



PCARA Update



Volume 4, Issue 12

Peekskill / Cortlandt Amateur Radio Association Inc.

December 2003

It's a most wonderful time of the Year!

Elections will be held at the December 7th meeting/Annual Holiday Dinner, which will be *At The Reef* Restaurant in Annsville (Route 9 and the Annsville Circle). Please come out and join us for our Annual Holiday Dinner. If you wish to join us, please let Ray, W2CH know by e-mailing him at



w2ch @ arrl.net as soon as you can. The cost is only \$19.95 per person with a selection of several entrées. Last year we had a wonderful time, spent with friends who enjoy such a magnificent hobby!

Bob, N2CBH has been very busy doing antenna work on the 2m repeater. He has been experimenting with a couple of different antenna configurations. It is hoped that eventually the current antenna on the tower will be replaced by another unit. On the 70cm side (449.925 MHz), the Gremlins are still active. There appears to be a correlation between wind speed and the severity of the crackles. Plans for the future include a new antenna/feedline installation and controller upgrade. These should help with the IRLP node's performance.

Also, on behalf of the PCARA membership, I would like to congratulate Will (Wires), KC2FYY on becom-

ing an Eagle Scout. Well done Will!

To each of you and your families, I wish a very happy and healthy Holiday Season, and a joyous and blessed new year! I hope to see each of you at the December meeting.

– 73 de Greg, KB2CQE



Repeater site tower. The Diamond dual-band antenna for 2 meters is visible on the left side, above three new panel antennas for Sprint. The 440 antenna is on the left, above 2 meters.



Wintry sunset at the 2m/440 repeater site. Because of problems with the Diamond dual-band antenna on the tower, Bob N2CBH has transferred the PCARA 2 meter repeater back to the Sinclair twin folded dipole antenna just visible above the roof.

PCARA Officers

President:

Greg Appleyard, KB2CQE kb2cq@arrl.net

Vice President:

Bob Tarsio, N2CBH; n2cbh@arrl.net

Secretary/Treasurer:

Mike Aiello, N2HTT n2htt@arrl.net

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W5GI put to the test –

November Phone Sweepstakes 2003 – N2HTT

You may recall from the article in last month's *PCARA Update* that I mentioned replacing my trusty G5RV antenna with a newly constructed, but untested W5GI "Multiband Mystery Antenna". Despite its success in working at least one special event station, (see the article last month) I really didn't have any notion of how it would perform overall.

One of the contests I have always been fond of is the ARRL November Sweepstakes. Since I lack an aptitude for CW contesting, I always try to make an appearance in the Phone portion, which usually takes place on the third weekend in November.

I am what you might call a "compulsive-casual" contester – lacking the stamina or the will to actually try for a win, I will hang in for hours, using a hunt and pounce technique, working stations to achieve some reasonable sub-goal. This year, I decided to try for one of the coveted "Clean Sweep" mugs, awarded for working all of the 80 sections now part of the November SS.

This seemed an ideal opportunity to try out the W5GI under actual combat conditions. As everyone knows, propagation to all places possible does take place during a contest, so I figured I'd get a pretty good picture of how well my wire worked.

At first, I thought I might try going QRP this year, with my FT-817. Upon reflection, (and after failing to penetrate a couple of pre-contest pile-ups,) I decided that the Clean Sweep attempt would be challenge enough, and that I should bring out the "big guns". Unfortunately, the "big gun" in this case is my Ten-Tec Scout, which only puts out 50 watts maximum, and requires a plumber's wrench to change bands. Nevertheless, I went as QRO as possible under the circumstances.

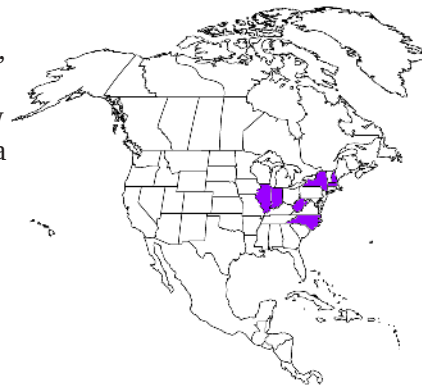
The best way to review my results is to look at some maps. To give you an idea of the location of my upstate QTH, here is a Mapblast map:



Here are the results, shown as colored-in maps:

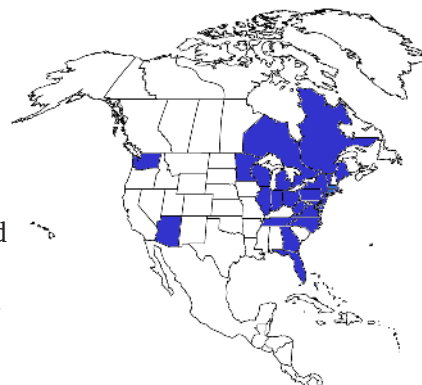
80 Meters

I didn't spend too much time on 80, as the antenna showed fairly narrow bandwidth, and not a lot of oomph on this band. Nevertheless, I worked a few states in a relatively short time.



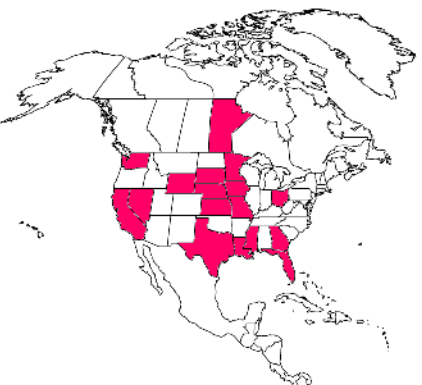
40 Meters

I was surprised to discover after the contest that I had worked most of my contacts on 40 meters, as I was just trying for close-in states. However I had a few continent-spanning contacts on 40.



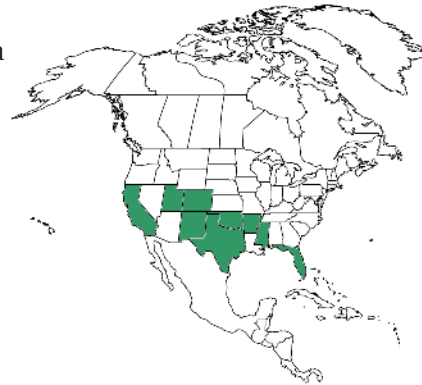
20 Meters

Twenty was clearly my powerhouse band on this antenna, tuning up easily and working weak stations without any problem. This is not surprising as the W5GI exhibits some gain on 20. I actually broke a pile-up or two.



15 Meters

This band was a pleasure to work. Little QRM, and strong signals, although not too many stations to be heard. These were mostly long-distance contacts.



10 Meters

Nothing. Didn't hear 'em, didn't work any. Could be the antenna, propagation, or lack of interest...

Hygiene issues

My operating time was a bit limited because of an unexpected issue: my shack is in the unheated garage, and it was COLD. We do have an old wood burning stove in the space but it seemed better at heating the ceiling above it than my operating position. I later added an electric heater and several layers of outer clothing to the mix, giving the entire affair the surreal atmosphere of an ice fishing party.

How did I do overall? Not badly. I made 125 contacts in a total of 11 ½ hours operating time, and worked 64 of 80 sections. Enough for a pin, but not a mug. I'm well pleased with the performance of the W5GI, and next year – watch out, I'm staying up late and wearing thermals....

– de Mike, N2HTT

Eagle Scout

On Saturday November 15, one of our PCARA members went through a highly memorable ceremony. That member was Will, KC2FYY, also known by his radio name of “Wires”. Will was undergoing his “Eagle Scout Court of Honor” alongside six fellow scouts from BSA Troop 49 at St. Augustine’s School in Ossining.



Seven scouts from Troop 49 begin the Court of Honor ceremony. Will, KC2FYY is third from the right.

Eagle Scout is the highest step through the ranks for a Boy Scout, starting from Tenderfoot and proceeding through Second Class, First Class, Star and Life. Only around 4% of Boy Scouts achieve Eagle Scout, so Will's achievement is a rare one. (Your scribe sees some parallels with amateur radio here.)

To earn the Eagle Scout rank, there are requirements for leadership, service and outdoor skills. Twenty one merit badges must be earned, including communications, camping and a choice of emergency preparedness or lifesaving (sounds like Field Day...) Will earned a total of **52** merit badges, significantly more than any of his fellow Eagle Scouts. Perhaps it is no surprise that Computers, Electricity, Electronics and Radio figured in Will's selection. In addition, he has earned four BSA Historical Trails awards, the World Conservation Award



Will on-stage with his parents, receives the Eagle Scout medal from Scoutmaster Peter Gardner.

and the God and Country religious medal.

A Scout rising through the ranks must also take part in several service projects. Will's Eagle Scout project was carried out at historic Sparta Cemetery, between Route 9 and Revolutionary Road, just south of Ossining. The cemetery contains pre-Revolutionary burial plots as well as military servicemen. Will removed a large number of plants surrounding the gravestones, checked and placed military flag stands then recorded over 700 names and dates of people buried in the Cemetery — restoring an important record previously destroyed in a fire at the original First Presbyterian Church.

Will's radio accomplishments are described in his Eagle Scout record. An Extra Class licensee, he has participated in communications for the New York City Marathon and provided emergency communications for the Red Cross in the wake of the 9/11/2001 disaster. At Ossining High School, Will is President and Chief Engineer of the School's FM radio station, WOSS-FM on 91.1 MHz.

Not mentioned is the fact that Will encouraged many new recruits to enter amateur radio from his school, his Scout Troop and even from within his own family! There were several familiar faces from PCARA's Technician Classes at the Court of Honor.

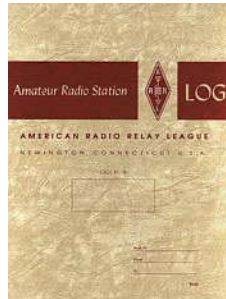
PCARA recognized Will for both his Scouting and his Amateur Radio achievements with a plaque, presented at the Court of Honor. Well done Will! – NM9J



Adventures in DXing

December hodgepodge – N2KZ

It took about four years, but it was quite an accomplishment. I have finally completed my first 50-page logbook. 1250 good, long rag chew QSOs have passed through my straight keys. Keep in mind that I avoid contests and prefer to chew the rag as long as possible. I'd say I probably now have over 600 hours of CW sending under my belt. I'm now starting to learn to use my first keyer, a Heathkit HD-1410 that is the perfect mate for my main rig: a Heathkit HW-16 transceiver. I'm now trying to fill my second logbook, and I'm on my way!



Sometimes the world of CW DX seems quite small. I often DX very, very early in the morning on 40 and 80 meters at 4 or 5 in the morning. I recently worked a nice solid signal on 40 meters from 8P6GU down in the Caribbean on the island of Barbados. I found him again, a few days later, up on 15 meters in the middle of the day. We had to laugh when we touched base again on 40 meters just days later. I'm convinced 8P6GU op Haschel Bynoe is following me! I received a nice colorful QSL from him just a few days after our first QSO.

I also met K5FLU recently. His name was Martin with a QTH of Starkville, Mississippi. I asked "Do you work for MFJ?" and his reply was "Yes. I am the President of MFJ!" It was the famous Martin F. Jue the founder of MFJ Enterprises famous for all sorts of gear especially antenna tuners and CW accessories.

Never feel limited in where you can operate. I have been carrying my HT on my commute via the Metro-North Harlem Division railroad. People really get a kick out of working someone who is railroad portable. I usually sit in the front car where the train whistles are incredibly loud. It creates great authenticating verification for my correspondents that I really am working them from inside a train. It's pretty amazing how well I can get out. I frequent the WECA machines on 2 meters and 70 cm, along with machines on 2 meters in Chappaqua and over in Rockland County.

Another interesting way to make a QSO is by IRLP. Our 440 MHz link to the world is up and running and quite entertaining. I have had some remarkable QSOs with hams in the Detroit area, New Jersey, and even Tucson, Arizona! The big challenge in IRLP DX is to find someone at the other end. I have linked up with repeaters as far away as Sydney, Australia, but my voice has fallen on deaf ears. I have also discovered that there are

links that act as reflectors where many hams can all link in at once. There are also weekly nets listed on the <http://www.irlp.net> site where you can join in a group get-together across the planet somewhere.

If you happen to be traveling and wish to link into our repeater node, it helps to know about the node at your remote site. I recently traveled to Plymouth, Massachusetts and hoped to link up with a friend from New Jersey. The node was not via a repeater but via simplex. I could hear my friend linking in and calling me, but I was not close enough to the local node to get in and reply. It also helps to coordinate whom is linking to whom. You don't want to link into a faraway node only to have your friend try to link in the other way if the connection is already made! I will be in Michigan during Thanksgiving and will try to link into our node for amusement and amazement. Wish me luck!

The recent solar flares have produced some odd propagation indeed! I am a big fan of medium wave and low ham bands (40/80 and 160 meters.) There have been long stretches of near blackouts of reception at night; especially noticeable on good old AM radio. I have a 1000-foot Beverage antenna hooked up to my trusty military surplus R-390A. To hear nothing but fluttery medium wave locals during the evening is odd indeed. The D layer has also been acting very strangely by producing very specific (and uncharacteristic) openings to areas within about a thousand miles of my QTH. It's almost like tropo skip on VHF and UHF. I could be pulling in WBT in Charlotte, NC with full strength, but not a whisper out of WTOP in Washington, DC. Both of these stations are 50 kW powerhouses. You'll also find that when all your usual D-layer companions are missing you may be entertained by stations in the Caribbean, Central America or beyond. I had one amazing opening around 5:30 pm one evening where a huge 1 kHz heterodyne came up on "KB 1520" in Buffalo, New York. Underneath KB I began to hear Arabic music and talk. It was my old buddy on 1521 kHz from Saudi

Arabia! The signal was riding in on our grayline, as it was way after midnight at the transmitter site thousands of miles away. This station operates with hundreds of kilowatts and is heard widely throughout the world. Less than one hour later the signal from Saudi Arabia was completely gone.

I also enjoy the experience of trying to work CW with the sporadic nature of auroral skip. Recently, auroral skip has been producing lots of flutter and



Buffalo's WKBW played the hits from 1958 to 1988. Its successor WWKB returned to a classic hits format in 2003. See <http://www.kb1520.com>

complete dropouts in the middle of QSOs. Was it something that I said? Although rare, it is a blast when you can hear your signal echo back to you with Doppler effects on HF. The amazing displays in the northern skies have been a wonderful sight, as well. I hope you caught the total lunar eclipse a couple of weekends ago. It was a nice clear night with a nearly full moon. I had the pleasure of chatting with a couple of hams while watching the eclipse come in. An amazing experience!

I have joined Mike, N2HTT, as a member of the Small Wonder Labs' Rock-Mite fan club. A good friend at work has loaned me 40 and 20 meter Rock-Mites to my delight. It

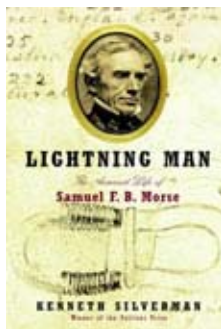
astounds me how hot a receiver these rigs have and how well they get out. Using just a stack of AA penlight batteries I have been working more stations than



Rock-Mite 40 meter QRP transceiver.

I can handle. My key has been a MFJ mini-paddle using my homebrew wire dipoles as an antenna. No antenna tuners have been necessary! It is really a blast to create a pile-up because so many hams are anxious to work a QRPP Rock-Mite. With a measly 500 milliwatts or less, I have logged several states with little effort. My best was a QSO with a ham in North Carolina using a Elecraft K1 at 5 watts to an attic dipole. We heard each other with no sweat. I had to tease him that he was operating QRO! Each rig allows you to operate on two frequencies and includes a built-in iambic keyer. They should rename these rigs "Fun In A Box!"

All I want for Christmas is a great book about Samuel F. B. Morse... but I already have a copy! *Lightning Man*, by Pulitzer Prize winning author Kenneth Silverman, is the first comprehensive biography written about Mr. Morse in six decades. It chronicles Morse's life from childhood through his passing in magnificent detail and insight. You'll learn about his career as a gifted portrait painter, budding geographer and photographer, and his life as a politician and college professor. I understand he had something to do with the invention of the electric telegraph and the Continental Code, as well! The book is beautifully presented and includes dozens of archival photographs. You don't need to be a CW buff to enjoy this book. Published



by Knopf Books, it is available at all major bookstores such as Amazon.com; Barnes and Noble, and Borders. I guarantee a good read you won't want to put down!

Please note on your calendar a sacred day in the world of CW: Starting on New Year's Eve at 0000 UTC or 7 pm Eastern time is the ARRL's annual Straight Key Night. All CW operators are encouraged to dust off their manual pieces of brass and pound out some good long rag chews with fellow wireless telegraphers. Many people who otherwise never operate CW show up along with old timers and daily keepers of the flame like myself! It is a fascinating 24 hours that should not be missed. It's fun to listen to and even more fun to join in!

Have a wonderful holiday season and Happy New Year!

— 73 de the old goat N2KZ

IRLP info

The PCARA IRLP node, number 4214, continues in operation on the KB2CQE 449.925 MHz repeater.

How to join in: If an IRLP station starts a contact, you will hear an announcement from the distant node on our repeater output, followed by speech from the remote operator. Reply as though operating in a normal repeater contact. You might want to give your location since the other station could be calling from almost anywhere.

Hint: after you click your PTT switch, **pause for two seconds**, to give the IRLP network time to start forwarding your audio. Otherwise the beginning of your over will be cut off. At the end of the contact, the originating station will break the link.

Setting up a link: If you want to set up an IRLP contact yourself, the first thing you will need is the four-digit number of the distant node. This information is available from the web site <http://status.irlp.net>.

Next, make sure you have a **good** signal into the 449.925 MHz repeater. Announce your callsign, then key the node number into your radio's DTMF ("touch-tone") pad, and immediately release the PTT. If the number was correctly decoded and corresponds to a valid node, you should hear an announcement of the distant node's identity.

The next thing to do is **listen** for a few seconds. The distant repeater or simplex frequency might already be busy — it's only polite to check beforehand. If there is activity, don't transmit until you hear a pause. Otherwise, make your first transmission — remembering the two second wait before talking. Announce your callsign and your location, then release the PTT and listen again. It could be several seconds before you hear a reply.

De-linking: When your contact is over, key "73" on your DTMF pad to break the link.

You can practice most of this with the IRLP echo reflector, node number 9990. Be patient, sometimes the reply-echo can take a while. - Malcolm, NM9J

Peekskill / Cortlandt Amateur Radio Association

Mail: PCARA, PO Box 146, Crompond, NY 10517

E-Mail: w2nyw@arrl.net

Web site: <http://www.pcara.org>

PCARA Update Editor: Malcolm Pritchard, NM9J

E-mail: NM9J @ arrl.net

Newsletter contributions are always very welcome!

PCARA Information

PCARA is a **Non-Profit Community Service Organization**. PCARA meetings take place the first Sunday of each month at 3:00 p.m. in Dining Room B of the Hudson Valley Hospital Center, Route 202, Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567. Drive round behind the main hospital building and enter from the rear (look for the oxygen tanks). Talk-in is available on the 146.67 repeater.

PCARA Repeaters

W2NYW: 146.67 MHz -0.6, PL 156.7Hz

KB2CQE: 449.925MHz -5.0, PL 179.9Hz

(IRLP node: **4214**)

N2CBH: 448.725MHz -5.0, PL 107.2Hz

PCARA Calendar

Sun Dec 7: Holiday dinner & December meeting,
At The Reef Restaurant, 3:00 P.M.

Hamfests

Sun Nov 30: Jersey Shore ARS Tailgate Hamfest, 8:00 am, St. Joseph Knights Of Columbus, Whittier & Tennyson Aves., Toms River NJ.

Sun Jan 18: ARRL New York/Long Island Section Convention, Long Island Mobile ARC, East Woods School in Oyster Bay, Long Island.

Sun Feb 29: LIMARC Long Island Hamfair, Levittown Hall, 201 Levittown Pkwy, Hicksville, NY. 9:00 am.

VE Test Sessions

Dec 7: Yonkers ARC, Yonkers Police Dept., 1st Precinct, E Grassy Sprn Rd, 9:00 A.M. Contact: D. Calabrese, 914 667-0587.

Dec 8: Split Rock ARA, Hopatcong High School, Rm C-1, Hopatcong NJ. 7:00 p.m. Contact Sid markowitz, 973 724-2378.

Dec 11: WECA, Fire Training Cntr, Dana Rd., Valhalla, NY. 7 p.m. Register with Sanford Fried, (914)273-2741, N2SF@weca.org.

Dec 15: Columbia Univ ARC, Watson Labs, 612 W 115th St. New York, NY, 6:30 p.m. Contact Alan Crosswell, 212 854-3754.

Jan 4: Yonkers ARC, Yonkers Police Dept., 1st Precinct, E Grassy Sprn Rd, 8:30 A.M. Contact: D. Calabrese, 914 667-0587.



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PO Box 146
Crompond, NY 10517