or (b) I abandon the attempt.

I have a small wheeled cart though it does not look up to the task. I have ordered a cart though it has not arrived. A friend has offered me use of a similar cart as a backup. I have options.

It will certainly be less fun without her, but there will be other chances to do this together. For now, I need to make a plan to do this alone. I hope to make final decisions on this by Thursday evening.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:21PM (-04:00)

## A thoughtful gift

Tuesday, July 24, 2007

Rich (AB1HD), a friend from the local club, had read my story of the KX1 on my website and of the marred knob. He thought it might be nice to get me a replacement potentiometer so the rig would no longer bear a scar from that moment of carelessness.

He surprised me with the little envelope at lunch about a week ago. I was delighted!

I spent about an hour tonight removing the old pot and inserting the new one. The old part did not yield easily and one of the pads lifted from the circuit board when I did finally free it. But, the new potentiometer went in easily enough and it was a simple matter of wiring a short jumper to complete the assembly.

The new potentiometer looks great. The radio still works well. I am a happy guy!

This gesture by Rich was a very kind and thoughtful. Thanks, Rich!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:55PM (-04:00)

## Weather and St. Kitts planning

Thursday, July 26, 2007

Planning for the Lovells Island trip has taken another interesting turn. While it is a gorgeous day here just West of Boston, it doesn't look like the sunshine will be staying. Violent weather is moving in for the weekend.



**Saturday:** 50% chance of thunderstorms

**Saturday night:** 30% chance of thunderstorms

**Sunday:** 60% of heavy rain

This is starting to look like a bad idea. That said, the rolling shopping cart arrived yesterday, assembled in minutes, and looks like it would easily hold all I needed to haul out there. Though it is not obvious from the picture, there is ample room for more stuff in this beast including water, food, and last minute items.

In the mean time, while I watch the weather forecasts, I've been working on the planning for the St. Kitts trip. A first draft of the logo for the trip was created last night. You can see this on the new web site [d Expedition-v4.com](http://d Expedition-v4.com). Again, this is just getting started so please excuse the skeletal form of all this. (Then again, you can watch the thing "fill in" as I go, I guess!)

I've already talked to the owner of the home we'll be renting down in St. Kitts so I know that 120v 60 cycle outlets with the expected USA fixtures are available throughout the villa. For those times when you aren't quite sure, though, here is a handy web site that has some interesting resources:

Steve Kropla's Help for World Travelers web site. The thing that caught my eye was the World Electric Guide: Electric Power Around the World resources page which identifies the power source (volts and frequency) along with the outlet shape for countries around the world. Very handy! This is no substitute for asking your hosts questions, but it provides a good starting place.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:21PM (-04:00)

## eQSL and LoTW for V4

Friday, July 27, 2007

In a little less than three months I'll be on St. Kitts. Time is short! I have begun working on the DXpedition web site and spent some time last night and this morning getting the eQSL and Logbook of the World set up. Both LoTW and eQSL are two phase processes. Here's the steps that make sense to me:

1. Create a LoTW certificate request for the new QTH. I have documented the steps for doing this on my web site.
2. Upload this to the LoTW web site.
3. LoTW will need evidence that this is a valid request. The easiest thing to do is to scan (or take a digital photograph) of the license issued by the local authority. (I took a picture of the license from St. Kitts, for example.) You can either send this to the ARRL as an attachment to an eMail [lotw-admin](mailto:lotw-admin@arrl.org) at [arrl.org](http://arrl.org), or put this on a web site someplace where LoTW administrators can fetch it.
4. This LoTW request will take some time to process. Wait.
5. In the mean time you can begin setting up your eQSL account. Add a new location to eQSL using their mechanisms.
6. eQSL Authenticity Guaranteed is most easily obtained by getting it from the LoTW. So, wait until you have finished setting up the LoTW account before proceeding with the eQSL account.
7. The LoTW folks will eventually send you a .tq6 file. Finish setting up the LoTW account. Create a single QSO record in ADIF. Sign it with the new certificate and

upload it to LoTW. It doesn't matter who you claim to have talked with as it will never be confirmed. I claim to have talked to *myself* (NE1RD), for example. The point is this: the next steps require that there be at least one QSO in the new account.

8. Now that you have LoTW set up and have at least one QSO in your "out box" there, you can use the LoTW credentials as a basis for Authenticity Guaranteed in eQSL. Return to eQSL and finish the Authenticity Guaranteed procedure using LoTW as the authenticator.

It sounds more confusing than it is. The idea is this: at each step you provide a little more evidence that you "are who you are", and you then use the previous steps to provide evidence for later steps. Think of it as climbing a ladder. Each rung brings you to another level which allows you to reach even higher rungs.

The upshot of all this is I should have both LoTW and eQSL accounts ready to accept my logs by the end of the day. With all of the other planning that needs to be made, this is a nice thing to get out of the way.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:24AM (-04:00)

## 2007 RSGB IOTA wrap-up

Monday, July 30, 2007



I made it out to Lovells Island this weekend for the RSGB IOTA contest. Lovells is part of the Boston Harbor Island group (NA-148). I operated from Georges Island several times last year, including the 2006 IOTA contest, but had not yet operated from any other islands in the group until this weekend.

The reason for choosing Lovells Island for this contest was simple: they let you camp there. Most of the other islands, including the "main" island Georges, are day-trip-only destinations and the last ferry leaves about 6 PM. In order to put in a full 12-hours, I needed to stay long after the last ferry departed.

Those who know me are probably surprised that I would attempt such a trip. My idea of camping is a hotel room without room service. Still, I do own a small

tent and some gear. Recent purchases bolstered my supplies. A quick inventory Friday evening showed I had all I needed except food. I own no camp stoves, have no freeze-dried meals, no portable cooking apparatus, and no wood or fuel to carry. So, I did what any 13 year-old would do under the circumstances: I made myself a big pile of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and declared victory.

Here is the cart with the camping gear and antennas stuffed and ready to go. (Click on the pictures for a better view.)

The weather was threatening Saturday. A strong cold front was to move through and bring with it a series of thunderstorms with the possibility of high winds and hail. Few people met me on the docks for the 9 AM ferry and most of those were rangers destined for work on the islands. We were told that fewer boats would be running that day because of the weather. I begin to doubt the sense of this excursion.

The ride between Boston and Georges Island takes about 30-40 minutes. From Georges,



smaller boats shuttle between the other islands like Lovells. The shopping cart, which made it possible to move all this gear from the car to the ferry, was not practical down rough gangways and on-and-off these smaller boats. Luckily, the DCR staff was very helpful hoisting and hauling the large carts, bags, and bundles of the many campers heading for Lovells. It seemed the farther you get off the beaten path, the more friendly and helpful people become.

The weather continued to threaten and I watched the doppler radar on my iPhone. Eventually I had made it all the way to the camp site as thunderstorms crawled across Massachusetts. I sat at the picnic table and thought very hard about scrubbing the mission. I love the IOTA contest. I wanted to do well this year by putting in more time. But, stranding myself on an island with little food, no water (except that which I brought with me), and only the minimum of camping gear during severe weather was probably unwise. I looked at the radar again. It was coming. Even if I left now, I probably wouldn't get back to Boston before it hit. So, I decided to say. I pitched the tent.



It doesn't look like much but it did protect me from the onslaught that was to come. The picnic table provided my operating position. The Pelican case holds my K2. Batteries are charged by the solar panel in the background. The Buddipole as a 20m vertical stands on its tripod in the rear.



The view was magnificent. I set up the 40m/15m vertical on the rocks above the beach with the elevated radials tied off to trees along each side of the path. The Boston gas tanks and Logan airport are in the background.

Conditions were challenging. Some combination of no sunspots and the geography of the island (with a hill between me and Europe) made the first few hours of the contest frustrating. Then, I felt a sudden change of temperature. The cold front had

arrived.

Quickly, I packed the radio back into its *watertight* Pelican case and gathered all the other parts (log, headphones, etc.) and headed for the tent. I made it inside and secured the rain fly just in time.

For the next hour or so it rained hard. The tent shook under the wind. Water came in. Lightning and thunder appeared but luckily no hail. I am feeling pretty stupid at this point. Then it cleared. The sun came out. I eventually put the station back together and found 20m slightly better than when I left it. I was even able to sustain a couple of runs calling CQ.



I still did not meet even last years QSO count or score. I could hear Europe, but it was like eavesdropping on a conversation being held in another room. I ended the day with 91 QSOs, 9 multipliers, and a score roughly half of last years 6 hour effort from Georges Island. I'll be spending the next few weeks reviewing my performance and making notes for next year. I'm sure there is something to learn from all this.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:48AM (-04:00)

## NA-148 LoTW uploaded

Monday, July 30, 2007

I have uploaded all QSOs for the Boston Harbor Island Group (NA-148) to the Logbook of the World system. I immediately got 49 QSLs in return. If you do not see a QSL on LoTW and think you should, please contact me. Thanks.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:24PM (-04:00)

## RSGB IOTA Contest log submission system up

Thursday, August 02, 2007

I have just submitted my log for the RSGB IOTA contest and completed the log activation. If you tried to do this earlier in the week and had problems (as I did), try it again. It is working fine now.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:33AM (-04:00)

## You snooze, you lose

Thursday, August 09, 2007

I have been very busy. That is a poor excuse for my complete lack of execution on the planning of the upcoming St. Kitts trip. I've tried to remedy some of that tonight but clearly my delays have been costly. As I like to say, "you snooze, you lose." I have certainly been asleep at the wheel! Anyway, here's what I managed to accomplish this evening:

- **Hotels** - While the villa has been under contract for some time (and I just sent the final payment to the fellow a few days ago), the hotels for either end of the trip were not booked until tonight. Our itinerary is to fly from Boston to Miami, stay overnight in Miami, then take a very early flight to St. Kitts the next day. Our return trip also comes through Miami, arriving late, with our Boston flight early the next morning. We needed hotel rooms at the Miami airport for both ends of the trip. Done.
- **Boston hotel** - Our flight to Miami leaves at 5:35 AM. Factoring in the roughly "two hours before flight" lead time and we're arriving at the airport in the middle of the night. We had intended to stay at a hotel at Logan (Boston's airport) the night before our flight as we had done for our St. Johns trip last year. But, I did not attempt to

book that room until tonight and that may have cost me. For some reason, a room that cost \$180 last year has doubled in price. Perhaps the Red Sox making their run for another World Series bid has hotels thinking rooms will be at a premium in October. Well, I'm not paying nearly \$400 for a few hours extra sleep. We (I) tend to characterize prices in terms of equivalent ham radio equipment costs. In short, "that's a radio." So, forget it. Looks like a sleepless night.

- **Side trip planned** - I enjoy the game of chess. I am a horrible, horrible player. I'm so bad, in fact, that I don't really enjoy *playing* the game with others as much as I enjoy reading about games, studying annotated games, and so on. Miami hosts the World Chess Hall of Fame, a place I'd been hoping to visit for some time. Sandy and I will take in the museum on our layover in Miami.
- **Announcements** - This is the thing I am very late on. I should have sent out these announcements a couple of months ago. I have likely missed publishing deadlines on the major magazines. {sigh} Anyway, I've sent email to the ARRL, CQ Magazine, and World Radio, The Daily DX, and Announced DX Operations. I also created an entry on the RSGB IOTA web site. We'll see which, if any, actually appear. I often say that this blog highlights things I've done right and things I've done wrong. This is most definitely something I did wrong for this trip. Get those announcements out 3-4 months ahead of your operation to help ensure you make everybody's publishing deadlines!
- **Reserved the car** - We only need the car for one day (to go to the museum), but I've got that booked.
- **Travel printouts made** - I normally create nice folders with print outs of all reservations, electronic tickets, driving directions, and other information so we have all the information we need in one place. I now (finally) have this stuff printed and in the folder. I just need to make a copy for Sandy and I'm done.

Lots of the planning for a DXpedition falls into the category of "mundane" but that doesn't mean it isn't important. I waited to book a hotel and the price went up. I waited to send out my announcements and now I've likely missed publishing deadlines. These are stupid mistakes I should not be making at this point. But, that's why I'm writing this blog. It helps keep me focused and, perhaps, will help some of you get focused, too.

Finally, I actually took the new Mosely beam out of the box today (something else that's been sitting too long!). I will report my first impressions this weekend.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:31PM (-04:00)

## TW2010

### Sunday, August 12, 2007

The weekend passed quickly. I did not get a chance to assemble the new Mosley Mini-32-A beam. My goal is to get that assembled and tuned tomorrow night and use it next weekend in the North American QSO Party. I know the pieces fit together, but the instructions indicate that I need to drill holes in the elements once the proper lengths have been determined. That must be done prior to the St. Kitts trip and this week is as good as any other to get this task finished.

There wasn't sufficient time to complete the beam assembly but I did have a few minutes today to spend on another antenna. My Force 12 Sigma-5 antenna had been in storage since my local club's Field Day. I assembled it and put the AntennaSmith on it to be sure it was still in good tune. It was not. So, following the directions in the manual, I spread the coils for the 20m until it gave me a good match. The other bands (10-17m) were fine and



needed no adjustment.

The other reason for disassembling the Sigma-5 was to get a glimpse at the controller board. I intend to make a computer model of the antenna and I wanted to see all the details for the matching circuitry.

An antenna similar to the Force 12 was recently released by TW Antennas called the TW2010 Traveler. A somewhat *spirited* discussion about this new offering erupted on the Yahoo Buddipole Users Group (BUG) forum. I threw in a few comments there, too. Here's what all the fuss is about.

The first thing to notice is that this antenna is very similar in shape to the Force-12 Sigma-5. Both the TW2010 and Sigma-5 are vertical dipoles for 10-12-15-17-20 meters, have control boxes in the center which contains relays for switching bands, break down small for travel, and have a remote control unit that allows you to do the band selection from your operating position 50 or 60 feet from the antenna. Both antennas handle about 1200 watts PEP SSB or about half that for CW. Both antennas claim high efficiencies and relatively low take-off angles.

The question some have raised is: can one of these antennas be efficient and effective? I can only say that the Force-12 Sigma-5 performed well on Georges Island (NA-148) during those operations and compared favorably with other antennas used. The new offering, the TW2010, is smaller, much smaller, than the Force-12 antenna. How will this affect efficiency and performance? That was at least some of the discussion in the BUG forum.

Another big difference between the Sigma-5 and TW2010 is the controller function. The Sigma-5 comes with a simple six position rotary switch for selecting the band. The switch is mounted on an L-shaped piece of plastic with the wires exposed. Pretty cheesy, really. The TW2010 has a computerized unit that can connect to Icom or Yaesu radios and utilize the CAT interface to automatically band switch. Additionally, the controller cable is detachable with the TW2010 with molded connectors. (The control cable on the Sigma-5 is not easily detachable.) The cable arrangement is certainly nicer than that of the Sigma-5. The computerized controller may be overkill, but it is an interesting design decision.

The TW2010 also breaks down into smaller pieces than the Sigma-5 and requires no tools for assembly or disassembly. A manual is available for download off the TW Antennas web site which has the dimensions, assembly instructions, and other information.

I do have some questions about the antenna and have sent them off to the company. I've received no response yet. When I get those answers, I'll post what I learn here. Of course, should I never get an answer, that'll get posted, too. {grin}

I'm interested in the TW2010, but I haven't decided if the interest is just academic, or practical. I am very impressed with the performance of the Sigma-5 but it is bigger and bulkier than I had hoped it would be. The TW2010 looks like it might pack and travel better, but it is significantly smaller and may not perform as well. Oh, and the other thing: the TW2010 is \$699 for the basic unit, nearly double the \$379 for the Sigma-5. I'll need to get answers to my questions from TW Antennas, and do a bunch of antenna modeling before I take the plunge on this. Also, it would be interesting to compare computer models for both the Sigma-5 and TW2010, too. Now that I've had a glimpse inside the Sigma-5 and have the schematic for the TW2010, I should be able to create both models. Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:24PM (-04:00)

## Social network websites

Monday, August 13, 2007

I'm not sure how much hams are using the new social web sites like LinkedIn or Facebook but I've invested a little time and created entries in both. You can find my LinkedIn entry [here](#) and my Facebook entry [here](#). Additionally, I've created an Elecraft owner group on Facebook. Thus far, there is only one member (me). Hmmmm.

The LinkedIn stuff is more about work history than friendship but the Facebook site seems like a nice step up from the limited information you can put on QRZ. If you've not considered these sites before, take a look!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:24PM (-04:00)

## RIGtalk USB to serial rig control interface on MacOS X

Monday, August 13, 2007

I just updated my home page with the following relating to RIGtalk drivers on the Macintosh:

West Mountain Radio has updated their web site with drivers for both PPC and Intel Macintosh computers. As of this writing, the drivers were located [here](#). I very much appreciate the effort by West Mountain Radio and their staff, especially Del Schier, who drove this project to completion. This is just one more reason to like West Mountain Radio stuff.

I have tested my RIGtalk with my MacBook Pro and Icom IC-7000 using MacLoggerDX. It works well and I happily traded heavier RS232C converters for that stick-of-gum-sized RIGtalk device and cable. That's how you make your 100 pound weight limit!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:56PM (-04:00)

## Mosley tested, shirts ordered

Tuesday, August 14, 2007

I assembled the Mosley beam tonight. It went together easily and tuned up nicely on 20m, 15m, and 10m. It is a little heavier than I had thought it might be, heavier than would comfortably sit on a Buddipole tripod and mast. I'll need to figure out how I'll hoist this new antenna in the air long before leaving for St. Kitts.

The final assembly called for holes to be drilled in the elements and screws inserted to finalize the element lengths. Upon further consideration, I'm not going to do this. Since I am not erecting the antenna permanently it might be better to simply put a turn or two of tape around the elements to hold them in place. There is sufficient overlap between the aluminum tubes that tape should hold it securely for the seven days we are on the island. I'll verify that this is sufficient this weekend when I use the antenna in the North American QSO Party contest.

By the way, the quick check of the beam tonight was done with the AntennaSmith. I continue to be impressed with this unit and amazed as to how much time it is saving me.

Finally, if you have visited the St. Kitts DXpedition web site you will have noticed the graphic for the trip of the islands and sea turtle. I created this design (along with the 100

Pound DXpedition logo and the logo for the BUMS VP2M trip). I'm no artist, but I get by. {grin} I took a few minutes yesterday and designed T-shirts on Cafe Press for Sandy and me. I had created T-shirts for the VP2M crew, too. I believe this is a great team-building and excitement generating opportunity. The shirts give everybody in your group a common identity and give members a concrete, tangible, and visceral link to their upcoming adventure. The print on demand places like Cafe Press provide a very affordable way to create items specially for your trip. If you do organize a group trip (or even if it is a little family vacation) you might want to consider a little "teamwear".

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:35PM (-04:00)

## Facebook revisited

Wednesday, August 15, 2007



Steve Weinert (K9ZW) said:

It seems you have to join to even see your pages - perhaps you could post screen shots to show those less inclined to register before looking what your pages look like?

Here is a partial snapshot from the Facebook site. The site provides lots of customization including the inclusion of add-on applications like "Where I've Been", a world map that allows you to click/select places you been, or wish to visit.

You can put up as much or little information as you like. I'm open on some things and reticent on others. That's OK, in my view. Sites like this can be a tremendous time-sync/time-wasting-exercise. Of course, so can obsessing about your QRZ entry. My suggestion was to consider these other sites as a place to say a little more about yourself in a structured way.

I've noticed the average age of the typical user on Facebook is about 1/3 of mine. It is very popular with the High School and College crowd. But, they appear to let old geezers like me in, too. If they'll let me in, they'll let anybody in! {grin}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:52AM (-04:00)

## Hurricanes

Wednesday, August 15, 2007

As mentioned on the the blog DX World of Ham Radio the path of the latest storms track directly over my favorite spots in the Caribbean. This paints a bleak picture and, selfishly, I am glad I'm not in its path.

Hurricane season officially extends through November, a month past our planned stay, and it goes without saying that a significant tropical storm or hurricane would be a serious problem for our trip! Of course, there is little that can be done in the case of a significant storm once you are on-island. But, in the case where a storm is heading there in those days just prior to departure we would have choices to make. I've always advocated safety

first. There are few things worth risking your life and a family vacation can hardly be one of them. If the forecast above were for our planned week on the island, we'd be making alternate plans. Period.

The BUMS had a similar problem early this year. While we were not visiting Montserrat during hurricane season, the island's volcano had become quite active during the weeks leading up to our trip. We had make very deliberate plans should the volcano erupt, or even hint that it might erupt. Luckily, the volcano calmed and our visit was a happy one without incident. We were wary, vigilant, and alert. Nothing more. Nothing less. Our prudence didn't diminish anyone's fun.

I grew up in the midwest and had a brush or two with tornados. I've lived in Massachusetts for a quarter century. During that time a hurricane and Nor'easter have wandered by a few times. I've got a great deal of respect for Mother Nature. By the way, if she's reading this blog: *Please don't screw up my trip!* {grin}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:10PM (-04:00)

## Better late than never

Thursday, August 16, 2007

In a recent blog entry I was unhappy with my poor performance planning the St. Kitts trip. One of the things I had botched was getting notifications out to the various publications that I would be on NA-104 for the CQ WW DX contest. I emailed out notices on 9 August and they have filtered out to the following places:

- **Radio Society of Great Britain** - the RSGB IOTA site shows the activation.
- **National Contest Journal** - the National Contest Journal shows it on the NG3K DX Contest Activities Announcements page
- **DX-IS** - A new site DX-IS News has an entry with my announcement. This new site looks interesting. Keep an eye on it!
- **rec.radio.amateur.misc** - The Ohio/Penn DX Bulletin was dropped on to the news group rec.radio.amateur.misc. This bulletin is echoed in many places.
- **VA3RJ's Islands Castles & Portable Operations** - web site picked up the announcement.
- **I1-21171's blog** - had an entry in his blog where he picked up the logo and translated the announcement into Italian (at least I *think* it is Italian!). That's very nice! I appreciate this extra effort!

Another site Weekly DX-Calendar by DH9SB had an entry for my Montserrat trip but not this one. I'll send a note to them this afternoon. There was also a note on the LoTW list by DXCC entity by HB9BZA that I had signed up for Logbook of the World for my V4 call. This is also an interesting site!

I've probably missed a few, but you get the idea. Though my announcements were sent very late, some have picked up on them and these postings will breed others as they get picked up by other sites. The utility of getting the word out isn't just so people look for you on the air, it also helps them find your QSL route and the dates of operation. If people see that you were only there one week in, say, October. They will hopefully not send you a card for a purported contact in July! So, today's lesson is: better late than never.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:42AM (-04:00)

## QSL card pondering

Friday, August 17, 2007

I received a message today from UX5UO QSL printers today. They had spotted the DX bulletin announcement of the V4 DXpedition and sent an offer to print QSL cards for the trip. I have done all of my recent printing with QSLworks but the card produced for the Montserrat trip was a little disappointing. Chris (W6HFP) had his wife Inese, a very talented graphics artist, design the card but the printing was muddy with poor registration. Since I had pushed for QSLworks with the team, I had some amount of egg on my face because of it. So, though I'm not necessarily jumping ship from QSLworks, I am now considering other vendors.

I try to have the outline of the design for my card in place before the trip begins. That way I'm sure to get the photos of the right stuff. I would be frustrating to realize once you returned home that the *perfect* picture for your QSL card was the one you neglected to take!

I have also spent some time thinking about operating before and after the contest. I had lots of fun offering QSOs on the WARC bands while on Montserrat. Our thinking for that trip was testers probably hand out lots of QSOs on 10-15-20-40m, but people still need even common islands on the WARC bands. Our thinking was rewarded with lots of big pile-ups and many *thank-yous* from hams for the new band. I think I'll try that again on St. Kitts. So, look for me on 17m and maybe even 12m at the top of the hour. I'll see if folks need NA-104 on the WARC bands, too.

Finally, speaking of artwork, I submitted my design for the DX Reference Wiki site. They have a logo design contest open until 31 October. This new site, mentioned on KE9V's site yesterday, is worth a look. And, perhaps in November, it will sport my new logo! {grin}  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:01PM (-04:00)

## The simplest tool: a ruler

Sunday, August 19, 2007

I made a post in early March *In search of the featherweight tribander*. I ordered a Mosley Mini-32-A in March with a special request that they make it to break down into 48-inch pieces. Because of this special request, I waited nearly four months for it to arrive and paid another \$75 for labor to accomplish the alterations.

I had worried about things like *Will it arrive in time for my trip?*, *How will I erect it on the island?*, and *Will it perform well enough to justify the weight?* The last thing I was worried about was *Is it really only 48-inches when disassembled?* I didn't check that until this morning. **OOPS**. It isn't. Oh for goodness sake! I was so worried about checking out the antenna performance with fancy meters and on-air tests that I neglected to use the most simple and important tool: a ruler to see if the darn thing will fit in the case. Sheesh.

The reflector pieces that attach to the boom are both 52.5 inches long with no obvious way to make it shorter. I both angry with myself for waiting so long to verify the antenna dimensions, and a little bemused that nothing is easy with antenna makers! I will call Mosley in the morning and explain the situation. I hope that they will offer to send me a new set of pieces that do fulfill the 48-inch requirement. Otherwise, it doesn't go to St. Kitts. Of course, if they do send new pieces, they will have to be tested and run through the paces as I did with the antenna yesterday in the North American QSO Party. Speaking of which, here's how I did:

## Band QSOs Mults

-----  
160: 0 0  
80: 50 22  
40: 149 31  
20: 61 26  
15: 1 1  
10: 0 0  
-----

Total: 261 80 Total Score = 20,880

As always, *claimed score* is just that: my claim. The contest sponsor (The National Contest Journal) will compute my score after deducting all my miscues from the log. I used this contest to put the new beam through its paces. The antenna assembled quickly and was upon the 20-foot mast and guyed in about 45 minutes. I also have a G5RV hidden in the trees so I could alternate between the two antennas to do A/B comparisons. I was surprised to find that the G5RV at 60+ feet with its arms in a flat-top configuration outperformed the beam most of the time. There are several reasons for this (though I am still working this out in my head). Here's my thinking:

1. **The beam was only at 20 feet** - The G5RV was up about a half wavelength on 20m; the beam is obviously very low for that band. I don't know what that did to the takeoff angle of the beam.
2. **The beam was only "generally" pointed** - Sure, the beam gives you some gain in the direction it is pointed, but as you move off to the side, the gain drops. I had it pointed WSW (or so I thought), but I wasn't all that careful. There were a couple of times that the beam was stronger than the G5RV during the contest. The two stations I remember talking with where the beam beat the dipole were both in the American Southwest (Arizona and Southern California). So, they were both very far away and in the direction I was generally pointing (maybe I had the antenna pointed too far South?)
3. **Maybe the beam takeoff angle was too low for a domestic contest** - Maybe the beam's takeoff angle was too low for close-in contacts. When I'm on St. Kitts the beam width will allow me to point generally to Europe or North America and the low takeoff angle will work better with everybody I'm interested in far away.
4. **Maybe the beam takeoff angle was too high** - Maybe it is just nuts to expect the beam to perform well if it is mounted so low. It is time to play with the antenna modeling programs.

As you might discern from the above, I have as many questions after yesterday's experiments as I had before them. The AntennaSmith showed good curves on the three bands. The antenna seems mechanically solid. It is about 8.5 pounds assembled (less mount) which is about what I expected. But, the performance was puzzling.

Finally, with all this antenna talk I've nearly forgotten to mention the other thing that got a shake-out yesterday: my backside. {grin} I attended Contesting University at Dayton this year and one of the points that was made repeatedly was *if you want to win you have to keep your butt in the chair!* I did just that yesterday. It was a 10 hour contest and I was in the chair all but maybe 10 minutes of it. (I refuse to do the waste dump in the bucket. I'm committed, but I have limits!) There is no way that I'm going to stay in the chair for all 48 hours of CQ WW, but I found working this 10-hour shift to be easier than I expected. And, as shown above, I was rewarded with my best score ever for this contest. So, though I obsess about all this equipment in this blog, it is important to remember that the most

important component to your DXpedition is you and the commitment you bring. Just two months to go. I can't wait!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:45PM (-04:00)

## Mosley notified of the problem

Monday, August 20, 2007

I just got off the phone with Mosley and told them of the problem with the lengths of the reflector pieces. The gentleman found my order, read the notes to cut the antenna down to 48 inch pieces. They will pass the word along to Gary, who designed the Mini-32-A, and see what can be done. They'll call me back when they've got an answer. Hopefully, they'll figure this out and get me replacement parts in time to test them for the St. Kitts trip.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:56PM (-04:00)

## Mosley steps up

Tuesday, August 21, 2007

Gary from Mosley Electronics called this morning and left a message. I will need to return two reflector loading sections and the 10 inch by 3/4 inch piece that attaches to the boom. The replacement sections and new aluminum piece *will* be 48 inches or less in length will be shipped out today. Hooray!

This is very good. Not that there was a mistake, of course. No, that was bad. The good part is this: mistakes happen and the measure of a company's customer service is determined by what happens next. In this case, I made the call, they located the paperwork for my order, determined that there was a problem, and promised that the person best able to solve it would contact me with a resolution. In under 24 hours I was called back, they had a solution, and they committed to getting the new parts shipped to me ASAP. This all happened in about one business day. I like that.

For what it is worth, I recommend Mosley Electronics for their antennas and customer service.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:30AM (-04:00)

## TW2010 company response and vertical thinking

Wednesday, August 22, 2007

I wrote to the TW Antenna people last week looking for some basic information about the antenna. When I didn't get a response to the web form, I dropped an email message to them a few days later. The company got back to me late last night. Here is my questions followed by their response.

Very interesting. Looks like a nicer execution of the Force-12 Sigma-5 design. Does the antenna and base all fit in the travel bag? How much current does the electronics draw? (The Sigma-5 draws about 100mA to energize the relays.) If the unit is unpowered, does it "default" to the 20m band? Thank you for your time. -- Scott (NE1RD)

TW Antennas replies:

Hi Scott,

Sorry for the belated reply. We've undergone a move and a hamfest, and are just now getting caught back up to speed. It's been a mess trying to get our communications infrastructure back up since the move.

We designed the travel bag to carry everything related to the antenna (controller, cables, stand, etc).

The electronics draw about 200mA, as it has a microprocessor and LED's in addition to the relays.

Yes, the switching array will default to 20m when un-powered.

NOTE: It was suggested to us that latching relays could be used so the antenna remains on a band until it is specifically switched to another. Also, current consumption would drop on average, as the relays would not have to stay energized all the time. We're currently looking into this option as a possibility for the future.

Thanks for your interest and kind words. If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

73's

-Richard.

TW Antennas

As Jeff (KE9V) pointed out in his post Little Store Bought Antennas this is still quite an expensive antenna. And, it is true as Jeff says that "shortened" antennas are a compromise, but perhaps not as much as one might think. Vertical dipole antennas are very effective and generally have good low radiation angle patterns which is great for DX. Switched Vertical Dipole Antennas (SVDAs) have been used on many lightweight DXpeditions with great success. They require no radial system and can be made fairly resilient to the wind and elements as evidenced by their record of service on DXpeditions like VP8GEO, VP8THU and many others.

The "shortened" part of this is accomplished by adding a capacity hat to both ends of the antenna and then applying a matching stub to null out that capacitive reactance. (The stub may actually be rolled up into a coil so it fits in the box, but you get the idea.) The book *The Short Vertical Antenna and Ground Radial* (Jerry Sevick, W2FMI) discusses this idea extensively and found even very short antennas that have been properly designed can perform admirably.

My intention is to do computer modeling on all these antennas by the end of the year, but my crude back-of-the-envelope thinking goes like this: in a regular 1/2-wave center-fed most of the radiation comes from the middle 1/3 of the antenna. This is the high-current area. As we move outward towards the antenna's end current drops and voltage increases until we find very little signal being radiated at all. A Droopy dipole (a dipole hung such that some length near the ends is allowed to droop towards the ground) perform about as well as their flat-top cousins because there isn't much going on at the far end of the antenna.

The shortened vertical just rolls up that droopy part into a capacity hat. The length of



antenna that is doing the vast majority of the work is still there. Further, though the radiation resistance (the part that does the good work for us) is lower in a shorter antenna, you can make up for some of this by making the radiator larger. Instead of using a wire 1/8-inch in size as you might on a dipole, the radiator for one of these verticals is one-inch in diameter. Even if the radiation resistance is only 25 ohms, a 2:1 transformer gives you a great match.

In these multiband antennas like the Force-12 Sigma-5 or new TW-2010 you still have loading coils for most bands which will reduce the efficiency. But, the other thing I'm interested in is weight, size, and versatility. Five single band antennas requires 5 runs of coax. A multiband antenna covering 5 bands requires one run of coax. I care about weight and size. It isn't just the antenna; you must also account for all the components that antenna system demands.

I erect a 40m full-sized vertical with two (or more) elevated radials as part of my antenna compliment. This antenna is also very good on 15m. If I can use a second story balcony, I am able to use a simple 20 foot fishing pole to hold this up. It is cheap, light, and very effective! I also erect a full-sized vertical for 80m suspended from a 33-foot mast. At this point in the solar cycle, antennas for 30m, 20m, and 17m give you pretty good coverage for bands that are likely to be open. Those can easily be done with fishing poles if you wish to have 1/4 verticals.

But, if you want to have vertical dipoles with an elevated feed point antenna systems like the Buddipole, Force-12 Sigma-5, and TW2010 provide a small, robust package for these antenna designs. And, when the Sun starts giving us spots again, the ability to have five bands on one piece of coax starts looking very attractive to me. \$700 attractive? I'm not sure. That I need to think about. {grin}

I might disappear for a few days. I have a deadline at work and the Lowell Spinners begin a long home-stand. After that, it will be time to get serious about V4 planning!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:08AM (-04:00)

## Picture from the IOTA Contest in July

Wednesday, August 22, 2007



Here I am in the RSGB IOTA contest, sweaty, tired, and taking my own picture at arm's length with my iPhone. This picture was before the thunderstorm rolled through. I am not making many contacts yet and I am not happy. The enclosure in the lower left kept the sun off of me. You can see the solar panel and Buddipole in the background. Boston Harbor and the menacing clouds appear in the background of the image on the right. That is a 33-foot pole with a 40m vertical wire hanging from

it. You can see lots of other cool pictures on the RSGB IOTA Contest list of submitted logs page.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:29PM (-04:00)

# What makes a good blog?

Thursday, August 23, 2007

For somebody who said he wasn't going to blog for a while, I'm sure blogging a lot! {sigh} Jeff over at Long Delayed Echos dropped a post *Mo Better Bloggin'* asking "what does it take to make a good blog?" This didn't start with Jeff. AD7MI kicked it off and several others have chimed in. This is now an excellent thread leading through several blogs. I have asked myself how to improve what I deliver but find the problem vexing. In engineering terms, blogging is often "open loop." I write stuff and people read it an hour, day, week, month, or even a year later. I don't know if those folks enjoyed it, thought it was a waste of time, or somewhere in-between. Feedback is good but under the best of circumstances only a small fraction of those who read will respond whether it is to a local newspaper, national magazine, or blog. So, in the absence of direct feedback, I take some direction by noticing what engages me.

Jeff follows 150 blogs according to a recent post. I follow fewer than 30 (though that number has been steadily growing). Some sites are little more than announcements for DX. Others are very personal expositions. Obviously the more personal works inspire. I followed K2DBK's trip to the Cayman Islands. I cringed reading about his antenna troubles, first concerned that he didn't have as much fun as he should have had, and then a pang of guilt that I may have given him bad advice about radials for his Buddistick. I've still got a *to do* item to verify some of my Buddistick configurations and measurements.

Steven Weinert (K9ZW) writes *With Varying Frequency* and has been very active both on the bands and with his blog. We met in Dayton this year, finally conversing in person after so many correspondences electronically. Maybe that is the sign of a good blog: I really wanted to meet Steve!

Soldersmoke podcasts break up those long drives. I learned of the loss of Mike (KL7R) while on Montserrat. I felt like I lost a friend even though we had never met.

Other posts like *Harry Potter Ruined my Marriage* from K9JY's blog and KA3DRR's blog talking about Radio Dawg having a few tooth troubles remind me that we are people with lives and families, pets, hopes and dreams.

Close friends in the area blog, too, including Greg NE1OB's *Sporadic Reflections*, and now Rich AB1HD's *Nerd on Call*. Rich is just getting started but Greg has been at it for a while. Though Greg doesn't post often, he seems to spot the best stuff and talk about it. I know whenever a new post appears it will be something interesting. One of his last posts was about "throw bags" that arborists use to get lines over trees. That post cost me about \$50! The blisters on my hands from practicing with these throw bags still haven't healed. What fun!

What I write here in my blog is focused on a particular topic: traveling with your radio. I do wander off-topic occasionally (as I'm doing tonight), but always circle back around. As with other blogs, I hope the distractions add and not diminish the value here.

I began rethinking the format, content, and commitment to this blog sometime in July. The problem I'm having now is understanding the advantages, and limits, imposed by this medium. Blogging seems like a good way to express brief ideas in staccato succession, but it is not particularly well suited to long discussions or the presentation of detailed technical information. For that, a white paper or even a book may be a better alternative. I will be eventually backing off this level of blogging so I can pursue some deeper ways to communicate.

What makes a good blog? Tell a story. Give something of yourself. People are drawn to honesty. Share your successes and your failures. Don't try to write for the ages; write for the moment with care. Understand the medium and your audience. I'm violating both

those last tenants with this post as it is both too long (violating the best practices of the medium) and is off-topic (not strictly for a ham radio audience). I guess I should add that you should know when to break the rules.

I've had private discussions with some who read this blog about the general state of blogging in the ham radio community. This is so new that the vast majority in the hobby have never heard of it. We, who are here first, have a chance to be the standard setters. That's a little scary... and exciting. It will be interesting to see how this medium develops over the new few years.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:32AM (-04:00)

## VP2M DXpedition video (abbreviated)

Friday, August 24, 2007

I have posted an abbreviated version of the Montserrat DXpedition video to YouTube. Enjoy.

Part I:

Part II:

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:01PM (-04:00)

## Mini-32-A now complete

Sunday, August 26, 2007

This is just a quick note on a Sunday morning. I've finishing up a white paper for a project at work that is due tomorrow. Thoughts of the scramble the night before a term paper is due have come to mind more than once. (And like those preverbal term papers, I drug my feet on this one for a bit, too, so the fact I'm in here on a Sunday morning is a problem that is largely self-inflicted.)

Anyway, I thought it might be good to close up the business with this Mosley beam. Reviewing, the sequence of events went something like this:

- I decided it was time to try getting a lightweight beam again.
- After a bunch of agonizing, I finally decided on the Mosley Mini-32-A. I had a special order for this antenna, specifying that no piece be longer than 48 inches (so it would pack easily in my golf bag). Gary at Mosley said that could be done. My order was put in the queue. Life is good.
- The antenna arrived in mid-July, but I didn't have time to look at it closely until later.
- Only when finally trying to pack the antenna did I realize that a couple of the pieces were much longer than 48 inches!
- I called Mosley on Monday and notified them of the problem.
- Mosley stepped up on Tuesday and said that the new pieces would be fabricated and shipped out right away.

Those pieces arrived on Thursday. Mosley FedEx-ed the new pieces so I'd have them immediately. Again, a company's customer service is best measured by how they react when things go wrong. Mosley's response to this problem was exemplary. I couldn't be more pleased.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:39AM (-04:00)

## Where'd he go?

Thursday, September 06, 2007

I have not blogged for about ten days. Miss me?

During this hiatus I have been trying to finish a draft of a white paper entitled *Antennas for 100 Pound DXpeditions*. You can find this in my download area. The file to download is named "Antennas-for-100.pdf" and it is approximately 26 MB in size so be patient.

I was not entirely happy with things I had done on Montserrat. Further, some of the "conventional wisdom" I received on various Buddipole configurations did not make sense to me (though I was reluctant to argue at the time). I decided not long after returning home that what was needed was a disciplined and scientific approach to this problem. What do these antennas do? How well do they perform? What configurations work? Which configurations are unsatisfactory?

I begin to answer some of these questions in this white paper. Here are some conclusions I've drawn on the Buddipole, for example:

- **No short whips** -- The standard Buddipole configuration sold comes with stainless steel whips just under 6 foot long. They are too short for reasonable HF work. I will still use them for my 6 meter Yagi made from Buddipole parts, but I'll not use them again for HF. Period.
- **For 20 meters and up, no coils** -- The standard Buddipole configurations specify coils and particular taps for the bands. I believe it makes more sense to remove the coils from the bag and substitute long whips (9 foot 4 inches) and two extra antenna arms. That can be used to make the antenna described below.
- **Only full-sized verticals for the Buddipole** -- In the end, after looking at configuration after configuration for the Buddipole, the only one that really performs well is the full-size vertical with no coils and four radials. The 20 meter version requires four arms and a fully extended long whip, but it is great on that band.
- **At least 4 radials** -- I've read lots of discussions about using just one sloping radial for the Buddipole. After extensive modeling, I am convinced this is a very bad idea. At least four radials are needed. Four elevated radials help create an antenna that performs very well. The one radial approach gives you a bizarre pattern with deep nulls.

I also analyze two other antennas: the Force-12 Sigma-5 and the TW Antennas Traveler. For their size, both antennas performed very well. The fact that they are multiband antennas (5 bands 10-12-15-17-20) fed with a single feed line means significant savings in coax weight. Instead of running five runs of small coax for five single band antennas, one could run a single length of high quality coax, reducing signal loss and still saving weight. It is important to assess whole systems of things, not just the pieces like the antenna.

I have presentations to give to local clubs beginning in about two weeks. My new slides are not done. So, I will likely disappear again for a while. Comments on the early draft of this white paper are encouraged. Let me know what you think.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 05:44PM (-04:00)

## Packing (1st round) for St. Kitts

Saturday, September 08, 2007

I began the great equipment drive of 2007. Like those cattle drives of the *Old West*, pieces and parts are strewn over most of the living room floor with a slow and meticulous migration of all this junk towards the large cases that will eventually go to St. Kitts. I hope to have the first "draft" of the equipment packed into the Pelican 1610 and "Vault" golf case selected from all this stuff by the end of the day tomorrow. The balance will go back into storage. When I have a complete set I'll post the inventory and weight allocation here.

After a brief respite at the Blue Ginger restaurant in Wellesley celebrating a friend's 10th wedding anniversary, we returned home to this enormous mess still infesting most of the upstairs living space. Rather than deal with it, I returned to working on the antenna white paper Did I mention that the white paper is a partial draft? There is so much more to add it is dizzying. I began working on the low-band antenna section (which was left with little more than a "to do" in version 0.18). So, some of these antennas will be in the next version.

Finally, I was able to put in a full evening of work on my presentation materials last night. I've got the first of three talks to be given to local groups in just a week so I've got to get something finalized. Luckily, audio and video captured during the Montserrat trip is a lot more interesting than me talking... and I've got a bunch of that stuff. {grin}

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:13PM (-04:00)

## Six

Tuesday, September 11, 2007

This is not ham radio related. Skip it if you like.

My home town is Acton, Massachusetts. I wasn't born here, but I've lived here longer (nearly 25 years) than I've lived anywhere else. My QSL card has a picture of Acton town center with its obelisk and white clapboard town hall in the background. Just to the left and across the street from the green is a small monument with a brick pathway. I was there this morning at 8:46 AM.

I was also there a year ago on this day, and the year before that. On this sixth anniversary of 9/11 no bells were rung and no flags were carried. I was alone, sheltered from the light rain by large tree that stands between the small monument and the street. There were no words today. I had none and no others were there to offer theirs. So, I stood in silence waiting for that one notable minute to pass.

Words that normally flow easily from my fingers now appear only haltingly. I cannot, or perhaps will not, convey all that I am thinking or all that I am feeling right now. Six years later I believe I am still processing the events of that day. It may take a lifetime to finish.

[www.sep11memories.org](http://www.sep11memories.org)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:56AM (-04:00)

## Weighing in and self-sufficiency

Wednesday, September 12, 2007

I've got a couple of things to report in today's entry. Things are starting to heat up for the St. Kitts trip. My packing exercise last weekend was a *partial* success. I have a first cut at the items to be brought with us on the trip but I'm still overweight. Since there are two of us I could bring a total of 200 pounds (100 per person) and still be within my general guidelines but I'm trying to reduce the total weight down to something considerably less. Here's where I stand right now (approximately):

- Pelican 1610 -- 42 pounds. This now holds the IC-7000, Alinco power supply, LDG tuner, mixer and mixer power supply (for recording audio), and cabling for everything. The only thing missing for a complete station is microphone and paddles.
- Golf case -- 60 pounds. This puts me over the 100 pound limit if I'm traveling by myself... but I'm not. {grin} In here is the 33-foot mast, Mosley beam, a three 20-foot fishing poles, pre-wired vertical antennas for 40/15 and 17m, radial wire, and a small Buddipole system. Also in here are five mast sections that weigh 2.2 pounds each (for a total of 11 pounds). There is other stuff in there as well, I'm sure. (I'm doing this from memory.) Note that coax and tools are not yet listed.
- Miscellaneous stuff -- There is also a messy pile of stuff next to the big cases. A tool kit (10 pounds), 500 feet of coax (20 pounds), Heil headset in case with adapters (couple of pounds), antenna analyzer in small Pelican case (another couple of pounds), and a few odds-and-ends (Dacron rope, bungies, etc.).

As you can see, I'm still overweight. But, I could stick all those odds-and-ends, tools, and even coax in another bag (together all this stuff weighs much less than 50 pounds) with Sandy and I packing all our clothes and personal items into her bag. I know I could do this, but I'm hoping to do better.

One of the reasons why the weight is out-of-control is because the antenna plan is not yet complete. Do I need the mast sections? (11 pounds) Do I need all that coax? (Four pounds per hundred feet) Do I need all those tools?

The excess weight is an indication that I'm deferring decisions until I get to the island. That might be the right answer (wait-and-see), but it is more likely that I've just not thought about things enough here at home in my pre-trip planning. As more decisions are made more weight will come off the package.

I'm also scrambling a bit to get my new presentation finished for the talks I'm to give soon. I speak to the local club on Tuesday of next week. I present to the Nashua, NH club in October prior to the St. Kitts trip. I speak to another club in November. The first two talks will concentrate on the Montserrat trip; the November talk will most likely include things from the St. Kitts trip.

I bought a projector this week. It seemed like an extravagance but it takes a lot of pressure off of me. I won't be scrambling to borrow one every time I give a talk. I was on the edge of making the decision when another invitation came in the mail from the Framingham club. OK. Uncle. I picked up a Sharp XR-30X projector from Staples. I had a coupon for an online purchase, there was a \$100 rebate on the unit, and overnight shipping was free. As the marketing slogan goes, "That was easy." This projector, combined with a small amplified speaker system, is all I need to do my presentations. I'm now self-sufficient.

I've removed the very early (partial) draft from my public download area because there have been substantial additions (and some changes) since I put it up about a week ago. I've not gotten much feedback -- except that it is long -- from folks. I'm inclined to wait until I have something much closer to a finished product before showing it again at this point.

The last few nights have been spent studying the effects of ground. The type and shape of the ground beneath our antennas is always important but in these 100 Pound DXpeditions the antennas tend to be small, close to the ground, and situated above rocky or sandy dry soil. There are some things we might be able to do about this. I'm running through those experiments this week. There have already been some fascinating results!

That's plenty for today. Back to work!  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:51AM (-04:00)

## Presentation and award

Wednesday, September 19, 2007



I've had a couple of things going these last few weeks that have kept me quite busy. First, and perhaps foremost, is the effort I'm putting into my antenna analysis white paper. I had a very preliminary draft up for a few days to solicit comments. I've since taken that down since so much has changed and been added. This is a long term project. Sure, I hope to get some results that I can use immediately for my St. Kitts planning, but I know I won't have a complete draft of this until early next year.

I'll decide how best to distribute it when it is closer to completion.

It was a beautiful day on Sunday and I spent some chunk of it assembling the Mosley Mini-32-A beam with the new parts. It seemed to work very well. I've got one concern, though. One of the coils on the new parts has unraveled a bit on its plastic form. I think it will be fine for the St. Kitts trip, but I've got to think about what to do about this problem over the long term.

In addition to St. Kitts preparations, working on the antenna analysis white paper, and working a VE session Saturday morning, I've also been scrambling to get the new version of my *100 Pound DXpedition* presentation ready. I finished the slides, audio and video editing, and rehearsals of the talk on Monday night. I gave the presentation to the PART club last night. It was well received (at least no rotten fruit was tossed in my direction). It is a completely revamped talk, much different and improved from the those I gave in 2006. I'm scheduled to give it twice more this year to other clubs (so far).

PART club elections were held last night. I had decided not to run again for club Secretary as I thought it would be good to bring in new blood to the Board of Directors. Steve Rimsa (WA1KBE) won that slot for the next year and I'm sure he'll do well. Congratulations, Steve!

Finally, prior to my talk I was presented with "Certificate of Merit" from the PART club for my contributions over the last few years. It was completely unexpected and, in a completely uncharacteristic way, I was speechless. For those who know me well, that is not a typical state for me! Anyway, the gesture is very much appreciated. It is a good group and I've been pleased to contribute in my small way. Here I am with PART

President Bo Buddinger (WA1QYM) receiving the award.  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:28PM (-04:00)

## Twitter

### Wednesday, September 19, 2007

I am experimenting with Twitter, a **very** lightweight way to tell the world what you're doing. This isn't a substitute for the DX packet spotting system but it might be interesting while on a DXpedition to tell folks what I'm doing (setting up antennas, on the air, changing bands, trying 6m, etc.) You can use your regular RSS feed utility to follow along by using this URL.

[feed://twitter.com/statuses/friends\\_timeline/8245932.rss](feed://twitter.com/statuses/friends_timeline/8245932.rss)

I will likely be using this on St. Kitts.  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:26PM (-04:00)

## 3B7C

### Thursday, September 20, 2007

I worked St. Brandon (3B7C) on 80m phone last night. I'd love to work them a couple of more times before they go but I'll have to hurry. They will be QRT on 24 September according to their plan. If I wasn't so busy at work I would consider a DX-itis sick day. {grin}

The 3B7C web site has some really interesting stuff on it including a great feature that helps you plan when you should work them on a particular band. I wonder how hard that would be to add to my log processing program? Something to ponder, I guess.

This crew of top-tier operators is doing quite well considering it is at the bottom of the cycle. The Daily DX reported that the team has passed the 100,000 QSO mark. They also have a DXCC total of 187. Wow. One of my (stretch) goals is to work DXCC while on St. Kitts but I can't imagine putting that many in the log! They have been disappointed with 15m and 17m openings. That's not good news for me. I had hoped to work a bunch on 17m while on St. Kitts prior to the contest. We'll see if things improve in a month.

Speaking of which: the solar rotation cycle is about 27 days. So, we should start paying attention to solar conditions about 27 days prior to our arrival. That is near the end of this month. There are no guarantees, of course, but the part of the Sun facing us in a few days will be the part of the sun facing us during my week on St. Kitts. Let us all wish for sunspots and otherwise quiet conditions.

I'm still packing and weighing stuff. I may assemble the Mosley one more time this weekend and put it on the mast we're bringing. Maybe I can work 3B7C on SSB and CW on 20m with it. That would be a nice test!

Finally, if you have not already done so, you must visit Scot's (K9JY) web blog and catch up on his continuing series *30 Ham Radio Contest Tips*. There are great ideas in here and not just for contesters. Highly recommended.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:17PM (-04:00)



## Painter pole mast

Sunday, September 23, 2007

Thirty days until our departure. I just realized there are only four more weekends to finish up my trip planning. I need to get focused!

Sandy and I made a trip to Home Depot yesterday. There were a number of last minute items on the list but the biggest problem to solve was that of the mast for the Mosley Mini-32-A beam. I have heavy duty aluminum mast sections that I purchased from The Mast Company but each 48 inch section weighs 2.2 pounds (1 Kg). This is great stuff. It held up a very heavy monoband yagi on Field Day. It supported the very heavy Force-12 C3SS on Deer Isle, Maine for a special event. I just need far less for the 6 pound Mini-32A.

I purchased two 8 foot painter poles. I cut the threaded head off of one pole and removed the rubber bottom from the other. They now slip together nicely. A simple bolt through the two poles allows the stacked combination to be about 15 feet in length. It looked sturdy, but would it support the weight of the antenna?

Yes. I assembled (for the last time before the trip) the Mosley this morning and popped it on top of the stacked painters poles. Once guyed, it was quite solid. I'm considering adding a *third* painters pole! That would give me a combined height of about 22 feet from the three poles. Each pole weighs about 2 pounds so I've cut my weight for mast material in half. I like that!

The St. Brandon team (3B7C) is wrapping up their work. I had hoped to work them on either 20m phone or CW before they packed up. I listed on 14.022 for a very long time. I could barely hear them. Then I bounced back and forth between phone and CW ends of the band vowing to make my attempt as soon as they were readable in either mode.

The Mosley was set up outside the shack's window and pointed towards St. Brandon. (MacLoggerDX has a beam pointing feature but I'd never used it before today!) Finally, an opening on phone gave me my chance. I made my call and the return from 3B7C came though cloaked in QSB. A big tip-of-the-hat to the operator on St. Brandon. He spent the extra time confirming my call sign and fighting the noise to get me in the log. Thank you. I now have them confirmed on two bands. It should appear in their online log tomorrow morning.

This was a confidence builder for the antenna, but it also was a wake-up call for me. I had been hoping all this time that conditions and solar activity would have improved significantly by now. Obviously, they have not. If anything, conditions seem worse than those we had on Montserrat! I may need to reconsider my QSO goals for the trip.

Dave Bushong has a new podcast in his 99 Hobbies series. His guest this time is Carl Luetzelschwab (K9LA) discussing propagation. His podcasts are always fun. Give it a listen!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 05:06PM (-04:00)

## Backup rig

Monday, September 24, 2007

I was up late last night (again). While Sandy was upstairs watching baseball, I was downstairs with the evening's project spread over the whole of the bed. I turned on The War by Ken Burns and began to work, first straightening out my Yaesu FT-817 kit, and

then bring *HamMac* up to date.

The FT-817 has served as my "backup" radio for trips. Weight and space permitting, I'll include this in my St. Kitts DXpedition, too. If the Icom IC-7000 dies before the contest, I guess I'll change my category to QRP and work as much as I can with 5 watts. Of course I don't expect that to happen, but there's nothing wrong with being prepared.

In addition to the radio, I have a small power supply and the LDG Z-11 automatic antenna tuner with the W4RT one-touch-tune accessory. In fact, I have a bunch of the WR4T Electronics accessories including the FT-817 Reference book, the One BIG Punch speech compressor, a 500 Hz CW filter, and a bale.

I made a modification to the radio last year adding a small box to the rear with a PowerPole connector. The small power supply leads terminates in a PowerPole, the radio has a PowerPole connector, and the power cord for the tuner also has a PowerPole connector. I had somehow misplaced my "Y" connector for the power (so I could route juice to both the radio and tuner) so I crimped another as part of last night's exercise. Once that new power harness was in place, both the radio and tuner fired up happily. It was then time to turn to *HamMac*. *HamMac*, as you might remember, is my laptop dedicated to radio work, especially DXpeditions and travel. I have not been deliberate in keeping the software up-to-date, nor had it been backed-up in a while. I worked towards both of those goals last night as part of this exercise. Included in the effort was installation of the new drivers for the West Mountain Radio RIGtalk USB rig control interface. MacLoggerDX recognized the radio immediately. (OOPS. MLDX was also out-of-date. A quick download and now I'm running the latest version of the logging program, too.)

The rest of the evening was spent loading software, manuals, and books on to the machine. I added the ARRL Antenna Book CD, the ARRL Handbook CD, and the ON4UN Low Band DXing CD. For fun, I also added the Chuck Adams (K7QO) Morse Code course. I'm trying, but sometimes I think my brain has become a dried and brittle thing.

I need to now review what is on the laptop and determine what else, if anything, needs to be added. I'll begin that effort tonight.

The St. Brandon log (3B7C) didn't have my 20m QSO in it when I looked this morning. Hopefully, this will appear later today. I did work them. Well, I'll put it on the card and (along with the 80m contact that does appear in the on-line log) and see if they confirm it. Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:14PM (-04:00)

## Antennas for travel: bring your brain

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

I announced earlier this month that I was working on a white paper *Antennas for 100 Pound DXpeditions*. I am still working on this, and will continue working on it through the end of this year before I can claim that I have a complete *draft*. I had a very early (and sketchy) version of this up in the NE1RD Download Area for a few days to solicit comments, but I've since taken it down. I will put up a new (partial) version again after my return from St. Kitts.

This exercise is really a continuation of the research that I had been doing since the beginning of this adventure, and especially a continuation of a series of blog posts that I had done a year ago called *Antennas for travel*. In those posts I talked about fishing poles, Force-12 Sigma-5, Buddipole, Buddistick, and Superantennas MP-1. One thing I should emphasize is this: I rarely use an antenna right out of the box without thinking about what it is doing and how I can make it better. So, for example, when I say I used



the Superantenna MP-1 on Hawaii, please note that I didn't use the stubby little 4 foot whip that came with it; I used the 12 foot MFJ whip. Also, I didn't just use the stubby little 8 inch rod packaged with the antenna; I added a 22 inch Buddipole arm (or two). Check out the photo below.

What's the difference? There is a great deal of difference! If you start with a 12 foot whip and add another two feet or even four feet in Buddipole arms, you have a full-sized, or nearly full-sized antenna for 20m. Compare that to an antenna that is only a 1/2 or even 1/3 the length of a full-sized radiator you would have if you simply used the parts that came in the box. There is a great deal of difference indeed!

The most important part of any antenna system is *your brain*. Bring it, you might need it. {grin} Take a look at what an antenna system offers out of the box, then ask yourself, "what can be done to make it better?" For antennas that use the standard 3/8 inch by 20 threads, the most obvious thing you can do to better the performance of the antenna is to add a long (12 foot) whip, and extend the area under the loading coil with items like a Buddipole arm or Hustler fiberglass pole. Full-sized antennas are better than shortened compromises. Doing everything you can to eliminate the need for a loading coil also helps. (Capacity hats are worth a whole post by themselves!)

Experiment. Part of the charter of the Amateur Radio Service is to extend the knowledge of this science and art. Those are high-sounding words, but you can help fulfill that charter by being a little adventurous with the antennas you use while traveling. You'll likely get better performance, make more contacts, and have more fun.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:59AM (-04:00)

## 3B7C now QRT

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

|      | 6m | 10m | 12m | 15m | 17m | 20m | 30m | 40m | 80m | 160m |
|------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| CW   | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓    |
| SSB  | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓    |
| RTTY | ✓  | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓    |

The 3B7C online log now shows both my QSOs.

I represent just two of 135,718 QSOs in their log. Amazing!

Congratulations to the Five Star DXers Association for a job well done.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 04:57PM (-04:00)

## Propagation planning meandering

Wednesday, September 26, 2007

One of the things Sandy and I did last weekend was pull together a pile of "spare" Buddipole parts to make a rugged version of the antenna. The VersaTee is the centerpiece of the unit with three shock-cord whips (two 5-section whips and one 7-section whip for the vertical radiator), and a pair of coils from the oldest of my Buddipole systems. I put a description of the antenna on the Yahoo Buddipole Users Group (BUG)



this morning after a couple of emails were exchanged with Budd and Chris at Buddipole Antennas. Because the antenna has two shock-cord whips as elevated radials it performs much better than the "L" configuration (which has only one horizontal element). The far-field pattern should be nice and even in the azimuthal plane with a take-off angle between 20 and 30 degrees, depending on the ground

beneath it. My first contact with this setup was with Wales on 20m. It was late afternoon here so Wales was in darkness. I still got a solid 59 with just 100 watts. I'll take it!

This is another candidate for the St. Kitts trip. The package weighs about 5 pounds (less mast). One thought is to configure a 17m version and put it on top of the painters pole mast I'm using for the Mosley beam. I'd run the two horizontal elements in parallel with the boom of the Mosley. I might need to try this before I leave. The California QSO Party is this weekend. Perhaps I will assemble the Mosley one more time after all!

HamMac got more *tender loving care* last night. I put the DXpedition web site source code on it, updated iLife and iWork, and installed DXLab suite. We were lucky to have the author of this software speak to our local club recently and I was convinced that I should have some of these resources available to me for my next trip. It seems like very good stuff!

I typically use MacLoggerDX as my logging program for DXpedition and contest logging. I probably will again for this trip, but I wanted to have the option of using N1MM if the mood struck me. This logging program is a favorite of the Yankee Clipper Contest Club and is becoming a favorite of testers in general. The comfort factor with MLDX is high with me. It has never let me down. We'll see.

The next big thing that needs to be done (and I've not started) is propagation planning. Now that I have an antenna that is directional, I'll need to figure out where (and when) to point it. The ARRL Antenna Book comes with a bunch of propagation prediction tables, there are many software offerings that do predictions, and there is a wealth of information for this on the web and elsewhere. It needs to be done. I don't want to be in the contest on Friday night wondering if I should be changing bands or turning the antenna. I should have that figured out well before I leave!

Finally, a note about traffic to this site. I'll never have the following guys like KE9V enjoy with his *Long Delayed Echoes*, nor should I. Jeff is promising new podcasts and I suspect the wires will be warmed by the number of downloads that generates. I know I'm excited to hear them!

This forum is reasonable for dropping some hints about the things I'm thinking about day-to-day, but deeper planning discussions or deeper analysis is best done through another mechanism.

All that said, the readers are spread out all over the planet. (I think this map shows the last 25 readers when the snapshot was taken.) I would just like to say to everybody, **Thank you for reading!** And thank you for all the supportive comments received both here on the blog and privately. They are appreciated.

Click on the image above for a larger view of the map.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:17PM (-04:00)

## ZF2LH on 17m

Thursday, September 27, 2007

I sneaked<sup>1</sup> out of work early to come home and watch the Cubs game. Though I have a very short commute, I tuned up on 17m and found ZF2LH (Larry) on 18.15750 hanging out and putting a few QSOs in the log on the HFPack calling frequency. He was on a Buddipole and had a pretty good signal though the band was closing. I wonder what configuration he was using? Anyway, keep checking these higher bands for openings. They are open much more often than you might expect.

Before I became engrossed in the game, I was able to sort about 50 cards for the outgoing QSL buro. I'll drop that box in the mail tomorrow along with some direct requests that came this week. This means I have only a small handful of NE1RD/1 cards to turn around to be completely free of QSL cards. Hooray!

[1] I had written "snuck" as in "I had snuck out of work", but the dictionary insists that "sneaked" is preferred. Who knew?

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:12PM (-04:00)

## Melting solder

Friday, September 28, 2007

The ARRL has a new fall lineup of publications. I purchased the new Antenna book at Dayton and have ordered the new Handbook from the web site along with some other items. The first of it arrived today including the new version of *Low Power Communications* by Rich Arland (W3OSS, formerly K7SZ). [I tried to put a link in for the book but the ARRL site is tangled up at the moment.] The ARRL had a special bundling the book with a 40m QRP-Cub Transceiver Kit from MFJ. Though Sandy would likely insist otherwise, Scott needs a new toy! I will assemble the radio tomorrow. I have been missing the smell of melting solder.

I had lunch with my friend Rich (AB1HD). He had borrowed my FT-817 and some accessories to give them a workout with his digital gear. The last of the pile was returned today including the PAR End-Fedz 20/40m end-fed half-wave (EFHW) QRP antenna. I believe this particular model is discontinued and replaced with a 10/20/40m version. Both are rated at 25 watts continuous duty.

When I came home tonight I used my throw bag to get a line quickly up in a tree to see if the antenna is still in good tune. The 20m band looked great; the 40m band dipped far below 7 MHz. Adjusting the antenna is done by doubling back some of the wire on the end. I *eyeballed* the amount to change and had it resonant in the middle of the 40m band the first try.

Though this antenna is rated only for QRP or very low power work, it could still have a place on a DXpedition. If you wanted a quick way to hoist an antenna for listening for band openings, this one is a good idea. Also, you can hang this off a balcony from a high floor hotel room. It needs no counterpoise (though a small one does help) so it is ideal for those situations where you must deploy an antenna in a small area. Note that the other PAR Electronics offerings handle 100 watts or more. If the others are as nice as the one I own, I believe you'll be happy with them.

I would like to offer my humble congratulations to the 3B7C team for their efforts on St. Brandon. According to their press release this evening they put in 137,500 QSOs. Wow.

They didn't use the "no sunspots" excuse; they just got it done. First class operators and good organization prevail. I have spent many hours watching DXpedition videos, reading DXpedition articles and books, and studying all that I can find from those who do this well. Obviously I'll be scouring anything coming from the Five Star DXers relating to this trip. It is one for the record books.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:53PM (-04:00)

## MFJ Cub

Saturday, September 29, 2007

I have added "How to: Build a MFJ Cub Transceiver" to my home page "Hints and Kinks" section. You can get to my home page here: [bsandersen.com](http://bsandersen.com).

I assembled and aligned this radio in one day. Well, I did all that, took the pictures, and did the web pages in one day! So, if all you're doing is assembling the radio, it should take only a few hours.

I set up the soldering iron late this morning and turned on the computer. Before I sat at the bench I cranked up a whole list of Soldersmoke podcasts. I had been so busy lately that I had fallen behind. I'm still not caught-up, but I got through eight of them today. They made an excellent backdrop to my own bench work.

I picked one of the worst days of the year to test the radio, though. The 40m band is filled to the brim with RTTY contesters. This does not make a very good environment for checking out the sensitivity of a new receiver!

I did not mention these items in the web pages but I'll add them here. Elecraft make some Mini-Module Kits that are very helpful for breathing life into a new radio:

- DL1 Wideband 20W Dummy Load -- I used this to test and align the transmitter.
- N-gen Wideband Noise Generator (100 kHz - 500 MHz) -- Peaking the filters in a radio is tedious work but this device provides a steady and extremely wide-band signal source. Just keep fiddling until the noise is loud, louder, loudest!
- XG1 Receiver Test Oscillator / S-Meter Calibrator -- I have the original one that is a single band. Luckily, the band happened to be 40m. Elecraft has a new one that works on 3 bands (80m, 40m, 20m). Tune the radio to 7.040 and set it to 1 micro-volt. Can you hear it? If you can, that is good news indeed.

None of this helped me in my planning or packing for the St. Kitts trip. But, I love to build things and it had been a very long time since I'd built a significant kit. Melting solder is good! Tomorrow I'm back to St. Kitts planning. But tonight I'm going to play with the new rig...

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:44PM (-04:00)

## Nashua group presentation

Monday, October 01, 2007

I just returned home after presenting my *100 Pound DXpedition* talk to the Nashua Radio club. It was a good group and a good time was had by all.

This is the last presentation before my St. Kitts trip later this month. That's good. I've got lots of planning to finish before we leave. It is time to get focused.

I'm still exhilarated over building that little MFJ radio this weekend. The Elecraft K1 Sandy got me for Valentine's Day is still in the box. I think the four day weekend around Thanksgiving would be a very nice time to get this project started. I don't know if I have

the patience to take the pictures and do the write-up for the K1 like I did for the MFJ Cub, but I'm considering it.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:27PM (-04:00)

## Gear selection part 1

Wednesday, October 03, 2007

The trip is now this month. In fact, I will be on-island in three weeks. Time to get these plans finalized. I will start with the main pile of radio gear. Here is the collection as of today. Except where noted, all this stuff is organized nicely in a Pelican 1610 case.

- **ICOM IC-7000** - This will be the main transceiver for the trip. It gives me 100 watts out, DSP, internal voice and CW keyers, and rig control functions in a very small and lightweight package.
- **HamMac** - Computer logging is mandatory for any serious DXpedition or contesting effort. The computer is loaded with both MacOS X and Windows XP, runs logging programs like MacLoggerDX and N1MM, along with some software I have written for DXpeditions that process my log file and produce an HTML version for an online log searching feature for the DXpedition web site. The computer also has electronic copies of all manuals for items taken on the trip, propagation software, complete copies of the ARRL Antenna book and Handbook, and much more. This is not just a computing tool; this is also a reference library.
- **LDG AT-7000** - This tuner has the same footprint as the radio and tunes over a wide range. I hope to have only resonant antennas erect, but this is my "backup plan" should I need to run something weird like a random wire or loop around the building. It weighs very little and takes up very little space in the Pelican case. Plus, the interface is so easy: just push the "tune" button on the radio and it does all the work. I like that.
  - **Heil Headset** - I actually have three different Heil headsets:
    - Proset Plus
    - Pro Set Quiet Phone
    - Traveler Dual Side
- **Foot switch** - Keeping both hands free for logging is very important. I have never liked VOX. Perhaps the same thing could be accomplished with VOX, but I am much more comfortable with the foot switch. Just *stomp to talk* works for me!
- **Mixer** - I am bringing the Behringer UB502 mixer. I recorded every on-air moment to my iPod down on Montserrat and it provided lots of great source material for presentations. (Also, if there was a question about me goofing up a log entry, I could go back and hear the QSO again. Nice.) Plus, after hearing the audio presented by the CN2R superstation, I'm wondering if I couldn't do something like that, too.
- **Alinco power supply** - The heavy, but extremely rugged, DM-330 power supply served me well on Montserrat and will be accompanying me on this trip, too. Why this one? Lame as this might sound, this is the power supply I saw used by in a very impressive DXpedition video. Good enough for them? Good enough for me! It is a bit heavier than I would like, but seem very, very solid. Oh, and it is dead quiet, too. No hash at all. Recommended.
- **AntennaSmith antenna analyzer** - The TZ-900 AntennaSmith from Timewave has been very helpful (and instructive) this spring and summer as I evaluate various antenna configurations and ideas. This will be packed in its own small Pelican case with the charger and USB cable in a separate bag. The Analyzer, like the headsets, also gets stuffed in with my clothes.
- **Small parts and cables** - Also packed within boxes stuffed into the big Pelican case

are various cables and small parts. These include a RigTalk, patch cables for the LDG tuner, adapters for the Heil headsets, power supply for the mixer, power harnesses for the power supply, radio, and tuner, extra snap on chokes to manage stray RF along wires, and various PL259/BNC/SO-239 connectors that are invaluable when you need to "try something" while visiting that faraway place.

This is the contents of the main Pelican case (plus some extra pieces) so far. All that is left to inventory are antennas, coax, rope, and tools. I'm still sorting out things in these categories. By the way, the Pelican case now weighs about 45 pounds. Note that includes the weight of the case (22 pounds). Life is good.

I'll continue the inventory discussion over the next couple of days. Perhaps a couple of pictures might help, too. I'll see what I can do.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 03:19PM (-04:00)

## Jamaica 100 Pound DXpedition by N0NJY

Thursday, October 04, 2007

Mail has backed up in my inbox. I just found this message from Rick Donaldson (N0NJY) about his upcoming trip. Here are the details. Sounds like fun!

Hey there!

I JUST found your 100 pound DXpedition site. haha. Wife and I are leaving on Tuesday for Jamaica. Below is our announcement if you can post it someplace on your sites. We're doing this with about 35 pounds of equipment, and our two pieces of luggage. Hope we get there ok!

Thanks!

73

Rick Donaldson, N0NJY

Jamaica DXpedition 2007 is a GO!

Who: N0NJY/6Y5, KBØIRW/6Y5 (Rick and JoAnne Donaldson)

What: Jamaica DXPedition

When: 12-14 October 2007

Where: Runaway Bay, Jamaica, West Indies

Why: For FUN! Island DXpedition (Celebrating our 30th wedding anniversary and 18 years as hams together!)

QSL: Home call (N0NJY)

Operational Times: APPROXIMATELY 1700-2100 UTC on Friday and Saturday, and 1700-2000 on Sun



Listening 14.200 - 14.230 (+/- 10 KHz)

Equipment: ICOM IC-735, Alinco Power Supply, Home brew antenna (Pictures on blog site for equipment)

Blog site with much more information for comments, and QSL information etc is located at: <http://jamaicadxpedition2007.blogspot.com/>

Thanks everyone!

73,

Rick Donaldson  
US Callsign NØNJY  
Jamaica Call NØNJY/6Y5  
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:42AM (-04:00)

## Model release form

Friday, October 05, 2007

For those of you who might wonder why we went to the trouble of making a *Model Release Form* for the DXpedition, read this tidbit from today's New York Times. Using someone's image requires their permission in many cases. Best to get it... up front.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:58AM (-04:00)

## For sale: Force-12 Sigma-5

Friday, October 05, 2007

I have just put the Force-12 Sigma-5 on eBay. Click on the link to follow the auction.

It took a long time for me to come to this conclusion. I like the antenna! But, it just doesn't travel well enough for my uses. At this point, I just want to find it a good home.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 02:12PM (-04:00)

## A small wager

Sunday, October 07, 2007

I just returned from the Yankee Clipper Contest Club meeting. This is the first one held since the summer recess and clearly they wanted to "light a fire" underneath us to go out and *kick butt*. ("*Kick butt!*" is the club slogan. If you do any contesting at all, you've probably heard that on the air at least once.)

One of the suggestions from club president Mark Pride (K1RX) was to pick another club member to compete with in the next contest. I knew Paul Young (K1XM) was heading off to Saint Martin/Saint Maarten for CQ WW DX SSB so I let my hand pop up and said I'd be on St. Kitts. So, if Paul does Single Operator Low Power (SOLP), we'll compare scores.

Of course, if he does, I'm going to get my head handed to me. Paul is an extremely accomplished contester, world traveler, and very bright fellow. He's also expecting to

have a log periodic for 20-10m on a 60 foot tower at his disposal. The only questions he has about his operation are "low power or high power?" (will his amplifier be there and working), and "assisted or unassisted"?) as he doesn't know about his internet connection options.

Just to give you some idea of how much trouble I'm in here, Paul's previous effort for this contest on Bermuda as VP9I delivered 2,905,112 points with 3,384 QSOs, 91 zones, and 301 countries. Putting this number in perspective is easy: Paul's single effort in one contest last year exceeded the sum of all my points from all contests. Ever.

Paul is the *real deal* and the "bet" is on. I now have one more goal for the trip (though realistically, this should be put squarely in the "stretch goal" category!). I'll make a note on the DXpedition web site how this worked out.

My beloved Chicago Cubs will need to wait another year to give its fans a championship. In the mean time, the Red Sox continue to perform. Even after a quarter century here in New England I'm still a Cub fan first and Red Sox fan second. So, while the Cubbies go home to lick their wounds, it looks like the Red Sox will advance to the next round.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 06:16PM (-04:00)

## Pre-St. Kitts equipment check

Monday, October 08, 2007



We leave first thing in the morning two weeks from tomorrow. There is still much to do. I spent tonight doing a final equipment check for the radios, power supplies, and recording equipment. Here it is (though it will be organized better on St. Kitts).

Just before the Montserrat trip I also did this exercise. I set up a station with only those things found in the Pelican case. I participated in the North American QSO Party just long enough to be sure things were working. After putting 50 QSOs in the

log I packed everything back up and began checking antenna stuff, coax, tools, and so on.

As fellow blogger David (K2DBK) says, "Turn in your log!" I did even for this very light effort and actually beat a few other fellows here in MA. Go figure!

I have had several inquiries about the use of the mixer and the capture of audio. The system is quite simple. The Behringer UB502 Eurorack mixer takes audio from several sources and combines them into a single audio feed. The connections are as follows:

- Icom IC-7000 external speaker to mixer input 2/3
- Yaesu FT-817 headphone jack to mixer input 4/5
- Heil headphones to the mixer headphone jack
- iPod headphone jack is connected to mixer tape in
- Mixer tape out is connected to the Belkin TuneTalk iPod recording device

There is a button on the mixer called *Tape to Mix* which allows you to play back the iPod audio through the headphones without changing any wiring.

The mixer weighs very little but the *brick on a leash* power supply is hefty. Also, in order to keep the audio clean, I need to snap on a bunch of ferrite (which also eats into my weight budget). This is a tradeoff I'm willing to make, though, so I can meet one of the DXpedition goals: capture audio and video from the adventure so I can show people how much fun I had later!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:19PM (-04:00)

## Contesting tips by K9JY

Wednesday, October 10, 2007

I got a note today from Scot (K9JY). He posted a summary of his excellent 30 Ham Radio Contesting Tips and wondered if his fellow bloggers might wish to weigh-in. Of course!

First, a big *tip of the hat* to Scot for pulling this list together. I have advocated many of these things but did not have them so succinctly stated or well-organized in my notes, or this blog. His observations about using QRP operations to sharpen your skills are dead-on, for example. I can attest that this approach has helped me a great deal in the brief time I've been in the hobby.

Many of the items on the Scot's list also appeared in the presentations at Contesting University, but Scot left off one very important point that was emphasized during those classes at Dayton: successful contesting requires that you *keep your butt in the chair*. If you are not in the chair, you are not scoring points. Stay in the chair. Stay focused. Keep working.

Another common mantra in contesting is, "If you're not CQing, your losing." As somebody who works contests at low power or QRP power levels, I find this a bit harsh, but there is wisdom here. Search and pounce (S&P) can provide a steady stream of points, but calling CQ and establishing a *run* is the only way to win those big contests. While you can't do this the whole time when you run low power or QRP, there are times when this is possible. In one contest I found an empty space on 80m and started calling CQ. After a few minutes I had a nice run going. The contest required the exchange of power levels (perhaps it was ARRL SS, I forget) and contact after contact received my exchange--including the indication that I was running QRP. One fellow, quite amazed at what he heard, asked for a repeat of the exchange and then asked, "you're QRP and you're calling CQ?" Amused, I replied, "Sure! You heard me fine, right? Why not?!"

That one thing: learning to be heard, might be the most important skill contesting will help sharpen. Whether it be in a contest or trying to break that pile-up for that rare DX station, learning how to be heard above the fray is an extremely valuable skill and contesting might be the most fun way to hone it.

Again, my congratulations to Scot for a fine series in September. Thank you!

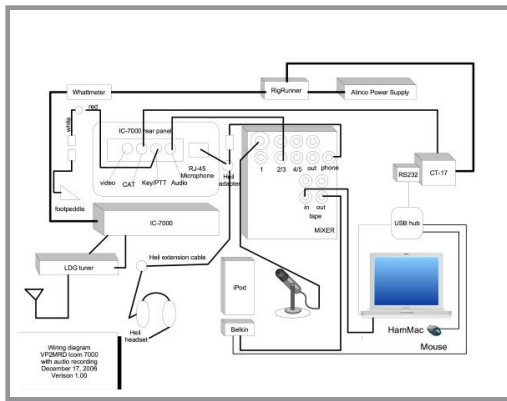
Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:49PM (-04:00)

## Station wiring drawing revisited

Thursday, October 11, 2007

I had forgotten that I had made this drawing for the Montserrat trip. For those of you wondering what the wiring diagram looks like for the radio, computer, mixer, and so on, here it is:

The only differences between this diagram and the setup I had the other night are (1) no Whattmeter, (2) I routed audio out from the iPod back to the mixer instead of taking it from the computer, (3) I'm using the RIGtalk serial adapter instead of the Icom CT-17,



and (4) no external microphone (I decided I didn't need it).

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:44AM (-04:00)

## More talk and a another tip of the hat

Friday, October 12, 2007

I received another invitation to present my talk *The 100 Pound DXpedition* last night. So, there are two chances to hear me in November. I will be presenting at the Montachusett Amateur Radio Association meeting on November 14, 2007. I will also be presenting at the Nashoba Valley Amateur Radio Club on November 15, 2007. Meeting details may be found on the corresponding web sites.

Congratulations to Scot Herrick (K9JY) for being spotted by Stan Horzepa (WA1LOU) in his Surfin' column this week. Scot's contesting tips are superb and Stan's posting will give it the attention those tips (and Scot's blog) deserve. Well done.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 12:23PM (-04:00)

## I am a junk-box junkie

Friday, October 12, 2007

I am planning to bring my Yaesu FT-817 to St. Kitts as my backup rig. Should something horrible happen to the IC-7000 I would still be able to make some contacts. In fact, if I were to enter the CQ WW DX SSB contest in the QRP category I would set the record for that category on St. Kitts by default as no QRP entry has ever been made from there!

One problem with the FT-817 is the lack of a speech compressor. Speech compression can make an enormous difference in putting *punch* in your signal, especially at QRP levels.

A few years ago I purchased two of the DYC-817 compressors from Box 73, a web site associated with FUNK Amateur radio magazine. I assembled them both and gave one to a good friend Steve (W1CTO). We then traveled to Maine to the house of Steve's in-laws to operate Field Day QRP. The units appeared to work fine for the first hour or so, then Steve's unit died. About an hour later, mine died. I can't explain it. {sigh}

The failure of the DYC-817s was pretty disappointing. And, I still had the problem! I next opted for the W4RT One BIG Punch, a circuit board inserted into the hand microphone for the radio. This works very well! I could just use this hand microphone but I would much rather use my headset and foot pedal. So, I'm back to where I started: I would like to have a speech compressor available for the FT-817.

I started looking around for a solution to this problem again last weekend and stumbled across the FAR Circuits SSM2165 kit. Well, "kit" is a little bit of a stretch. FAR Circuits sells the board bundled with the ICs, one of the two voltage regulators, and an inductor.

The ICs and inductor are surface mount devices. The other components: resistors, potentiometers, capacitors, connectors, and enclosure are left to the builder to scrounge. The board and ICs arrived today and I began the scavenger hunt this evening looking for the passive components. I had most of the resistors and capacitors in my *junk box* but came up empty on the circuit board-mounted pots and connectors. I'll drop by Electronics Plus in the morning to pick up the remaining parts. Perhaps I'll have a working stand-alone compressor for the FT-817 complete by the end of the weekend. Or, perhaps I'll have a *non-working* stand-alone compressor by the end of the weekend. That's the problem with junk-box projects of course: they don't always work first time. If it doesn't work first time, it will likely sit until after my return from St. Kitts since I've got very little time left before we depart and there are many unfinished tasks still on my list. Cross your fingers.

Finally, a few quick notes out to my fellow bloggers:

- Jeff (KE9V) mentioned my videos in his Long Delayed Echoes blog. Thanks, Jeff.
- Steve (K9ZW) mentioned my MFJ Cub Transceiver pages in his With Varying Frequency blog. Thanks, Steve.
- Scot (K9JY) got a well deserved call out from the ARRL main page today for his Amateur Radio Contesting blog. Yeah, I'm repeating myself (I mentioned this earlier) but Scot's blog is really good stuff! Thanks, Scot.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:14PM (-04:00)

## W2IHY

### Monday, October 15, 2007

If you've not been visiting spaceweather.com you've been missing... nothing. The Sun's face is blank today. The Sun's face was blank yesterday. The Sun's face was blank the day before yesterday. Are you sensing a pattern? I'm new to the hobby. This is my first solar minimum. **Somebody! Please tell me this isn't forever!**

To paraphrase, "Everybody talks about the space weather, but nobody *does* anything about it!" Well, today I did... sort of.

I received a couple of notes in response to my post "I am a junk-box junkie" asking me if I had considered the high-end audio components from W2IHY Technology. Specifically, the EQplus unit provides processing that adds compression and depth to the audio to give it a very nice "DX punch". I had seen these units at Dayton but had dismissed the boxes as unnecessary. I am lucky to have a reasonably good voice for HF and usually have no trouble being heard, but the extremely poor conditions at the bottom of the cycle, and my friendly wager made me reconsider this option. At this point, I believe I could use all the help I can get!

I called W2IHY just after noon today and caught Julius Jones just as he was trying to slip out for lunch. I could have placed the order on-line but I wanted to be sure that I ordered all of the right stuff the first time. After all, I leave in just a week! I'm really glad I did this over the phone.

The conversation started out easily enough. Mr. Jones is quite personable and put me at ease immediately. I reciprocated, of course. He asked, "what is your call sign?" ""NERD!," I said. "N E 1 R D." With that he laughed out loud and it took him a few moments to regain his composure. "I bet you're an engineer", he said, still chuckling. "Indeed I am!", I replied.

Now it was down to business. As long as I'm doing this, I got all the cables necessary to drive all the radios I own: Icom IC-746Pro, Icom IC-7000, Yaesu FT-817, and Elecraft K2

(with Kenwood microphone wiring). I arranged for quick shipping (though he normally sends things Priority Mail which is reasonably fast). It should arrive in the next couple of days.

The new audio "solution" also generates a new "problem": I have no place in the big Pelican case for the new gizmo. Ah, the challenges of packing never end.

I'll report here what I discover about this wondrous device before, during, and after the trip.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:00PM (-04:00)

## The eve of St. Kitts

Sunday, October 21, 2007

The week before a vacation is always hectic. There are things to do around the house, projects to finish at work, and of course all the preparations for the trip. We have one more day at home before our sunrise flight to Miami Tuesday. We'll need the time.

Packing is not yet complete. I had hoped to have this done at least a week ago, but failed miserably.

Execution on this trip planning and preparations has been sloppy at best. I have a thousand excuses but they are all lame. Truth be told, I have not been able to apply the same focus for this trip that I have put towards previous trips. We'll see if the results suffer because of it.

I currently have three bags packed:

- A Pelican 1610 case with the radio, tuner, power supply, mixer, and lots of cables.
- A golf bag with the Mosley Mini-32-A, two painter poles cut to be a mast for the beam, a 33-foot mast, a 40-foot mast, a couple of 20-foot fishing poles, and a few 48-inch fiberglass rods that I'll use to hold up radials.
- A soft-sided long bag with tools, coax, headphones, the W2IHY box, and the Timewave analyzer.

The total weight of the above is about 150 pounds, still less than 100 pounds per person, but more than I would prefer. And, that doesn't include the things I pulled out tonight including coax, the backup radio (FT-817), and the small Buddipole system. The last item is most troubling. The Buddipole has always been my *safety net*. I can make an antenna for any band 80-6 with it and its tripod eliminates needs for external supports. If there is room (and weight) available in the fourth bag, I'll try to sneak it in. It would be too weird without it.

The ARRL had an announcement for me which in the *ARLD043 DX news* which read like this:

ST. KITTS AND NEVIS, V4. Scott, NE1RD will be QRV as V4/NE1RD from St. Kitts, IOTA NA-104, from October 24 to 31. He plans to run QRP power in the upcoming CQ WW SSB contest. QSL to home call.

Well, I'm not planning on running QRP, but the rest is good. I'm not sure where they got the idea I'd be running QRP. Perhaps they read my goals section on the DXpedition web site where I mentioned QRP, or maybe because I'd been QRP in the last couple of years they thought I'd repeat on St. Kitts. For the record: I'm planning on running Low Power (100 watts) unless the IC-7000 dies. If it does, I'm down to the FT-817 (assuming I find a way to bring it) and I'm back down to QRP.

Sandy is packing clothes and books while I type this. I still have that task ahead of me. My next entry will likely be from St. Kitts on Wednesday. I'll try to post pictures of the installed antennas.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:24PM (-04:00)

## Pushing limits

Tuesday, October 23, 2007

When I first got this crazy idea of traveling with the radio I wanted a *catch phrase* which would convey the approach quickly. The tag line I settled on was, "Go light, work the world." Those words circle my logo for *The 100 Pound DXpedition*. Everyone works within limits whether they be space, time, money, or, in my case, weight and volume. I'm just more explicit about it.

Each trip I've made has become successively more complicated--and heavy. The general idea of traveling within the limits of checked airline baggage has been consistent, but the bags have been getting fuller and fuller. This trip has pushed these limits to the breaking point.

I don't think I was clear-headed about this until yesterday, when I stared at the pile of bags and wondered aloud, "why is there so much stuff?!" The answer relates back to the trip goals. In previous trips I was happy just to pack a self-contained and workable station within the weight and size limits imposed by the airlines. That, as I hope I have shown, can be easily done. This trip had additional pressures.

I'm heading to St. Kitts in the morning to work in the CQ WW DX SSB contest this weekend. My usual, and modest, goals of bringing just enough equipment to get on the air and participate have been replaced by more aggressive goals of bringing a competitive contesting station. I'm not saying this change in focus and goals has been a mistake, but as I begin thinking about it with a clear head (finally) I don't recall ever considering whether trying to assemble such a station under the *100 Pound DXpedition* banner was reasonable. Indeed, as I reflect on the last few days of feverish packing, it may not be. Allow me to explain.

The radio, power supply, automatic tuner, and even audio mixer and cabling for the station fits neatly into a Pelican 1610 case and weighs well under 50 pounds. In fact, because I've used the foam padding liberally when I organized the case, I ran out of space long before I approached the weight limit. This collection of equipment is nearly identical to that brought to Montserrat earlier this year and will likely be the "standard set" I'll take on most trips. This isn't where the problems arose.

*Feature creep* manifested itself in antennas and accessories. In previous trips I was largely content with bringing a Buddipole which could be configured as a full sized antenna for any single band 20-6m, and some fishing poles or masts for the lower bands. If I needed to change bands, I would take a few moments to walk to the antenna and make the adjustment. Sure, it took time, but the antenna system was light, versatile, simple, and reliable. This seemed like a nice compromise for the time it takes to configure and reconfigure it.

Then I got greedy. I didn't want to leave the operating position during the contest. Being on the air during the contest from a little spot in paradise wasn't enough. I wanted to be *competitive!* I wanted antennas available for all the contesting bands (save 160m) set up and ready for use. I didn't want to lose time (and points) by fiddling with antennas when I should be *running!* This is where things started to go wrong.

I convinced myself that a tribander, a light one to be sure, would give me three bands with one piece of coax. A win, right? Well, perhaps. The Buddipole system weighs about

8 pounds. The tribander weighs a little more by the time you add in hardware to mount it. What's a few pounds, right? Then I needed something to mount it upon. I needed a mast. Two 8-foot painters poles would do nicely. Toss in another five to six pounds. Can you see where this is going?

Unwilling to recognize the big uptick in weight, I assuaged my conscience by telling myself I was getting three bands on one piece of coax. Yes. That was true. But I always could have three bands with that one piece of coax--just not simultaneously!

My approach of using fishing poles and fiberglass masts for holding up the ends of vertical antennas for the lower bands has always leveraged the height of a second or even third floor balcony. A 20 foot fishing pole may therefore hold up a 33-foot wire if that pole is fixed to a third story balcony railing. A 20 foot fishing pole weighs about a pound. That's a good deal!

My selection of the villa for this trip was done hastily and, I fear, poorly. No such second or third story balconies exist so far as I can tell. So, my masterful use of that additional height in previous trips cannot be repeated here. It gets a lot harder if you are trying to hold up a 66 foot 80m vertical from near ground level. In previous trips, I was able to get the 33 foot mast (about 4 pounds) up high enough to support the 66 foot wire vertical for 80m. It may have run down at an angle, but it worked nicely.

This trip forced me to bring out the 40-foot collapsible Spider Beam mast. It is a magnificent piece of engineering, but it weighs 8 pounds! And, I still need to bring the 33-foot mast for the 40/15m vertical wire antenna. So, I just tacked on 8 extra pounds to accomplish the same things I've done previously. Do things start to sound like they are out of control yet?

Let's review: I previously used the Buddipole for 6-20m (8 pounds). I've now replaced that with about 16-20 pounds of Mosley beam, mast material, boom-to-mast couplers, and hardware. I previously deployed 40m and 80m vertical wire antennas with 5 pounds of masts; this time it will take 12 pounds of masts to do the same job. This is an increase of almost 20 pounds from previous efforts. Yes, the beam should give me some gain--a little--but is it worth it?

Tucked neatly in my carry-on bag is the FT-817 and LDG Z11 tuner. The accessory kit is for the radio is packed in one of the other bags. I decided that having no back-up radio at all was probably stupid. I had taken back-up radios on almost all of my other trips and I shouldn't skimp here. Note that I don't count the weight of my carry-on stuff in my 100 pound budget. It isn't checked. So, this, too, is extra since it used to be included in the weight budget. Add another 5 pounds to the overage.

Greed is still working overtime. I've had compliments on my audio when operating from various locations. The Heil headsets do a very good job and I'm lucky to have a voice that drives them well. But, the bottom of the solar cycle is upon us and I wanted *that little extra punch* you get from high-end audio processing. I ordered the W2IHY EQ Plus system with all the cables for Icom IC-746Pro and IC-7000, Yaesu, Kenwood (for my K2). I'll reserve final judgement until we see the on-air results, but initial indications are this system works very well. It also weighs about 8 pounds packed. There's another 8 tipping the scale. DO you see the pattern yet?

My *100 Pound DXpedition* is weighing in at about 210 pounds right now. The Pelican case comes in at 45. The two checked rolling bags come in right at 50 pounds (actually, they weighed in at 51 pounds each but the nice lady at the counter didn't ding me on it). The golf case came in at 65 pounds. Sure, the two of us checked all this in so we met the main criteria for a *100 Pound DXpedition*: travel only with what will fit in checked bags, but there is too much stuff! Way too much!

This trip can serve as both a positive and negative example. On the plus side, it is possible to bring a very large compliment of gear even within the airline weight and space



restrictions. I have all of the above plus tools, antenna analyzer, dacron rope, bungies, a couple of Heil Headsets (both the noise canceling units and the *Traveler Dual*), and more. It fit. It (somehow) made the weight cutoff. I should be able to deploy an impressive station while on St. Kitts.

The negatives for my execution are numerous and somewhat embarrassing. I did not think through the implications of trying to do intensive contesting. I just started chucking stuff in the pile--the very thing I've been preaching against all this time! I didn't fully understand or explore what tradeoffs were being made, and when I did attempt to do the math, I did it badly. Swapping the beam in for the Buddipole wasn't an even trade, though I kept assuring myself it was. Finally, I just got gadget-happy with the W2IHY unit. Sure, it will do a great job and I'll probably be very glad I have it, but I didn't even consider the weight when I ordered it. I wanted it, I knew it would help, I assured myself that I would "figure out how to pack it later." Duh. Bad plan.

All along I've tried to say what I've done right, what I've done wrong, and what I'd change to make things better. I plenty for all those categories tonight! I believe this is also the last of these major trips I'll take for a while. I was lucky enough to go to Montserrat with a great bunch of guys earlier this year. I'll be on St. Kitts in just hours. I'll have participated in one of my favorite contests from paradise by the end of the weekend. And, I believe I've figured out most of this *100 Pound DXpedition* stuff. I hope I've shared enough here that you have figured it out, too. Maybe I just need a vacation from all these vacations! {grin}

I hope to be set up on St. Kitts this time tomorrow. Watch the packet spotting network for V4/NE1RD. 73 from Miami, Florida!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 11:15PM (-04:00)

## Live! From St. Kitts!

### Wednesday, October 24, 2007

We are on St. Kitts! We arrived this afternoon and spent some time getting unpacked, doing a grocery run, and settling in. After spending a little time in the pool to cool off, I was able to build and deploy the 80m vertical. (I did not cut and solder the wire at home; I did that here.) I will assemble and erect the other antennas in the morning.

I've not unpacked the IC-7000 yet but was able to connect the FT-817 to the 80m wire vertical and give it a listen. It was not encouraging. I have S9 level noise here on 80m. I don't know if it is conditions, the location, or a combination of the two. I'll know more tomorrow.

The Red Sox and Colorado are on. We're stretched out and enjoying the game. Go Sox!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:19PM (-04:00)

## Rain

### Thursday, October 25, 2007

All antennas are now assembled and tested. I was able to make a run on 17m mid-day before taking the time to assemble the Mosley beam. I wish I could have done more, but the tribander took more time to assemble and deploy than I had estimated.

I was going to use one of the bedrooms for my operating position for the contest but the large table on the upper veranda looked too inviting. So, the radio and associated

electronics are now set up outside. At this moment they are covered with plastic as it is raining heavily. I believe the table is sheltered sufficiently to allow me to work there over the weekend. We'll see if I make a frantic move mid-contest.

I hope to get on 17m again in the morning for an hour but I do need to rest up and save my voice for the 48 hour contest.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 08:52PM (-04:00)

## Photos posted

### Friday, October 26, 2007

I have added some photos to the DXpedition web site. I'll try to add more today. For those of you with Google Earth, you can get a different perspective by entering these coordinates:

N17.29725 W062.68932

We need to make a run to the grocery store to stock up for the contest. I'll be on the air doing some final system checks after that.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:41AM (-04:00)

## A bust?

### Friday, October 26, 2007

I had reserved judgement until now but I believe I'm going to have some serious trouble with this location. There is a very large hill between the villa and North America. I have a straight shot to Europe and possibly Africa, but the other directions are going to be a serious problem. At this point, the contest appears to be a "Worked all Brazil" effort with a Trinidad and Grenada thrown in for good measure. It will no doubt be better after European sunrise, but right now I'm not encouraged.

Google Earth probably gave me all the hints I needed to see this coming--but I booked the villa before looking. We had such great locations on St. John and on Montserrat I was lulled into the false belief that they'd all be that good. I was lazy, and it is costing me.

Before anybody starts feeling badly for me, I should state clearly that I'm OK with all this. I'm going to make the best of it and have fun. I might not "kick butt" like I had hoped in this contest, but I'll still do well enough to have fun.

Speaking of "kick butt" (the battle cry of the Yankee Clipper Contest Club members) I have talked with other club members already. The folks working J3A were so loud I needed to turn on the attenuator in order to work them. They've got the right idea: find a great location and keep going back.

The other problem I'm having has nothing to do with hardware or location. My callsign is "V4/NE1RD" Victor Four Stroke November Echo One Romeo Delta. For some reason this has confused just about everybody I've talked with on the air. The mangling and tortured miscomprehension of this simple series of characters has been an eye-opener for me. When I was first assigned the call I made an attempt to get a "real call" like V44RD. My messages were met with silence. I should have pushed harder. The combination of having a stroke in the call couple with a callsign that is somewhat familiar in contesting (NE1RD) has made most of the scant few QSOs I've made an exercise in repeats and fills. The lesson: get a local call. Period. This business of having the licensing agency

giving you a call like "V4/NE1RD" is goofy.

Which brings me to another epiphany I've had. If you are thinking of going someplace, get the license first, then shop around for the location. Licensing seems to be the big hang-up in all this. The Montserrat licensing exercise was nightmarish. (No need to repeat all that here. Go read the blog entries from last year.) This St. Kitts thing with the "V4/" for the callsign after a long wait is equally frustrating. At this point, I think my order of assignments would be:

1. Pick the place you want to go
2. Get a reasonable license. Can't get one? Go back to step one.
3. Look for a private, secluded villa on a hill. Can't find one? Go to step 1.
4. Work out all the logistics. Can you get there easily (and inexpensively)? No? Go to step 1.

Pretty harsh, but I'm starting to think this is the correct approach.

Finally, some common sense perspective. I'm on vacation. I'm down here in a beautiful place with the love of my life. We're both tired and stress out (which is why we needed the vacation). I'm going to relax and have fun. If the radio thing doesn't work out 100% this time, so be it. I brought an excellent book (or two), we have a pool, we have a great view, and we have each other. There will always be another contest.

73 from paradise!

-- Scott

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:53PM (-04:00)

## Sense enough to come in out of the rain

Saturday, October 27, 2007

My callsign (V4/NE1RD) continues to bollix up operators world-wide. But, even with this minor annoyance I managed to put nearly 300 Qs in the contest log. This is far below the pace I had hope to make. I was able to work a few folks from home including some guys from the YCCC and my local club.

My operating position on the veranda is working reasonably well, at least during the day. Nighttime is a different story. I've been fighting off either mosquitos or heavy rain. Tonight's storm came up quickly and included some very high wind gusts. We scrambled to get the radio stuff inside and I lowered the beam to reduce the stress on those painters poles.

This brings up an important point. Though the *100 Pound DXpedition* is principally a *portable* operation, you still need to have an antenna deployment that is resilient to the elements. Storms and high winds can come up quickly, especially in a place like the Caribbean. Antennas and masts should be guyed or strapped securely to a building or fence. It does you no good to bring a great antenna system only to have it destroyed by the first breeze.

As far as antennas go, the Mosley Mini-32-A has performed very well. I am able to do some A/B comparisons between the beam and my 40m/15m vertical and the beam is much louder (as you would expect). I have made most of my contacts on the yagi. The 40m vertical is up but I had very few options for where I could run the elevated radials. So, this antenna is not performing as it did on Montserrat but is still getting out. I expect to make more 40m contacts tomorrow before the contest ends.

The band that is most problematic seems to be 80m. The noise on this band is consistently S9 or worse. I have overheard others complaining about it, too, so I don't

believe it is specific to this location. That's too bad. With all this extra space on the phone band, it would have been handy to have this band open and quiet.

I'll try to rise early to get back on the bands. I'd like to put in a good effort on this contest even with the limitations discussed. After the contest I'll likely pack up the 80m and 40m verticals and stick with the beam and 17m vertical for the remainder of my stay.

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:24PM (-04:00)

## Half

### Sunday, October 28, 2007

The word of the day is half. We are about *half-way* through our vacation and CQ WW SSB is behind me. The villa, while beautiful, is about *half* what I needed. The building is nestled against a hill with the bulk of North America sheltered behind the mass. I had a pretty good shot towards the East and South but the other *half* of the compass was a compromise at best.

I had deployed antennas 10,15,20,40, and 80m for the contest. A 17m antenna was also erected upon our arrival so I could work before and after the event. Of those six bands, only *half* were usable during the contest. The tribander (Mosley Mini-32-A) did a pretty good job (with the caveats I'll list below) but the low bands were a bust. There was no way to deploy these wire verticals against this hill so that the radials could be elevated or even run in a reasonable way. As it turns out, 80m was so noisy that lots of us here in the Caribbean had trouble with it. Pounding rain storms and lightning probably contributed to the problems.

I had hoped to spend most of the 48 hours working the contest but probably only worked *half* of that. My operating position was on the veranda and either rain or bugs were attacking at night. Given the shape of the low bands (and my antennas), it made more sense to watch baseball.

As a consequence of losing *half* those bands I made fewer than *half* of the QSOs I had hoped to make. My original trip goals looked to post about 1000 QSOs. I made about 385, with all but 8 on the tribander. Below is the summary of my efforts.

Summary:

Band QSOs Zones Countries

```
-----  
160: 0 0 0  
80: 1 1 1  
40: 7 4 7  
20: 115 16 44  
15: 238 14 31  
10: 24 7 8  
-----
```

Total: 385 42 91 Total Score = 79,800

This total is what I expected to have about *half-way* through the contest. Instead, it is my final (claimed) total. Needless to say, my little wager with fellow YCCC teammate Paul (K1XM) will go easily to Paul's FS/K1XM effort. I heard him running a nice pile-up several times during the weekend. (I just took a peek at the 3830 contest list looking for his post but it has not appeared.)

Now that the contest is over, we'll be relaxing and putting QSOs into the log at a more relaxed rate. Though we are only *half-way* through the week here I decided to take all the antennas down save the 17m fishing pole vertical. Weather forecasts call for

thunderstorms over the next day or so and both Sandy and I were spending *half* the night going out to the veranda to see if the beam and masts had blown onto the golf course. We both need a good night sleep. I decided it would be better to just disassemble and pack these things up before the weather turned worse and we drove ourselves crazy worrying about this stuff.

This was a *100 Pound DXpedition* but even that goal was only met *half-way*. The total weight of the checked bags exceeded 200 pounds. I hope to ditch some of this weight here on St. Kitts before we head back to the airport. The painters poles, while light, were seriously stressed by the trade winds down here. I'm still looking for a reasonable way to get this yagi in the air. In fact, it was only up about *half* as high as it should have been--barely peeking over the roof of the villa. I need to think about this problem as the antenna was coupling with the metal in the roof on 20m until I cranked it up a bit (further stressing the painter poles).

I plan on packing up about *half* the radio equipment in the morning. I'll take the audio processor out of the loop, I've already removed the recording equipment, and I'll probably switch to the Heil Traveler headset just to lighten the load on my head. It weighs about *half* as much as the Heil noise canceling model.

As of this writing we are about *half-way* through the Sox/Denver game. I've written more than *half* of what I wanted to say but I'm too tired to continue. Time to put up my feet, grab something cool to drink, and watch the game. 73 from St. Kitts!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:00PM (-04:00)

## V4/NE1RD QRT

Tuesday, October 30, 2007

Just a few hours after my last blog entry the flu hit and hit hard. I'm still dehydrated and haven't eaten anything since Sunday evening, but I am feeling better. My plans to casually work 17m after the contest were scuttled as a result. For those of you keeping vigil on the spotting network, thank you--and sorry.

I am very, very behind in email. At this point, I don't think I'll even try to catch up until I return home on Thursday. I do appreciate all the messages I've received, though! Thanks!

This will be the last entry from St. Kitts. 73!

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 01:03PM (-04:00)

## St. Kitts lessons learned

Thursday, November 01, 2007

We are home from our trip to St. Kitts. I thought I would capture some of the more important lessons learned from this trip while these details were fresh in my mind. Here they go in no particular order.

1. **Concentrate on goals** - I've always been big on setting and making goals for a *100 Pound DXpedition*. For one thing, this provides focus during the packing effort as you ask yourself on each decision, "Is this helping me reach my goals?" During the trip the goals help provide a concrete measure of your effectiveness in both your planning and operation. If you are meeting your goals, or on pace to meet your goals, your plan is working. Finally, once you meet your goals you can take a breath and celebrate a bit for your job well done. All of these things make sense if your goals make sense. My goals for this trip did not make sense. The three state goals were:

DXCC

2. 1000 Qs in the contest

3. New record for V4 for CQ WW DX SSB SOLP

1. **Get a local call sign** - I am truly shocked by the listening skills of some operators. There will be some operators who will have NE1RD and zone 5 in their log this year because they logged *what they wanted to hear* instead of *what they heard*. That was both their problem and mine, though, as my goofy call sign (V4/NE1RD) caused many repeats and much confusion. All of this ate precious time during the contest and cost me several multipliers.
2. **Terrain and building must be accommodating** - Like the "get a local call sign" point, I covered this in a blog entry this week. A building providing multiple floors and high accessible points is crucial for getting your antennas in the clear. This is especially crucial if you plan on operating on the low bands.
3. **You don't have to operate on the low bands** - I have been trying to bring enough stuff to create antennas for all bands 6m through 80m. In fact, you can have a lot of fun and be very successful if you were to bring just the smallest of antennas that cover 10m-20m. With the exception of a couple of QSOs, that is all I worked on this trip. If I had declared up-front that these were the only bands to be worked I could have saved the weight of two masts (12 pounds), two 100 foot runs of coax (8 pounds), and the setup and tear-down time of these two antennas. Swap the Mosley Mini-32-A tribander for a simple Buddipole (8 pounds) or TW Antennas TW2010 (10 pounds or so) and not only does the weight budget drop, the need for a hard-sided golf bag to handle those long parts is eliminated, too. If you are trying to operate on the low bands it requires the long masts and the golf bag. Eliminating that goal, avoiding 30m-160m, simplifies things greatly.
4. **Tools are heavy** - I am carrying too many tools. The host can almost certainly provide everything but soldering iron and solder (I'll still carry those). If you are traveling to a villa or home where your host can provide tools it saves you from carrying them. I didn't ask my host if tools were available prior to the trip but found a set more complete than the one I brought in a closet. Knowing I could have left the tool bag at home would have saved me about 5-10 pounds.
5. **Your operating position is important** - Again, because of my experiences on St. John, Deer Isle, and Montserrat, I thought there would always be something I could borrow from the house to make a reasonable operating position. It would be a small table, comfortable yet stiff chair, and so on. No such items were available at the St. Kitts villa. I'm sure the host would have provided one had I asked in advance. I did not. Next time I will.
6. **Travel medicines are important** - I should have packed Imodium or similar medications on this trip. I spent from 4 O'clock Monday morning until Wednesday morning with symptoms of food poisoning. I was miserable and dangerously dehydrated by the end of it. I spent time reading about oral rehydration therapy and drinking *Cool Blue* Gatorade. I was really quite nervous about traveling. Luckily, things had run their course by the time the cab came to take us to the airport. It could have been worse--and messier.  
In retrospect, I had not been careful about making sure my immunizations were up-to-date, I had not had a flu shot, I did not carry anti-diarrheal medications, nor did I have or purchase insect repellent (the mosquitos ate us alive), or make other reasonable and prudent medical planning. Between the scores of mosquito bites, two presumed tick bites (false alarms), and the bout of toilet hugging, I think I've finally learned this lesson.
7. **This is a vacation** ... not an assignment. I've made this whole thing too big, really, trying to push limits, capture audio, create a DVD, blog about it, make a web site,

compete with other in the local contesting club, and so on. If I'm not careful, I'll forget this is supposed to be fun and relaxing. In fact, that line was crossed some time ago.

I do enjoy these trips. I enjoy playing with the radio. I also enjoy sharing what I've learned in the hopes that someone else might happen upon these words and try it for themselves. But, too much of this *sharing* leads to a life lived in a fish bowl. After nearly 400 blog entries and several web sites, I believe I've shown just about all that needs to be shown to give a reasonably motivated reader a head-start in their adventure. I believe I pushed myself a little too hard on this one.

There were more lessons learned, of course, but these were the big ones. Now that I am home and resting comfortably in my own bed, I can reflect upon these and others. Soon it will be time to plan another *100 Pound DXpedition*.

V4 St. Kitts & Nevis record from the CQ WW web site.

| Power | Call        | Score     | Qs   | Zone | Cty | Year |
|-------|-------------|-----------|------|------|-----|------|
| A     | V47KP(W2OX) | 6,196,554 | 4830 | 125  | 421 | 02   |
| 28    | V47NS(W9NY) | 1,230,732 | 3054 | 34   | 119 | 00   |
| 21    | VP2KAC      | 1,783,500 | 3941 | 37   | 137 | 81   |
| 14    | VP2KAA      | 2,011,185 | 4186 | 37   | 150 | 81   |
| 7     | VP2KAE      | 432,942   | 1600 | 27   | 91  | 81   |
| 3.7   | V44NK       | 26,352    | 353  | 11   | 25  | 97   |

|      |              |         |      |    |    |    |
|------|--------------|---------|------|----|----|----|
| LA   | V44NK        | 127,566 | 857  | 33 | 81 | 95 |
| L28  | V47TV(OH3VV) | 857,934 | 3284 | 31 | 95 | 91 |
| L21  | V47NK        | 67,320  | 660  | 16 | 35 | 96 |
| L14  | NC2N/V44     | 7,595   | 127  | 14 | 35 | 04 |
| L7   | V49A(EW1AR)  | 135,408 | 705  | 18 | 75 | 05 |
| L3.7 | V49A(EW1AR)  | 40,227  | 298  | 16 | 53 | 04 |

Q21 V44/EW1AR(NC2N) 15,708 117 14 37 04

|    |       |            |       |     |     |    |
|----|-------|------------|-------|-----|-----|----|
| MS | V47Z  | 4,758,814  | 4308  | 119 | 402 | 94 |
| M2 | V47NS | 11,531,688 | 7154  | 134 | 530 | 02 |
| MM | VP2KC | 37,770,012 | 17767 | 175 | 677 | 79 |

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 09:50PM (-04:00)

## All good things

### Friday, November 02, 2007

Before we knew it was Noel Sandy and I weathered its strong winds and driving rain on St. Kitts. After passing us it went on to wreak havoc on Cuba and Hispaniola before stalling. Noel seemed to wait for our return to Miami. Now, it would appear, Noel has followed us home. The Northeast and especially the Massachusetts cape and islands are in for a beating from this storm that, by all appearances, seems to have it in for me. Seriously, this will be the third time I've been buffeted by the same piece of weather. That's just weird!

I said in a post in July that I had begun thinking about future of this blog. At just about 400

entries I believe I've had all the opportunities I need to express those ideas which were most important on this topic. I have discussed the planning, preparation, and execution of personal DXpeditions that were small, medium, large, and now *too large*. I hope that I have given some of you the thirst to try this for yourself. And, it would please me to believe that your first (or subsequent) attempt was made better by something I've mentioned here. I'm vain that way.

Officially, I am "suspending activity" on this blog. I will not delete the blog, nor will I promise not to make postings to it again in the future. I have simply "had my say" on this topic, at least for now.

My writing days are probably not over, however. I hope to put some of this newly reclaimed free time towards more substantive projects. You may see my name in print again sometime soon. It might also be fun to collaborate with other bloggers and writers out there. There are some very interesting and talented people in our community!

So, while this is not *goodbye* I understand in my heart that by suspending the blog it will never be quite the same, even if I resume it again someday. For those of you who have taken the time out of your busy lives to read my words, thank you. I have appreciated your comments and private emails more than you can imagine.

With deepest gratitude, your humble blogger...

B. Scott Andersen (NE1RD)

Posted by NE1RD's Blog at 10:35PM (-04:00)





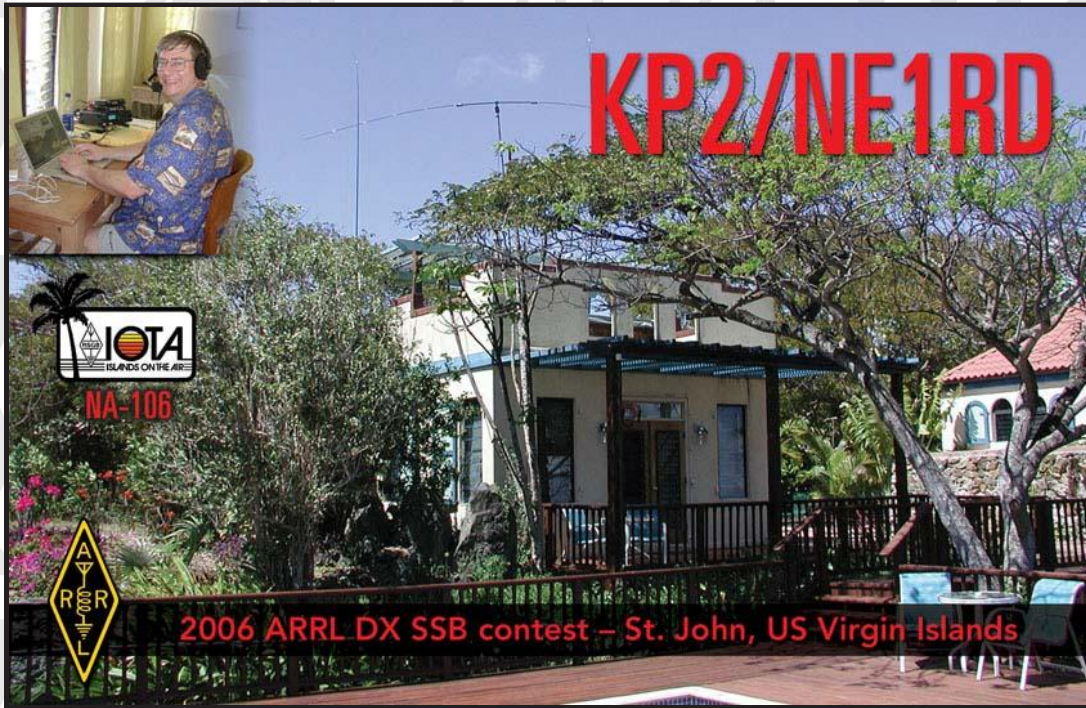


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B. Scott Andersen, NE1RD, is an avid DXer and DXpeditioner who emphasizes in lightweight operation.