

TCA

The Canadian Amateur

Canada's Amateur Radio Magazine
La Revue des Radioamateurs Canadiens
NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2015 – NOVEMBRE / DÉCEMBRE 2015

Season's Greetings - Joyeuses Fêtes



The Evolution of a
Winning ARRL SS CW Team

The 2015 World Radiocommunication
Conference Gets Underway
#RACatWRC15

EVOLUTION OF A WINNING ARRL SS CW TEAM

Chet Latawicz, VE3CFK

It always starts off innocently enough...

Two old high school buddies, 50 years out of school, got together for a beer and to reminisce about the good old days. About how much fun they had at Field Day and the times they'd set up a station in the middle of nowhere just to have fun. And then came the question: Wouldn't it be fun to relive those days?

The answer: "Yes, but why and where would we want to do that?"

Neither are big contesters. Dabble here and there, search and pounce (S&P). No real contest effort. Field Day is their typical contest venture.

Then came an opportunity. The American Radio Relay League (ARRL) instituted a new Multioperator Low Power category for their November Sweepstakes contest. Why not? Something different. It'd be fun!

As newbies to the contesting game, they realized that the Low Power category had a big handicap so Bill, VE3BXI and Eric, VA7DZ, decided they needed an advantage. A rare ARRL section would provide such an advantage. The ARRL list of most wanted sections in previous Sweepstakes contests was consulted, and Manitoba was selected.

"Why Manitoba?", asked Eric.

"Think of it as a DXpedition inside our country!", said Bill.

And so Bill and Eric set off on their exciting new adventure and the VE4DR "Contest-pedition" began. The logistics were developed. The equipment list was established. The wire, the coax, the barrel connectors, the electrical tape, the soldering irons, hammers, ground stakes, laptops, rigs and power supplies... were all added to the list. Food and sleeping accommodations had to be provided and transportation arranged. Clothing for the snow and winter cold was a necessity. The list went on and on. Hmmm.

Everything needed to be packed; not only the items to set up the station, but also to maintain, troubleshoot and provide any necessary repairs. This was turning out to be a major logistics effort – not much different than any DXpedition – just as Bill had foreseen.

This article was published in the May/June 2015 issue of the *National Contest Journal* and is being reprinted with their permission.



Bill, VE3BXI (left) and Dave, VE4XN, with the contest run position in the back.

The competition was getting stiffer. They needed more QSOs and a "Clean Sweep". But how do you accomplish this with low power and an OCF dipole? With 100 watts it is difficult to hold a frequency with wire antennas. You can only do so well S&P'ing. Additionally, a Manitoba Contest Club had been formed! More Manitoba

Next question: Manitoba? But where in Manitoba? At 251,000 square miles, it's a big place! Having worked in Winnipeg for the previous two years and also staying at a "ham radio friendly" Bed and Breakfast (B&B) in Brandon, Bill suggested it as a location and so they travelled from Victoria, British Columbia (1300 miles) and Sarnia, Ontario (1300 miles) to set up a contest station there for the 2011 Sweepstakes CW contest. They had a single K3 and a single off-centre-fed (OCF) dipole at 25 feet above ground.

Sure enough, around noon on the Sunday of the contest, a lot of operators checked their logs to discover they still needed Manitoba. Eric gathered his courage and, for the first time in his Sweepstakes career, he tried a "run" (calling CQ) rather than just S&P'ing. Somebody spotted him on a cluster, a pileup quickly developed, and VE4DR's score increased rapidly.

The result? To their astonishment, Bill and Eric won the Manitoba and Canadian titles that year for multi-low! In part, this happened because there was very little competition; being a generally cautious lot, not overly fond of radical change, most Canadian contestants stuck with the traditional categories.

2012 – MANITOBA

In 2012, the VE4DR multi-low team expanded with new members, Vic, VE3AOD and Chet, VE3CFK. Once again the team won both Manitoba (and Canada!) from their previous B&B "ham friendly" location in Brandon, Manitoba.

Reviewing the Canadian scores revealed that the Canadian competition was growing rapidly. Although the team's QSO count increased from the previous year, the team believed that major increases in their score would be essential if they wanted to retain their Canadian Championship title.

operators were getting into the Sweepstakes game, so the "rare" MB section was getting...well... less rare. What to do?

2013 – ONTARIO NORTH

In 2013, the team decided to take advantage of the new sections added to Canada by the ARRL Contest Committee. Ontario was divided into four sections: Greater Toronto Area (GTA); Ontario South (ONS); Ontario East (ONE); and Ontario North (ONN). This increased the total number of sections from 80 to 83. A review of the previous Sweepstakes results from the ONN area showed that there were only one or two competitors from this section – that would make us a rare section again!

To address the need for better antennas, the team installed a pair of phased 40m verticals at our "ham radio friendly" B&B in Sault St. Marie, Ontario. This was a wise decision as 40m turned out to be our "money" band. With directivity and gain, the antenna played well and gave us the majority of our QSOs. The rare section status of ONN should also give us the Canadian title once again. Wrong! We lost out to VE4EA. But why? We had good antennas and almost no competition from ONN? We were partially correct in our game plan, but we misled ourselves with one major assumption.

Although ONN was a relatively rare section (as were VE4, ND and VY1), it was impossible to identify it as a rare section strictly from the call VA3MN. That's because VA3MN looks like any other Ontario call sign with no obvious section identifier. Although VE4DR identified the station as being definitely in Manitoba and VA7DZ as definitely in British Columbia, VA3MN was just another Ontario call sign. It could be in GTA, ONN, ONS or ONE.

The advantage we had in the previous two Sweepstakes had been blown. That is, lost! However, we did settle for the top contender from the ONN section.

2014 – BACK TO MANTOBA

Having been disappointed in 2013, the team developed a plan that should result in more QSOs. The secret was believed to be four-pronged: location, location, location and antennas. The call sign advantage we previously held by operating from Manitoba was deemed a necessity. So back we would go to Manitoba. Wire antennas were fine, but to hold a frequency, we needed to be heard. With 100 watts it is difficult to hold a run frequency against the high power stations. We needed yagis and other antennas with gain. And on the higher bands (20, 15 and 10 metres), antenna gain is mostly about aluminium in the air: the more and higher, the better.



We decided to go back to Manitoba. But this time, we'd be armed with aluminium.

Unfortunately, our “ham friendly B&B” in Brandon had been sold so alternate station sites had to be considered. Bill, VE3BXI, suggested the Manitoba Amateur Radio Museum (MARM) in Austin and this turned out to be an excellent site. MARM is the wonderful result of Dave Snyder, VE4XN's efforts to construct a ham radio museum. It, too, is “ham radio friendly” (go figure!) and was equipped with a triband yagi for 20, 15 and 10 metres plus wire antennas for 80 and 40 metres. Our plan was part way there with a 3-element yagi gain antenna for 20, 15 and 10 metres, but wire dipoles for 80 and 40 metres were not acceptable to the team.

Bill then constructed a 40 metre four-square with elevated radials. The array was erected in the open field at MARM and turned out to be our secret weapon on 40 metres. We decided to live with the 80 metre dipole for 2014.

We also added a fifth member to the team. Fred, KE7X, brought additional contesting skills to the group as well as in-depth knowledge of the workings of Elecraft's K3. Fred gave an onsite tutorial on contesting with a K3. Thanks Fred! It was invaluable to our efforts.

The result? Not only were we successful in recapturing our Manitoba title, but we also took all of Canada and all of North America in our contest category – multi low CW!

2015 PLANS

More gain antennas! We'll need at least a pair of phased verticals for 80 metres as well as the 40 metre four-square we had in 2014. Yagi antennas for 20, 15 and 10 metres are a must. A unique prefix of a rare section is also mandatory.

So... will it be the Yukon for 2015?

Look for us. You never know where you'll find us in 2015.

MORE ABOUT MARM

The Manitoba Amateur Radio Museum, located in Austin, Manitoba is the result of the Herculean efforts of Dave Snyder, VE4XN. Dave spent many years of effort soliciting approval, funds and equipment and a new building was also erected specifically for the museum. Many Canadian hams, both past and present, have donated equipment to the museum for display; from an early spark gap transmitter to a more recent Collins S-line. It's a “must see” museum for all hams. For more information visit their website at <http://marminc.ca/> or send an email off to Dave at dsnydal@mts.net.

Photo at left:

The 40m 4-square set up on the grounds of the Manitoba Amateur Radio Museum.

Photo below: The VE4DR Team

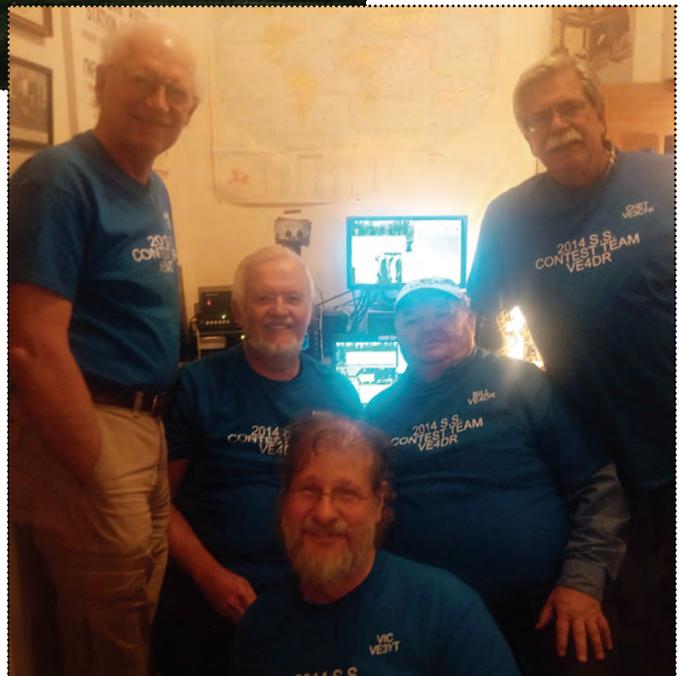
Fred, KE7X, Eric, VA7DZ, Vic, VE3YT, Bill, VE3BXI, and Chet, VE3CFK.

The VE4DR team thanks MARM and Dave for the opportunity to set up their contest station and use the installed equipment at MARM.

CREDITS

Bill, VE3DR (VE3BXI), Dave, VE4XN, Eric, VA7DZ, Fred, KE7X and Vic, VA3YT (VE3OAD).

Photo credits: the contest team and Dave Snyder, VE4XN.



An Advanced Class holder in Canada and Extra Class holder (as W2NHA) in the USA, Chet Latawiec is a retired chemical engineer and project management professional licensed to practise in both Canada and USA. He's been an Amateur Radio operator (with the call sign VE3CFK) since 1968. Chet's main interests since retirement have focused on DXing, the ARRL Challenge Award, 160m, contesting and maintaining/developing his remote Amateur Radio site. You can contact him by email at VE3CFK@arrl.net.