

River City Radio Rag

Iowa City Amateur Radio Club

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From

The President's Pen

Allan Dye, N0AM

Well, here we go again. I'd like to think that a year of practice would make this column easier - but as I stare at the blank screen in front of me, I realize it's gonna be as tough as last year. No Y2K to report about and Straight Key Night was not as productive as last year - I only got about half as many contacts, and don't remember hearing any ICARC members. Pity.

As the weeks progress, and more "upcoming events" fall into history, I must continue to rewrite this article. Since the final call for articles has gone out, I guess it's time to revise one last time and launch THIS event into the history book, uh... newsletter.

The next major event that comes to mind was the midwinter party. Last year was fun - I packed away my share of pizza. This year was equally as entertaining/filling. We didn't get heart-shaped pizza - although the party was on Valentine's Day - but we did have a lot of pizza for a lot of hams, and plenty of conversation to go around.

2001 - A Space Odyssey... brings back memories - but now the year is here. It doesn't appear that technology has progressed as far as the movie predicted. It WILL, however, be interesting to see how technology evolves during the course of the year - amateur radio in particular. I thoroughly enjoyed the January meet-

ing program - APRS. I'm still checking into the poor-man's (read cheap ham's) version. I found a couple of Linux versions, and a kit for a tracker which doesn't require a computer at all - just a radio, a GPS, and an interface module. Lessee, a Tracker in the trunk, a Baycom in the basement... and my youngest driver-to-be will be a victim of Big Brother (oops, that was Orwell's "1984" - which also hasn't happened... yet). I'm anxious to see which other of these technologies make their way into club meeting programs.

I should mention some opportunities for member participation. Contact Regis (KB0VDO) to see how you can help with the radio class to be held at Northeast Junior High School. You'll be surprised how much you can learn by teaching a class - or presenting a program. Eugene (W0ICY) still has a couple of openings in his monthly meeting program schedule. If you have interest in a topic - even if you don't have the expertise to present a program - I'm sure Eugene would like to hear about it. Otherwise... I still have my code practice oscillator!!!

Although winter weather keeps coming back, we are approaching springtime, however slowly it seems (THANK YOU Mr. Groundhog). Another upcoming event is Severe Weather Training. A reminder that it will be held Wednesday night, March 21. Stay tuned to the Sunday Night Net (or read elsewhere in the newsletter?) for more information about times.

It's not too early to begin considering Field Day. The first item will be the site. We can maintain status-quo with the East Overlook site, or we can try new ground - perhaps at one of the Iowa City parks. Lower City Park might be a hole for RF. I don't know much about Upper City Park. Dennis (WB0MCX) has collected information - many thanks. My biggest concern is quiet hours - if we can't use a

generator to power rigs, I don't know how much success the redeye shift will have. The bands I frequent get pretty quiet at night - even the 100-watt stations are hard to hear.

That's about it for this session. SK

Activities Coordinator Asks for Help

I want to thank everyone who attended the pizza party. We all had a good time and good food.

I would like to ask everyone to help me with program topics for upcoming meetings. If you have new equipment, bring it to the meeting and tell us about it. If you know someone who can present a topic you would like to hear about, let me know. Without your help, we won't have any programs for future meetings. Please help me continue to provide interesting programs.

I am planning to set up a booth at the Johnson County fair this year. I will need help with operators for a 2 meter and an HF station. Please contact me if you want to participate. Also, if you know how to get promotional information about amateur radio from ARRL, let me know who to contact. I know this is a few months away, but I want to give you a heads up about what I'm planning for the future. 73, Eugene, W0ICY

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HamRad Update

Rich Bingham, WW0Q

It's been a while since we've had a report on the activities of the ICARC's HamRad group. I'm very pleased to report that HamRad has not been idle between the time of my last article and the appearance of this issue. In fact, it was a very busy autumn indeed, with two training exercises and a graded-drill taking place.

At this point for the benefit of our readers who are not regular HamRad participants, a brief review of HamRads responsibilities in relation to the Johnson County Emergency Management Agency may be in order. Among the several roles that HamRad may be called upon to fill is that of Weather Observer/Spotter (our Severe WX Net during the spring and early summer, for example), Communications Support Personnel for the Johnson County Emergency Operations Center, and Communications Support for the two Reception Centers in Johnson County for the Duane Arnold Energy Center Emergency Plan. It is in the later role that HamRad saw one of it's busiest seasons ever.

At approximately three to five year intervals, the Federal Emergency Management Agency requires that all nuclear power plants in the United States review and test their Emergency Response Plans. The year 2000 was the Duane Arnold Energy Centers turn for evaluation by FEMA. In preparation for the FEMA visit, officials of the Center Iowa Power Cooperative—the owners of the Duane Arnold facility—met with representatives of the Johnson County Emergency Management Agency and members of various support agencies, such as area fire companies, the Red Cross, The University of Iowa, Iowa City government, and, of course, HamRad, all of whom would be involved should there be an actual emergency.

A review of operational plans and documentation was held with input solicited from the participating groups for revisions and updates to the portions of

the plan relating to their group. I assisted Carl Vogel, our liaison contact with IES/Alliant Industries, in updating the HamRad portion of the Reception Center documentation—a process that continued almost literally until the start of the graded exercise.

To test the emergency response plan, representatives of IES/Alliant, CIPCO, and the Johnson County Emergency Management Agency scheduled two training exercises prior to the graded drill, which itself was scheduled for October 18th, 2000. Once the dates for the two drills had been set, Tom Hansen, Acting Director of the Johnson County Emergency Management Agency, and Carl Vogel, representing IES/Alliant Industries, then contacted the various support groups who would be involved and advised them of the schedule and expectations for the training exercises and graded-drill.

As in previous years, ICARC HamRad was scheduled to provide communications between the various positions at the West High School Reception Center as well as the Emergency Operations Center. One of the first challenges that we encountered in the first training exercise at the West High School Reception Center was that of more clearly defining the role of the HamRad communicator at each position, and to what extent that individual should become involved in Reception Center activities beyond that of being a communicator.

This situation, and it is one that could well be faced in an actual event, came about because of a shortage of individuals with the necessary training to perform some essential tasks, such as documenting and handing out the personal radiation dosimeter equipment. While we've not gotten this issue fully resolved, I think we've made significant progress in better defining our role in this situation.

Another challenge to be faced was that of personnel assignments for the

various posts in the center. While it is simple (and convenient) to place the same individual at the same post each time, the reality is that some persons might not be available in the event of an actual emergency. Therefore, it behooves us to be as flexible as possible and to be able to play as many of the positions as possible. In this way we can better deal with the unexpected.

The final challenge we encountered was how much to deploy, that is how many resources would we need at the Reception Center to meet the demands of the task at hand. For a practice scenario it is usually better to have more than you need. However, in an actual event, you may be very, very short of available resources and/or personnel.

For the two practice exercises we deployed for a full range of operations, including VHF voice and data links, with HamRad members simulating everything from the EOC to the State EOC. Not knowing the scope of play in advance, we assumed that there would be a need for this additional capability. As it turned out, this was not the case. The scope of play was far narrower than we had first anticipated, a point which would come back to haunt us later.

When all the practice, discussions, and preparations had been completed, the graded-drill was held on October 18th, 2000, before the FEMA evaluators. In a departure from past practice, the FEMA evaluators used a new methodology whereby they would observe and then make recommendations or even demonstrate how things should be done, rather than simply observing and grading a 'pass/fail'. I'm pleased (and relieved) to report that our county passed the test.

The FEMA evaluators were complimentary of the work that had been done, both by the various agencies involved and the Amateur Radio participation as

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HamRad Update

well. We learned many things through the training exercises and the graded drill. Among these are: that I/we need to be less concerned with some of the 'frills' of the operation and to be more focused on the basic essentials; that we still need to work on being better able to 'play all the positions'; and finally, (the point that came back to haunt us) that we need to be certain we actually do have enough personnel to adequately staff all the positions we need to cover.

As it turned out, the fire companies themselves were understaffed to cover all the positions that needed manning at the graded-drill. Because a number of HamRad members have received training in operating the dosimeter equipment, several of our people found themselves doing double duty, both at the personnel dosimeter table and in the Male Decon area, in addition to their communications responsibilities. Many thanks to Allen Dye, N0AM, and Eu-

gene Alvis, W0ICY, for being able to step up and meet these needs on the fly. As a result, we were thinner on communications staff than I would have liked for us to be owing to scheduling conflicts and outside commitments involving some of our regular HamRad participants that left them unavailable for the graded drill.

The lessons learned: it is dangerous to make assumptions; plan for the unexpected; be versatile; and last, too much is not enough. The good news is that because we are a radio service that has the 'can do' spirit, we were able to improvise solutions to problems when they arose. The FEMA Evaluators made note of that fact in their remarks and were impressed by what we had done.

Also present at the graded drill as an observer was the ARRL Iowa District Five Emergency Coordinator, Ron Breitwisch, KC0OX. Ron and I had a chance to chat before the drill began and

again afterward. He was also complimentary of the job HamRad had done and was impressed by some of the documentation we had developed for this particular event. Without question, it is to our mutual benefit to maintain close working ties with our neighboring counties and their emergency communications groups, whether they are an independent group such as ours, or an ARES group. In the end, our objectives are really the same—be there when the chips are down and the need for communications is most urgent.

Weather Spotter Training

Montgomery Hall
Johnson County Fairgrounds
March 21, 2001
'Light Repast' 6:30 p.m.
Presentation 7:00 p.m.
RSVP to WW0Q.

Packet Racket

Mark Atherton, N0RXD

Packet Radio is still alive in Iowa City. After a year or so of being cut off from the rest of the world, we now have a path to get mail out to Des Moines and beyond, thanks to Ron, KC0OX and others.

About a year ago, a fire in the radio room at Rockwell Collins in Cedar Rapids put CIDBBS out of commission. It was our last neighbor which forwarded mail in and out of the area. Recently, Ron worked with hams in the Des Moines area to get forwarding working to his station through the ICN fiber link between CR and Des Moines.

Coincidentally, I have upgraded the computer running my station, N0RXD, to a 486/66, 32M, with a 1G SCSI hard drive. Now there is enough disk space to handle packet bulletins. We're now getting a bulletin feed from Des Moines through KC0OX, and TNOS saves them into separate bulletin areas based on the subject.

When you connect to N0RXD, you automatically enter a message area based on your callsign that stores mail addressed to you. But now there are other areas available, press A <enter> to see the list. AN <enter> will show a list of areas with new messages. The area names are ww, allus, dx, swap, packet, space, and local. To change to the area called local, just press A local <enter>.

The local area has bulletins addressed to @iowa. There are messages sent periodically tell of dates and locations of Iowa amateur testing sessions, upcoming hamfests, nets, and QRP events. The ww area stores bulletins that are sent worldwide, allus is for US distribution. The other areas are more subject-specific.

N0RXD has VHF ports on 145.01 and 145.09 MHz. Sometimes one works better than the other.

At the January meeting, Jim Kennedy WH6LR gave a talk on APRS. I have

APRS up on 144.39 MHz and I'm able to see many stations on the map. There is APRS activity in Cedar Rapids, Muscatine, Des Moines, and the Quad Cities. If anyone is interested in getting APRS set up, I can help in getting the program installed.

A recent project here has been the assembly of the "Warbler", an 80m PSK31 transceiver kit. Check it out at (<http://www.njqrp.org/warbler/>). The 3 watt QRP kit costs \$45 and uses inexpensive "colorburst" crystals for operation on 3580-3581 kHz, which happens to be the part of the 80m band where PSK31 is found. It has jacks for simple audio cable connections to your computer sound card, and an RS232 interface for keying the transmitter. Just add 12-15 VDC and an 80m antenna and you're in business. My rig is working fine but I'm still working on an antenna.

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What To Do With The C Band TVRO Dish The Neighbors Don't Want Any More

Ken Kucera, KA0Y

If you can get a good 10' or 12' or bigger TVRO dish, you can have a lot of fun on 1296 EME. By adding a circular polarized feed horn and a pair of water-cooled 7289 tubes for 200 watts, .29 NF preamp, 1296 transverter or transceiver to the dish, you can make many QSO via the moon. If you use this equipment, the neighbors may not realize that it is being used as a ham radio antenna, they will think it's for your TV, Hi Hi. Also, if you have neighbors with broadband TV preamps that cover 100mhz to 1000mhz for their TVs which pickup everything you might think 1296 EME.

EME is not for everyone, but with all the old dishes around, it is easier than ever to get on 1296. They can be used for tropo and for satellites like Ao40 and others. A small amount of power (10 watts) is easy to generate. Combine the 10 watts with the ERP gain from a 10' dish, wow! No, it's not as easy as having

a 50' dish with S7/S8 signals, but 70 percent of the stations I work are 10' to 20' dishes and they are receiving with S1/S3 signals. They also work 10' to 10' dish sometimes by setting up a ½ hour schedules transmitting every other 2-1/2 min.

Back in 1979 when I started on 2 meters with 8 F9FT yagi antennas, there was not a great deal of information to help you get started. We got our information from other hams local (K0CKX, K0IEI, WB0PLZ, K0DAS, W0RAP, WD0HMA, W0AWL, WD0AWE, many others), and many others across the county by telephone or on the 14.345 EME nets on Saturday and Sunday. Now there is information on the internet everywhere to help you get started.

The next project on my dish and mount is to mount a 10-foot dish on the backside of the big one for 10gig. This might be in a couple of years. Hi Hi.

Pictures of the work completed in summer of 2000 on my dish and towers, and to get all of it moved and back on the air, are on the internet at (www.k2ah.com). The link to the pictures is at the bottom of the first page (KA0Y 50' dish). There's also other EME, VHF/UHF and links of web sites to visit from his site for information.

Packet Racket

There are several programs for running PSK31. My favorite is called Digipan and is available from <http://members.home.com/hteller/digipan/> It has a panoramic frequency display that allows you to tune in signals using your mouse, leaving your radio on a single frequency.

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Moonbounce with attitude!

ICARC Meetings

2nd. Wednesday

7:30 p.m.

Grant Wood Area
Educational Agency

200 Holiday Road

Coralville, IA

Talk-In 146.85

W0JV

One Step Forward, Three Steps Back

Jon Poulton, W0CK

Each January, I take a time-out from operating to peruse the logs from previous years. Perhaps you do the same. No matter how I looked at it, 2000 was a bumper year for DX, with DXpeditions to Myanmar, Clipperton, Pitcairn Island, Bhutan, East Timor, Yemen, and Kingman Reef featuring among the highlights. As I flipped the pages, it was interesting to calculate the QSL return rate and to learn from my records which operators are good QSLers and which leave a lot to be desired! With the latter folks in mind, allow me to relate a story with a happy ending.

In July 1996, I worked Cocos Island (TI9) for the first time. As a newcomer to DX, I initially thought that it counted for Costa Rica, so I was overjoyed when I later found out that it represented a separate DXCC entity. I immediately began a crusade to add that TI9 QSL to my collection. The crusade began with the usual SASE plus one IRC, before escalating in 1997 and then again in 1998 to requests bearing larger "inducements". These three attempts met with no success but, since this was still the only TI9 QSO in my log, I decided to continue. In 1999, I resorted to more drastic tactics that I'd never used before, namely registered mail with a return card at about \$8 a pop. But, within a couple of months, the whole package came back (but without his QSL card), with the message "No longer at this address". Then in December 2000, the DXpeditioner came up on 10 meters using his home call. He gave me his new POB number and issued an invitation to send him "just a letter, no card, no IRCs, no dollars, just a letter stating the QSO details and he'd gladly QSL". I followed his instructions and received the usual responsenothing! So, as a last attempt, I tried the registered mail strategy again but this time to his new address and with an SASE sporting Costa Rican stamps (bought from William J.

Plum). The US Postmaster charged me his usual \$8 and, would you believe it, the City of Iowa City chipped in with an unexpected demand for \$2. Because the line at the Main Post Office moved so slowly that afternoon, I received a parking fine for not putting enough money in the meter! "Insult added to injury", I thought at the time and vowed to myself that this was definitely the last attempt to get this gentleman's QSL. (Of course, "gentleman" was not the exact word I had in mind that particular afternoon!). However, things looked a little more promising in June 2000 when the pink return card came back bearing the DXpeditioner's signature. At least he'd acknowledged my request, I thought. Finally, in late August, his QSL arrived in my prestamped envelope. No note, just the card with my name on it but with all QSO details correct. Boy, was I happy! Forty-nine months later, my crusade had finally paid off. Cocos Island was at last on the shack wall as No. 306 confirmed (or so I thought!).

I'm not sure who advised me that it "ain't over until the DX's QSL is on the wall of your shack". No matter who it was, I learned the hard way this year that this statement is not entirely true and should be replaced by: "Even though you have the card on your wall, it ain't over until the DXCC Desk says it's over!" Perhaps I had been forewarned by local DXers not to do this, but my modus operandi had been the following. Once I'd worked a DXCC entity for the first time and exchanged QSLs, I generally ignored subsequent spots on the DX cluster for that country. Of course, I had been lulled into this false sense of security, because I hadn't had any cards rejected by the DXCC Desk. That is, not until this year, when four were rejected because the DX stations had failed to provide ARRL with sufficient information. Instantly, my Laos, North Cook, Guinea, and Yemen contacts had be-

come worthless, and I kicked myself for assuming that my first QSOs with these entities would be eligible for credit and that no further contacts would be necessary. Certainly it is still possible that the DX stations will provide ARRL with the necessary documentation; indeed, that occurred last month for the North Cook contact, so I remain optimistic that some of the others will eventually be deemed eligible. In the meantime, if you ever hear Laos, Yemen, or Guinea on the air, my phone number's in the book! I'd appreciate a call from you. 73!

ICARC DX'ers DXCC Mixed Totals

Call	Worked	Confirmed
W0AWL*	339	339
KU0A*	335	334
KE0MO	325	324
K0DX	319	307
K0CF	317	305
W0CK	314	305
W0PPF	227	184
N0AM	110	97
W0ICY	101	24
WW0Q	97	58

*Honor Roll

ICARC DX'ers welcome Eugene, W0ICY, to the ranks of the deserving. Eugene has made remarkable progress in a very short time. He has worked enough entities to earn his DXCC certificate just as soon as the QSL card come in. Congratulations, Eugene.

All ICARC amateurs, whether you're a big gun or a little pistol, are welcome to submit your worked and confirmed entities. Contact KU0A to update your totals.

Comoros 2001 Sets DX'pedition QSO Record

Nelson Moyer, KU0A

The Five Star DX'ers Association is nearing the end of a three week operation as D68C from the Comoros. The Five Star DXers Association is a group of UK radio amateurs which undertakes major HF DXpeditions to rare DXCC entities. The group was formed out of the highly successful 9M0C DX'pedition team, which made over 65,000 QSO's in February 1998, from Spratly Island in the South China Sea.

Comoros was chosen as the venue for the 2001 DX'pedition because it has no resident amateurs, and because it is fairly rare, ranking in the top 100 most needed DXCC entities.

The D68C team consists of 26 operators from 10 countries, truly an international venture. The stated goal of this

operation is to work as many stations as possible on a combination of 22 bands and modes. The operators intend to give even modestly equipped stations and inexperienced DX operators the opportunity to get into the log by running 4 stations around the clock for the entire 3 week operation.

D68C came on the air on February 9, 2001. As I write this article on February 25, 2001, the team has worked almost 170,000 QSOs, a performance which smashes the previous record held by ZL8CI by over 70,000 QSOs.

Comoros is located in the Indian Ocean just off the Eastern Coast of Africa, slightly Northwest of Madagascar. The path is long and difficult, yet this group has had phenomenal signals on all

bands from 80 to 10 meters. Your editor worked them for 17 unique band/mode combinations for a personal best effort with any DX'pedition. He even worked them on 10 meter FM for his first ever QSO in that band/mode. Anyone with an HF radio and a wet noodle could work these guys. If you didn't work them, you didn't try.

My congratulations to the team for the best organized and workable operation I've ever heard. Check out their web site at:

<http://www.dxbands.com/comoros>

It contains a wealth of DX information which you will find interesting and helpful whether or not you're a DX'er.

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