

THE LOCAL OSCILLATOR

MARCH 1996

The Publication of the Panhandle Amateur Radio Club

Wally Provost N4BZ

Editor

94 VOICE MAIL NEARING COMPLETION BY BRETT N5SQK

Just a quick update on the 94 Voice Mail project. Link Communications has agreed to give us an upgrade for our controller at no charge. The good news is that we will have access to a 600 word library and the new software will support Digital Voice Recording (DVR). The DVR upgrade consists of an additional piece of hardware which digitizes voice and stores the voice on standard computer memory SIMMS. We will probably need about 2 megabytes of memory to start our VOICE MAIL project. I have 2 MB of memory which I will contribute to the cause. That's the good news; the bad news is, the controller software upgrade will require a complete reprogramming of our machine. So in the next couple of weeks we will schedule a visit to the site to install the new software EEPROM's, from there the machine will come up with very limited function. It will take a few days to learn the new programming method's and get everything back to the function we have now. The machine shouldn't be out of service more than an hour or so, but it may take a few days to get all the function back such as ID announcements and autopatch etc.

The following have contributed to the 94 VOICE MAIL PROJECT the proceeds of which will be used to purchase the DVR hardware to allow us to implement VOICE MAIL.

N5SQK BRETT SIMS \$30.00, KC5OMK
MONTY DENNY \$30.00, KC5DKQ ROBERT McKEE

\$30.00, WB5QLI KEN HANSON \$30.00, KC5EZO
DON BRISTOW \$30.00,

This is about half of what we need to do the project. Our plans are to beta test the Voice Mail with the contributors and then make it available to all members. Ken WB5QLI still has some batteries left if you need some good gel cells, the proceeds he is donating to the Voice Mail project. If you would like to contribute, contact Robert KC5DKQ, the club treasurer. If we don't raise the money to purchase the DVR hardware, we will return the Voice Mail donations.

PANHANDLE NET SCHEDULE

P.A.I.N. 146.94 MHZ 8:00PM SUN
CLOUD CHASERS 145.92 MHZ 8:00 PM MON
SIDEWINDERS 144.2 MHZ USB 8:00 PM MON
A R E S 146.52 MHZ 8:00 PM THURS
PANHANDLE TRAFIC AND EMERGENCY NET
3933 KHZ LSB 00:00 UTC DAILY
A M S A T 3940 KHZ 9:00 THURS
S W LYNX NET 147.56 MHZ 6:00 PM THURS

ATTENTION PUBLIC SERVICE OPPORTUNITY

National Multiple Sclerosis Society Panhandle Chapter is having their MS WALK Saturday April 13, 1996. Anyone that would like to help with communications is welcome and encouraged do so.

The Start: 1000 Polk 9:30 AM

End: Sanborn Park

Thanks Ronnie N5ZLU

THE DAY THE TALKIE STUCK

A couple of weeks ago on a fine Friday morning someone set something on their talkie and keyed the transmitter. It appeared from the signal strength that the talkie was inside a vehicle, probably plugged into the cigarette lighter. It kept the 94 machine tied up most of the morning. Robert KC5DKQ put the repeater on tone access which kept it from timing out. Luckily the talkie wasn't transmitting the PL Tone. The signal strength was fairly low but enough to hold the machine. The signal was noted to be more horizontal than vertical which made us suspect that it was a talkie in the seat. The transmission started at 8:00am. We were just about to go look for it when it ended at 11:30am. I suspect someone came out for lunch and found a rather hot talkie. The signal was coming from the ~~South South East part of the city~~. Thanks to Phil W5SFV for help in identification and direction and thanks to Ken WB5QLI for being ready to go look, when the transmission ended. Any true confessions?? Hi Hi... DE N5SQK

POTTER COUNTY ARES TO MEET AT WEATHER BUREAU

On March 12 the Potter County ARES meeting will be held at the National Weather Service Office. A good chance to see where it all happens.

AMATEUR RADIO WEBB SITES

General Ham radio

<http://www.acs.ncsu.edu/HamRadio/>

AMSAT

<http://www.amsat.org/>

QRZ updated daily

<http://www.qrz.com>

RACES MEETING

The march Races meeting will be Tuesday, March 26, at the Emergency Operations center at Travis and Line in Amarillo.

RANDALL COUNTY ARES MEETING

The March meeting of the randall County ARES will be held at the Main Fire Station in Canyon on March 19. The time has been moved up to 7:30 to allow for members driving from Amarillo.

This story is fiction. But, every event in it actually happened, only not quite as it is here. Except for me the people you meet in this story are all silent keys but they were very much like I described them. I've taken a little poetic liberty only in the arrangement of facts to make it more enjoyable. The story was published in the may 1979 issue of Ham Radio Horizons, a magazine out out by the Ham Radio publishing group back when the CB radio craze was on

HILLTOPPING WITH THE OLD MOUNTAIN GOAT

By

Wallace H. Provost Jr. N4BZ

He played third base, stoked a boiler, drove a black locomotive, and ran the engine that pushed heavily laden barges up the canal to Syracuse. He was a towering giant of a man who didn't have to ask for respect. But age and disease had taken their toll. One leg stiffened up and the other threatened to follow. He put away the bat and glove and moved away from the iron rails and the Mohawk to a mobile home on a ledge outside the city, where the humid summer nights wouldn't rack his bones. He looked down upon the city and he took up Amateur Radio. His name was Henry.

In a world of incorporeal voices, a man's body is no longer a shackle. From Henry's lair high above the Hudson valley, he could reach out and visit such wondrous places as Boston and Providence and Manchester. From his vantage point, where breezes from the Helderbergs cooled the hot summer nights, he used a Gonset Communicator and a six-element Telerelex to get out to places the flatlanders never heard of, unless they had tall towers or expensive low-band radios. There were hams in the valley who used high-priced sideband radios on 20 meters and worked Europe and Japan, but Henry preferred 6 meters, where he could prop his bad leg on a hassock, lean back in his easy chair, and gas as long as he wanted without everybody in the world trying to stomp on him.

Now there are places in the world other than Boston, Hartford, and Mount Agamenticus. There's Binghamton, New York, and Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, and Pompton Lakes, New Jersey; but from the eastern slopes of the Helderbergs, the Catskills get in the way, so you can't work

down there. Now you take a man like Henry, who hauled molasses out of Plattsburg and pushed a barge down Lake Champlain and up the Mohawk and the Erie Canal - you just don't tell him he can't talk to Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, or Wilkes Barre, because even with a stiff leg you just know he won't take no for an answer. Henry called me on the air one night.

"Why can't I talk to Pompton Lakes, New Jersey?" he asked.

"You're not high enough," I told him. "The Catskill Mountains are in the way and they stick up four or five thousand feet"

"So What must I do?"

"Go higher."

"How much higher?"

"Two, three thousand feet."

"I'm serious."

"So am I. You want over these mountains on 6, you gotta get two, three-thousand feet higher."

Anyway, I thought that was the end of it and I went back to working Schenectady, but on Wednesday he called me again.

"How about three thousand, seven hundred feet?"

"Three thousand, seven hundred feet of what?"

"That high enough to get into Pompton Lakes?"

"How you going to do that?"

"Mount Utsayantha."

"Mount what?"

"Look it up on your road map. It's down in Stamford. It's 3700 feet high. We're going there Saturday."

"Who's we?"

"You and me, that's who."

That was to be the first of many trips I took with the Old Mountain Goat, as Henry was dubbed by hams all over the northeast. Sometimes we went alone, like the time he tied up to a convenient pole only to find it had an electric fence on it. Sometimes we went with others. We went to Mount Everett in southwestern Massachusetts. As the night wore on we were met by others who came to see the Old Mountain Goat in person. One brought his wife and a banana-cream pie. Two came up from Connecticut. Conditions on the band were fantastic. We worked Auburn, Maine, that night.

Everett is a unique mountain; it's not exceptionally high, but there's nothing higher except Greylock 40 miles north. Someone brought sandwiches and coffee. We got back well after sunrise the next morning. The trip to Utsayantha was a first for us, and forever more that mountain would always have a special place in our memories. It wasn't our most Popular place; fifty miles is a long way to travel to get to the foot of a mountain if You expect to drive back the same

night. Our all-time favorite became Petersburg Mountain outside Cobleskill, only twenty miles away and blessed with Propagation that delighted us with new and totally unexpected experiences on every trip.

Henry kept talking it up all week on the band, and it looked like hams would be going up the mountain en masse --until word of the road up the mountain leaked back from down-country. The lure of distant cities and strange voices brought only four adventurous amateurs as we turned south on Route 30 While the sunrise was still a wish on the eastern horizon. With Big John, Henry's friend, you could be absolutely sure that no matter how tough the going got, he would never back down. And you could be just as sure he would forget some crucial item - a line cord, antenna, feed line. Big John was a builder. You might not recognize what it was he built, but it always worked. You learned early not to point a finger at anything Big John built, no matter how ridiculous it looked. One night on Sickle Hill, Big John was parked next to a city slicker using a brand spanking new commercially built hilltopper special. John had a contraption of box wood and coat hangers lying on a bushel basket atop his station wagon. The best the city slicker could do was Worcester. Big John worked Block Island while sitting right there next to him. The slicker packed up his fancy gear, went back to Albany, and was never seen again in the Helderbergs. Chowhound frequently went mountain topping with Henry and Big John. If old Chowhound found something he liked, he bought it. For years he owned land right on top of Sickle Hill, but he never learned that you can't buy a mountain. He was never able to get a station working up there. Try he did; it just wouldn't work. But he was a welcome addition to any hilltopping trip, because he never went anywhere without a well-stocked larder. That made four of us who headed down through Schoharie and Middleburg and past West Fulton, where John McGiver lives; and Blenheim and Grand Gorge, where the mighty Delaware river is a tiny brook, and on to Stamford at the foot of the mountain, where the Indian Princess Utsayantha threw herself to death because of her paleface lover. Route 30 winds through the lower Helderbergs and the backside of the Catskills. It follows the Schoharie Creek down to its headwaters, where it picks up the Delaware. At Grand Gorge we let Route 30 go on to Roxbury and the Major Catskills, while we headed west to Stamford.

Getting to the foot of the mountain is only half the trip. The second half could be the more difficult. Sickle Hill has a smooth, hard road right to the top; but then it's only 1200 feet high. A bright sunny day down in the valley can suddenly turn into a cold, wet drizzle if you happen to drive into a cloud at the peak. I can remember driving into a pea-soup fog on Mount Greylock that was so thick that I missed a turn, and when I came out of the fog I was at the bottom on the other side of the mountain.

If you have good tires and a first-rate cooling system on your car, Utsayantha is not a bad mountain to climb. The ~~road is mostly red clay, and you have to wash your car when you come down.~~ During wet weather it's better not to go. The only car whose driver's seat would move back far enough to accommodate Henry's stiff leg was a Saab. It took the hill admirably, but the Chowhound's Buick bottomed out several times, giving him and Big John, who rode with him, a few scary moments. When we reached the top we had to wait several minutes for the dust to settle before we dared open the door. On 20 meters, signals bounce off the ionosphere and it's perfectly normal to talk to Hokaido one day and Lima or Prague the next. It's no more unusual to work Australia than California. But on 6 meters, signals normally travel in straight lines, with a little bending. As a result, how far you get out is determined by how high you are. So you can be down in a valley on 20 meters with the whole world at your feet and you can always find someone to talk to. But on 6 meters, even 3700 feet in the air, it's just too normal to find nobody around on a Saturday morning.

Hilltopping antennas are a Popular source for innovation. Get four dedicated hams together on a Saturday morning, with a light wind and a little nip in the air to spur them along, and you can assemble and 3 erect almost any antenna system You want. But if a sudden squall comes up, or the band stays good till 3 AM and You have to get that thing down and Packed with 40-mph gusts slapping rain into your face, you do want it to be simple !

Adam 's Vista is a wide spot in the road on the east slope of Greylock , where the town of Adams is some 3000 feet straight down below you. It's a favorite spot for hilltoppers, because divine guidance, or maybe some unknown fence erector, put a hole in a rock about a foot deep and just the right size to support 20-foot pole.

Speaking of antennas, there was Two-Meter Pete. He was a loner - not as unusual as it may sound among radio amateurs. He had a hole in the roof of his car and a mast sticking through it. When he was ready to go to work he'd reach behind the seat and Push up that pole, slipping in five ~~foot sections until the antenna was some thirty feet off the ground.~~ If it was a bit breezy, Pete had a set of guys that could be tied to convenient trees.

Most casual hilltoppers carried a Portable beam and 20 feet of masting, which they tied to the car door handle. The Old Mountain Goat was a firm believer in big antennas. His hilltopper was 24 feet long, and he wasn't happy until it was 40 or more feet off the ground. Finding a spot to erect a monster like that became my job. I've been shocked by electric fences, raked by poison ivy, and soaked to the skin putting up and taking down antennas.

At some time in the past a tribe of Indians was kept on Mount Utsayantha for the tourist trade. They abandoned the mountain when it proved unprofitable, but they left behind their wickiup: a building of pine slabs some 40 feet long and 20 feet wide, with what looked like bunk beds along both walls and a hole in the center of the roof directly over a circular fireplace. I lashed the pushup pole to the center beam at the front door and guyed it to some trees. We set up just Outside the lodge, ready to slip inside if the weather should suddenly turn sour. Big John took the generator down the western slope, where it wouldn't disturb picnickers, but where we could get at it to add gasoline at night. The Chowhound got a fire going and started to unpack the grub. Henry set up the Gooney box on a card table just outside the lodge, got the log book ready, and began perusing the band as soon as Big John powered him up.

Once I lived on the Westfield River about 40 miles out of Springfield, Massachusetts. It wasn't much of a village: a dozen houses and a run-down paper mill, but it was a favorite spot for fishermen. You can tell a lot about how a man handles his frustrations by the way he fishes. If he has good control he uses a worm, finds a quiet pool, and sits patiently waiting until a curious trout comes looking for a special treat for dinner. Others will plunk the worm in, wait a few minutes, then try again somewhere else, or they'll use a lure and cast it out constantly, winding it back Then there are fly fishermen, who keep busy between bouts by trying to lay that fly just where the big fish is lurking. It's a lot like that in Amateur Radio - particularly on 6 meters, where it isn't crowded and you can call for hours without getting a single answer. We all took turns calling. The lack of answers drove the Chowhound deeper into the ice chest. Big John was sure it was because he had forgotten his favorite mike, and the Old Mountain Goat kept asking me to fix what was wrong or show him how to make a contact. When the contact came, we were all excited because it was from a place we never heard of. Turned out to be only 20 miles away.

The classic propagation for 6-meter radio signals is line of sight. If that were strictly true, it would be a boring band and nobody would waste time operating on it. There's a layer in the ionosphere that's affected by magnetic storms. When it gets excited, 6-meter signals are reflected down some 1000 miles away. This may happen three or four times over the winter and can happen for days on end in early summer. However, when it happens, there's only one place you don't want to be: on a mountain. For four hours that Saturday afternoon we sat there with the Chowhound munching away and listened to all of our flatland friends working Cleveland, Detroit, and Yazoo City and we couldn't even work back to Albany! The sun was going down in a blaze of glory, a cold wind had come up, some nasty clouds had been building in the north. We'd worked

one station in Oneonta, one in Schenectady, and one in Illinois, who didn't stay in long enough to even get the town. The Chowhound was ready to go home, the ice chest was getting bare. But the Old Mountain Goat was adamant. He came here to work Pompton Lakes and he wasn't going until he did, so we moved everything into the lodge just in time to miss the first drops of rain.

From Terra Alta to Burlington I've spent the greater part of my life climbing mountains. There's a place much worse to be during a storm than on top of a mountain that's on your way down. The road washed right out from under my wheels in Rutland one day. A nice smooth road can turn into a mad torrent of water in a matter of minutes. I came off Everett one night and got hit by a fog so thick I had to stop and wait it out, then I had to pull out a more courageous person, who drove off the road trying to make it in the fog. A mountain is a dynamic organism, and when it's attacked by weather disturbances its characteristics change drastically. You find yourself on a mountain when a storm hits, you stay right there until it settles down! The way down the mountain may not be the same way you came up.

There's a propagation condition called ducting, which occurs whenever a mass of cold air sneaks under a mass of warm air. We waited inside the wickiup while the storm pelted the mountain. The rain static on the antenna overrode any signals we might have heard; but after it passed, I listened around and could barely detect that swishing sound you get when you find yourself on the edge of a duct. We all recognized it immediately. Big John added some wood to the fire (it was getting nasty cold); the Chowhound had a mouthful of ham and cheese sandwich and stopped chewing; the Old Mountain goat, horizontally polarized on one of the bunks, snapped to attention. You never know where one of these ducts will take you. I once worked Elmira from my place outside Albany with only one watt. We were only on the edge. Voices would pop in and out; we weren't sure where they were from. When one came in solid, he signed New Jersey, and Henry called from the bunk, "See if he's from Pompton Lakes?" He wasn't, he was in Springfield, but he told us there was a YL over in Pompton Lakes, who was likely to be on any night. As soon as they heard we were in Delaware County, New York, stations kept calling us from Passaic to Philadelphia, one after the other. We took turns answering them. The old log book was really getting filled. This is what we came here for, and excitement was in the air. The half-eaten ham and cheese sandwich grew stale on the table. We even picked up a station in Wilmington, Delaware, and one in Frostproof, Maryland. Big John worked a solid half-hour with all of us hovering over his shoulder. Finally we landed one in Brandonville West Virginia. We really celebrated after that one! The chowhound went to the trunk and got out his emergency rations. I stoked up the fire. It was hard to believe, as the

band died out, that it was already three in the morning. "We didn't do it." Henry was looking over the long list of stations we had worked. "We didn't do what?" I asked. "We didn't work Pompton Lakes. Big John was sacked out on one of the makeshift bunks. He acted like Henry had just wakened him. "What's so special about Pompton Lakes?" he asked. The Old Mountain Goat's answer was what you might expect out of him, "How would I know, I haven't worked it yet." How can you combat that kind of logic? We'd lost our duct, but there was still some kind of inversion out there every once in a while voices would slowly emerge out of the noise until they were almost intelligible, then fade.

We did know that a YL named Hilda liked to work the band late at night. A dozen People had told us that she was the only active 6-meter ham in Pompton Lakes, so we had lots of hope. We took turns calling Pompton Lakes, hoping for a duct long enough to make it.

I want you to understand that most people who operate 6 meters work with modest stations in the valleys with modest antennas. The range seldom exceeds 30 miles or so. The population of 6-meter amateurs isn't too great. Most of the time you talk to the People over and over, and if you don't enjoy People or have a friendly personality, you soon tire of it and eventually go to the low bands with the crowd. Those who are left are friendly folks who enjoy each other's company. Even when you're hilltopping, most operators will listen to see if you are the kind of person who will carry on an interesting conversation before they call you.

We worked a ham who lived 15 miles from Pompton Lakes. He told us he hadn't heard Hilda on that night, which was unusual, because she was almost always on the air on Saturday nights. She had a problem, he explained, that made it hard for her to sleep. We talked to him for two hours. Strangely enough we were getting anxious to meet Hilda. We'd heard so much about her. It's hard to tell anything about someone if all you hear is her voice. As a society, we're used to body signs along with voices, and you learn early in your amateur career not to put much faith in the picture your mind makes, of anyone you meet on the air, even if you have talked to him weekly for a year or more. You get to know more about fellow amateurs from what others say about them, we had heard nothing but good words about Hilda from Pompton Lakes. At 5 AM the eastern sky was beginning to lighten. Big John and the Chowhound were sawing wood. I turned the controls over to the Old Mountain Goat and stepped outside to gas up the generator. The air was dry, but the wind was cold. When I came back in with a few logs in my arms, Henry was talking to Hilda.

Hilda had a mature voice with a pleasant lilt to it. She said she was going to the hospital in the morning, so she'd

taken some sleeping pills --that's why she wasn't on during the night. There are some people who are simply easy to talk to. They're interested in you and are interesting themselves. We knew from earlier reports that Hilda was in her fifties, had been widowed several years, and was active in local amateur and youth groups the kind of person whose whole life seems to be wrapped up in the people around her. Big John and Chowhound got up, and we had breakfast while we talked to her until it was time for her to leave for the hospital. The morning brought a hot sun to dry the road. We packed Up and were down the mountain before anyone said anything. I guess there was nothing more to talk about. The whole night was sufficient unto itself, and no talking could improve it. In fact, it was more than a month later before we could talk about it - unusual, because normally whenever we returned from a hilltopping expedition it was the prime topic of conversation for weeks.

I worked Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, a month later on 75 meters. I asked about Hilda. Yes, she had gone to the hospital that morning for open-heart surgery. But Hilda never regained consciousness

REPORTERS WANTED

Make THE LOCAL OSCILATOR the voice of the Panhandle. Keep me informed of anything of interest to Panhandle Hams. Catch me on 94, E-mail me at n4bz@arn.net, call me at 359-0458, write me at 5212

Westgate Drive, 79106. Complete articles are great but however you put it I can work with it. DX, VHF DX, PACKET, NTS, whatever. the pay is great. I'll split my commission with you. Six figures, all zeros.

UPCOMING HAMFESTS

Elk City Oklahoma Community Civic Center

March 2 Talk-in frequency not given

Midland Texas Midland County Exhibit

Building March 16-17 talk-in 146.76

Wichita Falls Texas Activity Center

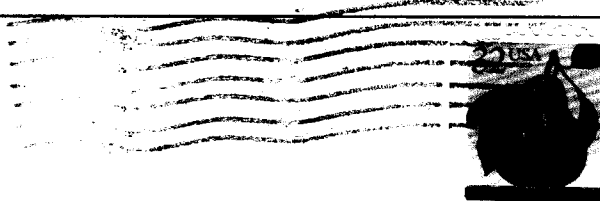
April 6 Talk-in 147.14+ and 444.000+

PL 192.8 for both

LICENSE UPGRADE CLASSES

The Panhandle Mamteur Radio club is planning to sponsor license upgrade classes at Amarillo College beginning this fall. The present plan is to provide cl\asses leading as high as the General Class test. It is important that anyone interested contact Monty, KC5OMK or Don, KC5EZO and let one of them know so they can determine the level of interest. If you are interested in going beyond the General class test inform them. If there is enough interest these classes can be planned as well.

PANHANDLE AMATEUR RADIO CLUB
PO BOX 10221
AMARILLO TX 79116



03/03/96 - Individual

CARL JEANS N5YXN

6112 CALUMET

AMARILLO, TX 79106