

Amateur Radio Field Day 2022, Bishop Amateur Radio Club

Field Day is the annual emergency operations drill for Amateur Radio operators in the United States and Canada, and is also the most participated-in event for the Bishop Amateur Radio Club (BARC). Practice in establishing radio communications from a remote location using emergency power, while offering an opportunity for club members a chance to get to know each other and operate as a team is the goal. This was curtailed in the last two years due to Coronavirus restrictions.

This year, BARC secretary Noam (W6RT) arranged for accommodations in the Cedar Flat group campgrounds at the top of Westgard Pass, at the south end of the White Mountains between Big Pine and Fish Lake Valley. Arrival planned for Friday, June 24, operation starting Saturday, conclusion and teardown on Sunday, June 26. This year was a go! My (Jon, NW6C) tentative plan was to load the car on Friday morning, eat lunch at the Bishop Senior Center, then head to the campground. This was adjusted Thursday when Bill called about stopping by to deliver a power generator to me. Bill's Jeep stopped at my driveway, then he got out and heaved a big cardboard box out of the back. Pulsar PG3500MR was the box label. With recent supply chain issues, Club president Bill (W6WWY) had found this bargain unit, and he and Noam decided it was just what the Club needed. Many years ago, the Lions Club donated a generator to BARC but, after many years of use, it failed. Later, the Club was given a surplus Mono County military four-cylinder generator, and a Ford truck bed style trailer to install it in. The problem there is that this rig is more suitable for powering a city block, and overkill for running a few newer solid-state transceivers.

So, box on the driveway, then removal of gen set parts from box, then some assembly required. Assembly was mainly the ground supports, including wheels on one end, and a wagon style handle. Check owners' instructions for suitable type and quantity of motor oil, add said oil, then see if it will run. Success on second pull! Even plugged a lamp into the outlet to prove it was generating electricity.

Friday, and on with my plan. This started with the choice of vehicles between the roomy gasoline hungry van, or the little Chevy S10 SUV. With the price of gas going crazy and the S10 already containing the mattress (chaise lounge pad), sleeping bag and pillow, the S10 was the choice. The challenge was to gently load the new generator. This would be a very bad time to overdo my back capability and end up with a sciatica episode. A board was eventually located to use as a loading ramp. Then, a selection of clothing, various utensils, enough food and drink for a few days, charged 100 Ampere-hour car battery, Club dipole wire antennas, coax, extension cords, folding chair, folding table, small tool box, some rope to haul up the antennas, battery jumper cables, ARRL and Club banners, and other bits that might be useful. The 2m/440 MHz mobile and a handy talky were already in the car. By this time, the little S10 was just about loaded to the roof. Lunch break at the Senior Center was squeezed between the loading operations.

Finally, 3pm was approaching, and time to hit the road. Terry (K6UN) was on the radio, doing the same thing, but with a sizable travel trailer behind his pickup truck. As I came up behind him at the bottom of the grade, he moved over to the right to let me wheeze by. Somewhere along the route, knowing that I almost always forget something important, it occurred to me that an actual battery charger would be

useful to recharge the battery I had loaded in the car, from the new generator. If need be, the battery could be charged from a running car, and the new generator did provide a limited 12 Volt supply.

Arrival at Cedar Flat. Dave (KO6ST) had already pitched a tent under trees behind his car on the left side of the opening to the tables, so I checked out the right side, stopping at a point where the signal from the 146.94 repeater was strong. This location also offered some shade. Noam and Eric (AD6VT) were busy setting up radio gear on the left (eastern) table. Dave was setting his transceiver up on the western side. Soon, Terry and wife Merle arrived, providing some excitement in maneuvering the trailer onto the one real trailer parking pad without damaging vehicles or trees.

The campground was really nice. Two sturdy tables on a concrete pad, covered by a steel roof, a really nice clean pit toilet, and a fire ring with a supply of firewood. Plenty of pinyon pines for antenna supports, although some looked a tad drought stressed.

John (AD6NR) joined us after taking the scenic route up Silver Canyon, with a stop at the Silver Peak radio site. He had made a stop there to convince the repeater controller to link the Mammoth Mountain repeater to the Owens Valley repeaters in both directions. This was hard to verify, because nobody was answering on the Mammoth repeater. Roxy (KN6FUL) found a good place for her van, and Bill showed up with his two-story Jeep (pop up tent on the top), with the upper part of an antenna tower supported by a hitch receiver mounted platform on the back. The new Club generator was unloaded from my car, and soon moved over to the far side of Terry's trailer, to be partnered with his generator. He later did some testing, using his two trailer air conditioning units as an electrical load.

Noam positioned some solar electric panels to face the sun and had some compact batteries for a power source. This was the high-tech setup, with all of the digital modes. Dave had his basic transceiver. Terry had his setup in his trailer and had some select gear for an Amateur Radio satellite contact. It was determined that we would be good for a 3A designation, with three transmitters on the air, all on auxiliary power. Roxy and then Bill joined me in unraveling the rat's nest of radio club wire dipole antennas, stretching them out, figuring out what band they were cut for, and then pulling them up with ropes tossed over tree limbs. Noam and Eric already had an off center fed dipole in the air. Coax from the selected antennas was then routed to the rigs. The supply of mounting rope ran out.

That antenna tower top on Bill's Jeep was not for mounting an antenna. It was for a wind-powered electricity generator. The tower section was moved to and then strapped to the shelter, with the wind plant on top. Last thing to do was hook the leads to the battery that I had brought. Not good. Big current draw from the battery to the generator. Then the onlookers got a demonstration of why Bill is so sought after to repair appliances, as he traced the short up to the generator, removed the generator, and then disassembled it through the slip rings and down to the control board. Finally, the evidence of an arc was spotted on the circuit board, and pieces of an insulator sleeve were spotted. A new sleeve was removed from an inline splice connector, then used to replace the broken one, then the unit reassembled in reverse order. Success, although not much wind. We did eventually have a few gusts that spun the propeller. Dave caught the action with video on his phone.

Two Mikes showed up (KE6IWM & KN6BYH), the former with all the fixings for a deluxe 2-meter single side-band operation. He configured a tower on the hitch receiver for his Yagi antenna. He also brought a tried-and-true battery charger, that was quickly placed between the 120V generators and the 100 Ah battery.

Dave homed in on the .94 repeater, finding that a mobile mag mount antenna on the steel roof of the shade structure made it possible to run the 8pm nightly net.

As the installations were finished and tested, darkness arrived, and the group settled around the campfire ring to meet and swap stories.

Saturday morning saw more arrivals and testing of equipment. We held off our start time to allow for a legit chance of contacting an Amateur Radio satellite that was going to be overhead about 20 minutes after the main 24-hour drill. John showed up with a broadband compact antenna that was pulled up near Dave's rig. Bill took the first turn at Dave's transceiver, with John acting as coach. "Hunt and Pounce" or "Claim the Frequency." I gave a try at logging on the computer, but my hearing wasn't up to it. All the handwritten logs would need to be converted to a data file so they could be sent to the League for scoring. It was noted that more headphones would help the operation, including sets for the radio operator and the logger. Some mysterious broad band interfering noise showed up on the receivers, soon traced to an inverter that Noam had turned on. Once turned off, the problem was solved.

Paul (KK6BAF) and Mark (K6NDN) soon showed up, Paul with a brand new off center fed dipole good through 160m, and Mark with a radio-controlled helicopter drone. Paul also had a new spool of antenna cord. That was a really long antenna. With the aid of the drone, cord was gently lifted over trees to support the new antenna. Noam plugged in the coax feed to a transceiver and reported that the new antenna did indeed give a boost to the longer wavelength bands. Paul also set out a supply of fresh brownies on the table. We weren't going to go hungry. Roxy added to the snacks, with a pot of homemade stew. Bob (W7WOW) joined us from Fish Lake Valley, equipped with his Morse Code key.

We will wait for the results, but from what I heard, 20m was the best for our location. Mike did get some 2m SSB contacts on his rig. Everything settled down into visiting, exploring, and contesting. Later that afternoon, Noam quietly disappeared down the road in his car, to return later with a load of Two Brother's pizzas. Uncommonly good food for a camp-out. At some point Adrian (N6ZA) and his girlfriend showed up for a visit. With plenty of operators, there was time for visiting and swapping stories around the campfire.

Getting up early Sunday morning was my chance to check out the longer bands. As Dave's rig looked the easiest to operate, I plugged in a light and gave a listen to 160m. Just a few stations, and none for Field Day. Also some international broadcasters. After searching the bands for a while, Dave showed up and got serious about adding some more contacts to our score. A green Forest Service pickup truck quietly came into the camp with two women in the cab, turned around, and gave a wave as they left. Apparently, we passed muster. Later I would join Mike and his dog on an exploratory hike around our camp site. There was what looked like new healthy trees sprouting in some areas.

The last major item was to help Terry snag a satellite contact. After some training on what to do, Terry got on his rig and I gave antenna pointing a try. Nothing. Terry checked all the connections, and Bill relieved me on the antenna positioning. Looked like a bust. Then Roxy picked up the signal on her Handy. Terry also got a strong signal, but we did not hear the complete identifier, and no response to Terry's call. Drat. So close.

Competition over and now time to start removing and packing away the gear. By early afternoon, all was in order, with the campground hopefully looking better than we found it. Bill eventually joined me at my house to help stow away the Club's generator for its next use. With new operators now having participated in a Field Day, we are looking forward to a good outing next year.

Cheers,

Jon, NW6C.