

NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2010 VOLUME 10, No. 1

Mercury Amateur Radio Association - MARA - North America - North East

1. Call into the net every Saturday morning.
2. Eat more healthy.
3. Exercise more often.
4. Be a better...



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OTHER STUFF

E-mail your comments, ideas, or submissions to marane@mara.net

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VIEW FROM THE TOWER

What! What! ... I was just resting my eyes.

Actually, I've more been recovering following a very challenging, busy, and blessed 2009; I've had extended illness and surgery, acquisition of a new home, and of course family. And I've been trying to get this column written since September. But enough about me...

A belated Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you, my MARA brethren. I hope the new year finds you well, well stocked, and happily hamming it up.

As we transition into the new year, it's time again to focus forward and set out goals for the year. I, who have been absent from the Saturday morning net for some time, have resolved more frequent attendance as soon as I can hang an antenna at the new house. As an organization, I would like your ideas and suggestions for what we can do to positively impact our mission and mutual support. I suggest we use our net and Yahoo Group forum to discuss ways we can encourage Ham licensing among church members and especially leadership¹. Please visit the Yahoo group MARA_NE e-mail reflector² regularly and be a driver and not just a passenger on the bus.

... be a driver and not just a passenger on the bus.

A special 'thank you' to Dave VE1VQ for a stellar job on the newsletter, and thanks to those who have supported the newsletter with articles.

- Bruce, N3IA

¹ If you have a story to tell about your successes in helping members or leaders to get their licenses, let us know by sending your words to the MARA NE editor at marane@mara.net

² Join the e-mail reflector by following the directions at <http://ne.mara.net/reflector.htm>



How well are you and your family prepared for the storms that may come?

CULTURED CORNER

by ANØNMS

New Year's Resolutions

*The old year goes, the new one comes.
Some think that is the time
To make big changes in their lives
So all things will become sublime.*

*The list they make, most show no one
For faults one wants not known,
As others might think worse of them
And so shun them, or worse disown.*

*The things they write upon their list
In pencil, sometimes pen,
Conceived in sincere thoughtfulness
Then forgotten by first month's end.*

*Far better to commit to do
One, two, or at most three
Of things that can be kept to mind;
Making simpler for you and me.*

GRANDMA MARA'S CORNER

I'd had enough of cities and people and had a craving for some quiet for a change. So after spending several days in and around Regina, Grandma cranked up the bike and headed out into the countryside and the open road.

There is something about riding a motorcycle in the summer in open country. You can smell things that you had forgotten all about; things that bring back memories, like freshly baked bread, new mown grass or hay, hot asphalt or barnyard.

Somewhere near where Old Wives, Saskatchewan, used to be, but now only exists in memory, the steering on the bike felt a little strange so I pulled off to the side of the road. Checking things out, I found the front tire a little slack. Now you have to realize that this is literally in the middle of nowhere, flat country as far as you can see - and you can see for a long, long way out there. There is no gas station with a handy air hose nearby. In fact, there is absolutely nothing nearby! As well as being able to see for miles and miles, you can also hear for miles and miles because there is no noise like we are all used to hearing at home. At times the silence is nearly absolute and then

you realize you can hear a plane flying high overhead, or you hear a bird or a tractor so far away that you can't see them.

While I was pondering whether or not to slowly drive to the nearest likely place to have a service station, I became aware that I have been hearing a slowly increasing buzz, that eventually turns into a low roar that gradually becomes a distant smudge which finally turns into a bunch of bikers. Now at first glance these guys looked rather hard, somewhat scruffy and dirty. At second glance they didn't appear any better. They pulled up around me and I was beginning to think maybe I should have risked smuggling my 45 Auto through the border anyway. I wasn't sure if the sight of them not having any women on the backs of their bikes made me feel better - or worse.

The biggest one, whom I assumed to be the leader, got off his bike and sort of swaggered over, making some comment about me having a problem with my bike. At this point I'm wondering how many I can take down with my K-bar knife before they can kill me!

You know how you can never find a police officer when you need one?

Well, I found one - or rather one found me! Being occupied as I was, I hadn't even heard the approach. The police car didn't actually come screeching up to a halt, more like a gentle rolling stop. And it wasn't a big burly policeman either but a little blonde, slip of a lady RCMP officer who couldn't have been more than 5'4" in her service boots. Seeing her, I started worrying about how I was going to

protect the both of us! I noticed she had a big smile on her face when she got out of her cruiser, so I figured she must be a kung foo expert or something. And then she did the strangest thing - she walked over and gave the big guy a hug. The other bikers were gathering around closer. Now

Old Wives and Old Wives Lake got their name from a Cree legend. A hunting party feared an attack by Blackfoot warriors. The elderly Cree women offered to keep the fires burning at the camp (near the lake) and to beat the tom toms through the night, while the rest of their people escaped in the darkness. The next morning when the Blackfoot party attacked the camp, they found only the old women and killed them. It is said that on windy nights you can still hear the old women's cries.

I'm really getting worried!

Once all of the hugging and back patting stopped, Constable MacKay (that was her name) calmed my fears. Seems these biker guys were all retired cops who, every summer, got together to cruise the back roads in some part of Canada, letting their hair grow, going without shaving (and washing I suspect), for days at a time (must be a guy thing). The big guy turned out to be her older brother whom she had been on the watch for, since she knew he would be in her area.

Grandma is in the rear seat of a police cruiser, looking out through the seat barrier; the lights and siren going!

Before I could say Harley-Davidson, the guys had my bike up and the front tire off. With the constable's brother in the front passenger seat and me in the back looking out through the seat barrier, we headed to a gas station on the nearby (from a western perspective) native reserve, twenty odd miles down the road. I'd never been in a police car with the lights and siren on before - kind of exciting! The young guy working there checked it out, found the valve was the problem, replaced it and wouldn't even charge me for the work. By the glances he kept giving the Constable when he thought she wasn't looking, I think he was kind of sweet on her, and hoped to make a good impression.

Once the wheel had been replaced, I was back on the road again - this time with both a biker and a police escort all the way to a very nice campground near [Old Wives Lake](#), where I spent a few days in the company of these guys. Those nights there were by far the safest I'd felt since I left home.

Grandma Mara

TECH STUFF

by VE1VQ

CHARGING THE RECHARGEABLES

Rechargeable batteries have come a long way from the early days. As they shrunk in size and increased in efficiency, so have their chargers improved in charging performance. Used to be that you had to watch things and manually shut off or disconnect the charger so that the battery wouldn't get overcharged and



The MAHA/POWEREX MH-C401FS rechargeable battery charger for house and vehicle.



The MAHA/POWEREX MHC-9000 charger.

the MH-C9000, has a digital display and allows for selectable charge and discharge rates. This one will handle and recover a wide array of battery problems.

Remember that just because you charged your rechargeables last year sometime, doesn't mean that they will retain their full charge when you go to use them now. That said, don't leave them in a fully discharged state. Charge them when they require it, store them in a normal temperature, dry location, and check them before you need them. If, at that time, they don't have the charge you feel is required, then top them up again.

Car and truck batteries are not nearly as delicate as the NiMH and NiCD types for your handheld or camera. For those, essentially a charger is a transformer, and a rectifier with a fuse thrown in for safety. Most will charge both 6 volt and 12 volt batteries and have a switch to select different windings on the transformer to accomplish this.

Once in a pinch, I made up a charger out of an old transformer with a 120vac primary/24vac secondary, a large solid state rectifier (of unknown breeding), a sixty watt light bulb (to limit the charging current), and a voltmeter to monitor things. I laid it out on the floor of my den and charged my car battery for several hours, enough

damaged. Now, many chargers monitor the battery conditions (voltage, current and sometimes temperature) and shut off or switch to a maintenance charge cycle.

One brand that seems to be popular with amateurs is MAHA/POWEREX. I've had one of the 401 models for several years and it has always worked well. Mine has a button to initiate a discharge with an automatic recharge following. The latest version handles both NiMH / NiCD and AA / AAA size batteries and has power source adapters for both home and vehicle. A more advanced version,



A lead-acid vehicle battery charger from Sears.

to get my Toyota wagon going during a cold spell.

Occasionally you will find an older car battery charger at a yard sale or flea market at a give-away price. If you can apply 120vac power to test it and hear the transformer hum, chances are good that it may only be a simple-to-fix solder or mechanical joint problem.



Older style lead-acid battery charger.

Charging gel type lead acid batteries requires a different kind of charger from the two previous. Normally in alarm panel usage, these are brought to their nominal voltage and kept there with a trickle charge. Be sure that any charger you use charges no higher than 10% of the amp-hour rating of the battery. There are cheap chargers that are little more than a wall transformer and a diode. Not recommended! Look for the ones built to safely charge, and once the main charge is complete to drop back to a trickle or maintenance charge. These will be microprocessor or dedicated controller chip based.

If you want a cheap but effective charger for the gels, locate a burglar alarm company and ask them for a couple of defective small panel alarm boards. Get ones with the red and black battery leads attached. The power supply and charging section for the standby battery will probably still be good. You will also need a 16vac 35va transformer or, a door bell transformer transformer may be substituted if the voltage is close. Use a hacksaw blade to cut out the power supply section and mount it in a box of your choice.

So there you have the basics in batteries, and charging ideas for those capable of being recharged. Whether or not you can charge batteries not intended for such tactics is fodder for another article. I wouldn't recommend it unless it was a matter of considerable urgency and nothing else was available.

Not really anything to do directly with ham radio or MARA but some of you might be interested in the Church technology web site at <http://tech.lds.org/>. It has to do with all aspects of technology in the Church. You can volunteer for any of the projects that strike your fancy.

Since our stake is about to install WebCast equipment to broadcast stake conferences over the internet starting in the fall of 2010, I've volunteered to beta test the software-only version of WebCast.

Take some time, browse through the material and see if anything catches your eye. If it does, sign up and help out.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Be always at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let each new year find you a better man.

- Benjamin Franklin

DI-DAH-DI-DAH-DIT

WHEN IS 'GOOD ENOUGH' GOOD ENOUGH?

How good does our ham station have to be? Really, when you think about it, we are into communication - the ability to transfer information. That communication may be in the form of CW, voice, or it may be one of the data modes. Whatever way it is, it is still all about getting information correctly from one place to another.

What we need is a reliable system. Interconnecting cables between the various pieces of our gear should be properly made and fastened. Our rigs need to be correctly matched to whatever antenna for whatever frequency we are using. Mechanically our feed line, whether it is coax, twin lead, or open wire, needs to be securely connected so that a high wind will not cause an intermittent or a complete failure. Coaxial connectors should be correctly soldered and/or mechanically assembled, and properly (not over-) tightened in place. Any outdoors connection, whether mechanical or soldered, should be sealed against moisture (see the [January 2009 newsletter](#) for an article covering this topic). Our antennas should be securely fastened to their supports.

Keep notes and sketches in a binder for the day when you have to do some repairs or changes, and your memory doesn't quite remember which cable went where, or why you did what you did. Labelling cables to match the notes isn't a bad idea either.



Years ago, I designed and built a power supply for my shack from scratch. It has the usual 13.8vdc output for my equipment, and is able to supply 25 or so amps. I designed in over-voltage and over-current protection, along with AC surge protection for the power diodes. About fifteen years after that, lightning took out several things in the shack, one of which was the power supply. The AC surge stuff, rectifier diodes, some of the control

circuitry, and regulator transistors were toast. Without notes and diagrams, it would have been very difficult to troubleshoot and repair it, but because I had all of the needed information, it was relatively easy to bring it back into working condition.

Sometimes we can go over the edge. A example that I consider 'overboard' is the amateur radio sub-culture dedicated to improving their AM or SSB transmitted audio to the ⁿth degree of fidelity, skirting or even breaking the regulations that govern such things. You can hear them at night around the top end of 80 meters comparing notes and ideas on equipment and tweaking this and that. Now, there is nothing wrong with improving the quality of your audio and a lot of hams take pride in their 'sound' (others certainly could take lessons!), but when it becomes fanaticism, well...

For me the answer to the question of "when is 'good enough' good enough" is that it works when you need it to work, that you can operate without endangering yourself or others, and that you know how your station equipment works so that you can reliably communicate with another station whenever the need becomes necessary.

Until next month,
VE1VQ