



HAMS

Keywite

May 2010 NEWS

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PO Box 1076, Hilton, 3245

M I D L A N D S A M A T E U R R A D I O C L U B



AFFILIATED TO
THE SARL & IN
ASSOCIATION
WITH THE NATAL
CARBINEERS

The Chairman's Report

CLUB COMMITTEE: 2009-2010

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It is indeed sad news to learn of the passing of Milne Buchan ZS5NZ. Born on 6 April 1918 and according to the club records he became an amateur in 1949 and was a SARL member from 1st July 1949, being an amateur and SARL member for 61 years. He was made SARL Honorary life member some years ago and had been the legal advisor to the SARL for a time. From what I am able to gather he lived in Weenen for many years and thereafter moved to Maritzburg. He served on the MARC committee in various roles. He was made a Honorary Life member of MARC last year for his outstanding service to the club, when the new club constitution made provision for this class of membership. His wife Barbara ZS5TZ died late last year. Our condolences to his daughter Anne.

There were 9 candidates that wrote the Radio Amateur Exams, 8 doing the class A exams. We wish them well and hope that all passed. Nationally there were 152 candidates that were registered to write a big positive for the hobby. Our sincere thanks to Evert ZS5EFP for giving up his time to lecture the candidates on Sunday afternoons. I have one new member who wishes to write the ZU exam in the near future and if there are others please let me know, so we can arrange tutoring. The next national RAE's will be held on 21 October 2010.

My thanks to the club members who have helped clean up the club shack, and dispose of all the unwanted items. It certainly looks so much better, and all the free space. Shaun ZU5DF has sorted many of the magazines into boxes covering calendar years. Any members is welcome to come along and borrow a box or two and wade their way through a year worth of information and there is much good and useful information in these magazines. The committee is considering how we can make this facility more useful for the members, there are a number good ideas to be considered. If you have any ideas on how we could improve this facility please let one of the committee members know so it can be considered at our next meeting.

The FIFA world cup is but days away and I see that the SARL with ICASA has made it easy for foreign visitors to operate in South Africa during the period. So if you hear a ZS10/ call sign then this will be one of our visitors, and lets give them a truly warm South African welcome. I have heard that the expected number of overseas visitors to be in the region of 200 000. I am sure some will be hams. Here's hoping the event goes off well, I am sure we will be surprised as how well we will do both on and off the field.

Till next time may I wish you well on the air waves.
73 Mike
ZS5BGV

Diary of Events

26 May	SARL club CW Contest
29 May	RTA Durban; CQ WW WPX CW
30 May	Comrades Marathon
16 June	Youth Day celebrations, SARL Sprint
19 June	MARC General Meeting
18 July	Intechnet at 19h30 on VHF/UHF/Microwave matters

The M.A.R.C. Infrastructure

Voice Repeaters (FM)			
<i>Visit www.marc.org.za/pages/freq.htm for updates of this list</i>			
VHF	Tx	Rx	Equipment
Hilton	145.6625MHz CTSS 88.5	145.0625 MHz	SCR200 20W, Diamond X-200 rx and tx
Estcourt	145.700 MHz	145.100 MHz	Emcom SA256 25W, Diamond X-200 rx
Franklin	145.725 MHz	145.125 MHz	GE MVP 10W
Worlds View	145.750 MHz CTSS 88.5	145.150 MHz	Emcom SA256 25W, Diamond X-200 rx and tx
Greytown	145.775 MHz	145.175 MHz	Home Brew @ 20w, Diamond X-200 rx and tx
Underberg	145.7875MHz CTSS 88.5	145.1875MHz	Q8000 30W
Windy Hill	145.700MHz	145.100MHz	Hamnet repeater.
UHF			
Mt Gilboa	439.225 MHz	431.625 MHz	Vertex Standard VXR-9000, Diamond X-200 rx and tx
Zwartberg	438.775 MHz CTSS 110.9	431.175 MHz	GE MVP 15W
APRS			
The national APRS frequency is 144.800 MHz (Tx & Rx). The I-Gate is at Hilton (ZR5S). Fixed stations should beacon at approximately 30min intervals with a path of WIDE5-5. Mobile stations should beacon at approximately 1min intervals with a path of "WIDE1-1, WIDE5-5". We have aprs digi's throughout KZN. A PBBS (mailbox) is on ZS0PMB-1 for emergency use. A KA-NODE is on ZS0PMB-7			
Packet Radio			
No packet radio frequency. However, limited packet radio facilities are available on 144.800MHz			
ECHO-LINK "voip"			
Our node number is 244279 Call Sign ZS5PMB. This Echo-link facility is available on the Midlands linked Repeater network.			
E-QSO "voip"			
We are in the "101ENGLISH" virtual room, on the "repeater.dns2go.com" server. This is linked to RF at Hilton on 433.000 MHz simplex.			
BEACONS			
Greytown	50.321 MHz (Tx)	ZS5SIX FSK	(off air)
WEB SITES			
MARC'S very own website	www.marc.org.za		
SARL's website	www.sarl.org.za		
HAMNET website	www.hamnetkzn.org.za		

Regular Events

The KwaZulu Natal Net (Early Birds):

Starts at 06h00 on 7.055 MHz. in winter and 3.650MHz in summer and continues until 07h40. Colin ZS5CF hosts the net from 06h00 & Gary Potgieter (ZS5NK)-takes over later on.

MARC Sunday Morning Net:

Times: 07h45. Club bulletin is presented at 08h0.

Frequencies: VHF: 145.750, 145.6625, 145.775MHz, 145.725MHz, 145.7875MHz, 145.700MHz
UHF: 439.225MHz

Hamnet Bulletins:

Sundays at 07h00 on 145.625MHz and 3.670MHz
Wednesdays at 19h30 on 145.625MHz and 3.670MHz

I never had a defining moment in my childhood which could be attributed for taking up Amateur Radio as a hobby. My father was involved in the local commando from when I was a small kid. He introduced the first mid-band radios into our area in the 70's for security reasons. We all had radios in our vehicles and in our houses, and were using them even before we were teenagers. Radio etiquette was drummed into us from the word go, and words like "over" and "roger out" were used regularly. Some of the simple rules we learnt were that conversations were terminated by those who started them, keeping overs brief and to the point, only using call signs to call others etc.

In my mid teens, I got very interested in electronics, and started building many kits, like stereo HiFis, amplifiers, a variable power supply etc. (later at varsity, my res mates could not understand why I was studying Mechanical Engineering when I was building electronic kits as a hobby). Then my dad decided to buy an intercom system for our house. It was another safety measure - he was OC of the commando at the time and he spent many days away from home on courses and camps. I then said that I would like to build this myself. So off we went to Phillips in Pinetown, who had a great intercom system, and looked at what it was all about. I asked the salesman if I could have a circuit diagram of the intercom. He went and made copies and handed them to me with a smirk on his face.

When I studied the circuit diagram, I realised that this was more than I could handle and phoned OM Hartwig ZS5WA, asking whether I could come around and ask for advice. He was the obvious choice as he had built some of his rigs and was the "electronics guru" in town. He could also talk to anyone in the world with these radios, unlike the primitive party-line phone system still used in Wartburg. Well, when I arrived, I got to see his "wires" in the sky from close quarters for the first time, and he showed me what amateur radio was all about. I remember him demonstrating Morse code. After leaving there with advice on building the intercom, I realised that building that intercom unit was definitely outside my optimistic ambitions, just as becoming a radio amateur was - I could not even understand conversations between airport towers and aircraft, never mind learning Morse Code. Needless to say, my father ended up buying the intercom system, and I did not pursue Amateur Radio.

A few years back, a few of my 4x4 mates decided to enroll for amateur radio classes in Durban and asked me to join. I declined as sitting classes in Pinetown on a weekly basis at night was not that attractive due to the travelling involved. However, I decided to join at the last minute, but missed the cut off date for registration. Luckily there was a glitch in the cut off date, and the extended date enabled me to register and join in. A lot of intensive studying ensured that I wrote the exams in the Electrical Engineering building at the University of Natal. It felt odd sitting in the lecture room which I visited every week of my 5 years at varsity there. I even recognised OM Dave, who was one of our practical tutors many moons back.

And the reason for becoming a Ham? Well, not as pure as some would like it to be. It was not due to the antennas I built to get my commercial radio operational, or the folded dipoles I made for my radio/telephone system to get dial-up on the farm (we still had "nommer asseblief" crank phones in the early 1990's here on the farm!), or that I wanted to help with technological advancements etc. My reason at the time was to simply being able to communicate with the outside world when we were mobile on one of our trips into Africa. Things have changed though and I am more involved in our hobby than I would have anticipated years back. I'm also glad that quite a few of my Ham class mates are very active in Durban.

To top it all, I have made some great friends through this hobby!

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The Amateur Amateur: Not Exactly Plug-And-Play

By Gary Hoffman, KB0H
Contributing Editor
May 1, 2010

I often hear people say, "Oh yes, I know how to program a computer", when what they really mean is that they know how to invoke some esoteric feature of Excel or Word. As a software professional, I do not consider that sort of ability to be anything remotely like actually programming a computer.

But I have to admit that I lapsed into the same erroneous mindset. Not with computers, of course, but with packet radio. Having connected a transceiver to a computer, and having sent and received packets, I blithely believed that, oh yes, I understood packet radio. Recently, however, I learned that, oh no, I didn't.

I didn't think that packet radio was plug-and-play, mind you. My first efforts did involve a fair amount of puzzled frowns and head scratching. But, other smarter souls had gone before me and had at least left some well-marked trails. I also followed the path of least resistance, in that I bought, rather than built. And what I bought was for a very specific application.

I understood well enough that I had not conquered the field of packet radio, at least initially. But over time, complacency crept in and I eventually did start thinking that way. Hey, my packet application worked, so I must know what I'm doing. Right?

Before I proceed with the rest of my tale let me briefly describe my stations. There are two of them, and most of the time they both reside in my shack.

The first and oldest consists of a Yaesu FT-847 and a Compaq desktop computer. The FT-847 can operate on the HF bands, as well as 2 meters and 70 cm. I call my Compaq "Longwave." I refer to this computer/transceiver pair as my "base station."

My second station consists of an Alinco DR-135T 2 meter transceiver and a Dell Inspiron 1150 laptop computer. The computer's name is "Surprise." (does anyone give names to their transceivers?). This pair is, as you've probably guessed, my "field station." though most of the time it is solidly plugged into power, antennas and other ancillary items in my shack.

Although I had operated in various digital and data modes on my base station, virtually all of my packet work was done on my field station. The reason was simple: The Alinco came with a built-in TNC (Terminal Node Controller).

I don't want to put down the Alinco, or any of its components. They did the job that I originally wanted them to do, which was simple terminal-to-terminal communication through a digipeater. But the day came when the Alinco's built-in TNC (a Tasco modem) wasn't quite up to performing a new task that I was attempting, namely running Winlink. I was able to find a work-around, more than one, actually. But the initial failure of the Tasco did start me thinking about better, more robust TNCs.

One of the work-arounds that I mentioned actually was to buy a new TNC. I got a Kantronics KPC3+, which seemed to be a very popular model. It was vastly superior to the Tasco modem in many ways (and much more costly), but I only used it on the Alinco once. Yes, it worked fine. But the KPC3+ was an external TNC and the Tasco was internal. Connecting the KPC3+ required running wires to the Alinco's microphone and speaker ports, making it a dedicated packet transceiver. If I used the internal Tasco modem instead, I could jump back and forth between operating in packet mode and operating in voice mode.

I set aside the KPC3+ with the idea that I would one day connect it to my base station. For my field station though, I decided that I would stick with the internal Tasco modem. If I needed to run Winlink, there were a few more work-arounds that I could put into play.

One day, I found out that there was a beefy replacement for the Tasco modem -- the Argent T2-135. Argent made a number of APRS products and the T2-135 was designed specifically to fit into an Alinco DR-135. Oh boy! I just had to have one! I begged my wife Nancy, N0NJ, to get me one for my birthday. And she did.

And that was the beginning of my harsh education on TNCs. I was about to learn that there was a lot more going

on than I had ever imagined.

I had no difficulties installing my new Argent T2-135 TNC. The Alinco was easy to open. The Tasco modem came out without a fuss. The T2-135 slipped right in. I closed up the Alinco and reconnected all of the cables. I was a happy ham.

Until I cranked up my computer and called up the packet software I had been using. I couldn't connect to the digipeater. In fact, it didn't look like the Alinco was transmitting at all.

At that point I remembered that AGWPacketPro, the software that managed the TNC, had a setup page that asked which model was being used. I called up the page. Hmmmm. The Argent T2-135 didn't seem to be listed. I tried some generic TNC settings, but none of them worked.

Okay, time for Plan B -- switch to simpler software until I got my bearings. I called up Microsoft's Hyperterm. Gee, that didn't work, either. I simply could not connect to the digipeater.

It was time for Plan C, which was to read the instruction manual. I had finally grasped that TNCs were not completely interchangeable. It was not going to be a simple matter of popping out an old TNC and popping in a new one.

Confusion

I read the instruction manual. Then I re-read it. Then I read it again. The very first thing that struck me was how complex the Argent TNC was. No, let me rephrase that: how rich it was. It could do a multitude of tasks that I had never imagined. My simple terminal-to-terminal application was just the tiniest fraction of a much larger packet radio world.

The second thing that became apparent was that the one command that I wanted -- the oh-so-vital "Connect" command -- did not seem to be in the T2-135's menu. That was a little disturbing, but I'd already found that the terminology varied from manufacturer to manufacturer, so I wasn't terribly worried. I just needed to find out which command to substitute for the "Connect" command.

I couldn't find it. So I sent e-mail messages to our local digital gurus asking for help. Surely they would know. In the meantime, I started looking around Argent's Web site to see if they had supplemental information. They did, in the form of a Yahoo discussion group. I went over to the Yahoo page, looked around and yes! Someone had encountered exactly the same problem that I had! They had posted the very question I wished to ask. And the answer was...

The T2-135 didn't have a "Connect" command. There was no "connected" mode. The device was designed to run a myriad of APRS applications, but nothing like a simple terminal-to-terminal operation.

Despondent, I removed the T2-135 from the Alinco and re-installed the Tasco. I didn't consider the affair to have been a waste of time, as I had learned a whole lot about TNCs and their capabilities. And I'm sure that sooner or later I will get into APRS and the Argent T2-135 will suddenly become my best friend.

A while later I did receive responses from the local digital sages. They confirmed that the T2-135 did not have a "Connect" command. They assured me, however, that there was a work-around.

Dazed, I could only shake my head. Hadn't I just left this party?

Editor's note: ARRL member Gary Hoffman, KB0H, lives in Florissant, Missouri. He's been a ham since 1995. Hoffman says his column's name -- "The Amateur Amateur" -- suggests the explorations of a rank amateur, not those of an experienced or knowledgeable ham. His wife, Nancy, is N0NJ. Hoffman has a ham-related Web page. Readers are invited to contact the author via e-mail at kb0h@arrl.net.

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Editor's Waffle

This month the HHN is shorter than normal, and would have been even shorter had it not been for the contribution from Rod's submitted article. I really appreciate any information which is submitted for the HHN, as I don't always have time to dig something out, like for this edition. Thanks Rod!

Luckily many excellent articles were posted on the forum in the last three weeks, so we had no shortage of technical stimulation this past month, that is, if you have internet and are subscribed on the forum. It is great to be able to share great information spontaneously with others - keep it up, it is most enjoyable and certainly better than hearing and/or reading negative comments - we have enough of these in our daily lives.

I would like to mention a few points about radio etiquette which were covered in our April general club meeting, but which still are not observed by some of us:

- Some of us are still quick on the button between overs, sometimes so quick that we begin to talk even before our radios can start transmitting. Breakers stand no chance in joining in.
- If there is a breaker, please let the one the mic was handed over to, to let him in, not the OM who last spoke.
- We have been hearing many overs lately where call signs were not used, or only once in a while. Arguing whether this is necessary or not is of no consequence - the law quite clearly states that we have to give our call sign once per transmission, and we all agreed to adhere to the conditions as set out to us by the governing authorities. Not giving a call sign once or twice on short overs might be overlooked, but not when it is being done regularly
- We still have some breakers chirping in between overs. They might be funny to the breaker, but are an annoyance to most others.
- Remember, you only have to give your call sign during a transmission. Repeatedly giving every person's call sign in a group is considered bad operating procedures by some. However, in groups or round robin, it is good practice of giving the call sign of the OM you are handing the mic over, before signing off with your own call sign. You can also give your call sign at the beginning of a transmission - it does not have to be at the end. In fact, it could also be in the middle if you insist :-)
- Call signs are also not being used properly on hf. In the last two weeks I heard many conversations where OM were doubling with each other. The reason in most cases was due to poor operating procedures. A frequent cause was due to handing over conversations without giving call signs: What often happened is that when someone was talking, and taking long pauses in their looong conversations, the next OM assumed that the mic was handed over and then long "doubling sessions" followed, neither hearing what the other said. If they had used call signs at the end of their overs, even with poor conditions, this would not have happened, as the next OM would know when it is his turn on hearing the call sign exchange. In these cases the reason for using call signs does not only make sense because it is required by law, but it also because it makes practical sense.

On a positive note, a big thank you to OM Shaun, ZU5DF, with the help of Gavin, Ian and others, for tackling the club house, bringing order to the valuable literature and ridding it of rubbish. Quite a few helped after the last club meeting - thanks to all involved. I hear that Brian organised a great braai as well! Soon we will have a club house to be proud of again, and not something some of us want to get rid of. This really goes hand in hand what others, like our "Shaun #1", have achieved in reviving repeater sites and equipment which have fallen into a state of disrepair in the last decade or two. Things are looking up, as is evident by the chatter on air again.

Many, including myself, have been rather quiet on air recently due to the rat race. What is great though that when working, many of us can listen in on the radios a lot of the time, even if we cannot participate. I suppose it is true after all that we always have many listeners out there.

Here's hoping that all nine of our candidates pass the RAE exams which they wrote on 20 May!

As an aside, the funeral of Milne Buchan, ZS5NZ, has been confirmed in the Witness and will take place on Friday 28 May at 13h00 at the Wesley Methodist Church, Cleland Rd, Hayfields.

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If you have any useful articles for this newsletter, please email them to zs5ml@marc.org.za for publication. Any articles of interest to Amateur Radio, both technical and non technical, will be well received.

If you would like your own email address ending with @marc.org.za, please contact me.

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Ham Bulletin Readers

23 May - ZS5CID

30 May - ZS5ML

06 June - ZS5PJ

13 June - ZS5BGV

20 June - ZS5CID

27 June - ZS5ML

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Tailpiece: 40 years of marriage..

A married couple in their early 60s was celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary in a quiet, romantic little restaurant.

Suddenly, a tiny yet beautiful fairy appeared on their table. She said, 'For being such an exemplary married couple and for being loving to each other for all this time, I will grant you each a wish.'

The wife answered, 'Oh, I want to travel around the world with my darling husband

The fairy waved her magic wand and - poof! - two tickets for the Queen Mary II appeared in her hands.

The husband thought for a moment: 'Well, this is all very romantic, but an opportunity like this will never come again. I'm sorry my love, but my wish is to have a wife 30 years younger than me.

The wife, and the fairy, were deeply disappointed, but a wish is a wish.

So the fairy waved her magic wand and poof!...the husband became 92 years old.

The moral of this story: Men who are ungrateful bastards should remember fairies are female.....

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