SUNSPOTS

REDWOOD EMPIRE DX ASSOCIATION

A DX and Contest-minded Amateur Radio Club serving the California coast north of the Golden Gate Bridge

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Club Call W6KB

Visit our Web Site at http://www.redxa.com/

MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

Wednesday, April 14, 2010 at Mister McGoo's Restaurant, Petaluma. If you need directions, please call one of the club officers.

6 pm — Social Hour in the Lounge
7 pm — Dinner and Meeting
8 pm — Program

PROGRAM: Our Program for the evening this month will focus on DX oriented shack automation software, in particular, three well-known programs, LOGic 8, Ham Radio Deluxe and CommCat.

REDXA President's Report

If we could take a vote about the one single thing that has changed ham radio the most in the past 20 years, it would probably be a unanimous "computers"! For that matter, it's probably been the single thing that has changed our lives in general the most in the past 20 years. Computers are everywhere we look, and even a lot of places we *don't* look. I sit in front of one at least 10 hours every day. There are two laptops and three desktops just here in my shack, although the three desktops are all under the stewardship of my 16-year-old game-crazy, computer-genius son.

We find computer processors in our cell-phones, our automobile engines, many of our kitchen appliances and in our TV's. In fact, our modern HDTV's *are* computers, taking a digital data stream from the cable, satellite receiver or OTA antenna and processing it into the video we see. "Google", which used to be the name of a very long number, (the largest number with a name is a "googol", a one followed by 100 zeros) is now a verb we use almost daily without even thinking. The hardware, the software and the combination of those that gave us the Internet have spawned an endless array of news networks, social networking sites and the ability to research just about anything.

Our earliest visions of computers in ham radio started coming slowly in the early 1980's when the first few Apple II, TRS-80 and Commodore computers were tasked to do some fairly simple, repetitive chores around the shack. In those days, you couldn't just download the software you wanted, so you generally wound up copying lines of BASIC out of a magazine, or writing it and debugging it yourself. My first attempt at that was writing a fairly simple program on my Apple II to do contest logging for CQP that could neatly print out a log line on a noisy impact printer after each QSO. I even wrote a module that made up random, legitimate call signs and automatically logged them to 'crash test'the software. Everything worked fine until the contest started and I learned the hard way that RF had a nasty way of making the printer go bonkers!

Computers have come a long way since then and these days, our ham radios are equipped with computers that can talk to other computers in our shacks, and our shack computers can automate almost everything we do in ham radio. Keeping our logs, sending and receiving CW, RTTY and other digital modes, controlling our radios, turning and tuning our antennas, tracking our DXCC and other awards progress, looking up information about the hams we contact, printing our QSL cards or even eliminating QSL cards with LoTW, can all be done with amazing speed, accuracy and organizational abilities we could have only dreamed of just a few years ago. "Point-and-shoot" DX spotting, fully remote controlled stations, SO2R contesting and the whole specter of SDR's, where the radio *is* a computer are all today's reality.

"Shack automation software" was a term we probably didn't see coming back in the vacuum tube era of ham radio, but today, thanks to inexpensive computer equipment and clever, elegant software design, it's here. One of the wonderful things about our hobby is that there are legions of brilliant, motivated people who are willing to put in countless hours developing top-notch ham radio software that is available to us for little or no cost. We owe much to these great folks!

The program for our meeting this month will focus on DX oriented shack automation software, in particular, three well-known programs. I will start with a general overview of what shack automation programs do, how they do it and how to choose the one that's right for your shack, followed by a demonstration of LOGic 8. Jim, K6UUW and Dave, KD6FIL will demonstrate Ham Radio Deluxe. Then Chuck, N6OJ will present CommCat, a program written by Sonoma County resident and REDXA member Howard, W6HN. As announced at our last meeting, Howard has extended a special offer exclusively to REDXA members. Try the free evaluation version of CommCat available on the web

(www.commcat.com) and if you like it, you can get the full, registered version of the program for just a $20 donation to REDXA.

So, if you're still keeping your logs and DXCC progress with paper and pencil, if you want to upgrade your current shack software, or if you're just looking for something new to keep you busy until we have enough sunspots to keep 20 meters open all night, you won't want to miss the April meeting!

Ron, N6IE

Treasurer Report
by Jim, K6JS

REDXA TREASURER'S REPORT

2/28/10 Balance Forward		$3,165.21
INCOME		
Raffle	22.50	
TOTAL INCOME		22.50
EXPENSES		
Badges	42.28	
Meals	22.00	
N6YEU Supplies	16.16	
Steppir Upgrade	100.00	
TOTAL EXPENSES		(180.44)
3/31/10 Ending Balance		$3,007.27

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MARCH 2010
by San, N7PIB

NO MEETING WAS SCHEDULED.

MARCH MEETING MINUTES
by San, N7PIB

President Ron, N6IE, called the meeting to order at 7:55 pm on March 10, 2010 after our fine dinner at Mr. McGoo's in Petaluma. There were eighteen members in attendance and an additional guest in K6JS, Jim's daughter, Devin, and our guest speaker, Eric Swanson, WB6MVT.

The minutes for the February 10, 2010 were accepted by a motion by Al, K6SRZ, and seconded by Doug, WW6D.

Old business: None

New business: None indicated.

President Ron announced that our website had been hacked, apparently from Germany but the problem

was fixed by Steve, KV6A, from Santa Rosa, with no apparent harm.

Regarding the annual DX convention in Visalia, reservations for the banquet dinner may be made on the convention website for tables of 10, provided one has their registration information on hand. Bill Hillendahl, KH6GJV, volunteered to make the necessary arrangements for the table reservations. Several members indicated that they needed rooms for Visalia.

Future program prospects include our April meeting on DX-related software, featuring president Ron on LOGic8, Jim, K6UUW and Dave from VOMARC on Ham Radio Deluxe, Chuck, N6OJ, on RTTY and logging software, and perhaps others. A possibility for the May meeting may be amateur radio directioin finding while the June meeting will be preparation for the annual Field Day the last weekend of June.

The Midway DVD will be ready for presentation at the Dayton Hamvention.

Bob, K6QXY, had a number of radio-related maps to give away as part of the raffle.

Jim, K6UUW, announced the VOMARC Hamfest which will take place on Saturday, May 1 at the Veteran's Building in Sonoma.

Bob, K6QXY, indicated that he has an MFJ noise-finding system, and that you may contact him if you need assistance in finding noise sources.

The issue of possible, claimed noise from the newly installed smart meters was mentioned and Ron clarified that the only possible effects would be heard at 500 MHz or higher.

The raffle grossed $45 with half going to AA6YX and half to the Club. Three lucky members wound up with new radio maps.

Our program was presented by Eric Swanson, WB6MVT from Petaluma and concerned the operations and structure of the Sonoma Operational Area Emergency Services. Eric is the ACS unit leader for the Sonoma South County area. The unit website is www.sonoma-county-acs.org and contains information that may be useful to those who are interested in the auxiliary communications service. Especially considering our multi-county membership basis, it was interesting to learn the extent to which each ACS unit is unique to each own county jurisdiction such that if one wishes to volunteer ones services for Sonoma ACS, one needs to be trained in the Sonoma system which is not the same as that for Marin or Napa counties. There was a visual presentation of a recent fire drill. There is a Monday

evening net at 146.91.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Contesting and DX News
by Doug, WW6D

6 meter excitement! Our own Bob K6QXY was featured twice in QST -- first in the March issue (p. 89) and again in the April issue (p. 89).

To paraphrase from the March "The World Above 50 MHz": "December is the peak of the minor Es season for us and the peak of the major Es season in the Souther Hemisphere. This month [March] features three unusual long distance series of contacts to the Southern Hemisphere... The third [QSO] on December 31 has Bob, K6QXY, working ZL1RS and ZL3NW and being heard by E51CG and VK3OT."

From the April column: "Long distance 6 meter propagation continued in early January. Bob, K6QXY (CM88) heard ZL video on Jan 2 and 4 and E51USA/B weakly on Jan 3."

Since then, Bob reports "On 2/20 I started hearing ZL Video (but very late) 0100Z. I was also hearing VK Video 46.240 [MHz]. Another set of contacts were made ZL3NW @ 0108Z and ZL2DX @ 0154Z. Signals were weak 519-539 with very rapid QSB. No sign of E-skip on either end of the paths and SFI was about 80. By all rights there should be no F2 on a path of over 11,000 km with a solar flux of only 80. These are some very strange contacts indeed."

What accounts for this propagation this time of year on 6 meters, you ask? Again from the April issue (p. 91), "... Jim [Kennedy] KH6/K6MIO believes it to be plausible that a combination of sporadic E (Es) encounters, with some combination of simple hops, tilted layers, progressive refraction, etc, plus low angle-of-attack encounters with the F layer magnetic equatorial anomaly ... can account for these remarkable long distance contacts."

But, as with anything scientific that is unexpected, there can be other opinions. Bob forwarded the following based on an analysis of the path from OA4 to ZL1 by K6FV (Dr. Victor Frank), a research scientist at SRI: "... [since] my path [K6QXY to ZL] crossed the geomagnetic equator, it will be interesting to see if the foEs frequencies indicate Es on both ends of the path. If so, then the probable mechanism was Es to TEP [transequatorial propagation] to Es."

Fascinating stuff! Nice going Bob and thanks for the report.

On the contest front, our own low power champ was finally recognized for his efforts. Fred N6YEU recently

received a plaque for 2nd place California - Low Power in the California QSO Party. Bear in mind that this was accomplished in the field during his County Expedition to Trinity County! Then, a few days later, Fred received another plaque for being the ARRL 2009 Int'l DX CW Contest (Low Power) Pacific Division winner! Fred initially thought it was a mistake, so he checked the ARRL web site and -- 'shor nuff' he was the one. Congratulations!

Other awards include Alan K6SRZ receiving 1st place, High Power in the 2009 ARRL DX CW for San Francisco section.

At the annual awards dinner of NCCC, Josh W6XU and Al K6RIM were each recognized for their stations' contributions to the 2009 ARRL Sweepstakes club entry in form of "KB 2000" certificates. These are awarded to those who make 2000+ QSOs combined on both the phone and CW weekends.

This month Visalia will host DXers from all over the world. If you haven't made plans, think about it. Information at: dxconvention.org .

CQ 160m SSB

Call	Category	Qs	St/Ps	Ctrys	Score
K6SRZ	SOHP	50	21	1	2,464

ARRL DX SSB

Call	Category	Qs	Ctrys	Score
K6RIM	SOABLP(U)	339	168	170,856
K6SRZ	SOABHP(A)	127	86	32,766
K6LRN	SOABHP	527	200	316,200

CQWW WPX SSB

Call	Category	Qs	Mults	Score
K6LRN	SOABHP	456	324	340,848
K6RIM	SOABHP(A)	301	242	186,562

Monthly San Francisco Section News Summary

Here is the link for the News Summary:
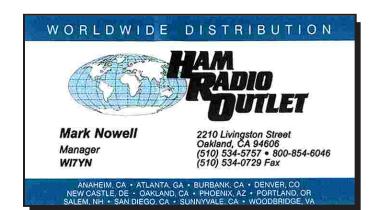http://www.arrl.org/sections/?sect=SF

Calendar of Upcoming Events:

Apr 14	* REDXA Monthly Meeting
Apr 16-18	Int'l DX Convention Visalia
May 1-2	7th Call Area QSO Party
May 8	CQ-M DX Contest
May 12	* REDXA Monthly Meeting
May 15	Manchester Mineira AA CW
May 29-30	CQ WW WPX CW
June 9	* REDXA Monthly Meeting
June 12-14	ARRL June VHF QSO Party
June 26-27	ARRL Field Day
July 10-11	IARU HF World Championship (and WRTC 2010)
July 14	* REDXA Monthly Meeting
July 17	NA QSO Party RTTY

SONOMA HAMFEST

The Valley of the Moon Amateur Radio Club (VOMARC) will have its annual Hamfest on May 1st. We will start serving a pancake, egg, sausage breakfast at 8:00am. There will be a swap meet, station demonstrations, emergency vehicle display and a fox hunt. It will be a great gathering of hams from all around the bay area.

Hope to see you there.

Jim, K6UUW, president VOMARC

673 Plum Street
Novato, CA 94945

MEETING: APRIL 14, 2010