



# Radio Amateur News & Views

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## COMPUTERS IN THE HAMSHACK

### The January 14<sup>th</sup> RANV Meeting: DOS: PREMATURE FUNERAL?

The first presentation in the series "Computers in the Hamshack" will be a talk by Brian N1BQ at the January meeting entitled, "DOS: Was the Funeral Premature?" There is a good chance that just about all of us have a DOS based computer gathering dust somewhere in our homes. DOS laptops with 20-80 MB hard drives and long dead batteries sell for \$10-\$25. DOS desktop computers can be had mostly for free or some might even pay you to take it away! Why then would you want such an ugly unwanted duckling?

Some of the best ham radio logging and control programs still run under DOS. There are DOS programs that will do direction finding. APRS has a DOS version which is still developed and up to date. There are many DOS satellite tracking programs with a simple interface to control a rotor. Most DOS laptops will run all the way down to 11 volts input with no internal battery.

The aim of the presentation will be to show the various things that can be done and to let you play with the applications live. There will be at least five or six computers with software and hardware setup for live use.

So join us on January 14<sup>th</sup> at the O'Brien Civic Center!

## VT QSO PARTY

The Vermont QSO Party will be the weekend of January 31-February 2. The event starts 7 PM Friday and ends 7 PM Sunday. This is both a contest and operating event. The simple instructions are: 1. Turn on radio (*most important*) and 2. Call CQ. Last year, WB1GQR contacted 2200 stations in 50 states and 77 countries. You don't need a big station. The key thing is to get on and call. Since there are few others calling CQ, you should have no trouble getting some answers. If you don't have a station, talk a bunch of buddies into getting on. For rules, go to: [www.ranv.org/vtqso.html](http://www.ranv.org/vtqso.html).

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## MILTON HAMFEST FEBRUARY 22<sup>ND</sup>

Mark it on your calendar. Call up your friends. The 21<sup>st</sup> annual Milton Hamfest and ARRL Vermont State Convention will be Saturday, February 22<sup>nd</sup> at Milton High School. Details are the same as last year's event and admission is the same.

Right now, we are working on the Forum Program. Returning from last year will be the ARRL, Contest and QRP forums. Other forums planned will be on antennas, satellites and microwave. Exams will again be given in the morning and afternoon. We will also offer DXCC, WAS and VUCC QSL Card Checking.

Last year hamfest attendance all over the country dropped dramatically. The Milton Hamfest bucked this trend and even showed a little growth. This was no accident. I want to acknowledge the hard work that everyone did to promote Milton and ask you once again to step up to the plate. Spread the word, give your pals a lift and come to the show. Even if you don't have time, stop by for 30 minutes anyway. The hamfest is nothing if you think about it but don't show. You don't get the buys at the fleamarket, you don't get the wealth of information at the forums and you don't share in the camaraderie of fellow hams and experimenters. So, get out there and tell everyone about the Milton Hamfest on February 22<sup>nd</sup>!

## OUR LAST RANV MEETING

by Mitch W1SJ

The last RANV meeting was the Holiday Party at the Eastern QTH of W1SJ and W1DEB. The meeting was hastily called to order when a dozen denizens of RANV suddenly showed up at 5:30 bearing all sorts of eats! The food lineup included 5 pounds of cold cuts, 3 pounds of chicken wings, 2 pounds each of meatballs and franks, each in their special sauce, cheese, crackers, pretzels, chips, dips, bread, curly fries, salad, soda, juice, eggs, egg nog, and more dessert than anyone knew how to eat. If you missed it, well, you missed it! Mouths were logging overtime and then some, trying to eat and converse at the same time. While all this was going on, Mike showed off videos of the Field Day extravaganza (*remember those 95 degree days!*). Grant showed off some pictures of his tower erection and then checked DX conditions on 20 meters. Meanwhile, at the computer, Brian was showing Dave KB1FVA the wonders of the APRS underworld. And while dad Dave was occupied, 18-month old Jessica was making QSO's with all the ducks on the fireplace (*first Worked All Ducks?*). The new RANV officers were correctly installed, and no directions were needed. Howie couldn't make it and will be installed later. And, outgoing Treasurer W1DEB gladly passed over the briefcase to KB1FRW!

The body total count was 25 and included: K1's HD, KD, KB1's EPT, FRW, FUV, FVA, IWK, KT1J, N1's ALX, BQ, JEZ, PEF, QKH, ZBH, ZUK, W1's DEB, DEC, RL, SJ, SLR, W4YFJ, WA1LIE, 2 spouses, 1 baby and a partridge in a pear tree.

## PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

RANV is kicking around some ideas and we would like your input.

A number of people mentioned that they would like to have a weekend "breakfast" meeting. Great - we all know that eating is something we all do well! Now for the details. Saturday or Sunday? Early or late? Breakfast or Brunch? And the important question - where? Send us your ideas. We would like to schedule something for the winter months.

Milton is coming up. What topics are you interested in? Let Mitch know and perhaps he can find an exciting speaker!

## Welcome To RANV

Ed N1UR of Montpelier is an active CW Contester and DXpeditioner and is a regular on 145.15.

Ken N1OSJ of Winooski regularly plies the waters of Lake Champlain to and from work at Channel 5.

Jeff KB1IWK of Essex recently obtained his Technician license at the Fall Weekend Class

## Contacting RANV

In Person: Meeting, Jan. 14, 7pm,  
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By Mail: PO Box 9392,  
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Please send submissions for the newsletter to the editor, W1SJ.

## THE PREZ SEZ

by Brian N1BQ, President

Welcome to the New Year. Hopefully, we will not have gone off to war and all of us will be enjoying good health, possibly save for the heartburn of holiday season over-eating.

The ARRL 10 Meter contest was this past month and RANV was well represented. Mitch W1SJ and I were conversing about the contest recently and we both noted the many stations thanking us profusely for the Vermont multiplier. We each experienced many of our contacts being their first Vermont QSO. As a relatively new immigrant to Vermont (13 years) I still am taken aback, pleasantly to say the least, at the joy and happiness being located in Vermont brings to the various state and section chasers out there. After living in New Jersey where two-land calls are a dime a dozen, it's quite a change.

We will be starting off the year with a series called, "Computers in the Ham Shack." I will offer the first installment on, "DOS: Was the Funeral Premature?" Over the course of the year, we will investigate Windows, Linux Macintosh, and Personal Data Assistants. In February, Mitch W1SJ and Mike KB1FUV will revisit IRLP and will also look at EchoLink. In April, Bob, KB1FRW, will shepherd us through building a portable two meter beam. In May, Mitch will give us a presentation about how to be prepared for emergency communications and how most effectively to operate at public service events.

For other activities, in May, there will be a large Boy Scout gathering at Shelburne Farms and we have committed to having a ham radio presence there. Spring also starts up Fox Hunting season. We are looking at some new ideas for that and we are always looking for new activities.

# RANV – CONTEST CENTRAL

by Mitch WISJ

Contesting is one of the most misunderstood of all of the amateur radio activities. You hear people complaining about the short “hello/goodbye” contacts and how contests interfere with “their” ragchew or net frequency. Many, many years ago, when I was young *Johnny Novice*, I echoed these sentiments. Then, a buddy of mine talked me into joining him to operate Sweepstakes and the rest is history. Some 30 years and 100,000 contacts later, the thrill is still there and I still enjoy it. That’s staying power!

These days, there is an increasing emphasis on emergency communication training. The ARRL offers 3 levels of emergency operator training. There are numerous public service activities to hone one’s skills. Yet, I’ve found the best training one can get in operating prowess is contesting. The very nature of contesting is to accurately pass information as quickly and as accurately as possible to the largest number of stations in the largest number of areas. Standing in the way of this goal is variable propagation, interference, equipment failure and operator limitations. These same things stand in the way of successful emergency communications as well. The only difference which emergencies present is that the rules can change from one minute to the next. Over the years, I have found that all good contesters will drop perfectly into the public service or emergency communicator role, once they get some information on the unique nature of their role. Of course, that only happens when the contester is interested in this activity. Sadly, many are not.

If we equate contesting with emergency preparedness, RANV and the extended membership is doing quite well. Amazingly, we have become a contest power in the Northeast. In last year’s Sweepstakes, I was able to take the number one spot in the Unlimited category and Ron KK1L,

number one high power category in New England. Number one multiop was W1YK, with one of the primary operators being ex-RANV member John N2YHK. In Field Day, RANV entry W1NVT, along with W1MOO and N1QS, both loaded with RANV members, all scored very high.

In this year’s Sweepstakes, I knew that the competition was intense and prepared the station and myself better than before. This preparation paid off, as I ran a record rate well into the night. Unfortunately, Sunday afternoon was a struggle, just like it has been over the last several years. Adding to the “rare” Vermont section this year was Grant K1KD, with a new antenna system. Ron and Grant battled neck and neck all day Sunday, with Ron finally pulling away in the last hours. As far as we know, the claimed scores show Ron in first, W1AO from Maine second, and Grant 1 QSO behind in third in the high power category in New

***“I’ve found the best training one can get in operating prowess is contesting.”***

England. So far, only K6LL in Arizona has a higher Unlimited score than I posted. Of course, these are claimed scores and the brutal log checking computer will gladly find logging errors and remove 40-100 contacts from each of us, causing a potential shift in the standings.

This year’s Ten Meter Contest had legendary conditions. Conditions in the Northeast were down some from last year, but better than everyone expected. Conditions in the South were noticeably better and there were records all over the place from stations down there. Sadly, I didn’t hear or work as many Vermont stations as I would have expected. Many didn’t avail themselves of this great opportunity to get on and have fun.

With the great conditions down South, I got knocked out of the top

Ten pace I set last year. Still, over 2000 QSO’s, 140 multipliers and 80 countries on phone only are nothing to sneeze at. Brian N1BQ got into the act on QRP to the tune of several hundred QSO’s. Grant started out in Mixed mode and ended up as a multiop and looks like he took Vermont, just edging out AA1VT. The Lyndon State Alumni crew, with 40% RANV membership operated AA1VT from David W1KR’s place. And W1PU returned as that dynamic duo K1HD and N1ZUK put on a part time effort. There were many hours in the chair available there, but no takers.

If you feel that you need giant antennas to have fun in these contests, guess again. Most of the above stations are using nothing more than a tribander at 40-50 feet, a nice setup, but considered puny by contester standards. The AA1VT group was using nothing more than wire loops and a vertical and low power. If you get a nice high dipole into the trees, you can certainly make a lot of contacts – if you know how.

I’m often asked how I learned how to contest. You can read about contesting in a book, but it won’t help all that much. There were 3 key steps for me: practice, practice and practice. Over the many contacts you will make, you will learn what produces better results and what doesn’t and then hone your ability over time. I encourage you to get on for contests and practice your operating skills. Coming up early next year is the Vermont QSO Party in February, which is a very nice low-key way to contest. There is the 160 Meter SSB contest on Milton weekend and the ARRL DX contest in early March. Get on the air! If you don’t have a station, ask around. There always is someone willing to let you operate his station. The important thing is to participate now. Who knows, this next contest may have the best conditions in 30 years!

# HOPE FOR THE NEW YEAR

by Mitch WISJ

I could make everyone ill by hauling out my New Year's Resolutions. I'd actually prefer creating some New Year's *Revolutions*. Hey, it works for some people in Government. Instead, I'll try to be an idealist and grace us all with My Wishes for the New Year. "Aw, c'mon, SJ, you're not getting syrupy on us in your old age." Not quite. I had something else in mind.

## My Wishes For the New Year (*Ham Radio Style*)

1. Every HF station who calls me will use their full callsign, with proper phonetics.
2. QRP stations won't spend a half hour saying that they are QRP and will instead do item #1 above.
3. Other hams, when hearing WB1GQR or W1SJ call CQ will say, "hey, there is Vermont, I better not call CQ within 3 kHz, lest I interfere."
4. No ham, no matter what frequency, no matter what country, no matter what license class, will use HI when they mean to laugh unless they are operating CW.
5. Expressions like, "on the side", "in the group", "for ID" "we" and "73's for now" will become obsolete and never used.
6. **RANV** members will renew their membership on time.
7. The ARRL will finally list **RANV** in the proper contest category (*local club*).
8. Folks who say they are interested in amateur radio will sign right up for a class and not give lame excuses about how they have to go to the dump on Saturday.
9. Hams who take the class will get equipment and join the local club and join in on club activities.
10. **RANV** gets a donation of a Bell helicopter (*and trained pilot*) to make trips to the repeater a fun day.
11. The repeater never breaks, making the need for item #10 unnecessary.
12. Half the population of the Northeast moves south and west, making traffic jams go away and making it possible to win SS from the Northeast.
13. Our national leadership will pursue activities other than lobbing bombs into countries on the other side of the world. It's a proven fact that people get really ticked when they get a bomb dropped on them and they may be inclined to lob a few back our way. And besides, I haven't worked YI2BGD in Baghdad yet.

# REPEATER NEWS

by Mitch WISJ

There is nothing new to report. The new repeater is still in Essex waiting to go up to the mountain. The best method, as far as speed and smoothness is to ride up on a track vehicle. However, such vehicles require fairly deep snow cover. There are several steep, wind-blown sections where cover is poor right now. When those get filled in, we will be able to proceed. The temporary system serving as the repeater is still working well, but there are folks here who are biting their nails worrying about it. The radio up there right now was never meant to operate with the activity level we have been logging lately.

Users are asked to keep individual transmissions fairly short and leave longer breaks between transmissions to allow others to access the repeater. Until the new repeater is installed, it will be operating from Essex with a different tone and can come on at any time. When both repeaters are active, users in the Burlington area will hear a heterodyne beat between the two carriers which can range from minimal to extreme, depending on location. The mountain repeater currently has a higher pitched single beep, while the Essex repeater has two quick lower pitched beeps. If you wish to respond to callers on the IRLP system, make sure you are using the 110.9 Hz tone required by the Essex repeater, or you will not be heard by the distant station.



Opened up view of new repeater

# ELECTRONIC QSL

by Mitch WISJ

Operating from Vermont and generating pileups is a lot of fun. Having to deal with tons of QSL cards in the aftermath of a contest is not. In an average year, I'll be involved in some 10,000 QSO's which will result in hundreds of QSL cards. The expense of answering this number of cards can be staggering. Just 100 cards mailed out will cost over \$40 in postage and printing. Double that to \$80 for DX cards. This is why active stations require self-addressed, stamped envelopes. For the hundreds of cards I receive, which are more accurately measured in pounds, the amount of time to look up each contact, fill out a card and collect the cards for shipment is prohibitive. And yes, I do look up every contact, and if I cannot actually verify the contact took place, the card is rejected. With the amount of cards which need to be handled, there has to be a better way.

The other day, I received an E-mail stating that I had an Electronic QSL Card waiting for me at a site called E-QSL.CC. Now, I have received jpeg files of QSL cards before, but this caught my eye. My interest waned when I saw that I had 945 cards waiting under WB1GQR and another 605 under WISJ. Oh joy, more work! But, I took the time to register to see what it is all about. E-QSL is a server system written and owned by N5UP in Texas. It is supported by advertising and donations. I found that some 14 RANV members are registered on E-QSL. When you register, you are entered into a database of users. You set up a profile with your information. Then, you get the privilege of "designing" your own electronic QSL. For low flying members, like me, you get a limited number of designs and pictures to choose from. For a "donation" (*sounds like a fee*), you get to

choose from nicer pictures or you can even upload your very own design. I whipped up a serviceable QSL card, and got to work to see how to make a dent in the nearly 1500 requests waiting.

I clicked the *InBox* and they nicely sorted the cards by country, band, mode and months. Since I am working on the 160 and 10 Meter contest logs right now, I chose to look at cards from December 2002. The program will sort the cards any way you desire. In another window on the computer, I brought up my log, sorted by callsign, so I could check each request. On each line of the *Inbox*, you can click a button to view

***"you can click a button to view the card, and depending on whether the information is correct, click buttons to either confirm it or reject it."***

the card, and depending on whether the information is correct, click buttons to either confirm it or reject it. The confirmation process sends an E-mail to the recipient, telling them that their card is ready. The rejection window has a list of reasons for the rejection. With a little practice, I was confirming QSLs at the rate of 1 every 5-10 seconds. This is a lot faster than the process of printing contest labels, affixing them to cards and stuffing the cards in envelopes. When done with a QSL, you can archive it for viewing later. Printing would also be an option if you like to kill trees. Or you can send E-QSL a buck and they will mail you a printed version of the card, if you like to get that excited feeling when you open your mailbox (*sort of defeats the whole purpose of E-QSL, no?*).

Can anyone log onto the system and "steal" your identity? Yes, it is entirely possible, but one cannot fathom why anyone would take the time to bother to do this. To answer this concern, E-QSL has something

called *Authenticity Guaranteed* Certificates. To obtain this highly prized certificate, you have them mail a secret code to your callbook address, or you scan your FCC license and E-mail it to them or have 3 E-QSL members vouch that you are the genuine article. I didn't bother with this, because I have no doubt in my mind who I am, but in 1 day I was already admonished by someone for not getting my "certificate" (*P&M, P&M*). When I finish this newsletter and get some time, I'll get around to sending in my license (*done, and certified!*)

Can you use E-QSL cards to get your WAS or DXCC? Absolutely not! The ARRL made it very clear in

March, 2002 that they will not accept electronic QSL's. You will have to contact your ARRL Director if you want to debate this one. The E-QSL's are

good if you just want to collect them and don't care about ARRL awards. But, the E-QSL folks have a few awards of their own: E-DX, E-100 and the E-WAS. However, you must collect E-QSLs from *Authenticity Guaranteed* Stations. And this is probably why someone complained to me about this. His Vermont QSL from me, is just plain no good! The things we worry about!

I found the site fairly easy to navigate. However, the forms used for user profiles and QSL information are very persnickety. I wanted to change my zip code, but then it required my Grid Square, which I didn't want it to list on the card, but it did it anyway. The site is deathly slow, even on a cable connection. Maybe they need more donations for a bigger server! Perhaps one day, E-QSLing will become the de facto standard. It certainly is faster and cheaper than stuffing envelopes or dealing with the dreaded International Reply Coupons (*IRC*). To check out E-QSL, go to: [www.eqsl.cc](http://www.eqsl.cc).

## CONTEST CORNER

by Paul AAISU

Next weekend, **RANV** Members can enjoy the *ARRL January VHF Sweepstakes*. This is a great contest for any class of license. From Technician No-Code on up, all hams can find something to do in this contest. It starts at 2 PM on Saturday, January 18<sup>th</sup> and ends at 11 PM on Sunday. If you do not have SSB capabilities on VHF/UHF, you can still have fun with FM. Rules can be found on page 95 of the December *QST* and on the **ARRL** web site. FM frequencies to monitor are 146.55 MHz or 446.00 MHz. Turn off your squelch and listen for stations calling CQ. The exchange is grid square, which for our area is FN34. There is a club competition in this contest, so if you operate the contest and send in a log, put "Radio Amateurs of Northern Vermont" in your Log File, and drop me an E-mail, so I can update the League.

Moving onto the last weekend in January is the *CQWW 160-Meter CW Contest*. It starts at 7 PM on Friday night and goes for 24 hours. As most of you know, the band is only open at night, so be prepared to stay up for a long time, once you get started. The exchange is RST and state. This is a hard band to build an antenna for, as a full size dipole for this band is 260 feet long. The folks on "Top Band" devote a lot of time and effort to improving their signal on this band. If you don't have a 160-Meter antenna up now, you could start reading books on the subject, and maybe build one. There are several designs that are available for folks who are short on space and even some that you can purchase too. So, why not look into it. The band is a lot of fun, and folks are always eager to work Vermont on 160 meters.

On February 1-2, is the world famous *Vermont QSO Party*. It actually starts on Friday, January 31<sup>st</sup> at 7 PM and runs for 48 hours until Sunday night. It ends up being mostly a phone contest, because CW participation is not that high, even though you get double points for CW. I usually get on CW and call CQ for at least part of the contest. It is up to you to call CQ as much as possible. Very few hams outside the state will be calling CQ hoping to find one of us just tuning the band. Yes, there are a few, but they do better by searching & pouncing on us. The exchange is signal report and county. They will send signal report and state. Most of the available contesting software packages will support the Vermont QSO party, but you have to specify the contest details for the program to properly operate. Complete rules can be found on the **RANV** web site, [www.ranv.org/vtqso.html](http://www.ranv.org/vtqso.html). So, be sure to get on the air and hand out Vermont to all of those needy hams.

Of course, there are many other contests that go on every weekend throughout the year. I just mention a few here to peak your interest. You can easily find yourself in the middle of a lesser-known DX contest, just by tuning the dial and handing out a contact. If you don't know the exchange, they will gladly explain it to you. They are anxious for points and you may just score a new country this way. It works for me. I recall getting a QSL Card from Israel, by searching & pouncing during the *Holyland DX Contest*. And I didn't even have to send one to them first. Plus, if you keep score and send in a plain old paper log to the scorekeeper, you may just end up with a nice certificate for your wall. It is also a good way to build up your code speed for copying call signs.

That would come in handy for our feature next month: the *ARRL CW DX Contest*.

## RANV MEETINGS

We have an exciting mix of activities for the **RANV** meetings in early 2003. This month, Brian N1BQ will start us off with the first installment of "Computers in the Shack", the details of which can be found on the first page. For February, we will reprise Internet Repeater Linking. Now that the IRLP link has been functional for 6 months, this talk will focus more on usage of this valuable resource. We will also introduce the Echolink linking program and hopefully be able to demonstrate some QSO's on the computer. In March, Jeff N1YWB will talk about the Linux Operating System. While this might sound like a great topic for computer geeks, Linux is a very useful system for a number of ham radio applications, including things like IRLP. Our April meeting will be a very exciting event. That meeting will consist of an antenna construction night. All attendees who choose to, will end up building a portable 3-element 2-meter yagi, useful for portable operation and fox hunts. Finally, in May, we are looking to do a meeting on emergency communications and possibly contest operating as well.

**RANV** meetings are always on the second Tuesday of the month. Mark your calendars and datebooks now and reserve those Tuesday evenings for some great fun.

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## QRP FORUM

Dave Bensen. K1SWL, the founder and chief designer for *Small Wonder Labs* in Connecticut will be giving a presentation at the Milton Hamfest as a part of the QRP Forum. Small Wonder labs has a top notch reputation rivaling Elecraft for its line of reasonably priced, high performance CW, SSB, and PSK transceiver and accessory kits. His PSK-20 transceiver was a featured cover article in *QST* several years back. He will have kits with him for sale and one of his kits will be placed as a raffle prize.

**NEXT MEETING:**  
**“Computers in the Hamshack”**  
**Tuesday, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 7 PM**  
**O’Brien Civic Center**

**RANV**

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**<http://www.RANV.org>**