

WEST SIDE SIGNAL

Official Bulletin of Toronto's Oldest Amateur Radio Club

Club Executive

President

Dave Karecki VE3RER
1043 Royal York Rd Toronto On M8X 2G5
(416) 234 1456
e-mail karecki@rogers.com

Vice President

Bert Almemo VE3OBU
54 Rodda Blvd Scarborough On M1E 2Z8
(416) 283 4444
balmemo@sympatico.ca

Treasurer

Mike Durrant VE3PNX
10 Crane Ave Etobivoko On M9P 1T9
(416) 241 6017
e-mail mdurrant@ArcturusNetworks.com

Secretary

Bill Catlender VE3PA
2 Norwalk St Scarborough On M1J 2V1
(416) 439 2891
bill.catlender@sympatico.ca

Signal Editor

Dave Lott VE3BHZ
51 Lincoln Ave Cambridge On N1R 4W6
(519) 621 4396
e-mail david.lott@sympatico.ca

Custodian VE3JJ

Bill Loucks VE3AR
155 Brentwood Rd N Toronto On M8X 2C8
(416) 231 8474

Club Historian

Al West VE3UT
4251 Dundas St W #525 Toronto On M8X 2Z5
(416) 622 1445

Meetings

Meetings held at 7:30pm on the third Tuesday of each month, Etobicoke. Municipal Offices (Burnhamthorpe & The West Mall) No meetings in July or August. Visitors always welcome.

Club Nets

FM Net

Wednesday 8:00pm
VE3SKY repeater 146.985 Mhz

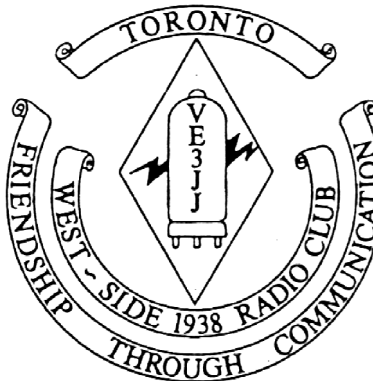
CW Net

Sunday 10:00am 7.029.5 Mhz

SSB Net

Sunday 11:00am 7.075 Mhz

Issue No.127 Jan 2010



Next Meeting

Tuesday Jan 19th 2010

7:30pm

Etobicoke Municipal Building
Burnhamthorpe Rd & West Mall
Etobicoke

CLUB NEWS

Hope everyone had a very good Christmas and I wish you all the very best for 2010. Our Christmas luncheon at the Imperial Buffet was not particularly well attended but the 9 who showed up enjoyed a good lunch with very good company. I personally was pleased to get the chance to meet up with the gang again and it was certainly nice to see that Maureen was able to attend with Ron VE3DBY. Others in attendance were Dave VE3RER, Michael VE3PNX, Bert VE3OBU, Phil VE3FZL, Chris VE3EQF, Al VE3UT and of course myself. The snow held off

long enough for me to make the drive from and back to Cambridge a piece of cake.

Solar figures are showing signs of improvement but it doesn't yet appear to have affected HF propagation greatly although periodically there have been some short openings on 15 and the odd one on 10 but still nothing to write home about. Our Sunday morning nets on 40 meters are still mostly a washout for me here in Cambridge, I can hear the guys most times but only very weakly and then can't get through on transmit. In the past year I think I made contact just twice. Thank goodness for our Wed evening 2 meter net, at least I can keep in touch quite reliably there. Eventually I guess we will see the bands open up again but it seems that they are very slow in waking up. Hopefully 2010 will see a very noticeable improvement in band conditions and we can all start having some fun on the air once again.

I hope Christmas was good for everyone, no complaints here at all except as usual I ate too much and am presently in the process of getting rid of the extra 5 lbs I loaded on with all the good food available. Good job it's only once a year Hi. Here's wishing everyone all the best for 2010.

73 de VE3BHZ

The Lone Ranger and Tonto went camping in the desert. After they got their tent all set up, both men fell sound asleep.

Some hours later, Tonto wakes the Lone Ranger and says, 'Kemo Sabe, look towards sky, what you see?' 'The Lone Ranger replies, 'I see millions of stars.'

'What that tell you?' asked Tonto..

The Lone Ranger ponders for a minute then says, ' Astronomically speaking, it tells me there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically , it tells me that Saturn is in Leo. Time wise , it appears to be approximately a quarter past three in the morning. Theologically , the Lord is all-powerful and we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically , it seems we will have a beautiful day tomorrow.

What's it tell you, Tonto?'

'You dumb ass. It means someone stole the tent.

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES

A little boy got on the bus, sat next to a man reading a book, and noticed he had his collar on backwards.

The little boy asked why he wore his collar backwards.

The man, who was a priest, said, "I am a Father"

The little boy replied, "My Daddy doesn't wear his collar like that".

The priest looked up from his book and answered, "I am the Father of many "

The boy said, "My Dad has 4 boys, 4 girls and 2 grandchildren and he doesn't wear his collar that way "

The priest, getting impatient, said "I am the Father of hundreds" and went back to reading his book.

The little boy sat quietly thinking for a while, then leaned over and said, "Maybe you should wear your pants backwards instead of your collar.'

MORE BAD SOLAR NEWS

Yesterday SpaceWeather.Com reported "SOLAR MINIMUM: The sun is in the pits of a very deep solar minimum. Many researchers thought the sunspot cycle had hit bottom in 2008 when the sun was blank 73% of the time. Not so. 2009 is on the verge of going even lower. So far this year, the sun has been blank 75% of the time, and only a serious outbreak of sunspots over the next few weeks will prevent 2009 from becoming the quietest year in a century. Solar minimum continues."

MAIL ORDER KARMA

A18P

I like QSLing. There, I've said it. In this, as in so much of life, not everyone agrees with me. Some Hams consider it the Darkside of Radio; a drudgery, not a delight; a job, not a joy; labor, not leisure. I find it challenging and satisfying and rewarding. QSLing is one of the most enjoyable aspects of Ham Radio for me. Before you shake your head and turn the page, let me point out that many things in life can be transformed entirely by a small change in perspective. I hope to share with you some thoughts about QSLing that may change your perspective on the ritual of exchanging rectangular pieces of solidified wood pulp.

I have lots of QSL cards and I like to just go through them and remember the excitement of the initial contact. It's like holding a tangible memoir of the QSO. It seems like a more concrete connection for both of us to have taken the time to fill out a card and send it off. I always put at least a short handwritten comment on each card, and I always sign them. It's like sending out little packets of positive Karma. These days I don't automatically send out cards for repeat contacts, but I will always send a card if requested. I'm a new ham,

but the old-timers saying of “the final courtesy” certainly rings true to me.

Another appealing aspect for me is that I have a very efficient system for QSLs. Largely because of the automation of the DXLab software, and my finely honed procedures (hey, I've had a lot of practice!), I can really crank out some mail. I always joke at the Post Office that they should give away free Ham radios, and they would come out way ahead on the postage. When I decided to pursue my Worked All US Counties, I needed to send out about 600 domestic cards in order to get counties confirmed. It was very satisfying to me to be able to efficiently generate those. I guess it's just the engineer in me! My return rate is also pretty good; it really helps that I have antique postcards of the Goodyear Blimp for cards. We found them in an old file cabinet in the Club Shack at work and people just seem to love those cards!

I also save all the envelopes for the DX cards. The stamps are interesting to me. They often show the most prominent feature of a country, or a famous person or political leader. I intend to learn more about the stamps and perhaps figure out how best to catalogue them as time allows. I think that would make an new excellent hobby for me, as soon as I find an extra minute to start.

Sometimes, the thrill is in the difficulty of the chase. For instance, lately I have been trying to close the loop on my Worked All Zones (WAZ) award. The one zone which has eluded me has been #22 - the subcontinent of India. There are quite a few hams on in VU-land, but I can never even hear them with my modest antennas, let alone complete a QSO. Then, suddenly, during one of those recent rare but becoming more common 17M openings, I hear VU2PAI on CW, and I hear him pretty well. Wow! The first time I've ever even heard India - this guy must have a terrific antenna farm. I go back to him and discover that most of the USA has also discovered him. The pileup is terrific and I am in the thick of it. I zig, I zag, I try to anticipate his next move, but his pattern isn't very regular. This is becoming the norm lately for well-equipped Hams; they have a bandscope, either in their radio, or on their computer, and they just click on a strong signal, which gives me no pattern at all to follow. So I try to find a quieter frequency in the middle of the pack and call after each completed QSO. An hour and a half into the battle and I'm pretty discouraged; the Big Guns are getting through but I seem to be wasting my time. I can't walk away, though, because this is INDIA, my last Zone!!! I am hitting the macro key, but hardly listening anymore - the situation seems hopeless. Then, unbelievable - I hear my call coming back - at least most of it - apparently I'm not getting through that well. I send my call 3 more times and a signal report. He comes back with my complete call and a report. He calls QRZ while I dance across the living room shouting at my wife and daughter, “India, India, India, India”. They just shake their heads and turn back to the TV.

Now, for most hams that is where the adventure ends, but did I mention that I like QSLing?? I realize that this guy is the loudest signal coming out of India. He also has a PO Box as a QSL address. His profile on QRZ.com says that sometimes he has trouble because the QSL cards don't get through to him. I figure from all of this that he is getting a ton of QSL requests, and getting my card from him might take longer than I can stand. I can't bear the thought of my lonely card being at the bottom of a huge sack of QSL requests, waiting forlornly for whenever he might have time to catch up on his paperwork. That's when I decided to go all the way, all the way to Ninja QSL. It's time to pull out all the stops!

I have quite a few Indian friends at work. I start canvassing them for information about the city where VU2PAI lives (Mangalore). I find 2 friends with connections, and I work them both in parallel. Nishant knows an Indian doctor here in Akron, who will be returning to India this month for a visit - and his family is in the same city as VU2PAI. The dentist also has bought Ham gear in the US for hams back in India and taken it over to them - so he is connected to the Ham radio community in the city where VU2PAI lives - the odds against this are practically infinite. I get my card and self-addressed envelope to Nishant who assures me that his friend the dentist can deliver the card in person.

Phaniraj is another Indian who is in my group; he tells me that his brother is a University Professor just outside the same town. He offers to mail my card to his brother, and have his brother send the card over by registered mail from about 15 miles away. I figure this is also an excellent way to stand out from the crowd and keep from becoming another anonymous card in the huge stack of QSL requests. I now have a 2 front war going, and I am spending more time working this QSL than I am spending on the air.

I wait excitedly for news for the next 2 weeks. Meanwhile, I email VU2PAI asking for confirmation of the QSO. He doesn't reply, and I continue to fret about whether I am really in his log. Phaniraj confirms that his brother has sent the Registered Mail, and the dentist has left for India. Now I can only wait.

That Saturday, one month after the original QSO with VU2PAI, I am on the radio when I see a spot for him on 15M. I go up on 15, and I can hear him! The only 2 times I have ever heard India, and it was VU2PAI both times. Again, I can only imagine the antennas that are at the other end of that transmission. I jump in the pileup and start working. I find a nice quiet spot in the middle and try to get through. Then it happens - this was actually in Morse code, but I'll give you the character version of what I heard.

AI (pause)

AI (long pause - I was getting pretty freaked out by now - seemed like a year, was probably 10 seconds)

Then

AI8P got your card today

I responded R R R, too stunned to think of anything else, we exchanged reports, and he returned to the pileup.

WOW! What are the odds? I think the pause was while he figured out where he had put my card so he could check that it really was the same call. So my 2nd ever contact with India was the same guy on the exact day that he received my QSL card for the first contact. I definitely think that I made an impression and will not be an anonymous card at the bottom of the stack. In fact, I got my card from him about a week later, so he must have filled it out and sent it pretty soon after our 2nd contact. I asked Nishant to call off the dentist, since Phaniraj's brother's Registered Mail had done the trick. Meanwhile, I started filling out the WAZ paperwork. Soon after arriving at my QTH, my precious card from India joined 39 other cards on a trip to Mississippi, where WAZ #8635 was awarded (I can't believe there have been less than 9000 WAZ awarded!).

So, for this QSO, which was more exciting, the QSO or the QSL?

Which was more challenging?

Which was more satisfying?

Which was the greater Karma?

I leave you with the thought that perhaps QSL cards can be more than drudgery, perhaps they can significantly enhance the Ham experience. They do for me, anyway; your mileage may vary.

KEEP YOUR FINGERS CROSSED

2007 - Chinese year of the Chicken - Bird Flu Pandemic devastates parts of Asia

2008 - Chinese year of the Horse - Equine Influenza decimates Australian racing

2009 - Chinese year of the Pig - Swine Flu Pandemic kills hundreds of people around the globe.

Has anyone else noticed this?

It gets worse next year...

2010 - Chinese year of the Cock - what could possibly go wrong?

VIOLINS, TREES AND R/F PROPAGATION

Instruments crafted from the late 17th century onwards by revered violin maker Antonio Stradivari sell for millions of dollars today, and musicians and scientists have long sought to explain their superb sound quality.

Now, American scientists have come up with a possible explanation: A dramatic European cold spell may have enhanced the quality of wood from which the instruments were crafted.

A sharp dip in temperatures between 1645 and 1715 coincided with a reduction in sunspots and the sun's overall activity known as the Maunder Minimum. Researchers say those factors may have slowed tree growth, thereby creating the ideal building material for violins later manufactured.

The research is described in the current issue of the tree ring science journal *Dendrochronologia*.

"Grounded in Folklore"

The violin first emerged in northern Italy in the mid-1500s. Many of the most distinguished violins ever created were produced by famous local families of violin makers—such as Amati, Guarneri and Stradivari—in the 17th and early 18th centuries. Stradivari was the most famous of these craftsmen, and produced over 1,100 violas, guitars, cellos, and violins. Around 600 of his instruments exist today.

Many top musicians today prefer to play instruments created by Stradivari or his contemporaries. But scientists have found it difficult to pin down the exact difference between a modern violin and a Stradivarius.

"It may be that Stradivarius violins are so well made that they are easier to play" to their best potential, said John Topham a tree ring expert and violin maker in Surrey, England. "The finest instruments are the ones that allow musicians to express themselves best," he said.

Henri Grissino-Mayer, co-author behind the new study and tree ring scientist at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, said there is continuing debate as to whether these instruments do indeed sound superior and what, if anything, explains that quality other than the legendary skill of their makers.

"There are many competing hypotheses ... and a lot of it is grounded in folklore," he said. "Some people even believe [Stradivari] used the wood of ancient castles and cathedrals."

Others suggest that Stradivari and his contemporaries used a special varnish (the secret of which has been lost today), or that the wood was chemically treated, soaked in water, specially dried, or stored for long periods of time.

Grissino-Mayer believes many of these explanations are flawed, however. For example, despite scientific investigations using ultraviolet photography, electron microscopy, and x-rays, a secret varnish has yet to be revealed. Furthermore, tree ring analysis has demonstrated that many surviving Stradivarius violins were made using wood that grew during Stradivari's lifetime, discounting the idea that it may have come from ancient buildings.

Slow Grow

Instead, Grissino-Mayer and climatologist Lloyd Burckle of Columbia University in New York have come up with an alternative hypothesis. They suggest that climatic cooling over many decades affected rates of tree growth and may have contributed to the acoustic quality of the violins produced by Stradivari and his

contemporaries.

Dense wood with narrow growth rings may help to "instill a superior tone and brilliance in violins," the researchers wrote, adding that wood grown under fast conditions is less resonant and unlikely to survive the stresses placed on a violin.

"Much of Europe was gripped by the little ice age between around 1400 and 1800," said Grissino-Mayer, noting that the period of cold weather and long winters peaked between 1645 and 1715. Trees growing during that peak period, the so-called Maunder Minimum, "showed the slowest growth rates of the entire last 500 years," he said.

Intriguingly, Stradivari was born one year before the start of the Maunder Minimum. He produced violins from 1666 until his death in 1737. Other studies have shown that Stradivari used violins built from spruce wood contemporary to his lifetime, and Grissino-Mayer believes this would have been locally obtained.

Still, scientists like Grissino-Mayer don't discount the unique talents Stradivari and his contemporary artisans brought to producing wonderful-sounding violins. "They didn't only have better materials ... the skills of the maker will have a considerable effect on the tonal quality of the final instrument," said Grissino-Mayer.

Woody Issue

"It's an interesting idea, but there is little supporting evidence," said Topham, the violin maker and tree ring expert. "They have come up with a theory based on just a few examples [of Stradivari's work], which are not representative of his entire output."

Topham has examined or repaired over 80 Stradivarius violins. He notes that while some of Stradivari's early violins do bear wood with narrow tree rings, others have wider spacing. He also argues that the spacing of tree rings across the range of Stradivarius violins he has examined lack consistency.

Nevertheless, John Montgomery, secretary of the American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers who is based in Raleigh, North Carolina, said of all the so-called secrets of violin production, "the most important element is wood selection." Wood inhibits or favors vibrations depending on its characteristics, said Montgomery, and the wood chosen by early, great instrument makers was excellent.

"The good news is that we continue to find wood with great properties today," he said, adding that well-made new instruments can sound as outstanding as old masters.

BUG TAMER PAR EXCELLENCE

VA3CBE

I bought an old vibroplex bug at a swap meet. I hate to call it old due to the fact that the serial number indicates it was made the same year I was HI!

After learning CW on a straight key and progressing onto an iambic paddle I wanted to give the “bug” a try. The bug is great for sending fast CW, but I am not quite able to copy at those speeds and the adjustable weight on the paddle will only reduce the dit speeds to approx 22wpm. The solution is the bug tamer. The tamer is a device which slows down the pendulum to allow slower sending. Not wanting to buy anything I was going to wrap some thick water pipe solder around the pendulum but then got the idea of using an automotive wheel weight to do the trick. Different size of weights produces different “dit” speeds. Easily interchangeable and CHEAP! Now learning to use the old vibroplex might take a while, wish me luck!



Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit, wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad.

ANNOUNCED DX OPERATIONS

PITCAIRN ISLAND

VP6AL

Nov 13 - Mar 1

All bands and modes

QSL PDC Hahei RD1 Whitianga N.Z

WILLIS ISLAND

VK9WBM

Dec 1 - May 1

All bands and modes

QSL VK4DMC

AFGHANISTAN

T6LC

Dec 3 - Mar 3

by W4JJ

Mainly 20 and 40m CW and SSB

1430z to 1800z daily

QSL K4MJN

HAITI

HH/HB9AMO

Dec 25 - Jan 25

30 to 17m CW only

QSL PA7FM

THAILAND

HS0ZGQ

Dec 30 - Jan 25

by DL1MJF

40 to 10m CW and SSB

QSL DL1MJF

MALDIVES

8Q7CE

Jan 8 - Jan 25

by YO8TLC

40 & 20 MAINLY cw

QSL YO8TLC direct or bureau

GUINEA BISSAU

J5UAP

Jan 15 - Mar 31

By HA3AUI

160 - 10 mainly digital but SSB & CW on request

QSL HASAUI direct

JUAN FERNANDEZ

CE0Z/JA8BMK

Jan 19 - Feb 9

All bands and modes

QSL JA8BMK direct