



# Squelch Tales



Newsletter from the Merrymeeting Amateur Radio Association for July 2009

# HAPPY INDEPENDANCE DAY!



## QSL Direct

by Tim Makins, EI8IC

There are many good pointers, and many valuable tips on how to QSL direct floating around on Internet DXing sites but the advice to include a foreign postage stamp is not always valid. Speaking on behalf of a number of Indian hams that I know personally, I can say that they want dollars, not their own currency stamps. The ability to acquire foreign currency is very useful to them, and they like to build up a small stash of dollars that can then be used for foreign purchases.

Stamps sent are often the wrong value, or are old stock, making them subject to questioning at the post office. Sometimes they are the pictorial issues, which stand out and can get stolen. They say 'Buying foreign postage is often less expensive than the often requested two green stamps (\$2.00 US)...' but is this really important to the US ham? It certainly is important to a third-world ham, who uses the extra few cents to help pay for the card printing costs. By including a stamp and no US dollars, the third-world ham has to pay for the card himself. Why should he? What does he have to gain from the transaction? Nothing - he loses out by sending the card. I know some hams in India with home made CW rigs, and for whom the price of a card is a real issue. Just the fact that they have received one from you makes no difference at all - it doesn't pay the printing bill! I would guess that in a lot of cases, an envelope received with no dollars just gets tossed in the bin. The US ham certainly wouldn't have added stamps if he knew that!

I hope these comments from the 'real world' may help. **73s,EI8IC**

## A good time at the Bangor Hamfest

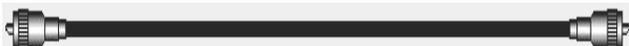
A report by W1ZE

Saturday morning, June 6<sup>th</sup> found Steve, AA4AK, Al, W3ZD and yours truly gathering at the Red Cross building in Topsham. We all jumped into Al's van and headed up I-295 and 95 to Herman High School. We arrived shortly after 8:00AM and set up our small table, put out a few items for sale and hung up the QCWA banner, since all three of us are QCWA members. Steve gathered his paperwork and QSYed to the school library where he awaited the on-slot of hams wanting their QSL cards verified for DXCC, VUCC, WAS and WAC.

The turnout by 9:30 was about the same as previous years. Maybe down a little bit from previous years. With the poor economy, a lighter attendance could be expected. Shortly after we arrived in the parking lot Paul, KA5FPT, another QCWA and MARA member arrived and our tailgate area became a gathering spot for MARA and QCWA folks.

I had a shopping list that included request items for MARA members who were not going to make the trip and was able to gather up most of the request items. Al and Steve did not buy much but Paul found several treasures he could not live without. I was able to negotiate a good price on an AEA PK88 packet TNC for seven bucks and that was my acquisition from the event. By the way, the TNC worked flawless and is no in service at W1ZE.

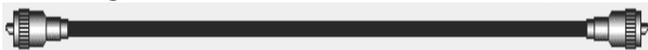
Steve was a little disappointed that no one showed for a QSL card verification check. I guess the word did not get out soon enough.



Several folks asked Steve if he was going to be at the Saint Albins and Windsor Hamfests.

After the grand prize was announced and none of us were the recipient, we packed-up and headed down the road to the Happy China restraint in the Bangor Mall for the Pine Tree Chapter QCWA meeting. We had a very good buffet lunch and a pleasant meeting before heading south and home.

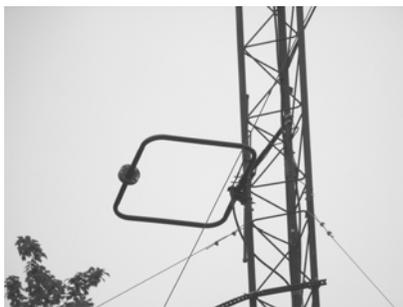
73, Bruce



## Folding Lawn Chair 50 MHz Halo revisited

By W1ZE

Several years ago Dick Stroud, W9SR had an article in QST titled “**Six Meters from Your Easy Chair.**” This article caught my eye so I made a copy of the article and put it in my Ham radio antenna computer file (a very large file).



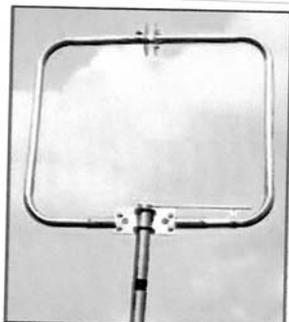
A year ago, after I got my 55-foot tower up in the air with my

SteppIR Yagi on it. I thought it would be good thing to have an Omni-directional, horizontally polarized antenna for six-meters so I could keep tabs on the calling frequencies to alert me to a six-meter band openings.

A halo or squalo antenna would fit my needs. At about the same time I was about to clean out the garage and noted two old cheap Wal-Mart aluminum folding-chairs. One was a little bent out of shape and the other had it's webbing coming apart. Dick's article came to mind and they were saved from a trip to the Phippsburg recycling center and relocated to the workshop.



BEFORE

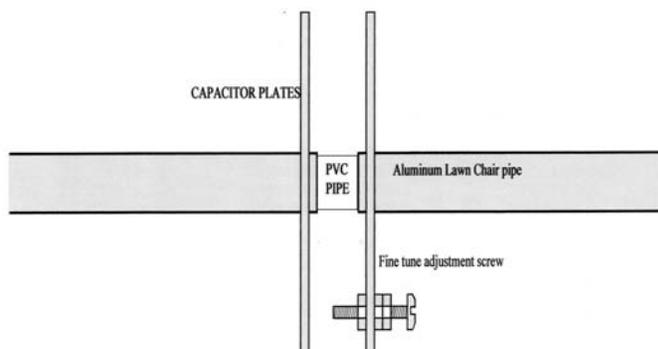


AFTER

I made a trip to the hardware store for a small piece of aluminum sheet to fabricate the capacitor plates and a blank galvanized electrical quad box cover to be used as the mounting plate.

With hacksaw and tin-snips I went to work. A few hours of fabrication work the antenna started taking shape. After it was assembled I went into the test mode with my antenna analyzer. After some gama-match adjustments and finding a proper capacitor gap I got it resonant in the in six-meter band. What was troubling to me was the touchiness of the capacitor disc plates adjustment. I could never seem to get the SWR sweet spot at 50.125. It was either out of the band on the low side or up at the high end of the band, never a happy medium. I needed a smaller capacitor in parallel to the big disc capacitor to fine-tune the antenna.

What I settled on was a 6-32 brass screw and a few brass nuts that would act as a screwdriver adjusted capacitor mounted near the edge of one capacitor plate.



This mod worked slick. After rough tuning of the capacitor plate I could fine-tune the have the lowest SWR at 50.125. Two turns of the screw would move the sweet spot 20 kHz. After final adjustment I had 1.5:1 or less from 50.010 to 50.500 MHz, most of that range 1.1:1.

I have made dozens of QSO with it and it works very well as an Omni-directional horizontally polarized antenna.

If you would like to build a lawn chair halo and need the plans, go to the ARRL web site. If you are a member, download the following PDF file from:

[www.arrl.org/members-only/tis/info/pdf/020133.pdf](http://www.arrl.org/members-only/tis/info/pdf/020133.pdf)

If you are not a member, I will be happy to send you a copy of the plans. I can be reached at [w1ze@arrl.net](mailto:w1ze@arrl.net).

73, Bruce



# Does Your Club Have an Elmer's List?

By Dan Romanchik, KB6NU

Whilst looking up information for a recent hamfest, I found the club's website and began surfing around. In doing so, I came across their Elmer page (<http://www.mcrca.org/elmers.htm>). On it, they list a variety of topics with the name, call, and phone number of someone who can answer questions on that topic.

My club something similar once, but it was less than successful. I think that one of the problems was that we asked people to fill out a form on our website if they needed any help. That information was e-mailed to one guy, who then forwarded it to the appropriate Elmer. There was just too much time lag between the time someone asked for help and when they got it. Or, it may have been that filling out the form was just too impersonal.

We are going to try it again, though, using the format that the Monroe club uses. I'm also going to give it more billing on our website, and push it more at meetings and other gatherings.

The topics the Monroe club lists on their website are:

- \* Antennas
- \* Buying Your First Radio
- \* Code Practice
- \* Computers
- \* Packet
- \* County Hunting
- \* DXCC Awards
- \* Rag Chewers Club
- \* Worked All States
- \* DX
- \* FM
- \* Homebrew
- \* Testing
- \* Public Service
- \* Technical Q&A
- \* Traffic
- \* Tube Radios

We already have Elmers for several of these topics. I, for example, would be more than happy to volunteer to be the Morse Code/CW Practice Elmer. We have one member who is an avid County Hunter, another who restores vintage gear, and yet another who's been spearheading a

statewide effort to set up a packet network throughout Michigan.

In addition, we are going to add or modify several of the categories. For example, Computers might become "Computers/Software" depending on who volunteers to be the Elmer. We have a couple of guys who are heavily into VHF/UHF operation and contesting, so we'll be adding those topics as well.

I really do hope that this will be an important resource for our club. In the past year, we've helped quite a few folks get their licenses, and now we need to help them take advantage of that license and get the most out of the hobby. Elmering is the way to do that.

Does your club have an Elmer list? If so, does it have topics that I haven't thought of yet? How do you get newcomers to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of your Elmers? And, finally, what topics have you volunteered to be Elmer for? Let me know by e-mailing me at [cwgeek@kb6nu.com](mailto:cwgeek@kb6nu.com).



## BATH HARRITAGE DAYS Needs our help



By Lee Tribou, N1OHC

The City of Bath Heritage Days Committee as asked the MARA for help in providing parade route surveillance and communications during the Independence Day parade on the morning of July 4th. The volunteers will gather at the five points intersection at the corner of Congress and Lincoln Streets by the armory at about 9:30AM. The parade will roll off at 11:00AM from the five point's intersection, down Lincoln Street to Center Street; down Center Street to Front

Street; north of Front to Oak Street and continue on Oak Street back to the five points.

As in past years, we will place communicators at strategic points along the route and communicate back to net-control (KS1R) at the starting point via two meters, most likely on 146.52 or .58 MHz simplex. As would be expected, a handheld or portable 2-meter transceiver is the preferred equipment for this event, Oh yes, don't forget to fully charge your transceiver batteries. If you can help out, please contact Lee Tribou at 837-7330(cell), 443-4194 (home) and [sionaann@zwi.net](mailto:sionaann@zwi.net), or Bruce, W1ZE at 442-9630 and [w1ze@arrl.net](mailto:w1ze@arrl.net). **We need your help!**

73, Lee



## 2009 Field Day Report, *Fantastic!*

Steve Kercel, AA4AK

Let me extend my heartfelt appreciation to the many people who participated in MARA's 2009 Field Day operation. There were 53 people present including 33 ham participants, partly from our club and partly from the surrounding ham community. I will not try to acknowledge the specific individual ham participants; there were so many that I'd likely miss a critical player. I do extend most special thanks to Connie Jones and the other people at the Midcoast Chapter of the Red Cross for all that they did for us.

This is the seventh year that the ARRL has allowed the Class F format, and it is becoming increasingly popular. The advantage of a Class F

operation is that Field Day is intended to be an exercise in emergency preparedness. What do the club members typically do in a real emergency? Typically, we head for the Red Cross in Topsham, and coordinate emergency communications from their radio room. We use it as an ARES EOC even if we are not handling Red Cross traffic.

What we had on Field Day was technically a "two-transmitter" operation. The two transmitters were a PSK-31 station on 20/40 meters, and a traditional SSB/CW station on 10/15/20/40/80 meters. We also had an "extra VHF station" on 6 meters. In addition, we used the existing Red Cross ham station, N1TRC, as our "get on the air" (GOTA) station; this enabled operators who wanted to do something new to give it a try. This year, John, N1OIG, gave us a dramatic demonstration (91 CW QSOs) of computerized CW on the GOTA station.

For the second year we used Bruce's homebrew Moxon array, made from hardware store materials. Bruce had stiffened it up considerably from 2008, and it survived without a scratch the fairly severe weather we had during the Field Day weekend. The 6-meter setup produced 57 QSOs.

This was the second year for Harry's, N1TTT, smoked turkey; he outdid his previous performance handily. Special thanks to Michele, W7LIF, for the focaccia bread Sunday morning breakfast. Special thanks to all the people who brought covered dish items for dinner and breakfast. This underscores a serious lesson in EMCOMM that is not widely enough appreciated. If you want the volunteers to turn out, you need to keep them well fed.

Operations were dramatically more effective than in previous years. Both stations started at 2 pm, and we essentially met our goal of running both stations for 24 hours round-the-clock. One thing we learned from previous operations is that trying to pass Field Day traffic on the Seagull Net was a big waste of time. This year, we passed the message to the SM via N1URA on 75 meter SSB. For the other formal messages, we sent a book of 10 messages addressed to individual participants in the W1MWV operation at the White Mountain ARC in New Hampshire. This required only two minutes of air time on 80 meter CW. Bruce, W1ZE, copied the ARRL

Field Day message on several different modes. In addition, AA4AK called up the Pine Tree CW Net from the FD site (Saturday evening is his regular NCS slot.) This happened so discretely that hardly anyone noticed.

We picked up 1510 bonus points. Special thanks to Al, W3ZD, and John, K2LOT, for providing their solar arrays.



Bruce made ten solar powered QSOs on 6 meters. This year we GOT the satellite points; Donnie, WD1F and Brian AA1WI, put in a very persistent effort that finally paid off. Paul scored the educational points for us by giving a class on the construction of coaxial antennas. This year, we found 4 young people to give us 80 out of a possible 100 points.

As ever, what kind of Field Day is it if it does not rain? This year we got way more than our share. We had a thunderstorm in the wee hours of Sunday morning. Unlike 2008, the weather did not turn nice by the time we had to clean up. Antenna removal was deferred to Monday evening due to the set-in rain on Sunday afternoon.

*Our 2009 operation produced our best results ever.* We ran both stations to literally the last minute of the contest. We had 964 contacts, 148

on SSB, 188 on PSK-31, and 628 on CW. Our total score was 5070 points, including 1510 bonus points. (Note: This is a preliminary score estimated the Monday after Field Day. The final report will probably be slightly different.) This is a dramatic improvement over our previous “best ever” operation in 2008; there we had 636 contacts and 3650 points. In the 2008 Field Day, there were 75 class 2F entries, and only 5 of them scored higher than 5070. *We are in an excellent position to achieve New England High Score for the third time in four years and an overall top-ten finish for Class 2F nationwide.*  
73, Steve AA4AK

**Were you licensed  
prior to 1984?**  
If you were, you are eligible to  
be a member of the  
**Quarter Century  
Wireless Association.**

If you would like more information  
about QCWA, go to:  
**www.qcwa.org**  
or contact Maine Chapter President  
**Bruce Randall, W1ZE at:**  
**W1ZE@arrl.net**

