



# Radio Amateur News & Views

The Official Journal of the Radio Amateurs of Northern Vermont

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## FS5KA ST. MARTIN DXPEDITION The April 11<sup>th</sup> RANV Meeting

For our April meeting, your speaker for the evening is none other than yours truly, W1SJ. I had the opportunity to do what few hams get to do – go on a DXpedition in the middle of a major contest. Many of you have been involved by keeping track of where I was and providing contacts on many bands. Many of the details of how this came together can be found in this edition of the newsletter.

In the meeting, I'll have a multimedia show which will provide the story, pictures and sounds of what this was like. The show will include both ham radio activities and tourist activities, so I hope there will be something for everyone's interest. And who knows, maybe you will get excited enough to become an avid DXer or Contester!

Activities get underway at 6 at Zack's on Williston Road. The meeting will be Tuesday, April at 7 PM at the O'Brien Civic Center, 113 Patchen Road South Burlington. See you then!

## RANV SPACE LAUNCH

It will be a busy few weeks as we prepare for the first RANV "Space Launch". Brian N1BQ has already picked up a small television camera and transmitter. Presently he is working to set this up into a package which will work in the extremes of high altitude. The plan will be to launch at 7 AM on Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> from Milton High School. This is dependent on favorable winds. The prevailing winds will likely cause the balloon to travel up to the Northeast Kingdom. We will need trackers who can pick up APRS data and we will need field trackers to help locate the payload after it comes down.

There will be two other launches that same week. These will be from

Paradox, New York in the Adirondacks on Wednesday, April 19<sup>th</sup> and Friday April 21<sup>st</sup>. The expected landing zone is from Vergennes to Burlington and this would be a great opportunity to do some balloon tracking without having to travel great distances. The Friday launch will be before our Fox hunt that evening, giving everyone the opportunity to do TWO Fox Hunts in one day!

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## MS WALK APRIL 16<sup>TH</sup>

The 2006 Multiple Sclerosis Walk is scheduled for Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>. This is an early chance to brush up on your communication skills and do a good deed. The MS Walk needs a few volunteer communicators to staff the rest stops and travel with the walkers. Volunteers need to be on post by 7:30 AM for a 9:00 start. The latest jobs will finish up by 1:00. The Net Control station will be at Burlington High School, with most of the route traveling down North Avenue. If you can spare some time for a good cause, contact Bob KB1FRW at 434-2517, E-mail: [mcamp@gmavt.net](mailto:mcamp@gmavt.net).

## FOX HUNT APRIL 21<sup>ST</sup>

Our first Fox Hunt of the season will be Friday, April 21<sup>st</sup>, starting at 6PM. The hunt will take place on the input of the 145.15 repeater (144.55 MHz). John K1JCM will be our Fox for the evening, with likely assistance from Robert W1RFM. The usual rules apply: hunting area within Chittenden County, Fox on public assessable land, transmissions are at least 10 seconds out of each minute and at least an S1 signal must be heard in a mobile at I-89 Exit 14.

## OUR LAST RANV MEETING

by Carl ABIDD, Sec'y

The March 12<sup>th</sup> RANV meeting was called to order by President Brian N1BQ at 7:10 PM with 20 members present. Brian reported that he got an E-mail from John Bee from Quicksilver Radio, saying that he and KJI Electronics were pleased with the Milton hamfest, and plan on returning next year. Brian also thanked those who made presentations and helped in other ways. The hamfest is considered a big success.

Next, upcoming events were announced. Friday, April 21<sup>st</sup> is the first Fox Hunt of the year. Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> is the MS Walk-a-thon. Help is needed for this. On May 28<sup>th</sup>, the Vermont City Marathon takes place. Volunteers are also needed for this. June 24-25<sup>th</sup> is Field Day. Mark your calendar now for these events.

Bob, W4YFJ volunteered to bring the snacks for the April meeting.

Dave W1DEC reported on the progress of the PRB-1 legislation (*H-12*). It was voted on favorably on the second reading, and it looks good on passing this year. There was some discussion on the bill and the process it needs to go through to become law.

Brian next introduced Mike KB1MDA. Mike is involved in high altitude balloon launches, and gave a talk on what it involves. It was interesting to see the tracks the balloons take, and how they change speed with altitude. Mike explained the difference between "Balloon-Sat" and "Cricket-Sat". He also talked about some of the local launches from Milton High School and Ticonderoga, New York. One story of note was the balloon that didn't get recovered because it was in a field with "Beware of the Bull"

## FIELD DAY JUST AROUND THE CORNER

by Mitch W1SJ

This month we have a Balloon Launch and Fox Hunt. Next month we have Hosstraders, Parades and Marathons. And in June there's Field Day. There is always a great activity waiting just around the corner.

You may think it is early to talk about Field Day, but it isn't, since it is only 10 weeks away. This year we are faced with some serious challenges. Two of our key overnight operators, N1YWB and KC1WH will not be there and someone new will have to step up to help out. If we lose another operator or two, we will be in crisis mode. While we have been getting new hams, we unfortunately have not been creating new HF and contest operators. This is a bad road to take since we must always replace the old people with new ones. I don't have a quick solution to this. It requires someone who is interested and has the time and desire to train for the job. It doesn't work very well

signs! Mike also showed off some of the hardware that goes aloft in their balloons.

Brian then talked about our planned launch. He demonstrated the video camera with overlay position, altitude, temperature and time display. The need for funding was discussed. Brian estimated that our payload could be assembled for under \$500. Dave W1DEC made a motion, seconded by Bob KB1LAX to spend up to that amount for the project. It passed unanimously. The launch dates are April 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The meeting ended around 9:30.

to sit someone brand new down and expect them to produce reasonable results. In fact, that method often results in frustration and burnout. In the last few issues of *News & Views*, we have put more emphasis on HF, Contest and DX operating with the hope that this style of operating will catch your imagination.

If operating isn't your bag, you might want to get involved with the Field Day demonstrations. Each year, we demonstrate SSTV, APRS and Packet for an additional 300 points. Jeff took care of this for us but we need to find someone new. Most of this can be put together on a laptop hooked to a suitable radio. It involves getting the software, setting it up, testing it and making it work during Field Day. It can be a lot of fun. Who is interested?

And, who wants to be an HF operator? Now is the time to start preparing.

### Contacting RANV

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Please send submissions for the newsletter to the editor, W1SJ.

## DX IS...

by Ed NIUR

HF DX opportunities have been abundant this past month despite the bottom of the sunspot cycle. The ARRL DX SSB contest was held last month. Were you on? Even with 100 watts and a dipole at 30 – 50 feet, 20 and 40 meters were very DX friendly all weekend. Asia was a loud as I have EVER heard it on 20 meters at 5:30 – 7:30 PM on both nights. Japan was very workable as well as Alaska, Asiatic Russia. I worked Mongolia (JT1CO) but admittedly that one required a beam. Europe was LOUD from 6 AM – 4 PM both days. With determination and “time in the chair”, you could have worked DXCC, or pretty darned close, with a few dipoles and a 100 watt transceiver from here in Vermont.

I worked JT1CO on 40 meter CW at 6:30 AM in the middle of March. This was a new zone for me on 40 meters and I believe that JT1 is only workable in the morning like that, from here, for a few weeks a year as winter turns to spring. The signal was pretty strong. It was posted on the DX cluster but I happened to find him while tuning the band in the morning and there were only 3 or 4 people calling.

I worked C91VB (Mozambique on 17 meter CW at 8:40 AM. He wasn't even moving the S Meter. He had no one calling him and he came back to me first call. What makes this one of interest to other “budding” DXers here in Vermont is that I have no 17 meter antenna! I used my 80 meter inverted V and my rig's internal tuner.

Also, I worked KL7J (Les in Alaska) on 160 meters at 5:35 AM (40 minutes before sunrise). Paul AA1SU and I tried to work Les many times last year. This time it was on the first call and he is in the log with a 579. The interesting story here is when conditions are good it's a LOT easier. Also, I noticed that KL7J was posted on the cluster on 1829.5 by a VE1. I went to that frequency and Les wasn't there. I decided to tune around. I found Les on 1824.0 calling CQ. 3 minutes after my QSO he is re-posted on 1824.0 and there are 10 -15 people calling him. I probably wouldn't have broken through that pile-up with 200 watts and the 15 - 20 min window that probably existed to work him before the sun came up too high.

The DX Cluster is a friend and an en-

emy. There are many sources of this information. If you haven't experienced it yet, do a search for DXSUMMIT. Here, the world is posting what they hear on 160 – 2 meters. The good news is that you can go right to a frequency and see if you can hear the person or maybe work them. The bad news is - everyone else can too. So quite often you get what is called a “DX cluster pile-up”. As a low power station, that can be a problem as it puts you in a very competitive situation to work DX. This is made even worse if you have marginal antennas. The cluster should be one tool for people interested in working interesting DX, but be careful of making it your only tool. There is lots of fun stuff to find just tuning around and you will find that some of it has not been posted yet to any DX Cluster. Such was the case when I found KL7J and worked him first call. DXing is a lot easier if the only thing you are worried about is “being heard” rather than “breaking a pile-up”.

As spring is approaching, not only is good HF DX available but the weather is getting better for 6 and 2 meter DXing from mountaintops. Find a spot and try it out some time. You may find it is really fun to be sought out by others.

Also, spring means that antenna season is right around the corner. Do you have an HF antenna? Look around the yard and find your tallest tree. How tall is it? To roughly measure it, ask your XYL or friend to stand at the base and take a picture. You get a great idea of the height by multiplying your friend's height by enough times to reach the top of the tree. If it takes 10 friends to reach the top and the friend is 6 feet, you have a 60 foot tree. A simple inverted V a 45 - 60 foot tree will reward you with a wealth of DX on HF. Maybe you don't have your General yet? Well, no code is around the corner. And the Hosstraders Hamfest is coming. Purchase a used HF rig (\$250 - \$400) and start listening to what is out there. All it takes is a tree and a wire to hear stuff. If you like what you hear, and think that it would be fun to work it, what better way to get motivated to upgrade and try it out.

## MEET THE MEMBER

Kayle - KB1JOO

Who exactly is KB1JOO? I was born May 31, 1976. My father was a truck driver/mechanic and my mother was a Jill of all trades. I was the last and youngest of 9 kids (5 Brothers, 3 Sisters). Even at a young age I had an interest in electronics and computers. I loved to disassemble the stuff to figure out how it worked.

In high school I was a 3-sport athlete (Football, Baseball, Basketball) and along with this I took all the computer and electronic courses I could. After graduation I spent the next 7 years working in the computer field at a few local shops. For the last three years I have been employed as a Senior Wireless Engineer working for a local company where I design and deploy wireless infrastructure for corporations, municipalities, and hotspot venues. It was at this point that I got interested in ham radio and got my technician license in 2003. I laugh because I bought my first radio (Vertex VX-150 HT) a month before I had a license.

I have helped out at Field Day, the Milton Hamfest, and many other events. Besides ham radio, I have several hobbies which include golfing, hiking, Geocaching, and software programming, but my passion is Photography. I love all aspects of it from weddings to portraits (setting up a studio), and landscapes as well as horseshows, snocross, and other events.

# FS5KA ST. MARTIN DXPedition

by Mitch W1SJ

Recently, I had the opportunity to be the operator of a semi-rare DX station in the ARRL DX contest. After 48 hours, big rates and 6000+ QSO's, it was like going to contester heaven.

A few years ago, Mort W1UQ, a member of RANV at the time, was at Milton and mentioned that I should come down to Sint Maarten and visit with him. At the time, the notion of a DX-vacation didn't seem all that real. During one particularly cold nasty winter, Mort mentioned this again and I had my fill of the endless cold snowy days. "When should I come down?" I replied. I was on the beach inside of two weeks, in early January 2003. Debbie and I had a wonderful time, and even got in some casual operating.

Sint Maarten is a unique place in that it is comprised of two separate DXCC countries, all on an island measuring only 8 miles across. The south side is part of the Netherlands Antilles or Dutch West Indies (*prefix PJ7*). The north side is Saint Martin (*note difference in spelling*) and is part of the French West Indies (*prefix FS5*) and is technically a department of France. Mort had very nice visitor ham shacks on BOTH sides of the island! I knew that I wanted to come back one day and put my abilities to the test in a contest. The French station is very appealing due its location on the highest point of the island (*1391 feet*) with steep drops in all directions.

Unfortunately, contests are not scheduled at convenient times if you are in the training business, which both Debbie and I are in. The contests of interest, ARRL DX, CQ Worldwide and the ARRL 160/10 Meter Contests all fall during classes. A DXpedition trip would have to be at least from mid-week until the next mid-week to allow time for pre-contest preparation and post-contest relaxation. Over the years, I kept looking at how to put the schedule together, and it was always tough. This past December, I said, "the hell with it - I'm going, no matter what!" I managed to do a whole bunch of creative scheduling to move around classes on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. Debbie pressed her son into service as a substitute for her class. Mort did some last minute wheeling and dealing and had a place available for us.

Although the ham shacks on the island are fairly well equipped, there is no club to do the maintenance. With salt air and humidity, all equipment ages rapidly, especially antenna parts. There is always a concern that when you go to fire up the station, something won't work. Luckily, Dave K3LP went down to operate the ARRL CW DX contest two weeks earlier and I was able to find out from him exactly what the situation would be. I decided to use the equipment in place, Kenwood TS-440S and TS-570S and an Alpha 78 Amp. There is an 8 element log-periodic at 75' and Dave left up 80/40 dipoles at 75 feet. All I had to do was to add a 160 meter dipole, and I'd be all set. And more good news: the band new club call FS5KA was just issued and I was going to put it on its maiden voyage!

Travel was on Thursday before the contest. I was extremely nervous because I was flying with U.S. Air, the only choice from here. Not only do they have high prices, they are in Chapter 11. I tried to get some information from the clerk like, "will you guys still be flying in another 3 weeks?" When I got a vague answer to that, I asked if her resume was up to date. She laughed. I didn't. To complicate things even more, we had only a 45 minute connection in Philadelphia, which I was told is a legal connection time. Heck, if the pilot sneezes, we'll miss that connection and lose a full day!

My nails were trimmed (bitten off) real short on this trip, but it went off like clockwork. We arrived on the island at 3, got to where we were staying and met up with Mort's son David PJ7DB and took a reconnaissance trip up to the mountain. I knew what I had to do for setup.

Friday dawned, and it was the hardest part of the trip. I had to stock up on food, say goodbye to Debbie, leave the sun, the beaches, the sights, the activities and restaurants and cloister myself on a mountain for three days. Suddenly, this didn't seem like a good idea anymore. I had to summon that steely resolve which all good testers have and ignore the temptation around me and get up to that mountain and do what I came to do!

For setup, I had the usual wrestling matches with dipoles and trimmed the antennas to get the SWR where I needed it to be. Late in the afternoon, I started putting the station through its paces. When I tried to tune up the amplifier on 15 meters, it gave me a quick hiss (*just like the cats when they are cranky*) and didn't tune. It didn't work back on 20 meters either. Aha, but I was ready for this possibility, as I brought up a spare amp from the PJ7 shack. It didn't work either. This, I wasn't ready for. But, there was a spare Dentron 160-10L sitting in the corner of the room. All right! Whoops! It had a French style plug and the shack receptacle was an American style 240 volt unit. I had 2 hours to go and didn't have time for a debate, so I just pulled the plug off of the Alpha. But wait a minute! Does that Dentron run on 120 or 240 volts? I assumed the French plug was for 240 volts, but I wasn't 100% sure and. I searched for a voltmeter, and of course, not one was found. So, I put a 120 volt plug on, tried it on low voltage; convinced myself it was indeed too low; put the 240 volt plug on, hooked it to the transceiver and got a tidy 500 watts out. Four 572B's should put out a lot more than that, but at this point beggars weren't going to be choosers.

I got on 20 meters 20 minutes before the start. It was instant pandemonium! Stations from all over the world were piling up. I enjoyed the popularity and took my sweet time answering stations, making the pileup only worse. Hey, I was having fun! But business is business. At 23:59, I announced "stateside only please", since in the ARRL Contest DX stations work stateside and Canada only. Boom, the contest started with a flash. Some ask, how fast can you work em? The answer: how fast can you type! The contest meter was showing dizzying short term rates, tipping over 500 QSOs/ hour as I questioned the sanity of keeping this up for another 48 hours. I didn't have too much time to daydream as 20 meters was quickly running out of gas. Still, even with fading conditions, I logged 280 QSO's in that first hour, which was absolutely amazing.

Now it was time for real work on the low bands. OK, I'm gonna plop myself down right in the middle of that damn 80 meter DX Window and ain't no one gonna evict me, cause I'm the DX this time! Unfortunately, many DX stations had this same exact game plan and the window was a war zone. I tried CQing a little up the band, but no one was calling. Everyone was working split! OK, I can do that, as I found a clear spot on 3720, "CQ Contest, listening 3820, FS5KA." I worked one station, then another, then I was spotted and the pileups came right back. I was surprised how many guys can work split!

I spent the evening jumping back and forth between 40 and 80 with good success. Unfortunately, my forays onto 160 meters were unsuccessful. Only a few contacts were logged. Meanwhile, I could hear KV4FZ (*only 100 miles away*) running stations. I got a sinking feeling that the dipole I put up wasn't cutting it. The second night was much better on the top band. But there were other problems to deal with first.

Early in the evening, I thought I had a visitor, as I thought I smelled cigarette smoke. But wait a minute; I'm the only person on this mountain, who could be smoking? A while later, I heard buzzing noises from the amplifier. I also noticed a good deal of smoke blowing out of the bottom. This was definitely not good. I throttled back the power a bit, crossed my fingers, said an incantation and hoped for the best. The best didn't happen. Reports were piling up about weird sounding audio as the power dropped. As I ran the pileups on low power, I pulled apart the amp and found that one of the capacitors let go.

Later that evening, Mort showed up on frequency and I regaled him about the sorry state of amp failures. He had

another amp in storage, but it wasn't working either. "Mort don't you have anything else?" I asked, knowing that he had an Alpha 87 in the shack there.

"Oh, that's my baby and it doesn't travel," he replied. Somehow, I got Mort into the contesting spirit and he was hauling an 80 pound amp downstairs! Tremendous! As no one was available to bring the amp up to the mountain, I drove down to get it at the lull of activity at around 4:30 AM. Here I am driving down a very, very steep trail in pitch darkness. I didn't have time to be scared (*and should have been*), since I had to get back! I got the amp in record time (*25 minutes round trip*) and it was uneventful, except for the unadvertised speed bump which I *almost* hit at high speed!

The night's activities left no time for sleep and I spent many 200+ QSO/hour hours with my eyes half closed. It was really hard to realize that by Saturday evening, I had yet another full day of this silliness.

Sunday morning had awful slow hours - 70-90/hour which normally is good, but felt like I was standing still. After the Europe opening closed, everyone turned their beams south and the rates went right back up. The sad news was that 10 meters was virtually a no show in my area. The guys further south had the opening. I drowned my sorrows with monster rates on 15 meters. The last hour on 20 meters was totally intense as I yelled and screamed my way to a 263 QSO hour! What a finish!

I packed up the stuff, ran down the mountain and had a nice ribs and rice dinner at the Regatta festival on the beach. The rest of the week was filled with hot weather, beaches, barbecues, shopping - all boring stuff compared to the weekend!

## AVERAGE 'JOO - MILTON FEST

Kayle KBIJOO

The 2006 Milton Hamfest is done and it's time to look forward to next year's event. Before we do, let's take a look at this year's and see how things went. Despite the inclement weather, there was a great turnout in terms of visitors and vendors. There really was a little of something for everyone. Heck, I even bought a new radio while I was there. Once again we raised the bar when it came to forums. There was a wide range of them and they were well presented. I think far and away Milton provides some of the best forums anywhere. It was great to see everyone chatting, swapping ideas and buying gear. It really made for a great day. The demonstration people did a fantastic job recovering from early problems and making the best of the situation. For me, the biggest wow factor came when I was chatting with the guy from Quicksilver. During our conversation he mentioned that he ran out of several things that he thought he brought too much of (including two of the items I wanted). That says a lot about the fest - it's bigger than most realize.

In closing I'd like to take a minute to thank all the people who visited the hamfest and helped make it a success this year, and a bigger thanks to all the volunteers who made this happen. Speaking from personal experience, there is a lot more involved in making this event happen than anyone realizes. Remember that this is your hamfest as much as it's mine, if there was something you liked, didn't like, or want to see next year let us know. We can't promise anything but if we all give a few minutes to the cause it will only grow and get better. Thanks Mitch for the great hamfest reviews in the past.



**A smiling W1SJ  
ponders the past 48  
hours at the helm of  
FS5KA**

**NEXT MEETING:  
“FS5KA DXpedition”  
Tuesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 7 PM  
O’Brien Civic Center**

**RANV**

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