

2010 LIGHTHOUSE WEEKEND WITH QSY

August 21, 2010

By Bill Walsh - NG2D

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I spent the day, Saturday, August 21, at the Esopus Meadow Preserve, a parkland located on the eastern shore of the Hudson River where there is a clear view across the water to the Esopus Meadow Lighthouse, located in the middle of the river. The QSY Society arranged to participate in the Lighthouse Weekend event for this one day between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm. I arrived a tad late, at 9:10 am, expecting to find our chosen location bustling with hams setting up equipment. Although there were several cars in the parking lot a quick scan of the grounds came up empty. There was no one; I was the first to arrive. Apparently the parked cars belong to other park visitors who were likely hiking the nearby trails. About five minutes later, Scott (W2NTV) drove up. I helped him set up his antenna behind the Preserve's building on the east side, closest to the shore. Meanwhile Fred (KC2QFR) arrived and began setting up his antenna on the opposite side in front of the building. I gave Fred a hand too. Marcus (N2LTV) was the next to arrive followed shortly by Julian (WA2WMJ). I lost track after that. We had a good turnout by the club as well as ample passers-by who stopped to see what we were up to .

Early on, before we had set up much equipment, I spotted two women in the parking lot just returning from a hike. I recognized Cathy and Pat right away, two fellow IBMers, folks I worked with during my last assignment at IBM before I retired. I greeted them and snapped their picture. I took this surprise encounter as an omen forecasting a good day, as indeed it was.



The Esopus Lighthouse.



IBMers Cathy and Pat.

When all the equipment was made ready and everyone was settled down I operated one radio on 40 meters and made two voice contacts. A little while later I sat with Fred to see what he had. Fred was running a digital station, something I am unfamiliar with, at least as far as it is used by Hams. Digital operation is quite different from both voice and CW (Morse Code), in that the entire contact is made via text, much like instant an message exchange, except very slow and the contacts are usually with random Hams throughout the world. Since we were operating in a contest the exchange was very brief; the point being to make a contact and exchange basic information, like operator name and location, and then move on. The interesting thing about the digital mode is how reliably it works under bad conditions with extremely weak signals, much weaker than one can actually hear. The computer, however is somehow able to ferret out usable information from very weak signals. Since the entire transaction is handled by the computer, the radio volume can be shut off while the computer displays all of the details.

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Fred was running software that goes so far as to eliminate most typing, relegating the exchange to a series of mouse clicks. There are hotspots on the screen to send pre-defined messages. An entire QSO (that is exchange of information) can be completed by clicking on these hotspots in any desired sequence. The only time it may be necessary to actually type is to venture beyond a prescribed, cookie-cutter exchange. Of course contest exchanges tend to be minimal, other exchanges, such as “rag-chewing” is another matter, in which case the keyboard will be quite active as the communication is more personal and conversational.

The lighthouse event is not as formal or, in our case, as well organized as the much larger field day event that I reported on previously. There are fewer participants in this event, both at the club and throughout the world. Club participants bring to the site anything they want to use or contribute. Someone brought hot dogs but no one brought a grille, because there was a grill in the adjacent field last year, which was, for some reason, removed. Pete (N2YJZ) took it upon himself to drive to Wal-Mart to purchase an inexpensive grille for the occasion. We had no plates, silverware, catsup or mustard either, so I volunteered to buy some as my contribution.

The lighthouse preserve is in an area where visitors come to enjoy the outdoors, consequently quite a few people stop by to see what we were up to. We took the opportunity to introduce Ham Radio, hopefully taking some of the mystique out of our hobby. Most people have heard of Ham Radio of course, but know little about it, this gave them a chance to learn more and see a station in actual operation.

I learned a few things myself about antennas from Julian, the club’s antenna guru, things that I may be putting to use sometime in the future. I’ve gotten the itch to set up my station once again, but so far it isn’t strong enough to act upon. My main stumbling block is finding a suitable spot in the house for the radio. What’s the problem? Don’t ask, it’s complicated.



Marcus and Bill: antenna raising. Photo by Finn

We started cleaning up around 4:30 in the afternoon. We were required to leave by 5:00. We had all antennas down, equipment away, and the area picked up shortly after our 5:00 pm deadline. I enjoyed myself immensely and made some new friends in the QSY club.

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Scott's pride: his awesome antenna.



Marcus.



Finn, the clubs webmaster.



Scott.



Fred's impeccable beam antenna.



Dave the Hotdog King.

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Dave (KC2QFS) and a hungry Fred.



Julian, foreground & Joann in the background.



Finn's daughter Heidi with husband Pete



Fred at the digital station console.



Finn (WB2UWU) and his wife Lilli.



Dave's wife Joann (KC2ARK), the queen of the coffee beans