

NORTH SHORE ARC



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Is anybody out there?

From Ken VE3RMK

After having to use my table saw as a table saw it was nice to get back to using it to hold my shack up off the floor. That's the funny thing about having a house and having to maintain it. You have to use things for their intended purpose. Anyways the work was done (for the moment) and it was time to spend time on the bands. Over the summer and fall we'd had some fairly strong winds but at the time I didn't think much of it. After all my antennas had suffered worse and were just fine. I try to take a look at them with my MFJ analyzer, but this time I was a "man on a mission". You can imagine how my sense of joy was building as I got things plugged in and connected. I had thoughts of the chance to snag another state or two for my WAS. VOAPROP showed that things were looking very promising, so I powered up the rigs. The sounds of static and QRM filled the workshop. It was truly a magic moment. Almost every time I power up the rigs is a magic moment, I guess that's why I enjoy Amateur Radio. As I tuned around 20M and a HAM in Northern Ireland was calling CQ. This is one contact I really wanted. I called back. NO response. I listened as another HAM in New York State made contact. When that QSO finished I called again. NO response. I was puzzled. The HAM in New York was running 100watts into a dipole. So was I... or so I thought. I listened to the Northern Ireland HAM go QRT. I dialed up and down the band listening to the over signals but there wasn't much, so it seemed like a good time to check the SWR with the antenna analyzer. Talk about a surprise! The 20M dipole that had previously been flat (for just over 4 years) was over 3:1!! Darkness prevented me from looking into the situation.

The next day, I wandered into the back yard and looked up. There was definitely a more noticeable sag in the 20M dipole than before. So I synched up the ropes a bit. The sag was gone, BUT now the SWR showed 15:1... I was annoyed to say the least. After supper the dipole came down. On the ground it became apparent that one leg was "loose". Sadly the only way to determine the cause was to open things up. My trusty Dremel tool did the work. The silicone seal plug seemed way too loose.



Is anybody out there? Continued....

A look inside showed even more worrying signs..... signs of moisture. The Dremel tool got a work out.



I've been told that antennas have a finite life. Sad to say, in this case it was only 5 years. The leg that wasn't loose had a silicone seal plug that required major force to extract. The end with the socket yielded water not just moisture when it was opened..... It also yielded the cause of the missed opportunity.



So I have to build a new dipole. I'm thinking I'll build a fan dipole for 20M, 17M and 15M. Why do we always have to work on our antennas in the wintertime?

From the Chair in the Shack

As we enter 2010, I feel that our hobby is finally beginning to show signs of stress. Several things have brought this to mind.

Although the number of licensed hams increases yearly, club and activity rosters shrink.
Activity both on repeaters and HF bands is lower.

Demand for our services for public event is up but participation is sagging some.
Building projects, even simple ones is losing popularity.
Kids are not "wowed" by radio as they were.

I'm asking myself why this might be happening. Here is a list of things I think may have a bearing on our hobby in no particular order.

Current job demands take away available time.

Recession means fewer have money to spend on a hobby.

Internet has fantastic appeal and content.

Cell phones and internet have provided lots of communications opportunities.

Projects are increasingly seen as expensive, possible failures and too technical.

So many areas in amateur radio are available that there is confusion about what to do next.

People are more likely to be distrustful of others.

Each of us has so many interests that ham radio loses out.

There are many more. I'm certain that almost all of us have had one of those factors actively reducing our ham time. We are to be excused but we should understand where the whole complex will lead our hobby.

On the face of it, there is much to worry us. Remember, though, what interested us in the hobby to begin with. The sheer magic of signals passing through space, often between continents or into space itself is a miracle. Controlling those signals is an incredible feeling. We hams do it by ourselves. Yup, radio manufacturers supply us with equipment but we don't have to use prebuilt stuff. We can make our own. And even the best radio is only as good as the antenna (we can build great ones) or the operator. Really, we are the essence of the signal's success or failure. We learn as we go how to make communications possible.

By contrast, how many of us have even the slightest idea how internet packets are transmitted and switched or how the cell phone network operates? If either is broken, can we fix it or replace it? Of course not. The one power we all have is to communicate when all the fancy stuff fails. It is magic.

I'm resolving this year to learn more about radio and operate more often. How about you?

73 de Pete

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This is the start of what should be great year for all of us and for the Club. Let's all pitch in.

Your humble scribe,

Ken
VE3RMK

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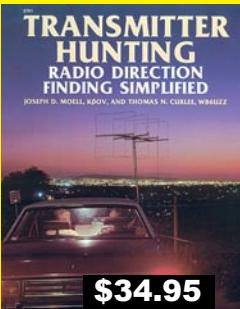
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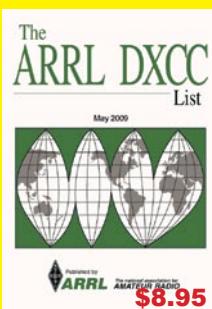
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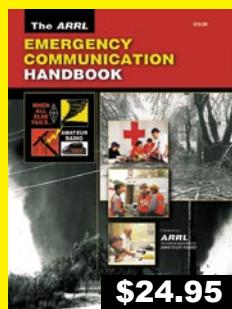
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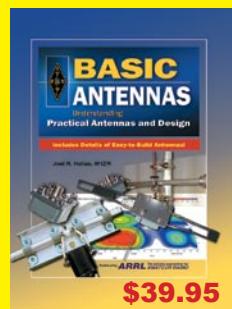
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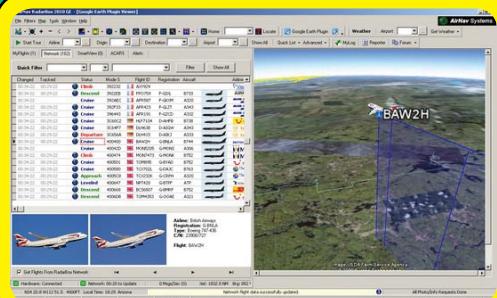


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