
The Open Feed Line

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THE MICHIGAN AMATEUR RADIO ALLIANCE

Post office box 670 Comstock Park MICHIGAN 49321-0670

May-Our Public service Month

For the last 4 years, May has always been a busy month for our club. This is the time when we put forth our best effort in helping to keep weary motorist safe during the summer holidays. We kicked off the month by providing communications for the Hunger Walk, held on Saturday May, 1, 1999. It was a big success for both our club and the folks who actually walked the distance: they helped raise over \$200,000.00 that will help other agencies out. Some where in there, The Old Kent River Bank Run was held, using our 145.410MHz repeater. Joe Bell WD8USA coordinated the communications. The last weekend in May is when our summer events really start. That is when the first of three holiday weekend Operation Care Coffee Stops takes place.

This year we are going to join forces with The Grand Rapids Amateur Radio Association and keep the coffee stop open longer than we can by ourselves. GRARA will be operating the event a whole day earlier. In this way, by combining our efforts, we can keep one stop open much longer than we could if we were doing it alone. This isn't the first time our clubs have operated together. The Old Kent River Bank Run, as well as whenever GRARA needs to use a good local city coverage repeater, our clubs have worked together to help others out. This is a shining example of Ham's helping ham's provide public services to weary motorists. We provide hot coffee and cookies to motorists from the MARA Mobile Communications shed. This is the 2nd year of its use. Come out and check it out. Stop by and say hello to your friends.

A New Face

You knew it would only be a matter of time before it happened. Yes, MARA is

going to vote on a new face. Ron Karger AB8DT, has designed a new MARA logo, which if accepted, will be on all our letterhead, this newsletter and our QSL cards and shirts.

The striking difference is the touch of blue on the round emblem and Ron's clean, uncluttered look. The club is holding off ordering hats, shirts and jackets till the whole membership votes. Changing our emblem isn't the only article coming up for a vote. After nearly 3 years of remaining the same, we're about to vote on by-law changes. These past couple of years have shown us that we really need to account for different circumstance that our present by-laws simply do not address. One suggestion is to have the past president become the vice president for a whole year. "Do you have any suggestions on how to make our by-laws govern us better?" Remember that it was YOU who helped form them the first time. Come with your ideas and suggestions to our June club meeting. We will be voting on this come August.

Field Day 99

By Jim Cordes KC8FGQ

By now, you all know about the MCW net on the repeater Thursday nights at 9:00PM. We usually do not have a net on the second Thursday of the month, because that is our club's meeting night. However, there may be nights when we will have a MCW net on meeting night, such as in May, when the meeting is cancelled due to the Dayton Hamfest. Again, I would like to thank all those who have supported this effort by checking in. you do not need to be a MARA member to check in. if you have any comments, questions, or suggestions, feel free to contact me.

We will be holding MARA's Field Day 99 at Riverside Park in Grand Rapids, at the island shelter, which is near the center of the park, next to the river. There are flush toilets, running water, trees, picnic tables, and all kinds of other great stuff. Field Day will be June 26-27 this year, from 2:00PM EDT Saturday until 2:00PM EDT Sunday. All are invited.

Sandy K8VOJ and Steve K8VOL are in charge of the potluck Saturday night. All amateurs are invited, but please bring a dish to pass.

We still need a volunteer to run the Novice/TechPlus station. If you are a Novice or

TechPlus, and have interest in this opportunity, please come forward. Brian KC8FUW and myself did it last year, and had a very good time. If no one from MARA can do this, we will try to get a non-member to do it, as this station contributes to the club's total score. If you are interested, remember that you will probably get QSL cards out of the deal, as this station uses the callsign of whoever volunteers. I got cards last year. This station is limited to the Novice bands. If any of you know anyone who may be interested, please tell him or her to contact me. They do not need to be a MARA member at this point in the game. Obviously, if no one comes forward, we cannot have this free station. Sorry, Generals and above cannot volunteer, nor can no-code Technicians. We don't want to cheat. If you want to volunteer for any other aspect of MARA's Field Day, please speak up. Again, you do not need to be a MARA member. Just like so many other things in life, you get out of it what you put into it. We will not be formally scheduling operators, but if you would like to reserve a certain time slot and band, please say so. We plan on having a 160-meter dipole, so that will be fun for you night owls. We also get to have a free UHF-VHF station. Louie N8ZVB has volunteered to run this station. He is bringing his Swan, but still needs to procure a six-meter yagi for this event. Six meters may very well

be an exciting band this year, so if you want to get involved in this station, please contact Louie White, myself or the brains of the operation, Gale N8GS.

Everyone will be using the club callsign, except the Novice/TechPlus station. My phone numbers are 459-5415 and 459-1195, between 8:00PM and 8:00AM.

Thank you and lets make this the best Field Day we've ever had.

DX QSLing

By Mike Eilers K800K

There are many articles and ideas on how to send WSL cards out to DX. The cheapest way is using the ARRL outgoing QSL bureau. The bureau method is cheap, but extremely slow. Sending QSL cards direct or their foreign QSL manager is expensive, but usually much faster than the bureau system. How do you send a card direct? A self-addressed envelope saves the station or his manger much work, especially when they answer 50,000 requests for cards. Many will suggest enclosing a 'green stamp', a one dollar bill, to cover return postage. I have read about foreign post office workers that have hand held scanners that can detect the minute metal threads that some of our currency has laced through the bills.

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Of course, then your mail is stolen and your QSL never reaches its destination. I understand this is more of a problem in poorer, third world countries than places such as modern day Europe. For this reason, I personally prefer International Reply Coupons (IRC's). They are available from most Post Offices, for \$1.05 each. It is said that one coupon should pay for return postage from anywhere. Other says that this fact is not necessarily true. I send two coupons; one coupon if not necessary to cover postage, can help cover the cost of printing QSLs. Many major Dxpeditions send multicolored photo QSL's cards, which can't be cheap. The extra IRC could help covers expenses to go to some of these rare spots. USA QSL managers make QSLing much cheaper, \$0.33 each way. I usually QSL direct if the station I worked is a brand new country, or some rare, exotic Dxpedition. Otherwise, I use an outgoing DX QSL bureau similar to the ARRL but with more flexibility. This bureau charges 5 QSL's per dollar. He then forwards the QSL cards on as ARRL does. But, he has a relationship with some DX station and/or their QSL managers to bulk mail cards directly to them. I do not know if the ARRL does this. Many managers don't like

bureau cards or put the lowest priority on them. The cards eventually come back through the ARRL system. But it does save time in regards to chasing down addresses to go direct.

The bureau I use has no membership fees, no advance notice needed. Just send in 5 cards per dollar to WF5E DX QSL Service, 3400 Bedford Midland Texas 79703. I usually wait until I have 25 or 30 cards to send. And be sure you have SASE on file at ARRL's W8 incoming QSL bureau.

73 Mike K800K

(MARA and the Open Feed Line in no way endorse products. This article merely shows how another system is being used.)

MDXA Beaver Fever!

By chuck Lemarbre W8VOM

The MICHIGAN DX Association, MDXA, will be putting "Beaver Island" on the air September 10th through the 17th. Beaver Island is IOTA (Islands On The Air) #MI032L and we will be using an 8 man team with the call KC8MHX..."MICHIGAN HAM XPEDITION". We will use standard IOTA frequencies as well as other frequencies. We hope to get into the W8HVG Link repeater each night from Beaver Island to give the VHF/UHF brothers and sisters a whack at Beaver Island. For a QSL card, please contact W8VOM at the address below.

MDXA-BEAV
0-947 Lake Michigan DR
Grand Rapids MI 49544

For more information on The Michigan DX Association, contact Chuck at the above address, or visit the MDXA web site at

<http://www.members.tripod.com/~CYBERHAM/WMDXA.html>

MARA World Wide Web

What has been visited by over 50 countries, been used like a reference book for electronic parts and companies, had repeated visits just to look up callsigns? The MARA web site of course. We have had a web presence for the last 2 years and in that time, have changed it several times just to keep it up to date with new adventures our club's members have taken the club. From our first Field Day held in a swamp, to last years multi-tower event, covering all of the ham bands: it's on the web site. It's that time of year again; when the web site is going through a change, and we'd like your input into how to best design it for the whole world to see. Yes, that's right, the whole world will be visiting our site. "How do you want us to look to them?" How creative can YOU be? Tell your ideas to Rich K8JX at 361-5975. He's waiting to hear from you right now.

Terrible Terry

By Terry Francis WB8ZNO

What is spring? New, wonderful, refreshing, startling. Spring can't be missed. One day there are only tiny small buds. Presently, if one looks closely, there is small green growth showing itself just ahead of the tulips, daffodils, crocus and more. It is so wondrous; they all snuggle under the frozen ground of old man winter to pop up at the first sign of spring to brighten our lives with the promise of what's to come. As the days grow warmer, the transit birds begin to appear it has been wonderful watching the winter birds eat at the feeder such as the adorable black cap chickadee and their cousins such as the common Red Polls and more. Then spring arrives and the elegant evening gross beaks arrives with their outstanding plum of body white and black. The woodpeckers thoroughly enjoy the suet balls and cakes. They are equally beautiful. We cannot discount the largest birds of all, the wild turkeys. They come all winter in their large flocks both hens, toms and Jake's. Everyone is compatible equally sharing what humans have furnished. There is never dullness when the wildlife

appears to share the bounty provided. Spring is now in full bloom. The finches and wild canaries have returned, as has the Red wing Black birds with their song. The late evenings are entertained with the song as the nightingale looking for his mate. Spring has brought the Chipmunks out of their dens in the ground. They move fast and furious, tails straight up in the air taking their share of the seeds provided. Chipmunks, doves and squirrels eat side by side enjoying their daily meal. The deer are sorely missed. It is that time of year when the does retreat into the backcountry to deliver their fawns. If we're lucky, we'll see the fawns at play when their mothers bring them out into the open. The bachelor bucks can be seen from time to time crossing the road or going to water. But for the most part, they become pretty scarce now.

They don't need their corn. Mother Nature provides all kinds of grazing for her animal kingdom. There will be the occasional visit from the porcupine, skunks, rabbits and raccoons they won't linger long, just a short visit and back into their wooden homes. Of course, it is so delightful to see a mother coon cross the yard with her kids tailing behind. But then they move on too. The millpond just around the corner, is home to a pair of geese supporting a rather large family of

chicks. They stretch out in a line across the pond with one parent in front and one parent behind. Occasionally they decide to cross the road in the same fashion. That is a traffic stopper. By the end of summer, they will be as beautiful as their parents are. Here in the woods is a constant chorus of songbirds, the sound of the chipmunks, the rustle of the leaves on a breezy day and the splash of the robins taking their daily bath in the birdbath. They are not disturbed by the dogs-just taking it in stride. Traffic, smog, sirens. They don't exist in the woods. Only the peace of nature. Isn't that what spring is all about? Now my wife doesn't want me to let you know that she wrote this article. But I don't listen any too well. She says I only hear what I want. But the credit goes to her. I will only add these few lines.

Winds from the West suits everyone best
Winds from the east suits everyone least.
Winds from the west makes fishing the best.
Winds from the east make the fish bit least.

Red in the morning, sailors warning.
Red at night sailors delight.

That's all folks. Ya all have a great summer.

(Terry has retired and writes about the "golden years".)

Rain Gutter Antenna

By Jack Ciaccia- WM0G. this appeared in the march 1999 edition of B.A.R.C's BARK, the newsletter of the Boulder ARC. Mary Ciaccia Editor. Reprinted from the ARNS bulletin May 1999

I decided I would give the ARRL International CW DX Contest held February 19021, 1999 a try from new, super stealthy HF radio setup...let me explain.

My HF rig is an Icom 745 and a Dentron transmatch running 100W but my antenna system is a little unusual though. After I moved to my new QTH in Lafayette, CO. I tried to put up my trusty old Butternut HF6VX vertical. I am located in a covenant-controlled neighborhood and thought the vertical would suffice as it is ground mounted and is not taller than my house. But, the local neighborhood HOA "watchdog" showed up at my front door about one week after I put it up and reminded me about the HOA rules of NO OUTSIDE ANTENNAS! It turns out, she lives in the house directly in back of me and can see the antenna from her dining room window—my typical luck! Well, not to put the nice radial system I had recently "planted" to waste, I started to think

about some alternative, stealthy antenna designs. I noticed the rain gutters and downspouts of my house. They were aluminum and brand new so they probably made contact continuously. The downspout section is about 25 feet high and it connects to a horizontal gutter run which is 35 feet long. Hmm. 60 feet of conductive material in an inverted "L" Marconi type design and ready-made! I'd heard of Hams loading up their rain gutters before but never thought that I would be relegated to this option myself. I ran a 100-foot piece of RG-8X out from the Shack to the bottom of the rainspout. I drilled a hole in the drainpipe and attached a sheet metal screw. To this screw I attached the center conductor of the RG-8X coax. The shield side of the coax was then soldered to the ground radial leads. The ground radial system consists of 10 random lengths of 4 conductor antenna rotor cable buried in the lawn and the ends of three of these radials are also screwed into my basement's metal window wells too.

I tested the stealth antenna with my MFJ antenna analyzer to see if there were any inherent resonant points on this system. There were a few spots where the Rain Gutter Antenna was under 2:1 SWR. Coincidentally, these occurred at the top of the 75 M band and again in the middle of the 15M band.. "Life is good!"

time to attach it to the transmatch and HF rig and fire it up. It loaded up nicely on 75M so I thought I would try to check into one of my favorite WAS nets, the Geratol net on 3.768 MHz net control was in Indiana and had no problem hearing me. As the net went on, Yardley Beers-W0JF, a local, also checked in and now I had a reference station for reported signal strengths. The reports Yardley was getting from the same station we worked were very similar to mine, although once in a while he would be an S unit above me. Not too bad considering he was using a well-designed trap vertical for 75 meters. I've written this article in hopes of inspiring other Hams living under similar conditions to look around at the possibilities of not-so-typical antenna designs and give HF and Dxing a try. The satisfaction of making a QSO under not-s-ideal conditions is a lot more gratifying than working DX with a KW and a multi-element array at 150+ feet. Ask anyone who works QRP! Plus, working under adverse condition hones up your operating skills and then, when you do have the great station, you will be a great operator as well.

(This article has been edited for length.)

Home Page?

If you would like to share your home page with the rest of us, please let Rich K8JX know what the address is and we'll put it in the next issue.