

# The NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2011 VOLUME 11, No. 9

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

## FALL SEASON IN NEW ENGLAND

DEPENDING ON HOW GOOD YOUR  
IMAGINATION IS, YOU MIGHT SEE  
AN ANTENNA IN THE PICTURE.

**Imagination is a wonderful thing!**

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# Grandma Mara's RAMBLINGS

For me, the only month sadder than October is the one following it. October means I have to seriously think about putting the motorcycle away soon. November means I've run out of time and another riding season. And it means that when I prep the bike to put it away for the winter, I have to get the snow blower ready for the white stuff.

One of the best things about October that offsets the thoughts of the winter-soon-to-be is the fall smell. You know, the one that originates from the leaves and grass and other good stuff, as the cooler temperatures begin to happen. Grandma is fortunate to live in a rural setting with several empty acres of land all around my house. For those of you who are not so fortunate and live with asphalt surrounding your castle, you may never have experienced this pleasure.

October also means it's the time of year to lower the wire antennas, take down the VHF and UHF verticals, and lower the beam to check out the mechanical and electrical bits that make them work and keep them up in the air. I'm a believer in preventative maintenance rather than waiting for something to seize up or fall apart.



Grandma had noticed that the standing wave ratio (SWR) on 15 meters on the tri-bander had been creeping upwards ever so slowly over the last few months. Sometimes, after a hot and windy period, it would drop back a bit closer to normal, but then a day of rain and it would be high again. I suspected water was getting into one of the traps. So, one day in September, in return for the promise of one of my chocolate layer cakes, Walter came over to check it out. I know he would have come without the 'bribe' but it's a game we play. Down came the crank-up tower with the beam now being reachable from the roof of the garage. What are the chances you would find the problem in the first trap you open. Well, it didn't happen here; it was the last one, and there it was, about half full of water. The drain hole was plugged with the remnants of a bug of some kind and the trap had slowly filled up. Then when we had some

hot and windy days it would slowly drain and dry to the point where it 'got better'.

Walter took it into my garage workshop and blew it dry with compressed air. Then he used an old toothbrush and some kind of cleaner he had brought with him and shined up the trap coil wire and all of the connections. After that treatment, he washed it in distilled water and again blew it dry. He then reassembled it and reinstalled it on the beam. While it was in the lowered position he also inspected the rest of the hardware, tightening where necessary. While he was doing his thing in my shop, I was doing a check of all of the other antennas mounted on the tower.

When it was all done and back up in the air, we checked all of the bands. Fifteen was well down within specifications, as was ten and twenty. It was certainly worth a chocolate layer cake!

Next job - get the snow blower going.

- MARA NE -

## CULTURED CORNER by ANØNMS

The continuous monthly contributions by the columnist of the CULTURED CORNER column has developed a case of composer's choke (otherwise known as writer's block) and has called for a cessation of the clock.

We sincerely hope that ANØNMS gets un-blocked by next month and is able to resume the job of keeping us cultured.



# TECH STUFF

By VE1VQ

Last month's column dealt with slingshots and air powered guns for raising antenna support lines. I thought I'd add a bit more about the former.

For some of you, the simple act of possessing a slingshot makes you a criminal because of the jurisdiction in which you live! For the rest of us more fortunate souls whose elected 'representatives' haven't seen fit 'to save us from ourselves', we have the freedom to shoot ourselves in the foot or some other body part if we so choose. Luckily, up here in the True North Strong And Free, our politicians haven't taken that option away from us - yet!

On a nice sunny and calm August Saturday, I went to use my trusty slingshot to fix a couple of the support lines on my loop antenna. The tree branches have grown up in height and the lines didn't move up with them. Upon checking the bands, as I always do, I found the ends of the tubing that go over the metal fork ends showing signs of degradation. If you pull the bands as if to shoot, they will show surface stretch lines. This seems to occur at the ends attached to the metal yoke ends. I've never had it happen at the pouch end.

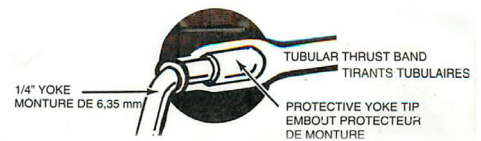
No problem! I always keep a spare set on hand! Somewhere! I surprised myself and found them right in the box where they were supposed to be.

The instructions tell you to wet the ends of the replacements with alcohol or water to make it easy to slide the new ones on.

The first side slid on exactly like it should with very little effort. The second side was not so easy, but with patience and perseverance I succeeded. Once again it was man over machine!

I find that the alcohol dries too fast if you get a stubborn one. Try it as it may well work better for you. If not then soak the frame ends and the ends of the tubing in a cup of warm water mixed with a drop or two of dish detergent for several seconds before sliding the two

together. Once it is in place, leave it for a few hours to let the water dry.



Don't use any kind of grease, oil, or other type of lubricant, as you don't want the bands staying slippery and suddenly coming off the frame in the middle of a shot. The water will completely dry making for a secure junction.

Those little black plastic things (called protective yoke tips in the above drawing) included in the package with the bands are for sliding over the ends of the metal frame before the tubing is attached. If this is a replacement effort there should already be a pair in place, and so you can discard them.

The antenna repairs had to wait for still another day.

As I was writing this in mid September, I found a high efficiency pair of replacement bands at the Cabelas' store in Edmonton, Alberta (see picture above). Supposed to give 30% more velocity. Look out trees!



- MARA NE -

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

**"Just because we can't do something great (in our lives) doesn't mean we can't do something good!"**

Wayne Thibeau,  
a member of the Yarmouth,  
Nova Scotia Branch, given in  
a 2011 Sacramento Meeting talk.



## GOT SOMETHING YOU CARE TO SHARE?

A construction project, pictures of your station... home or mobile; a Field Day station at the chapel or elsewhere, a trip in the woods or some remote location with a portable rig, or maybe an antenna in your backyard. A poem or fiction or a real life story involving ham radio would be just fine as well.

Whatever it is, share it with us. Send it to one of the e-mail addresses shown on page 1. Don't be shy now!

## DI-DAH-DI-DAH<sup>D</sup>

I was listening to Dan, NE3Z, one August Saturday morning following the 9:20am 40 meter net. He and another station I couldn't hear were talking about their first equipment. Dan was saying his first antenna was a Hy-Gain vertical. My first radiator was also the same one. I was part way through technical school at that point and I don't remember that we spent a lot of time (if any) on antennas during that first year. I had built an CW HF transmitter from a design in a mid 1960's ARRL Handbook. It wasn't a very efficient design with a 32 watt output to a dummy load for a 75 watt input on 80 meters. With its Pi network, it would match that antenna just fine (more or less). The feel of those RF burns still haunts me to this day! I don't think I ever made a contact beyond a couple of hundred miles with that vertical. It wasn't until later that I found out it needed radials to work properly!

For a few months I used the two or three crystals I had bought, begged or borrowed. It was common before the days of transceivers to call CQ and then tune the receiver up and down the band looking for a reply from others using a crystal on some other transmit frequency than you. It only took a short time before I asked one of the instructors to let me borrow a HEATH VF-1 vfo from



HEATHKIT HG-10 VFO

the school for over the summer vacation. Stability was not a word you used when talking about the VF-1. It was something you left running all the time.

Like the old song title, "How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm, after they've seen Paree?", how are you going back to crystals after you've used a vfo? It wasn't long after the summer ended before I placed my order with HEATH-KIT for an HG-10 vfo. As I remember, that worked first time also; I was on a roll here!

By this time the Hy-Gain vertical had a few radials off to one side and worked a slight bit better. A friend who worked for the telephone company gave me some drop line (twin lead spaced out to give something - perhaps - around 75 ohms). I built a dipole that was about fifteen feet off the ground extending down the driveway from the end of my parent's garage to a handy tree at the far end. I looked up antenna radiation patterns in my Handbook and knew they weren't the recommended ones, but I didn't care because now I could 'get out' all over Atlantic Canada, and into Quebec, Ontario, and down into New England, on 80m CW. I hung out mostly in the U.S. Novice band as my speed was only slightly better than most of theirs, and they were happy to make a 'dx' contact. DX for me was Virginia or Pennsylvania! Ah... those were 'the days'.

Until next month,

Dave  
VE1VQ