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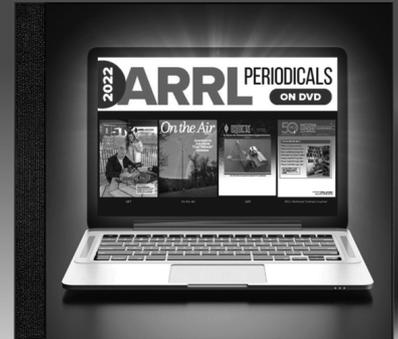
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Portable Contesting in the Frozen North

Jim Lageson, NØUR; Al Dewey, KØAD, and Mark Endorf, WAØMHJ

We Minnesotans like to think of ourselves as a hardy bunch. There's no reason to let sub-zero temperatures keep us from hitting the road and doing a little radio sport. Come February, most Minnesotans will tell you that cabin fever has begun to set in big time. We're already through a big part of the contest season and are itching to get outside. So we grab our rigs, ignore the cold and set out to do a little portable contesting. Typical of those with this challenging spirit is Jim Lageson, NØUR, who has done some "frozen lake" contesting.

(Ice) Fishing for QSOs (Jim, NØUR)

I really enjoy portable contesting during the winter months. Maybe it's the sense of adventure or maybe it's just a good way to get out and enjoy the outdoors. I have operated portable in the Minnesota QSO Party, as well as the FYBO (Freeze Your Behind Off) QRP contest the last few years from the middle of a frozen Minnesota lake, parked on the ice.

Besides just being a unique location, something that generates questions and attention from other parts of the country, a frozen lake offers a quiet radio environment and plenty of room to put up an antenna. What it doesn't supply is supports for your antenna. A couple of old aluminum irrigation pipes and some 10 foot wood furring strips take care of that.

One problem I encountered was when a local snowmobile club showed up on the lake. They decided my station was the perfect turn-around point on a course they had set up to do some racing. So much for the quiet environment.

I have used a tent for shelter, but found using my van for shelter is the way to go. You can have your station set up before you travel, and if you aim the windshield south, you get the benefit of solar heating — if it's clear that day. It also is much easier to pull down and pack up after the contest; with just a few hours of daylight during the winter, it is always dark. It is also much safer when the wolves venture out on the ice and surround you to check you out for dinner. A few honks of the horn, or a few RF burns, usually send them on their way.

I do bring a kerosene heater, which is too large for my small space, but a few open windows help regulate the temperature. The first time I used the kerosene heater I didn't have any windows open, and after a few minutes I noticed

my heart rate had increased, and shortness of breath. I realized we (the kerosene heater and I) were both using what little oxygen there was in the van. Sunny days are much safer, and easier.

Another problem is where to go to the bathroom. Unfortunately, Lake Wobegone is lined by homes and I did not feel comfortable just standing outdoors. That is where the coffee can comes in. I will warn you — be careful. Without fail, I have found that trying to use the coffee can while auto CQing will result in a good rate. Someone will always come back to you just at the wrong time. Trying to log and send your reply with one hand while filling the coffee can takes practice, but it can be done.

As far as my station, I run these contests QRP (when you finished rolling your eyes, please continue). There are great advantages running QRP. For one, you can do a 12 hour contest on one fully-charged, deep cycle battery. I have run my K2 and an old laptop without fully discharging the battery. You may have trouble seeing your screen on a sunny day, but some shielding will work, and you will be warm. My antenna is a center fed Zepp using a tuner and 450 Ω twin lead feedline. It is simple and efficient, and it will get you on all bands with one antenna. I have had very good re-

sults with this antenna.

I hope I have enlightened you to the fun and thrills of winter portable contesting from Minnesota. Feel free to come up and join us some year. Bring your long johns.

Roving in the Cold (Al, KØAD)

The weather reports were not encouraging leading up to the weekend of the 2007 Minnesota QSO party this year. The TV meteorologists were predicting the coldest temperatures in many years. Absolute temperatures in the mid-teens below zero in the south, and the mid-twenties below zero in the northern part of the state were predicted. Even worse, the wind was going to be blowing, giving wind chill temperatures in the mid-thirties below zero in much of the state.

For those of you not familiar with the wind chill temperatures, the danger of frostbite to exposed skin can be measured in minutes at these temperatures. This means that any adjustments to the mobile antenna requiring you to get out of the car had better be quick. The TV news in Minneapolis strongly advised against any kind of unnecessary travel over the weekend. Of course, try telling this to nine dedicated rover stations who had been planning all year for this event. "Unless there is too much snow or ice



Pat, KØPC, operates the FYBO (Freeze Your Behind Off) QRP Contest from the middle of a frozen Minnesota lake.

to drive, we're going," was the general attitude of this group which included NØIJ, WØTVD, NE9U, WAØMHJ, AF9T, NØPI, KØAD, ACØW, NØIM, NØUR, KØPC, AAØAW, NØEO and WØZQ.

Murphy seems to thrive in temperatures like this. With absolute temperatures at 24° below zero in Duluth, John, NØIJ, and Terry, WØTVD, met at 5:45 AM to get things ready for the 8 AM kickoff. But things were not working well, and John and Terry had to shuttle back and forth between the truck and the heated garage. After getting off 45 minutes late, they noticed that the screwdriver antenna simply did not like the cold temperatures. This limited their ability to quickly change bands between 40 and 80 meters, which is vital in a QSO party like this. Several other rovers, including NØIM, also had the "slow screwdriver" syndrome.

WAØMHJ, whose driver happened to be his wife, noticed car troubles right out of the chute. Gas line freeze up was suspected but, luckily, it seemed to correct itself — particularly if the car was driven in a lower gear. NØPI started his van early, so when his CW op showed up at 6:30 AM, things were pretty well ready to go. There was just one anxious moment when the very cold laptop would not boot up, but it finally made it and ran all day.

Scotty, NE9U, came over from Wisconsin Friday night and stayed at KTØR's QTH overnight. He did a final checkout on Friday night and all was well. On Saturday morning, however, the rig interface stopped working. Worse yet, the 80 meter antenna resonated at 3450 kHz. He played with it for a while, but it was a no-go. During the day, he braved the cold a few times, but he was just not able to get it going very well. Despite not being able to make a lot of 80 meter Qs, Scott had a great score.

Despite the coldest streak to hit Minnesota in many years, a dedicated group of rovers succeeded in putting Minnesota on the map that day. With the contest ending at 6 PM, the day concluded by each of the mobiles checking in — one by one — on the MWA reflector. When the last of them had reported that they were safely back, it was time to go to bed.

Up to My Waist in Contesting (Mark, WAØMHJ)

I have a friend who has a cabin in north central Wisconsin. The cabin is closed up throughout the winter, so I asked him whether I might do some kind of "radio thing" from it. He gladly gave me the keys, but warned me that the 0.33 mile road leading to the cabin might not be plowed. Thankfully it was.

Both of my young sons had recently starting archery target shooting, and I had heard about people launching wire



NØPI parks his van on one of many snow covered Minnesota county roads during the 2007 Minnesota QSO Party. Note the front license plate.

antennas into trees with a bow and arrow. Since they both had upgraded to sophisticated compound bows, I decided to take one of their "starter" bows to use for putting my wires up into the trees. Off I went with my TS-50, power supply, extension cord, bow, one arrow, a 20/40 meter dipole, lots of string, a shovel and one portable electric heater.

When I arrived, there was a one-car width wide clearing straight to the neighbor's house. I drove down the path there to park. My friend (the cabin owner) had called this guy to warn him of my coming, but did not explain further. I did my best to try to explain why I would drive all the way up north from the cities to sit in an unheated garage for eight hours. But the more I tried, the more he seemed to not want to know the details. I think he was convinced I was quite nuts.

Outside temperatures were hovering around -20°. It was only about 200 feet from my truck to the garage, but I noticed that the snow was over two feet deep. For those of you who have never walked in this depth of fresh snow, moving 100 feet can be very tiring. Trip #1 was to shovel around the doorway so I could actually unlock and open it. Trip #2 was with antenna and bow in hand. This turned out to be the killer. Tying the string to an arrow at -20°, shooting it up over a tree while in thigh deep snow and then going to retrieve the arrow was challenging. Let's just say it didn't work on the first try. The remaining two or three trips were to carry the gear inside and get it set up for the QSO Party.

Fortunately I had allowed a lot of time for setup, and was actually planning on a cold brew and a hamburger at a nearby establishment before starting. No time for that! The contest was just starting. I was able to clip along at a decent enough rate. Thanks to proper dress, my feet were still dry and I was not particularly cold, except for my fingers. After a few hours the neighbor came over and peeked in the door. I lifted the headphones and waved. A minute later I yelled out "I just worked Yugoslavia!" He spun around and I never saw him again that day.

Toward late afternoon, there was this tremendous boom, like someone had shot a gun. I continued to operate, but decided to take a break a few minutes later. When I went to walk outside, I realized that what I had heard was the sound of all of the snow sliding off the metal roof of the shed. Enough heat must have melted and loosened it. I was able to push the door open three or four inches. That was just enough to see that there was a mound of snow that was at almost eye level blocking the doorway. I decided I would continue the contest and dig my way out at contest end. At the end of the contest, everything was packed up except the antennas, which were left to remove in the spring.

The past few years I have enjoyed the relative luxurious accommodations of operating mobile in the QSO Parties, but I still have fond memories of being waist deep in snow while setting up for the Wisconsin QSO Party. NCJ