

Smoke Signals

Volume 12, Issue 6 June 2009

The Newsletter of Charles County Amateur Radio Club

Meetings & Nets

First Friday_ Monthly meeting at 7:30 PM at LaPlata Train Station; Net-Tuesdays 8:00 PM on 443.700 MHz, (No PL, TSQL 179.9 Hz)
Once a month social gathering for breakfast –please check the website for schedule
Second Tuesday Commex with the ARES/RACES team Charles County 7:00PM EOC LaPlata

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Smoke Signals is published monthly as the newsletter of the Charles County Amateur Radio Club, Inc. Items to be published in the Smoke Signals should be submitted by the Sunday before the first Friday of the month. Email submissions are most efficient msack@prodigy.net or mail to Michelle Sack PO Box 1182 Waldorf, MD 20604. Permission is granted to reprint.

Future Activities:

June

13th: Cobb Island Day and CCARC Meeting
27th-28th: Field Day

July

10th: CCARC Meeting
11th: Breakfast - IHOP in LaPlata

August

7th: CCARC Meeting
8th: Breakfast - IHOP in LaPlata
8th: MD QSO Party

September

5th: Breakfast - IHOP in Lexington Park, St. Mary's
6th: Indian head 100 (Tent)
11th: CCARC Meeting

October

2nd: CCARC Meeting
10th: Breakfast - IHOP in LaPlata
11th: CIVISTA Bike Ride (tent.)
17th: JOTA

November

6th: CCARC Meeting
14th: Breakfast - IHOP in LaPlata

December

4th: CCARC Holiday Party/Meeting
12th: Breakfast - IHOP in Lexington Park, St. Mary's

Cobb Island, Planning for Field Day

Well Folks, I just sent the person in charge of Cobb Island the news that we would not be coming this year. Hopefully next year we will have less people on the road and will be able to attend.

Since we canceled Cobb Island, we will hold our monthly membership meeting this Friday, 5 June at 7:30 at the LaPlata Train Station. I will be out of town but the topic of discussion is a Field Day planning session so please bring your ideas and lessons learned from last year. Please also vote on the amount you would like the club to spend on food & gas.

Field Day is right around the corner. As a reminder, our location this year will again be the Laurel Springs Recreations Park off of Radio Station Road. I would like to start verifying who will be bringing what radios and will start off that list by saying that I will again provide a 718 for the GOTA station and an 857 for a Digital Station, however, I know others are also doing Digital and may want to bring their gear. Send me a note off reflector.

We are still looking for a:
CW station (with PC capability)
HF Voice Station
VHF/UHF voice station??

Antennas: In the past we've used either club antennas or member antennas. Please let me know if you will bring an antenna and for what band and I'll get it added to the list.

Please send back to me so I can consolidate and send out an updated list to the reflector and then we can work to update that list. This should cut down on the number of emails you get from me. 73 Bob KB3KOW

Cycle Tour

I realize it is a wee bit early to start planning the Cycle Tour in October, but I wanted to throw out a reminder. One of the comments from last year was to add additional rest stops (1-2). Please let me know if you come across some additional places that you think would be good and I will start keeping a list. We have about 10 people already registered for the tour!

Lara Castle Civista Health Foundation Phone: 301-609-4319

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Past Activities

Walkathon

Initially arriving on site were Rob (N2OMC) and Bob (W1BJC). They had the table and canopy already set up and where then joined by Bob (KB3KOW) and offspring, Andrew. In short order we were joined by Lee (N3YWZ), Sharon (KB3GHI), Joe (KB3HMP), Jacob (KB3SLL) and Mike (KA3GRW). After getting our location assignments and some quick radio checks, we dispersed around the area. Rob, Bob, Andrew and Jacob took the net control station, Lee and Sharon were at check point #2, Joe started at check point #3 and Mike manned check point #4. We noted that this year instead of 5 stations, there were only 4 and the one normally located at the football field in Milton Sommers was absent. Rob did ask and found out that the cost to sponsor a table is \$1000. So much for my thoughts on the club or Scouts sponsoring a table. I took up station at the unofficial checkpoint #5, which was at the football field by Milton Sommers.

The event went without any major issues; I do believe our 'comm support' was able to avoid a small snafu with Spirit Station #4 at the Green Turtle. Mike was there for a while and once he heard that walkers were enroute, he reported to net control that there was no one manning the station and no refreshments. As you can imagine, with the heat and the distance, water was a much-needed item. Net control contacted the event coordinator to report the issue. Seems that the coordination with the Green Turtle management took place several months ago and they had changed managers, so no one was aware of the level of support they were supposed to provide during the event. The Green Turtle promptly responded by providing water and ice in time for the first wave of walkers.

I also discovered that the local LaPlata law officers were monitoring our net. One of them stopped by to chat for a few minutes and I could hear the net on one of his radios or scanners. At least this one person was using us as additional 'intel' for things going on during the event. I did fail to get his card, as it would be interesting to see how much use was made of our comms.

The last set of walkers finished about 11:30 am. It was reported that in past years they've had over 1000 walkers, but this year the numbers were just over 500.

As you may recall, this was also an opportunity to test out both EasyPal and some DStar chat capabilities. The lessons learned from this include the need to have AC power at net control for the computers as well as additional bodies. In the case of Lee and myself, we were doing digital pictures on one freq while monitoring the net on another radio and to add to the fun, I was also doing DStar chatting at the same time.... too much and too few hands.

We also failed to pre-test the EasyPal before deployment so we were only about 50% successful in getting pictures transferred. In the future, if the plan is to use these technologies, then we need to probably have dedicated radios and personnel to run them. There

is always the Indian Head 100!! I will note that the DStar chat did work but only after a change in antenna by Bob (W1BJC). There seems to be a FM dead zone around the back of the Court House so Bob and I will be getting together at a future date to conduct some additional tests to determine distance and capability.

Scout participation: It was great to have them there, but they need to be utilized more than they were this time out. We, the older folks, should be sitting in our chairs under the trees drinking our iced tea while they are running the radios and taking the reports. I think for next year I'll go mobile and try to get a group of Scouts to join me for the 5-mile backpack course. 73 Bob KB3KOW
Scouts Space Day and the opportunity to talk to the International Space Station.

Unlike last year, the pass was off the coast of California. The Santa Rosa radio club and the NASM supported the uplink; Bob (KE3GG) provided the magic of the telebridge to tie it all together. The staff at the NASM was great and they even provided some food for everyone who participated.

The event normally kicks off with a previous ISS person giving a talk and question/answer period. This year it was Richard Arnold, who was a Bowie HS Graduate. He stated getting his license was a great thing but that since returning to earth he hasn't used it as much and couldn't recall his call sign, but he did put in a plug for Ham Radio. He answered several questions from the audience. The one I liked - asked about re-entry and what it felt like- he noted you could tell you were getting closer to Earth when the M&M's you lost four weeks ago started slowly falling back to the bottom of the shuttle.

Another great event! 73 Bob KB3KOW

Kit Building Day

I wanted to take a few minutes and thank everyone that came out for Kit Building Day yesterday. We all had a great time and four Tiny Trak 3 Plus kits were built that all worked! I know for Tim, Joe & myself these were the first kits we have ever built. Imagine our surprise when they actually worked! Jim Dunn also built one that worked, not sure if that was his first kit though.

Many thanks to Bob, KB3KOW for setting this up, I know we all agreed we want to do it again, maybe twice a year. Also thanks to Bob, KE3GG for the use of his hanger or as we termed it yesterday, "the perfect man cave". What better place to hang with the guys and play radio then in a hanger with an airplane parked in it! And of course we thank our very patient but ever watchful instructor, Charles. He had some very interesting ways of helping us to remember the components, let's just say I didn't hear those terms when I went through Tech School!

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Members in attendance were (hope I didn't forget anybody):

Bob - KB3KOW

Bob - KE3GG

Bob - W1BJC

Rob - N2OMC (I sense a pattern here)

Joe - KB3HNP

Jim - W3JTD

Charles - AA3WS

Tim - KB3OSF

Andrew - As of yet, no Ham ticket but we are working on him!

We felt like kids at summer camp who just finished their project. We hooked the 9V battery up to our newly assembled and soldered Tiny Trak's and watched the lights light up as it went through it's power up test. The next project is to acquire/build the needed cables for it.

Can't wait for the next kit day, I think we should all build a fully functional SSB rig. - Well maybe that's a bit much for our second project we have ever built!

73, Rob - N2OMC

Other Information

NASA Releases New Predictions for Solar Cycle 24

An international panel of experts -- led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and sponsored by NASA -- has released a new prediction for the next solar cycle: Solar Cycle 24 will peak in May 2013 with a below-average number of sunspots. "If our prediction is correct, Solar Cycle 24 will have a peak sunspot number of 90, the lowest of any cycle since 1928 when Solar Cycle 16 peaked at 78," said panel chairman Doug Biesecker of NOAA's Space Weather Prediction Center (SWPC). This report clarifies a NOAA report from earlier this month that stated that Solar Cycle 24 would bring "90 sunspots per day on average."

The latest forecast revises an earlier prediction issued in 2007. At that time, a sharply divided panel believed solar minimum would come in March 2008 followed by either a strong solar maximum in 2011, or a weak solar maximum in 2012. "It turns out that none of our models were totally correct," said Dean Pesnell of the Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) and NASA's lead representative on the panel. "The Sun is behaving in an unexpected and very interesting way."

In 2007, experts varied in their predictions on when the solar cycle would peak and how strong it would be. In April of that year, NOAA, in coordination with an international panel of solar experts, predicted that the next 11-year cycle of solar storms "would start in March 2008, plus or minus six months, and peak in late 2011 or mid-2012." In the cycle forecast issued in April 2007, half of the panel predicted a "moderately strong cycle of 140 sunspots, plus or minus 20, expected to peak in October 2011. The other half predicted a moderately weak cycle of 90 sunspots, plus or minus 10, peaking in August 2012. An average solar cycle

ranges from 75 to 155 sunspots. The late decline of Cycle 23 has helped shift the panel away from its earlier leaning toward a strong Cycle 24. The group is evenly split between a strong and a weak cycle."

At a meeting of the American Geophysical Union in San Francisco in December 2007, David Hathaway of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, along with colleague Robert Wilson, said that Solar Cycle 24 "looks like it's going to be one of the most intense cycles since record-keeping began almost 400 years ago." They said they believe the next solar maximum should peak around 2010 with a sunspot number of 160, plus or minus 25. "This would make it one of the strongest solar cycles of the past 50 years -- which is to say, one of the strongest in recorded history." Four of the five biggest cycles on record have come in the past 50 years. "Cycle 24 should fit right into that pattern," Hathaway said.

Right now -- June 2009 -- the solar cycle is in a valley, the deepest of the past century. In 2008 and 2009, the Sun showed some of the lowest sunspot counts on record, as well as weak solar winds and a low solar irradiance, going more than two years without a significant solar flare. "In our professional careers, we've never seen anything quite like it," Pesnell said. "Solar minimum has lasted far beyond the date we predicted in 2007."

In recent months, however, Pesnell said that the Sun has begun to show some small signs of life: Small sunspots and "proto-sunspots" are popping up with increasing frequency. Enormous currents of plasma on the Sun's surface are gaining strength and slowly drifting toward its equator. Radio astronomers have detected a tiny but significant up tick in solar radio emissions. All these things are precursors of an awakening Solar Cycle 24 and form the basis for the panel's new, almost unanimous forecast. Pesnell cautioned optimism, telling the ARRL that there is an "error bar of +/- 20." This means Solar Cycle 24's sunspot number could be as high as 110, or as low as 70. "Based upon my own personal research, I don't think we'll see 90."

When asked if such a low number foretold the beginnings of a Maunder Minimum, Pesnell said that a Maunder Minimum takes several cycles to appear: "Sunspots [in solar cycles] leading up to the Maunder Minimum took several cycles to disappear. I really can't predict what will happen in Solar Cycle 25. What we're seeing now is something that look likes a sunspot, but it looks as if someone has come along and 'stomped' on it, creating a multitude of little things. We don't have a name for this and we've never seen anything like it before."

There could be more surprises, panelists acknowledge -- and more revisions to the forecast. "Go ahead and mark your calendar for May 2013," Pesnell said. "But use a pencil."

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Greetings CCARC:

Prior to our May CCARC Meeting, I admit to having only mild interest in D Star, and even less knowledge. Bridge Bob (W1BJC) provided a very good demonstration of DStar and I think I was hooked even more so after the presentation. While listening to the goings-on of our general discussions, Bob's HT came to life with the beautifully clear audio of a fellow DStar operator in Birmingham, Alabama. Bob and this gent had an impressive exchange. The audio was so clear that I first thought Bob was monitoring a local public service frequency.

Being a cable TV hold-out (as well as a 15 year veteran of dial-up internet...Is that how long it has been since Mr. Gore invented that thing?), I am qualified to offer the audio description of that DStar exchange as similar to analog TV vs. digital. With analog, the signal could be fuzzy/snowy, and you can hear some scratchy audio. With digital, the image and audio are either in perfectly, or out completely. I assume that is the case with DStar, however please correct me if off base.

Accolades to Bridge Bob and his faithful demo ace, Boy Scout Bob, KB3KOW. As I described this to Sharon, KB3GHI, her expected comment was "Guess this means another radio...huh?" So I began the research.

Hihi 73 Lee N3YWZ