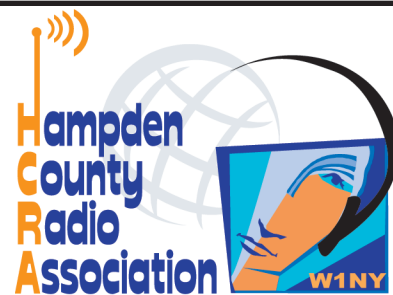


Zero Beat



Hampden County Radio Association

January 2011

NE1RD to speak at January meeting

Come see and hear B. Scott Andersen, NE1RD, speak at our next club meeting on January 7, 2011 at 7:30 PM. He'll be speaking on the 100 Pound DXpedition with a special emphasis on operating QRP. Results from his recent trip to St. Thomas for the CQ WPX Phone contest will also be presented.



Scott is the author of *Buddipole in the Field*, a comprehensive book on getting the most from the Buddipole antenna system for portable operations. Scott says:

Travel: I have lots of different interests in the ham radio hobby but the thing I've been having the most fun with lately is lightweight DXpeditioning. I have begun something called the 100 Pound DXpedition where I pack lightweight gear and travel to fun places.

Building: I've always loved building things (and taking things apart!). One of the great things about this hobby is it provides opportunities to build and operate radios and other devices of your own design and built with your own hands. It is a thrill to talk to someone away with nothing a small device you

Operating: reasons why hams on the air and seek like to rag chew talk), they seek

thousands of miles more than a wire and put together! There are largely three around the world get other hams: they just (just hang out and DX— the chance to talk to new countries, islands, or other entities, and contesting a chance for radio operators to compete by making contacts with as many other hams as possible as quickly as possible. Some contests go 48 straight hours. Think Le Mans but using radios and computers instead of cars.



Seasons Greetings from the North Pole

Let me start out by saying that elves are very persistent in their ways. They can make one heck of a toy soldier or a jack in the box. Hooking up communications on a sleigh? No way! After a 6 pack of hot chocolate and a half a tray of sugar cookies we finally agreed. When hooking up a mobile rig to your sleigh it is always best to go right to the battery. Reason: less draw on the light duty cigarette lighter adapter. BTW the one on the sleigh was already in use for the mobile scanner, watching out for aircraft. Putting 2 loads on that little 15 amp fuse and 18 gauge wires, oh boy. Ran some nice 12 gauge wire right to the battery, with 20 amp fuses on the negative and the positive leads. That being for shorts to ground and/or AC spike from the alternator.

Next was the antenna. Height was not going to be a problem. But one clumsy, oversized elf could be. A nice clean run of good quality coax secured and out of the way of feet will stop a lot of accidents and repairs. What type of antenna to use on the sleigh? Magnet mount, lid lip clip, runner (bumper) mount, or just drill a hole in the sleigh? Depends on your needs, type of antenna and of course what will Mrs. Claus say about drilling a hole in the brand new sleigh. Whatever you decide, try to keep the load (if applicable) as high as your biggest ground plane nearest the antenna.

Well now to get that RFI from Rudolf's nose to quit interfering with the radio.

73 & 88 to all, and to all a good night.

Ed, KB1NWH

Visit our website at hcra.org

Join us at our next club meeting on January 7, 2011 at 7:30 PM at the Feeding Hills Congregational Church, 21 North Westfield Street (Rte 187), Feeding Hills, MA 01030. Featured speaker is B. Scott Andersen, NE1RD.

From the Shack...

2010 – A look back – a look forward

Welcome to 2011 folks! Like it or not you made it through another year, hopefully received some nice gifts for the holidays and are suffering through the agony of the year in review on every media outlet invented. Now you open up your *Zero Beat* and say, “Oh no, not again!” Nope, not again, I’m not going to bore you with all the things HCRA did last year, all the events, parties, meetings... If you were there you know all about it, if not then you have even more to look forward to this coming year.

Another facet of the year in review is it makes you believe things were better in the past than they are today. For amateur radio operators that translates into “real radios glow in the dark”, “they don’t build them like they used to” and the always present “you can’t build anything yourself any more, we’ve all turned into appliance operators!”

Well, fellow hams, I’m not the oldest ham around, nor the wisest but I’m not the newest, either. Over the years I’ve owned or used a wide variety of receivers, transmitters and accessories. A few of them surely weighed more than I do! The statement “they don’t build them like they used to” is certainly true and that’s a good thing. What would you rather get on the air with today, a Yaesu FT-101E or an Icom IC-718? Both are desktop HF transceivers. On every specification the newer 718 tops the 101 (except of course size & weight) and is far cheaper to own. An Icom IC-718 costs \$629 in 2011, the FT-101E (adjusted for inflation) would cost you \$3,064.16 in today’s dollars! I don’t know about you but I would rather live in 2011 than go back to 1975. I’d have a better radio and \$2400 in my pocket to buy other cool gadgets!

Back in the day we happily hooked up our transceivers and used CW, phone and RTTY just like today so what’s the difference? In 1975 our receivers didn’t hear as well, our transmitters had to be tuned up and a RTTY station required a small closet to put it in. (but don’t you love the smell of hot machine oil in the morning?). In 2011 we still operate CW but now with easy to use electronic keyers, our SSB sounds better with audio tailoring and RTTY sits on our computer alongside a whole host of other ‘soundcard’ modes like PSK31 and WSPR. Did you know that WSPR can actually copy signals below the noise level? In 1975 twenty dollars barely bought a one-tube receiver kit, \$20 today gets you an SDR receiver kit that will run rings around that tube RX. In 1975 we put up an antenna and



hoped for good, accurate signal strength reports. In 2011 we can put up an antenna, call a few CQ’s and check the Reverse Beacon Network and actually see our signal strength or go on-line and listen in near real time to our signal on a receiver half way across the world. You sure couldn’t do that in 1975!

So where is all this rambling heading? I’m not advocating forgetting about the past. Those old rigs and accessories are nostalgic, interesting to restore and fun to operate. But don’t let that lessen the excitement of everything we have today and coming up just around the corner. From SDR radio, SteppIR antennas, information exchange over the web, moonbounce an average ham can do and lots more 2011 has a lot to offer no matter what your interest, experience or budget. There are more exciting things to do in amateur radio today than ever before and many of them can be done by the average amateur. Wouldn’t you rather be the 2011 ham instead of the 1975 ham?



To help get everyone on the right track our first guest speaker of the New Year is B. Scott Andersen/NE1RD. (pretty cool call, eh?). Scott is the type of ham never to stop asking what he can do with our hobby. He’s been a pioneer of the “100 Pound DXpedition”, an advocate of kit building and construction, organized the 2010 Massachusetts QRP convention and more. He’s put a lot of

effort into bringing together amateurs from all areas and disciplines so we can share each other’s successes. You really don’t want to miss our January 7th meeting, it could easily set the stage for you to get even more out of ham radio this coming year.

As a member of HCRA you’re exposed to many of these innovations at our meetings. I challenge each and every one of our members to try something new this year, something different, something exciting and engaging. Who is going to be the first one to show us how to compare HF antennas, or use the NCDXF beacon network, perhaps explore propagation with WSPR or build an SDR or CW Skimmer station? We all learn from each others adventures and our club and our hobby become stronger because of them. Won’t you help us get there?

73 and Happy New Year,

Jim, KK1W

Center picture: [Jim Mullen braving the elements on a SOTA activation, Steerage Rock, Massachusetts.](#)

How I got my new tower and antenna (and worked a gazillion new countries)

by Marty Bowen, W1MJB

We all have our peccadilloes; one of mine is “collecting stuff” but not necessarily putting the stuff to use. Anyhow, a few years ago, I had an opportunity to buy a complete AB-577 antenna tower. It was surplus but “brand new”.



It was one of those deals that you just can't pass up, so I bought the unit and put it in the garage for “safe keeping”. This June it finally was put to good use at Field Day to support the VHF station's antenna array and then returned to the garage for another long siesta. I got involved with the SOTA Jerks operating QRP from various western

New England summits just after Field Day. After each activation, we celebrated with a pint or three at the nearest craft brewery. Well, as you know, beer leads great minds to grand ideas and the more beer consumed the grander the ideas become and believe me there were grand ideas flowing every weekend as we quenched our parched gullets. Now with most people a grand idea is just that—a grand idea—and probably will never solidify into anything tangible but sometimes magic really happens and ideas are made real.

One Sunday afternoon during a stint at the local watering hole, Jim, KK1W, and Matt, W1MSW, were abusing Frandy, N1FJ, for having a perfectly good SteppIR beam languishing in its shipping box on the floor of his garage since Dayton 4 years before. This was nothing new, as the SteppIR was a constant topic of conversation. Now, some ideas languish like unused beams and others quickly explode into action when the right person has them, so that very evening the emails from Jim came fast and furious: that SteppIR needed to go up in the air where it belonged and before the electron cloud cleared dates were set, working parties formed and Frandy was buying the components for the magnificent erection. Within weeks Frandy had a tower supporting his now operational SteppIR. Next came Matt, another IPA induced electron cloud produced in short order a dandy rotatable 5-band DX Engineering Mark 2 HEXX Beam mounted high on Matt's home which proved its worth quickly as Matt produced enviable scores in the CQ WW SSB contest. At some point in the late Fall Jim had another grand idea. Marty (that's

me) was the only moron among us without the ability to rotate an antenna with appreciable gain to work DX signals. Winter was coming fast, Thanksgiving was only weeks away and the ground would soon be frozen, so yet another electron cloud ensued. Marty needed to drag that AB-577 out of the garage and get the base firmly secured then mate it to a beam and get it into the air before winter weather closed in.

Although I certainly thought it was a grand idea indeed, I instantly composed a dozen reasons why it just couldn't happen, after all I was doing fine (I thought) with my wire dipole and besides it was too late in the season to properly erect a tower or mast to support a beam and then there was the expense, etc. Well, you know Jim once he gets an idea it needs to be brought to fruition, dammit! So the e-mails continued and within a week, (having remembered that Jose N4BAA had recently told me that having a high beam to use was like having God come into your shack and bring with him DX heaven), I agreed that it was indeed a grand idea that needed to be made real. A crew was drafted and the AB-577 base was lagged to an unused concrete walkway. I traded Frandy another AB-577 base and tubes



for a Cushcraft A3S triband beam and some other junk, and purchased the rotor, control and coax cables. Just before Thanksgiving the newly refurbished beam went skyward atop the AB-577 at 50 feet. It is a magnificent site to behold and has opened up large portions of the world never even heard on the dipole, let

alone worked and added to the log book.

So, to my friends Dave Cain, AA1YW; Frandy Johnson, N1FJ; Ed LaCombe, KB1NWH; Jim Mullen, KK1W; Steve Rodowicz, N1SR, and Matt Wilhelm, W1MSW: Thank you for the gift of friendship and the gift of your time which made the dream beam a reality. For without you, it certainly would never have happened. And Jim—thanks for being Jim.

Support your local club! HCRA benefits from your participation. Want to see your name in the Newsletter? Write an article! Hampden County Radio Association, P.O. Box 563, Agawam, MA 01010

Hampden County Radio Association

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

December 8th, 2010

Attending : Marty Bowen W1MJB, Dave Cain AA1YW, Eli Harris KB1RIE, Frandy Johnson N1FJ, Ed La Combe KB1NWH, Jim Machia NN1Y, Jim Mullen KK1W, Matt Wilhelm W1MSW

Absent: John Pise KX1X, Larry Krainson WB1DBY
Meeting called to order at 7:06 pm, at Hampden Bank in West Springfield, MA.

Officer Reports

Vice President – John Pise KX1X

1. Tech Class Report: Although this class was sponsored by a consortium of local hospitals and was held primarily to license hospital personal some of the 6 new licensees are really interested in the hobby and one has become a General class licensee already.
2. General License Class: December 27 & 30 at Heights Hall in Fairview. John is looking for additional instructors.

Treasurer – Dave Cain AA1YW

Current Financial Report

Auction results: \$815

Raffle: \$250 (gross).

Holiday Party

Collected: \$780

Paid: \$1271.81

Net cost = \$491.81

Balance \$5705.

Secretary – Marty Bowen W1MJB

1. Current member count: 79
2. The October minutes were read and the board voted unanimously to accept the minutes as read.
3. Holiday party recap: All agreed that the party was a success and a motion was carried to return next year on December 5th if rates remain affordable. Jim will follow up with the Steaming Tender to tentatively reserve the facility for next years Holiday party

Director Reports

Tech report – Ed LaCombe KB1NWH

November and December have been busy months for the tech department. Here a few of the problems and larger projects handled during this time frame: KB1RID: programming, KD1RV: tower, N1INB: TVI, W1MJB: tower, KB1USX: antenna, KB1OPV: RFI

Zero Beat Editor – Frandy Johnson N1FJ

Cutoff date for submissions to Zero Beat: December 26th

1. The board has agreed to allow Larry and Frandy to swap positions. Starting with the January **Zero Beat** Frandy N1FJ will be the editor and Larry WB1DBY will take over the At Large position. Frandy has requested ZB articles in either .doc or .txt format. Matt/ W1MSW will offer his services as assistant editor.
2. Certificate Recap: The certificates awarded at the Holiday party were well received and we are looking for more ideas for next year.

Membership – Matt Wilhelm W1MSW

1. New members: No new members this month.
2. Generator Raffle Update: So far, about 10% of the tickets have been sold. We need to crank up our efforts to sell more tickets. Frandy will see if we can purchase the

generator locally for less than Mayberry or at the same cost..

3. Auction Raffle – \$250 gross minus cost of the prize.
4. 10 Meter Contest planning – A good turnout is expected to bolster the HCRA scores for this years test.

At Large – Larry Krainson WB1DBY

Nothing to report at this time.

Program – Jim Machia NN1Y

1. February: There is also a possibility of moving the May IRLP presentation to this spot and having MARS do a presentation in May. Marty will follow up with Bob(MARS) to confirm for May. If so then IRLP will move to February and this season is filled.
2. May: IRLP-KX1X with the DX Crew providing a live demo of the IRLP
3. Will contact K1ANX about a spy radio presentation for a future meeting.

Crew DX President, KB1RIE

1. Auction Concession results : \$95 Net profit.
2. The Crew is prepared to accept the responsibility to manage the monthly snack/raffle as discussed at the October meeting.
3. The DX Crew will provide a monthly article for Zero Beat beginning with the January edition..
4. Crew meetings will now be held at Chesterfield Scout camp. Permission has been granted for future construction of an amateur radio station at the scout camp..

Old Business

1. A change to a quarterly newsletter has been dropped
2. After much discussion, all plans to move forward efforts to reserve St. Marks Episcopal Churches hall for future monthly meetings has been tabled until next month. There are other possibilities still to be investigated prior to making a decision.

New Business

1. Next meeting January 10th – Hampden Bank in West Springfield, MA.
2. Auction Recap: (KK1W) The auction went well, about 50% of last years profits. Jim will follow up with letters of appreciation to the two large donors.
3. A motion was raised and carried by unanimous vote to reserve Dufresne Park for Field Day 2011. The board discussed and approved reserving the park for all three days. This will allow extended camping and easier setup. Jim will send out the deposit.
4. What, if any, path should we take to follow up on 2009 members that haven't renewed? Matt will follow up on this with emails. Board members should forward a list of possible members
5. Should the DX Crew president be added to the Yahoo BOD group? – Yes. (email address: getgreedyRJ@aol.com)
6. WB1DBY has secured a TYT HT for the Holiday Party from Lentini in exchange for a year's worth of advertising. – Thanks Larry!
7. Matt will be filling in database work until Marty gets his windows machine back in service
8. Board meeting schedule for the remainder of the season: Jan 10, Feb 7, Mar 7, Apr 4, May 9, Jun 6 .
9. If we need an alternative meeting to Hampden Bank there is an opportunity in Ludlow at Chemi-graphic (Judy Bowen).

Respectfully submitted this 20th day of December 2010

Marty Bowen W1MJB

You're never too old...

by Marty Bowen, W1MJB



When I was a kid of eight or so, I discovered that an old Philco radio in my uncle's basement had shortwave bands on which you could listen to broadcasts from places all around the world. I was fascinated and spent hours designing and building miniature antennas to hang in the basement in hopes of increasing the radio's reception potential. Mind you, the antennas were designed, not with the use of theory or mathematics, I just simply mimicked the forms, coils and all, as seen in picture books and magazines. Some actually did help a bit but only by chance.

Around the age of fourteen, I had managed to work a few odd jobs and save enough money to buy a brand new Hallicrafters SX-110 receiver and put a dipole up in the back yard. I was allowed a basement corner for my "shack" which was comprised of the Hallicrafters receiver with earphones, a twenty-four hour clock and a few SWL guide books and a ham call book. I sent signal reports to all the big signals heard including Voice of America, BBC, Radio Sophia, Radio Quito and, of course, Radio Moscow. When I received their written acknowledgments or spiffy QSL cards it created a hilarious stir in the family for I had two aunts who thought for sure that I was on my way to Leavenworth prison for a long stay, if I did not cease and desist my practice of communicating with radio station located behind the "Iron Curtain". Several years later when the Office of Naval Intelligence sent agents to canvas the neighbors during the routine vetting process after my enlistment in the Marine Corp; they were again sure that their worst fears were about to be realized.

In between the two events I spent many happy hours scanning the short wave and ham bands. I was most fascinated by the strange melody of the CW signals heard on certain portions of the bands and was amazed to find that my dad had been an Army high speed code operator during the World War II and could still, after fifteen years of separation from CW, sit down without pencil and paper and copy what seemed extremely high speed CW. I also learned that he hated CW with a passion and admonished me to never become a military radio operator, period. But none-the-less, I equated the ability to operate CW with being a true radio operator and that notion has never left me.

Flash forward and you find a sixty-four-year-old, first licensed in March of 2003 and self-driven to test for and receive an Extra Class license by August of that year under the diminished code requirement of five words per minute, which I admit I just barely passed. I also must admit that I am actually haunted by the notion that I am not a real Extra

because I am incapable of working CW at twenty words per minute as the original Extras were forced to do in order to get their tickets. Oh, I had all the excuses memorized and used them often but I don't think I was fooling anybody, most certainly not myself.

This summer Frandy, N1FJ, an unapologetic proponent of QRP CW and Matt, W1MSW, a highly motivated and immensely talented rookie ham were inspired by the Summits On The Air program which originated in Europe and began to operate QRP CW from western New England summits. They were soon joined by Jim, KK1W, an avid CW operator. Now, SOTA is not strictly HF nor is it strictly QRP power levels but if you want to make DX contacts using QRP then CW is the mode to use. Anyhow, I was invited to join the threesome on an activation of Mt. Norwottuck in the Mount Holyoke range. It was truly a revelation. First, I discovered that the fattened aging body cannot necessarily do with ease what the mind imagines it can do and, secondly, that CW is not dead and is necessary for some forms of radio communications.

I was inspired to become proficient at CW operation by my sense of embarrassment at not being able to join in the fun of operating CW during that first activation. I had tried to take my turn and work a station in Iceland but my ability to send CW was severely in question when I was asked by all three what exactly had I imagined I had just sent to the Iceland station. Well, I said it was my call sign and the letter K to turn it back to the other operator. The three heads shaking in unison made it clear that it was back to the bull pen for me. That embarrassment has been with me ever since, inspiring me to truly absorb Morse code and practice daily to become more proficient at sending and copying CW.

I am not even close to calling myself a CW operator nor will anyone allow that I am a CW operator for some time to come, but I have made several dozen CW contacts to date and my ability to copy and send Morse code increases daily. The one certainty is that I will never quit and someday I will send and copy Morse code proficiently at speed in excess of twenty words a minute, then my Ham soul will be at rest and the haunt will be gone forever. I walk by a photograph of my dad in uniform every day and cannot help but imagine that he winks at me because he often said grinning and shaking his head "Son, if there is an easy way and a hard way to accomplish a given task, I know you will choose the hard way", and time has proven him correct. But I have come to love that which he had no love for at all, CW and I did come upon that love the long hard way. CW forever!



Dust off that old key
or paddle and get
on the air!

One Year and Three Rookie Roundups Later

The CW Rookie Roundup was held on December 19th and concluded the first year of Rookie Roundups sponsored by the ARRL. Both rookies, like myself, and non-rookies came together for this 6-hour contest and made it a true success. A total of 32 rookie logs were submitted, which was fewer than earlier roundups, but still demonstrates



that my favorite mode is far from dead. What amazed me was how great all the rookies sounded on the air. The exchange was not an easy 59 MA, but instead the

call sign of the station calling, your call sign, name, year first licensed, and state. Quite a bit of info to get down when you're new to the mode and nervous about getting it all right. The three contests I've participated in this year have really helped improve my operating and contesting skills. I encourage everyone, rookies and non-rookies alike, to participate in the 2011 Rookie Roundups and to sponsor a rookie at your station to give them a helping hand. Speaking of which, thank you to Jim-KK1W and Frandy-N1FJ for opening up their stations over the last year to participate in the roundups and for their moral and technical support during the contests. To see the results from December's CW Rookie Roundup and previous contest results from this year please go to: <http://www.arrl.org/contest-results-articles>.

73,

Matt W1MSW

Wanted: Tigertronics Signalink USB preferably with 6pin Mini DIN cable but not required. If you have one these collecting dust in your shack and would like to sell it, please



contact Matt-W1MSW westcoastbayou@gmail.com or 413-336-4701.

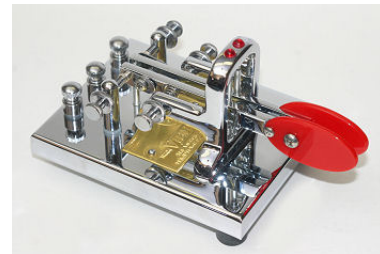
Venture Crew 510 has just been rebuilt. After many a year of inactivity, we have taken this year and next year to pilot our goal of becoming an active crew. We have arranged such activities as Soldering Classes, General License Classes, and also high adventure goals such as Summits on the air, Field Day, and WPX at K1TTT. If you have any questions about the crew, or on how to join, please contact Eli Harris at getgreedyRJ@aol.com. We look forward towards a good year of radio/high adventure.



HCRA's annual Holiday Party at the Steaming Tender was a great success. We hope to return there next December. If you didn't make it this year, make sure you do in 2011!

Item for Sale: The Vibroplex© Iambic is the modern descendent of the Original. It incorporates the traditional **Vibroplex©** look for use with modern electronic keyers. The code speed with the Iambic depends on the particular electronic keyer with which it is operated. And, you get the same crisp operation at 5 words per minute as you do at 50+ wpm. Weight 5 lbs.

In excellent condition: \$199 from Vibroplex, WB1DBY price \$150.



HCRA Power UP Raffle

Honda EU2000i 2 KW generator

- 2000 Watts (16.7 A) of Honda Inverter 120 VAC Power
- Super Quiet
- Weighs less than 47 lbs!
- Fuel Efficient
- Inverter - Stable power for computers, ham rigs, etc.

\$10/ticket. Only 200 tickets will be sold. Drawing will be by June 3, 2011.

Contact Matt, W1MSW@arrl.net or purchase tickets at meeting.



Lentini Communications, In Berlin, CT (just south of Newington) is a sponsor of HCRA. Please tell them you saw their ad in *Zero Beat!*

TYT TH-F4 (below)

Features:

- 1/2/4 watts
- 128 Memories
- VOX
- PC Programmable
- Power on password
- Channel Naming
- FM radio
- Drop in charger
- Heavy Duty Belt Clip

\$84.95



The Wouxun KG-UVD1 (below) has all the features any ham can use:

- 144/440 MHz
- SOS Function/FM Radio
- Bright Flashlight LED
- Dual Band/Dual Display
- Voice Prompts
- Drop in charger/LiON Battery
- 5 watts high/1 watt low power
- VOX
- PC Programmable
- Low voltage voice prompt
- Stop watch function
- Keypad lock
- Programmable scan modes
- Heavy Duty Belt Clip

\$129.95



TYT TH-UVF1 (above)

Features:

- Emergency Alert
- Dual Band/Dual Display
- Multi and Priority Scan
- Channel Naming
- VOX
- PC Programmable
- 128 Memories
- 5 watts high/ .5 wat low power
- Heavy Duty Belt Clip
- Long life 1500 MAh Battery
- USB Programming Cable
- Programming Software on CD

\$129.95

