



Radio Amateur News & Views

The Official Journal of the Radio Amateurs of Northern Vermont

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FOXHUNTING PICNIC The July 11th RANV Meeting

For our July meeting, DO NOT go to the O'Brien Civic Center, because the meeting will not be there! As we do each year, we hold our July and August meetings in the great outdoors. Our July meeting will be at Mills Riverside Park in Jericho. Take Route 15 East out of Essex Junction. When you pass Clark's Truck Sales on the right, look for the sign for the park, which is right before the turnoff onto Pleasant Valley Road. We will convene around 5:00. Park in the lot, walk across the covered bridge and head for the pavilion. We will have the grills set up there. RANV will provide beverages, burgers, dogs and buns. You bring whatever else!

At 6, we will start to have hidden transmitter hunts. Fox boxes will be strategically placed in various places in the park. All you need to do is to find them. Be sure to bring your Fox Hunt equipment. Although we are not doing the Geocaching part this time, there will be some of us who will be searching for the many caches in the park and you are welcome to tag along to see what it is about.

Please let us know if you have any plans to be at the meeting so that the correct amount of food can be purchased. The picnic meetings cost extra money for food and pavilion rental and we will keep doing these as long as the attendance warrants it. In others words, see YOU ALL there!

COMING UP!

With Field Day behind us, that's the first of the Big Three RANV events this summer. There is the July 11th meeting/picnic in Jericho and the August 5th picnic in St. Albans. Be sure you can get to at least one of these!

There are a few other ham radio activities of note this summer. Next weekend, July 8-9th is the IARU HF Championship. This is a shortened summertime DX contest, running from 8 AM Saturday to 8 AM Sunday.

On the very next weekend after that, July 15-16th is the CQ World-wide VHF Contest. This runs from 2 PM Saturday until 5 PM Sunday and only 6 and 2 meters are used. Find yourself a high spot and be competitive on the two bands!

A second hamfest returns to Vermont on August 19th. That's when the St. Albans ARC holds their first hamfest that Saturday in St. Albans. It starts at 8 AM at the Highgate Commons Shopping Plaza, Route 7 near I-89 Exit 20.

RANV PICNIC August 5th

Next month, our normal monthly meeting will be replaced by the RANV Summer Picnic. It will take place on Saturday August 5th and will be held at Kill Kare State Park in St. Albans. Festivities get underway starting at 11 AM and run all afternoon.

RANV will supply park admission, soda and charcoal. You supply the rest! For those who are new to the picnic, major activities include eating and talking. There is also antenna stringing, working DX, calling CQ, yakking on the repeater and perhaps even some other interesting modes. We'll even have a Fox Hunt or two. There is also swimming, hiking, boating, volleyball and fishing. Eating appears to be the hands-down favorite!

Be sure to bring family and friends, food to eat and appropriate sporting goods DO NOT bring pets! Unfortunately, the park doesn't allow them, and it is too hot to leave a pet in the car. See you at the picnic!

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LAST RANV MEETING

by Carl ABIDD, Sec'y

President Brian N1BQ called the June meeting to order at 7:20. There were 15 members and guests in attendance. The first order of business was Field Day. Help is really needed! There were a few volunteers. Next, Field Day food was discussed. It was decided to order Chinese food for supper. Since we will need some cash, Paul AA1SU made a motion, seconded by Bob KB1FRW to allocate up to \$400 for operating expenses. The motion passed.

Mitch, W1SJ made arrangements for a solar charged battery with Brian N1BQ for a Field Day bonus. Mitch also announced that he will be the fox for the Friday night Fox Hunt.

The main topic for the evening was Amateur Television (ATV). The speaker was Ed N1QG. He explained that unlike Slow Scan, ATV is real TV, moving pictures and all. He showed some historical and hysterical video clips of some of the people who did ATV in the area back in the 1980's including WB2JSJ, who made his own graphics! There was discussion of the various TV repeaters used, and the various frequencies and modulation schemes used. Ed also showed some ATV equipment and explained how it all went together. He left us with a question, what next, A-HDTV? That would be cool.

The next meeting will be at Mills River Park, a fox hunt/picnic combined event. In August, we will be at Kill Kare State Park for our annual picnic.

After introductions, we adjourned for snacks. The meeting ended at 9.

THE PREZ SEZ

by Brian N1BQ, President

Field Day - WOW! A few months ago there was a report that there were no sunspots whatsoever in March, 2006. By May, speculation was that we are definitely coming out of the cycle and that all it can do is get better. I am in no position to do anything more than nod and hope this is true. But, if this Field Day was any indication, RANV and its QRP kid brother, Northern Vermont QRP Society (NVQS) both had record Field Day performances.

Not only that, but after a Winter, Spring, and early Summer of the dampest, most abysmal weather anyone can remember, we had three days that were, as I like to say "the kind of days dreams are made from!" What a concept! No wind, no oppressive heat, no torrential downpours.

The July 11th meeting will be at Mills Riverside Park on Route 15 in Jericho. It will cover Fox hunting and Geocaching (*this park has a large number of geocaches*). We will set up at 5 PM in the pavilion. We will grill hamburgers and hotdogs and there will be soda, ice tea and bottled water.

Looking ahead - next month on the first Saturday, August 5th will be the summer picnic at Kill Kare State Park on St. Albans Bay.

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

WHERE'S THE HAM?

by Mitch W1SJ

Remember the cry several years ago, "Where's the Beef?" The appropriate cry today is "Where's the Ham?" Ham radio activities have been getting smaller and smaller over the last 10 years. Here at RANV, we've hardly noticed this trend, since our membership and activities have either been growing or have held stable. Our membership is currently at 124, an all-time high and something which other organizations are envious of. We have numerous activities and on the whole, the club looks very stable.

Don't let any of this good news lull you to sleep. It doesn't take much time to take a volunteer organization from stable to non-existent. The ominous signs are all there: meeting attendance starting to sag and poor turnout at activities such as Fox Hunts, Picnics, Field Day and hamfests. This is not about seeing the glass half empty. Instead, it is pointing out a dangerous trend and making sure we are all aware of it and take steps to reverse it.

While the recently completed Field Day was very successful in terms of points, it had the dubious distinction of representing a minority (*a small one at that*) of the membership. The planning and execution for this event has become exhausting because there are simply not enough people to get all the jobs done. Attending Field Day shouldn't be a chore; it should be something which everyone wants a part of. Perhaps my thinking is old fashioned.

Last year's Fox Hunt Picnic in July drew only 10 members. I would like to think that we will do better this year. The reality is that the cost of the pavilion and food runs well over \$100, which is certainly in our budget. However, I don't see the worth of spending this money for such a small turnout. While the August picnic at Kill Kare draws a lot better, its

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WATERFRONT FOX HUNT

by Mitch WISJ

The last RANV Fox Hunt was held Friday June 16th. It was a nice balmy day and as such, I decided to hide on the waterfront to provide nice scenery and cooling lake breezes. I stuffed all sorts of radio equipment in a backpack, found a free place to park and walked over to Perkins Pier in Burlington. The original plan was to set up on one of the benches facing the lake. However, there was no metal to affix my mag mount to at these locations (Note: bring ½ wave vertical next time!). I tried several spots and either I couldn't find a suitable ground plane or the signal from the particular spot was poor into the repeater. Of course, the hunters didn't need a good signal from me into the repeater, but I wanted to keep things listenable for the folks at home who were not out hunting. Finally, I found a railing along the bike path which provided enough of a ground plane and enough signal to be useful.

I installed Debbie on the radio and she read excerpts from the latest novel she was reading. I was a little concerned because sometimes some of those books have some real dicey language in them. Meanwhile, I went for a walk to check our signal and to find a more secluded backup location, should it be needed. We decided to stay put as it was a nice comfortable spot with a light cooling breeze and music wafting in from nearby Breakwaters Pub, on the ferry dock. Carl AB1DD came on from his boat and I tried to talk him into hunting, since he would be able to sail right up to us!

So this relaxing scene played out for the better part of an hour. All of sudden, I heard this loud rumbling noise and the ground started to shake. Large truck? Not likely on the bike path. Freight train? Nope, they were not moving. Earthquake? It was possible, but not really. Before I could ponder this question any further, I caught a glimpse of Paul AA1SU and Kayle KB1JOO flying by me at near warp speed. Trust me, it was a very scary sight. They had engaged in a foot race down the bike path to be the first finder. Unfortunately, I didn't have the camera to record the photo finish, and by my eye, it was a flat-footed tie. Frankly, I considered myself lucky to be alive and not trampled in the confusion.

We waited around for the 3rd hunter, Jon KB1LIE to show up, but he ended up going all the way down Pine Street. So, we directed him to the ferry dock where we were going to have a nice snack at Breakwaters. Unfortunately, this was not to be. Over a hundred 20 something's were having their Friday night happy hour and there was no room for a group of respectable ham operators. So, our little party ended up on the patio on Church Street in front of Ken's Pizza where we chowed down and told our Fox Hunt war stories into the night.

The next Fox Hunt will be Friday, August 18th at 6 PM when Paul and Kayle will jointly be the Fox.

DXIS...

by Mitch WISJ

I'm sitting in this month for your DX Editor N1UR who reports that he, himself is DX right now in France. I suspect that this is a non-radio expedition since there is no contest going on and no mention of skeds was made.

Did ya get on 6 meters? If you didn't, you missed a lot. Over the last month, the 6 meter Sporadic E openings have been hotter than a pistol. There is only one way to catch 6 meter openings. That method is to monitor all the time. Keep your radio set between 50.125-50.135 MHz and set the squelch to a loose setting. Most Sporadic E openings happen in the afternoon through early evening.

During the June VHF QSO Party a few weeks ago, 6 meters was wide open for the start of the contest. It was so wide open that every single operator abandoned 2 meters for hours. The sound of big contest stations like W2SZ not getting answers to CQ's on 2 meters in the first few hours of the contest was truly amazing.

While the 3800 foot elevation of Mt. Equinox gives me an enviable signal on VHF and UHF bands, it provides no advantage during a Sporadic E opening. When that occurs, I'm just another 100 watt pip squeak with a yagi in a sea of kilowatts. Wherever you went, someone would invariably end up on top of you. Initially, I had to search and pounce to get a good rate going. The first stations had EL and EM grid prefixes and were mainly from the Gulf Coast, from the Florida panhandle, across Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas and into Texas.

About 90 minutes into the contest, the skip started moving north, literally up the Mississippi River. Now a lot of EN grid prefixes were appearing, representing Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska. I finally found a clear spot to call CQ - way up around 50.280 and had a mass of stations in Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota North Dakota and Michigan calling. And then the West Coast popped in via double hop Sporadic E skip, with a bunch of CN97 grids from Seattle calling in. I even logged a Montana and Alberta station in all of this. Oh, and the Gulf Coast stations were still plugging away in there. The opening died down after 8:30, providing over 6 hours of wild fun. There was a small opening to Florida Sunday but nothing like the fireworks on Saturday.

When the contest was over I had 420 QSO's and 118 grids on 6 meters. Of those, 225 QSO's and 100 grids were Sporadic E contacts. I logged some 37 states. Some of the big boys nailed well over 200 grids.

The openings continued on and off throughout the remainder of June. During Field Day, we had a bunch of spot openings, resulting in 35 contacts throughout an area including Tennessee, Virginia and Maryland stretching out as far west as Arkansas and Missouri.

Typically, Sporadic E openings die off in July, but that doesn't mean that they don't occur. Keep your radio on 6 meters during the day and eventually, when you least expect it, something will pop in!

FIELD DAY 2006

A Record Setting Blowout!

by Mitch WISJ

Field Day 2006 is past and it was glorious. The HF propagation was absolutely magical and we produced in excess of 4600 QSO's, up considerably from our normal 3500. I can't explain what occurred to increase the numbers so dramatically. Certainly the short skip openings on 20 meters on Saturday and the big openings on 15 meters on Sunday helped, but we had big numbers on all four open HF bands throughout the entire Field Day period.

Before Field Day, things certainly didn't look like they were going to be glorious. In fact, things looked downright gloomy. On Friday, after the antennas were up, only 20 hours before the start of Field Day, some contacts were attempted on a 20 meter band which was more dead than alive. If I didn't already know that there were propagation issues, I would have thought that we had a bad antenna. Not a good way to start.

Staffing Field Day this year was a major headache. Besides losing a couple of operators from last year, several others were leaving town on Field Day weekend. Then, worse yet, operators who planned to come made other plans. This was downright frustrating and I really thought about stripping the whole Field Day effort down. Our setup and take down crew were understaffed, making the job go a lot slower. No cooks were found, forcing us to order out

for dinner. Several of us had multiple jobs and were pushed to the limit to make sure everything we needed to do before and during Field Day got done. We weren't the only group having problems. Up in Underhill, Brian and the QRP group were scrambling to get things going after key players had to either cancel or came late. And another Field Day group in the area simply cancelled their operation due to lack of support. We may have reached a point where our area can no longer support four separate Field Day operations. It is with great sadness that I have to report that Field Day, the real essence of amateur radio, is start-

FIELD DAY BOX SCORE			
80 CW	229	80 SSB	599
40 CW	297	40 SSB	311
20 CW	591	20 SSB	1491
15 CW	141	15 SSB	400
GOTA CW	0	GOTA Ph	492
VHF CW	1	VHF Ph	84
Sat CW	2	Sat Ph	5
Total CW	1261	Total Ph	3382
		2006	2005
Total QSO's	4643		3629
Total Bonuses	2050		1710
Total Points	13858		11130

ing to become a footnote due to continued lack of interest.

But we persevered and managed to get all the antennas up by Friday night with a paltry crew of only 7 people. Experience, good engineering and comprehensive assembly notes got us through the day. By 2:00 the next day, all stations were humming away, ready for the start. And what a start it was! Fueled by short skip which brought normally rare Northeast stations right up to S-9 on 20 meters, the first hour on phone was amazing. Normally 160 QSOs are made that first hour. The high water mark was 191 in 2003. This year a dizzying 205 QSO's (3.2 per minute) were made. This is the best hourly rate I have ever had state-side! The second hour was in excess of 150 and we continued to have over 100 QSO per hour rates for 12 hours, ending in the wee hours of the morning. CW followed the same track, keeping the rates above 50 virtually every hour for the first 12 hours. On Sunday morning, when it looked like we had everyone in the country worked, 15 meters finally opened big and both stations had monster hours. The phone station surged past the previous high water

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FIELD DAY HALL OF FAME

AB1DD Carl – GOTA Organizer; equipment; set up; tear down.
AA1SU Paul – Phone/CW op; equipment; bonuses; set up; tear down.
AB1T Doug – CW op.
AK1H Phil – Field cutting.
K1KD Grant – Phone/CW op; equipment.
K1LAX Bob – Phone op.
K1SAH Seth – GOTA op; tear down.
K2MME Howie – CW op; set up; tear down.
KA1KLJ Matt – GOTA op; equipment; set up, tear down.
KB1FRW Bob – VHF op; set up; demo bonuses.
KB1KPO Jerry – VHF op; set up; tear down.
KB1KVY Thomas – GOTA/VHF op.
KB1LIF Barb – VHF op.
KB1MRT Laura – Lunch.
KM1Z Fran – Tear down.
N1YD Jeff – GOTA op; set up; tear down.
W1RFM Robert – GOTA op.
W1SJ Mitch – Chairman; Phone op; equipment; set up; tear down; results.
W4YFJ Bob – Set up.
WB2PBH Stuart – Trucking.
WT1L Chris – Phone/CW op; set up.



K1SAH and N1YD at the GOTA Station

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mark of 2376 QSO's in the morning and we eventually had to replace my venerable PCC laptop since the 512K of RAM could only hold 2700 QSO's! This was never a conceivable problem in the past, but it was a good problem this year, which was easily solved. Phone ended with a dizzying 2801 QSO's, an average rate of 117 per hour. CW set a new record at 1258 QSO's.

FIELD DAY VISITORS

Debbie W1DEB, Arn K1ARN,
Danielle KB1CNQ, John K1JCM,
Arnie W2HDI, Johannes KB1JDT,
Bill KA1PTW, Marc WA2S, Rob Levine
(Red Cross), Ira Trombley (VT House),
Marianne Apfelbaum (Williston Observer),
Anne & Joel MacLeod and a bunch of
others I'm sure we missed!

The GOTA station was somewhat revamped this year with a larger antenna and better audio with a boom headset. I'm sure this helped a little, but the propagation likely helped a lot. They banged out 492 QSO's, just down from the 500 QSO maximum we are allowed. Seth K1SAH used his DJ skills to take command and made most of the contacts. He was assisted by Jeff N1YD, Matt KA1KLJ and Robert W1RFM. We had the potential of earning 1000 points at the GOTA station for each operator making 100 contacts and we ended up earning 400. We had many, many kids come by (15 at last count) and make a contact, qualifying us for the Youth Bonus points.

GOTA Youth Operators

All under 18 years of age
Each made One Contact

Alek, Nicki, Ian, Robert, Thomas, Greg,
Sam, Max, Shane, Jonathon, Owen,
Garrett, Mike, Cade, Conner

In fact, we qualified for every other bonus, adding 2050 points to our score. Great job by Carl wrangling the kids and getting them on the air!

The VHF station was quietly manned by Jerry KB1KPO, Barb KB1LIF, Bob KB1FRW and a few other unknown operators. Their numbers were up, fueled by spot 6 meter openings throughout the weekend.

When the dust had settled, 4643 QSO's were in the logs, accounting for 13858 points, a large improvement over last year's 11130 points and even a big improvement over our best ever total of 12194 points back in 1999. We finished first that year. Most Field Day groups do not report their scores on the Internet so we cannot tell how we did. Overall, it appears that contact totals were up all over the country. Time will tell if we finally end up on top of the super competitive 2A heap.

In the publicity department, things didn't look so good initially. The *Essex Reporter* again failed to put in our press release (I recently had a chat with them about that) and the crew from WCAX never showed. But Marianne from the *Williston Observer* was there on Saturday taking all sorts of pictures. Grant, that hot dog, ended up being the winning picture on page 3 of the *Observer*.

We ended up with 21 participants, including 7 mainline operators, 8 GOTA and VHF operators and 6 other support staff. We had something like 30 visitors, which included 15 kids who came in and



AA1SU finishing up things on SSB

made a contact each. We had two less participants than last year, but a lot more visitors. However, we cannot ignore the fact that a club of over 120 members could only get 20 members to the Field Day Site for any length of time. That is not a good trend.

On a bright note, nothing broke, nothing fell down and everything worked as advertised. *RANV Power & Light*, our local utility, provided virtually uninterrupted power all weekend except for a 1 minute outage which was handled by the UPS. The weather was absolutely perfect for 3 whole days, which was a big deal, since the folks to the south of us drowned in the rain, and I can't remember the last time we had a weekend without rain! When it is all summed up, we did a tremendous job and all had a wonderful time!

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attendance has been sagging for the last few years as well. For an event which requires nothing but to show up and eat, one can only wonder why the attendance is sagging.

What do we do? We ALL have to take stock in the club and support the activities. We ALL have to take responsibility in making sure that the club chooses the right activities to maximize participation. No one else can tell you how to manage your time, which amounts to the same 24 hours a day, 168 hours a week for all of us. But the cold hard fact is that when participation keeps dropping, the activities and then the organization will go away. The cold evidence is that other clubs and other hamfests, right here in Vermont have withered away over the past 10 years. Interestingly enough, the people who do the most belly-aching about this were the ones who did the least to support the activities.

**NEXT MEETING:
“Fox Hunting”
Tuesday, July 11th
Barbecue at 5, Meeting at 6
Mills Riverside Park, Rt. 15 Jericho**

**RANV SUMMER PICNIC
Saturday, August 5th
Kill Kare State Park, St. Albans**

RANV

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