

The NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2011 VOLUME 11, No. 3

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



In March - for those of us in the northern hemisphere - this is what we dream about!

When we aren't dreaming about antennas!

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OTHER STUFF

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E-mail your comments, ideas, or submissions to marane@mara.net or to ve1vq@eastlink.ca

Grandma Mara's RAMBLINGS

CULTURED CORNER

by ANØNMS

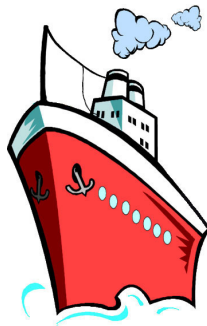
Grandma was never much for joining the hoards flying to Florida or Quay Something-Or-Other in the Caribbean at this time of the year, even when my hair wasn't gray under the 'improvement layer'. Laying on a beach and turning some shade of red, especially with a necessary visit to the nearest hospital clinic, was never my idea of a fun way to spend a vacation. Now take one of those cruise ships that have a 24 hour buffet, and don't require that you do anything except sit in a deck chair - that's for me! It would be hard but I could close my eyes to my diet for a week or two, then not get on my scales for a month or so after I returned!

I did look into the possibility of a ham radio cruise where the cruise ship makes HF equipment available for licensed amateurs to use, but couldn't find anything on line. Probably hams don't constitute a very big market segment. All of the information I did find, talked instead about NOT bringing your own equipment on board - even your VHF/UHF hand-helds! They did allow FRS, even selling them in the gift shops! Guess that's so you can find each other on the ship.

If you don't like bounding on the main, or perhaps you get seasick, then maybe there's a warm ham vacation spot on land for you. I did find a few of those listed but I really had my heart set more on the cruise with the never ending buffet!

Guess I'll just resign myself to watching the snowflakes fall and trying to keep warm. At least this way will be easier to keep my New Year's resolution and stay on my diet.

MNE



IT'S NOT SO CLEAR

*The cold and snow this time of year
Does not make one so inclined
To venture out of doors to do
What's best done in summer time.*

*Although 'they' say that work done on
An antenna this time of year
Makes it work so much the better
Though why it does is not so clear.*

*It's awfully hard to track 'they' down.
You can never seem to find 'them'.
And no matter how hard you look
Chances are slim of finding 'him'.*

*'They' seem to say a lot of things
And we believe whatever is said.
When it comes down to antennas
We believe whatever we're fed.*

MNE

TECH STUFF

By VE1VQ

PART 1 - INTERESTING STUFF ABOUT PEOPLE'S STATIONS

We buy the rigs we use for various reasons. Sometimes we like what we see in a magazine ad, sometimes a ham buddy has one, sometimes we get to try one at a dealer's location, other times we get one at a 'good price'. Antennas we hoist up into the air are often those we read about in a ham magazine. Sometimes we build them because they're simple,

GOT SOMETHING YOU CARE TO SHARE?

Have something you want to share? A construction project, pictures of your station - home or mobile, a station installation at the chapel, or Field Day, or maybe a hike into the woods with your portable rig. Whatever it is, share it with us. Send it to VE1VQ@eastlink.ca

sometimes because we read about them in CQ or QST, or sometimes just because they will fit into the space we have available.

I posed the question about what equipment and antennas people had at their stations in the last several month's newsletters, and here are the returns...

Rick VE3ATM

For antennas, I have a home brew [inverted V](#) that I use for most frequencies. I also have a [G5RV](#) that tunes well for 40M but not much else, so I use the inverted V for everything else. The thing that is unique about mine is I did not have a wide enough lot to get the separation on the legs of the V so I spoke with a number of hams in the area when I first put it up, and they all recommended what I will call the lazy Z.

It looks a bit like this from above and the side.

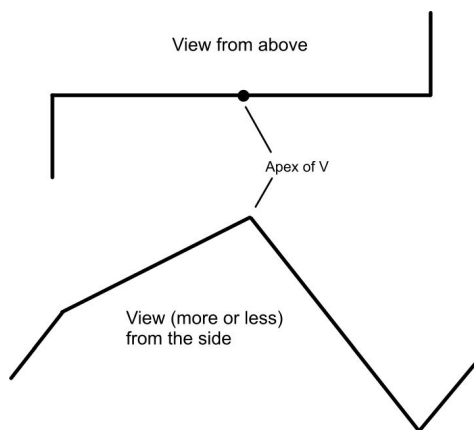
I don't remember the angle of the legs as it was a few years ago that I put it up, but each portion of the V comes

down to approximately 9 feet above the ground then using a rayon line at the turning point, I then go horizontal for the balance of the length of the leg, The apex is about 60 feet above the ground with the end of each leg terminated on an insulator to rayon line through a pulley weighted by a brick. It has served me well now for over ten years. This is the antenna I use for the net (MARA MW) each week.

A couple of weeks back, I had my Kenwood TS-80 SAT audio die. I was net control that day. I would still transmit, from what everything was showing, but I could not hear a thing.

I had repeated issues with audio over the past couple of years. I would hear a pop on occasion then the audio would blank out. If I hit transmit the audio would always come back. Well, this time it did not. I thought I was in for an expensive trip to the repair shop.

I work with a couple of hams so I talked with them. One of them said, had I plugged in a headset to see if I had audio? I had not. He also said, if you do not use your headphone jack it could very easily be the contacts in the headset jack. Try plugging and unplugging a few times if I found I had audio on the headphones. He said he ran into that once. Because of moisture in the basement, it is not



uncommon to get corrosion in the contacts.

Well, I went home that night and sure enough that solved my problem. I wanted to share this with others as it could easily happen to someone else.

Colin W9UPK¹

IC 756 Pro II. I picked it up used. I wanted better filtering and noise control than my faithful TS 850 SAT (which I still have and use for Field Day). I enjoy the LCD and all the things it can show. It's an easy rig to use.



IC 7000. This is my back up rig. It does a lot for a small rig and I can use it mobile and HF/VHF/UHF.

IC 706IIG. I've had three of them and still have two. For mobile they are the easiest to operate while mobile, easy to program and HF/VHF/UHF. It's too bad they are being discontinued.

[Alpha Delta DX-DD](#) as an inverted V. Great for 40 and 80 and saves space. It tunes well.

[SteppIR 3](#) element with 6 meter element. It's been a great antenna and you can do interesting things with it. However, it's mechanically a bit complex. I'm selling it and going back to my tried and true friend, the [Traffie HexBeam 5Bi](#) because it's smaller, lighter, always has flat SWR, easy to erect and works like a champ. I bought my first one in 2000.

[Cushcraft R-7](#). This is my back-up vertical. It was my first HF antenna and I still have it so it's mounted and waiting for when I need it.

My dream antenna is a loop antenna. I keep thinking about it.

For years, I successfully used a Traffie Hex Beam. Then I sold it to go to the SteppIR. Late this summer I noticed one of the beam couplers (a rubber gasket) had separated. I called SteppIR/Fluid Motion and they explained there had been a bad batch and sent me six new ones without any charge.

They were nice about it. However, before I could replace it, the beam came loose and fell to the ground. There was no damage to the plexiglas beam element, luckily! I have no problem with the SteppIR and it has been a good antenna, but the incident with the separated coupler made me re-evaluate

My dream antenna is a loop antenna.

I keep thinking about it.

W9UPK

what I needed and the possible problems. I have concluded that the SteppIR is a great antenna but unless you have a hazer or ability to easily raise and lower your antenna for repairs, it's not the way to go. The rubber couplers are never going to last forever, especially in Iowa's harsh winters. Eventually they will fail. Admittedly, everything can fail sooner or later, but a rubber coupler is just more susceptible to weather fatigue.

Since I don't have an easy method to raise or lower my antenna, I'll put up the Hex Beam. It is lighter, more compact and on 20 meters can compete very well with the SteppIR. Most importantly, I think it will outlast the SteppIR.

¹ See http://ne.mara.net/pdf/newsletter/2009_news_nov.pdf for the previous article on Colin.

Donn VA7DH

I have four supports in my yard consisting of pairs of 2" and 3" irrigation pipe. They are then held up by short trees or structures that can brace them up. Irrigation pipe is exceedingly light considering it comes in 20 foot lengths. I can easily support one cradled in my little finger. These pipes support an 80m [NVIS \(Near Vertical Incidence Skywave\)](#) loop antenna about 34 feet above the ground. This is adequate for covering about a 300 mile radius when we have our Mercury NW net out of Washington and Oregon. I mentioned NVIS and that's basically what people need for emergency preparedness. It beats the heck out of trying to establish VHF/UHF repeater links except that HF is a bit bouncy and can be absolutely crazy. When we get a rain storm hitting the whole coast of BC and Washington we usually get a huge amount of electrical activity in the form of QRN, signal to noise doesn't cut it. Then we have to either wait it out or go to VHF/UHF repeater networks to get from A to B.

The loop antenna can also work on 40m and with the height I have, we are able to get some DX going all the way over to the Florida Keys. I haven't had much success with 20m with the loop. Not sure why that is.

The loop is made from a length of plastic insulated 14 gauge wire I picked up at Home Depot for an outrageous price. I recently picked up a 1,000 foot roll of the same in stranded wire at a HAM get together for about \$30. Not bad. I can make a lot of antennas with that.

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VA7DH

I have another antenna called a [Chameleon 6](#). It's a whip antenna in two sections. I took it over to church with me when we had an emergency preparedness seminar and set it up outside within a guard fence around an HVAC (Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning) installation. I had brought along an aluminum speaker tripod and had mounted a bayonet connector on top of the same style used for quick disconnect of other large whip antennas. It makes it simple to assemble on site. The grounding was equally simple. I purchased a couple of sets of so-called jumper cables from a store and fastened one from the tripod to the guard fence and another from the tripod to the HVAC piping. I cabled it inside to a Yaesu FT-847 rig via a small LDG tuner. I fired it up not expecting to get much with such a small antenna. I soon picked up an English speaking voice in a thick Japanese accent. I called him back and he responded. I then tuned up the band (20m) and heard a young Russian sounding fellow who was talking very fast, sounded like a giddy teenager. Considering the strength of his signal I'm sure that I could have talked to him. Full quieting on both those contacts. Wow!

I also have used a commercial antenna, a Buxcom Windom 7-band HF antenna. It worked for me but not quite as well as I would have liked. I think that if I had some substantial trees to hang it from it would have worked much better. In regards to commercial antennas and dipoles I highly recommend the [Alpha Delta](#) line. DX-CC and DX-DD. Easy to put up. They are designed to be fed with coax but if a person has an SGC-230 or similar auto tuner then I'd suggest feeding with 450 ohm ladder line. It opens up the possible width of every band. That's what I use with my loop.

For VHF I use a variety of things and they all seem to work. I had a Ringo Ranger II up for a while and it did an exceptional job but eventually got noisy. We live in an area only a couple of kilometers (km) from the sea, and the air contains some salt. The antenna is made of aluminum and is in telescopic sections and clamped with small hose clamps where the sections join. After my antenna

Isopoles are nice and have wide bandwidth. They always look space age and make the neighbors gasp at the wondrous technology you have.

VA7DH



started getting noisy, I took it down and pulled it apart. It was white inside from corrosion, oxides, etc. I shined it up best I could and greased it. The grease has made it seem pretty bullet proof. I also have an old 2m Isopole antenna that was given to me. The great thing about the Isopole is that the coax connection is made up inside the down-turned cone and is therefore protected from much of the weather. Isopoles are nice and have wide bandwidth. They always look space age and make the neighbors gasp at the wondrous technology you have. :-)

I have another dual bander antenna that is a copy of the Arrow solid element 2m/70cm antenna. Various people

have worked on this type of design and everyone seems to come up with slightly different dimensions. Mine can be found on my web site². Another antenna I have made is a roll up antenna that provides a significant boost to hand helds. These roll-ups are nice to stuff into a grab-and-go bag. With one of the roll-ups attached to my hand held Icom 91A, I was able to pull up and talk on the Abbotsford repeater 92 km away. Not bad for a

I was able to pull up and talk on the Abbotsford repeater 92 km away. Not bad for a 5w hand held.

VA7DH

5w hand held. That antenna is also listed on my web site in the antenna section. That roll-up is not a J, it's a [Slim Jim](#). I know they look the same but they are a little wider bandwidth and seem to have a bit more gain. I have made several and sold them to my acquaintances and friends for about \$35 each including a BNC to SMA adapter making the antenna fairly flexible as to what to connect to. The twin lead I make them from, up until now, is a type sold by Radio Shack in the USA. It has a nice thick stranded pair of conductors and a foam core section between the wires. There are lighter and cheaper variants but I have not had good success. I recently got a spool of 300 ohm twin lead from the USA through eBay and it's very similar but yet different. The velocity factor will, therefore, be different and hence the dimensions will need to be worked over.

² <http://www.ldsradio.ca>

Next month, we'll conclude this series with the remainder of the answers I received. If you care to have your station included, send your information to ve1vq@eastlink.ca

MNE

ARRL FIELD DAY - 2011

June 25-26

ALWAYS HELD THE FOURTH FULL WEEKEND IN JUNE!

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“ March is the month that God designed to show those who don't drink what a hangover is like.”

Garrison Keillor

DI-DAH-DI-DAH!

HOW I GOT FROM THERE TO HERE!

Even though my father worked for over thirty years with the provincial power company, I didn't get interested in things electrical and electronic until I was in my final year of high school. It was sparked by a friend in my class. He had put a short wire loop in an electrical plug and produced random blown fuses or breakers (whatever they had in the school in the mid 1960s). He eventually became a physics teacher in that same school, and held a ham license with the call of VE1AQF before his death a few years back.

After high school, I attended a vocational high school in a two year electronics course. Now they are community colleges. Back then it was tube technology, with one whole day on transistors! If you found a job, and the instructors agreed, you could leave a few months early and still graduate. My first job was in April of 1967 with [PYE Electronics \(Canada\)](#), a sales and service company of VHF/UHF two-way radios for police, government and businesses, and repairs of car radios from car dealerships, for the grand salary of \$65 a week before taxes; and we got paid once a month! I was also much thinner in those days, because at that pay, I couldn't afford a car and walked everywhere or used the public transit system.

Several jobs followed, along with marriage and children, and a move back to the area in southern Nova Scotia where I was born. I worked for a company there, designing radio tracking receivers and transmitters for a few years before becoming my own boss, doing burglar alarm, sound systems, and fire alarm sales and service.

I was... much thinner in those days, because at that pay, I couldn't afford a car and walked everywhere...

I figured I'd seen enough mistakes made by others to perhaps not do the same on my own. A few years ago I dropped the burglar alarm part of the business (too much competition and not enough profit) to concentrate on the fire alarm side. I've also been a service contractor for IBM for over twenty years.

It was in the second year of that two year electronics course that I got my amateur ticket (VE1AUF). Both of the instructors were hams. The

senior instructor told us that someday it might be the difference between getting and not getting a job. That turned out to be true, as my boss in that two-way radio company told me that it was the deciding factor in why I got the job over the others who had applied.

When I was still living with my parents, and for a while after, I was active on CW, although I was never any speed demon. Thinking back, I believe I peaked at around twenty-two words per minute. I've always been more interested in building and making things work, rather than operating. For a while, I did have a FM tube type taxi radio, that I had converted to two meters, in my car. This was before there were a lot of ham repeaters around, and most hams would monitor 146.52 MHz for people like me who would happen along. Every Friday and Sunday nights, my time on the road to and from my parents would take about four hours each way, and the hams along the way would stay up until we had chatted for that short time while in range on simplex, and they knew I was safely on my way, and could pass me over to the next fixed station down the road.

Eventually, from lack of interest, and no place to set up a station, I let my license lapse. My fiance objected to

sharing the front seat with that (not so small) two meter rig!

A few years later when I became interested again, my original call had been re-issued so I picked up the two by two call (VE1VQ) which I still have. And because I frequently travel to western Canada to visit family, I applied for and received a call for use out there (VA6NS).

I suppose I've now reached an age where many people start to think about retirement. I'm not sure that I want to retire just to baby-sit the grandchildren as my sole reason for getting up in the morning. Maybe I'll become a WalMart greeter, just for a change of pace. And make \$65 a week again.

Until next month,
VE1VQ

The senior instructor told us that [a ham ticket] might be the difference between getting and not getting a job.
