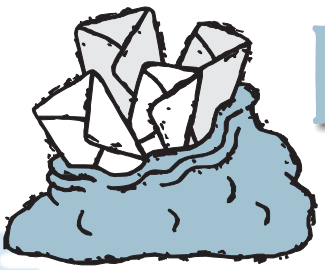


LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

This column is open to your considered comments. Opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of Monitoring Times. Your letters may be edited or shortened for clarity and length. Please mail to Letters to the Editor, 7540 Hwy 64 West, Brasstown, NC 28902 or email editor@monitoringtimes.com

Happy monitoring!
Rachel Baughn, Editor

Welcome to AM DX Season

Each change of season brings with it new propagation conditions that usher in better conditions for some DX targets and a different set of obstacles. For AM DXers, though, fall and winter are the favored seasons, with fewer static crashes and better chances for long-distance reception.

Our September issue traditionally features the shortwave side of AM – hence the profile of shortwave broadcaster WBCQ. But, this September we also bring you two articles on how to get better reception on the AM broadcast band. We hope you will find them all useful.

Here are a couple of comments about the broadcast band

"I enjoyed the article on MW DXing in the April issue, and I plan to drop Ron Bailey a line of appreciation. [*Ron's September article is a follow-on to that April reminiscence-ed.*] In many ways, it paralleled my experiences in listening during the early 1970s. Why is it, after getting all of the high end digital gear we couldn't afford as kids (or didn't exist), our favorite memories are of the simple gear that was pressed into service to do the job? I suppose there's a lesson there."

Kevin Carey

Talking about AM DXing, "I think that the AM IBOC/iBiquity sideband noise interference thing deserves an article. I think it is awful technology and there are many out there who agree, even AM broadcasters. The sideband noise is broadcast without guilt or conscience.

"I am solidly against it and want it to go away as soon as possible.

"I don't think there are any compelling arguments in favor of this IBOC, sometimes called 'IBUZ.'

"Um, let's see ..... do I have strong feeing on this?!"

Iden Rogers

Foul Play: Unnecessary Interference

Summertime interference comes largely from lightning. In the August edition of "Below 500 kHz" Kevin Carey passed along a website which displays lightning strikes. Jim Falls sent Kevin another source for lightning information.

"Kevin - try this: **www.strikestarus.com/**

"Great graphics. I used it tonight before I called a HF ARES net because of the QRN racket. Didn't help w/the QRN, but at least I knew where the noise was coming from."

Jim Falls KG6FWT, Eureka, CA

When Mother Nature cooperates with quieter conditions for shortwave DXing, it's doubly annoying when manmade interference makes its presence known everywhere you tune. Many communities in the U.S. have been battling broadband over power lines (BPL), but fellow hobbyists in the U.K. are also suffering from a poorly-made broadband device. The following is from a notice posted on the Enigma2000 yahoo group.

A new yahoo group UKQRM has "been set up to deal with the huge threat of power line adaptors like the type BT provide. These adaptors pump RF into the mains wires of a house to form a network within that house.

"Of course these same mains wires act as transmitting antennas. The QRM can extend many hundreds of feet away from the property. See this example.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=S__UBDaL-aE

"We have 115 members in UKQRM and would like to welcome other users of the short wave spectrum to the group be they hobby or professional users. This terrible interference which is 24/7 never letting up makes no distinction between the short wave listener or pro user!"

"If you have the QRM now you should join us to help fight back, if you are concerned about it for the future (and you should be) you should join as you can help fight!"

http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/UKQRM/

UKQRM Owner

See this month's Utility World for more background on power line communications plus some encouraging news.

Special Event Station

The Southeast Louisiana Amateur Radio Club (SELARC) will be operating special event station K5R on Saturday, September 13, 2008. The club will be commemorating the landfalls of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita along the Gulf Coast in 2005.

Operations will be on the frequencies of 7.250 and 14.250 (+/- QRM) beginning at 1400 UTC and ending at 2000 UTC.

A QSL card will be available by mailing a S.A.S.E. to: Scott Hernandez,K5R, 957 Nancy St., Mandeville, LA 70448.

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/K5R

Thank you very much for whatever help you can give us in publicizing our event.

Scott Hernandez, KD5PCK

HDTV and Correction

"Congrats [to Ken Reitz, *Getting Started* June 32008] on making crystal clear the upcoming transfer to digital TV. I noticed you emphasized that Digital TV and HDTV are not necessarily the same thing. Very well done.

"What I also got from your story is that there will be more UHF Digital / HDTV signals and therefore more emphasis should be on improving reception in the UHF band(s). Is that also to say that there will be no further activity on Channel 2-13 ?? Or at least a general trend away from the Low Band?

"I live in Tombstone, Arizona at 4500 feet elevation and receive most local (Tucson and environs) HDTV / Digital signals with a Tru-Tech HDTV receiver I bought at Target in February. I am using an old Radio Shack fringe antenna which has a smaller UHF set of elements and a Radio Shack mast mounted preamp. The only HDTV signals I have trouble copying are Channel 13 KOLD whose transmitters are on Mt. Bigelow at 8500 feet North-East of Tucson. I also have a rotator but the signal is precariously dependent on exact direction to Mt. Bigelow. I feel after reading your article that a better UHF antenna and UHF amp. should clear that up.

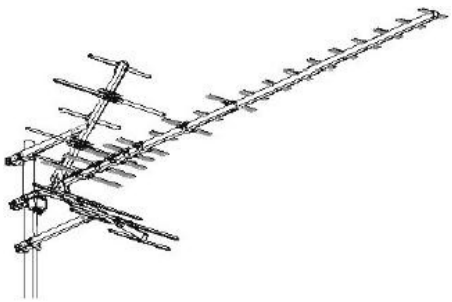
"Thanks for the advice"

Chris Townsend, NU7V

Hi Chris-

"Thanks for your comments! Yes, with very few exceptions, all digital terrestrial TV stations are moving to UHF (all channels will continue to call themselves by their original channel assignments to avoid a totally hysterical public reaction). Yes, get the biggest UHF array you can put up, the one I mention in the article will help. You might consider raising the antenna as well, if that's possible, but only if you can get a significant increase: going up a few feet won't make much difference, but doubling the height of an antenna doubles the gain (to a point, of course).

"Don't replace your pre-amp until you've swapped out the antenna. Most pre-amplifiers have nearly the same specs and won't make



Here's the Winegard HD9095P (around $80 plus $10 shipping) from Stark Electronics (444 Franklin St. Worcester, MA, Call 508-756-7136 Fax 508-756-5752 Mon-Fri 8:30-5pm Eastern Time)

as much difference as having a better antenna. Also, make sure you're using RG/6 coax because it has less loss per hundred feet at UHF frequencies. Please let me know how you fare with your reception and thanks for writing!

Ken Reitz

In the August *Communications*, Ken recommended the HDTV Antenna Lab website to help make a decision about your antenna purchase. T Martin corrected the spelling of that web site link: it should have been **www.antennalab.com.**

Antenna Principles

"I enjoyed *Antenna Topics* in the May 2008 *Monitoring Times* very much and you brought out some good points concerning signal to noise ratio (s/n).

"I have been SWL DXing for over 50 years and have a total of 204 countries *confirmed*. I am going to start manufacturing some antennas in the near future for DXing that have worked for me over the years.

"OK, the reason I mentioned this is because on 160 meters I used four antennas. They were known as 'snakes' because you simply laid them on the ground, but I modified my snakes a little. I made them a quarter wavelength long and shorted the outer ends of the RG 58 together, and at the shack end of the antenna I cut the braid on the coax.

"I ran this into an antenna switch 'cause these babies are directional. I had the antennas broadside to the direction I wanted to hear; thus four of them gave me directions of N, S, E, W, Ne, Sw, Se, Nw. This was the reason for the shield being shorted at the end. I simply connected them to the switch, from that I ran the switch into an MFJ tuner, and the tuner then connected to a receive preamp. I connected the ground of my tuner into a ground rod and a chain link fence which surrounded the property I owned.

"In one winter season on 160 meters I achieved the first 160 meter WAS award in Mississippi. One night I was operating a contest and the band was terrible with noise due to an approaching storm from the North. I switched to the W antenna and worked stations in California with ease; not much signal strength, but because of the good s/n ratio it was easy copy. A friend of mine in northern Mississippi ran Beverages and could not even hear the stations I was working with ease.

"These are NOT transmit antennas. Another thing about these antennas is that they do not interact with each other. When it came time to cut the grass I simply rolled them up.

"I love shortwave listening and picked up a new country last night and, yes, I am a ham but my first love is LISTENING. You are doing a very job with the column. Keep up the good work.

"Again, thank you for your comments on s/n ratio; it is a fact often overlooked by DXers. GAIN is not the key factor in hearing weak stations; it also takes low noise, and noise is getting to be a major factor in the society we now live in. Gain simply sells antennas."

73 and good DX

Larry Jones, K5ZRK

Thanks, Larry. Readers will be interested in a three-part series Clem is starting this month which will address more about the basic principles behind how antennas really work and why this concept of signal to noise ratio is so important.

SHAREing Wisdom

"I saw a reference to SHARES frequencies and the reference seems to imply that these are frequencies allocated for use by the U. S. government. Can you tell me whether there are frequencies known as SHARES and, if so, where can they be found in the radio frequency spectrum? Thank you."

James D. Diggs

"SHARES is a classified government program to provide contingency communications to participating government agencies in time of emergency. All SHARES material is classified including their station list and frequencies. Their official website is at **www.ncs.gov/shares/**

"Of course, radio hobbyists never let a little classification stop them from finding a few freqs.

"The primary frequencies for this HF network are well known and have been published in my various columns in MT for many many years. Here is that list:

Channel 1: Voice 5236.0
Channel 2: Voice 14396.5
Channel 3: ALE 4490.0
Channel 4: ALE 5711.0
Channel 5: ALE 9106.0
Channel 6: ALE 11217.0
Channel 7: ALE 15094.0
Channel 8: ALE/STI 17487.0
Channel 9: BBS 6800.0
Channel 10: BBS 13242.0

"Various government agencies have pooled additional freqs in the SHARES freq pool for use by all. These lists are not available in the public domain, but a few have been published from time to time in MT. If you need more on these freqs you should consult our online indexes on the MT website and order copies of those articles from Grove Enterprises.

"You will find a few more SHARES freqs on my personal radio blog at **http://monitor-post.blogspot.com/2007/06/n5fpw-hurcomm-monitoring-list-2007.html**

"I would recommend you go to both of my blogs below and type in SHARES in the search box in the upper left hand corner. That should get you a few more freqs.

"Hope this helps answer your question."

Larry Van Horn
Assistant Editor, Monitoring Times
Btown Monitoring Post:
http://monitor-post.blogspot.com/
Milcom Monitoring Post:
http://mt-milcom.blogspot.com/