The Framingham Circuit

Newsletter of the Framingham Amateur Radio Association, December 31, 2024 Vol. 91, No. 4

President's Message: I hope everyone had very happy holidays and I hope you all will have a great New Year. Keep us posted on your ham radio activities, purchases, builds and experiments. We will try a Saturday afternoon lunch at the Longhorn off route 20 in Marlborough on January 11, 2025, details to follow. Several of us went with another ham group and they say they take separate checks so it should work well. If so, we could do these luncheons more often, giving us an alternative to hotdogs for when the weather is inclement. Members and guests invited, but you probably should let me know about how many are coming. It looks like they could handle two long tables so maybe 20 people or so. They key thing is that you have to stay in the seat you order from so they can work out the checks. We had some great talks this year and have some interesting ones coming up. Thank you for your support in keeping this club active!

Club activities since last Circuit.

- August 22-25, 2024: NE HamXposition in Marlborough, MA.
- September 5, 2024: Experiences of a New Ham, the First Nine Months, by Jonathan Slawsby, W5GI, with John Iwuc, KB1VXY
- October 3, 2024: Kay Savetz, K6KJN, Twenty Things I've Learned While Curating the Digital Library of Amateur Radio & Communications
- November 7, 2024: Robert "Bob" Evans, AB2NE / G3ZFJ, APRS: Automatic Packet Reporting System - APRS: What Is It and What Can It Do?

Upcoming meetings (FARA Meetings in Bold) and activities:

- December 31, 2024: Happy New Year's Eve and New Year's Day: Slow Key Night link>> https://www.arrl.org/news/arrl-straight-key-night-january-1-2025
- **January 2, 2025: FARA Meeting.**
  - "Batteries for Portable Operations" video suggested by Steve N1MH.
  - "C5I Bijol islands dxpedition" video, suggested by Dave, K1HT.
  - We will also have a show and tell session.
- January 11, 2025: Lunch at Longhorn off rt. 20 in Marlborough. Members and guests invited. Details to follow.
- North American QSO Party, CW 1800Z, Jan 11 to 0559Z, Jan 12
- January 18, 2025: 1/18/25: Whitman Winterfest 2025 Flea Market, 9 am to 1 pm, K of C hall, Whitman, MA www.wa1npo.org
- NA Collegiate Championship, SSB — 1800Z, Jan 18 to 0559Z, Jan 19
- North American QSO Party, SSB — 1800Z, Jan 18 to 0559Z, Jan 19
- ARRL January VHF Contest — 1900Z, Jan 18 to 0359Z, Jan 20
- CQ 160-Meter Contest, CW — 2200Z, Jan 24 to 2200Z, Jan 26
- January 25-26, 2025: Winter Field Day. https://winterfieldday.org/
- Vermont QSO Party — 0000Z, Feb 1 to 2400Z, Feb 2
- Minnesota QSO Party — 1400Z-2400Z, Feb 1
- **February 6, 2025: FARA Meeting.** Sumner Weisman, W1VIV, will talk on **"**Repair Your Radio Without Understanding Electronics? Sometimes You Can!"

- February 15, 2025: Algonguin Flea Market in Marleborough
- **March 6, 2025: FARA Meeting.** Charles Rousseau, W1ZOP, will talk about "Air Force Mars Radio"
- **April 3, 2025: FARA Meeting - TBD**
- **May 1, 2025: FARA Meeting.**
    - Max Kendall, W0MXX, will talk about "StratoScience: Amateur Radio and Youth Education to New Heights."
    - Also officer nominations.
- May 2-3, 2025; Nearfest XXXVII. https://winterfieldday.org/
- May 3-4, 2025: New England QSO Party
- **June 5, 2025: FARA Meeting.**
    - Officer elections.
    - Field Day planning.
- June 28-29, 2025: ARRL Field Day

Odds and ends:

- Jonathan, W5GI reports: "I'll be on Anegada 12/30-1/23 if anyone wants to schedule a QSO. Planning on trying to set up an i-gate so I can play with APRS down there. While on Anegada during the beginning of December I had my first contact with Sierra Leone. Just ordered a Yaesu FTDX101-D Max that should be here when I get back from Anegada." NOTE: If others are interested in working Jonathan while he is there, we should set up a time to consolidate the contacts. Let me know and we can try to arrange a time.
- Steve, W1NIV, has a new call as of October 29, 2024 after the contest below. See his article on the September 2024 VHF contest where he operated as N4NIV
- Barbara, KC1KGS, writes "Leandra AF1R, Steve K1DNZ (he's on our Natick Net Monday evenings and good buddies with Joe W1HAI), Jim WB4EJR and I met up at Zippity-Do-Dog last night for a hot dog (or 2). They were open as part of the Cochituate Rail Trail New Year's Eve event--fire pits and various activities along the trail from Framingham to Natick. The dogs were great and there were lots of people enjoying the festivities!" (See photos at end of Circuit.
- John, KB1VXY:
    - On 10/31/24, while in Maui, I worked VK3YY from the south facing 8th floor hotel balcony on 28.480 at 2:59 UTC using an FT817ND running 5 watts into an end fed antenna draped around the balcony. While I heard many stations, I was not making any contacts. This was a SOTA station (Summits on the Air) who had just started calling. He gave me a 51 and I gave him a 55. I used the matching box for a Par End Fed 10/20/40 attached to a half wave 10 meter wire.
    - We drove all around the island, doing the treacherous Hana Highway (I'm too old for this), with narrow one lane dirt roads hugging net covered cliffs (to catch rocks) to the right and steep cliffs overlooking the ocean to the left. At one point we did come face to face to a truck at the top of a hill and had to back up about 50 feet into a spot so the truck could pass. I heard very little repeater activity on the island. The Lahaina fire had occurred about one year previous, and evidence of it based on the remaining foundations and chimneys was everywhere. Access to the downtown area was blocked.
    - I worked KA2ZSD in Naknek, Alaska on 28.395 on 11/28/24 at 19:00 UTC receiving a 57 signal. The station was booming in 59+ into Hopkinton, MA.
    - I have been on FMLA for the last 6 weeks post surgery, giving me time to look into other aspects of the amateur radio hobby. For some time, I have been interested in trying Yaesu's System Fusion and their WIRES-X network. The radio I had, the FTM100, required three firmware upgrades, one for the main chip, one for the receiver, and one for the faceplate, in order to get on the WIRES-X network. (Their newer FTM300 and FTM500, and the FT2-5 HTs, all come with the update). The upgrades took about an hour and went flawlessly. Then with some help from Bob, KC1OXG and Jonathan, W5GI, I was able to get on the WIRES-X as a "portable HRI node" which allows me access to most of the rooms, without having to purchase their HRI-200 to do so. I access the FTM100 node station, using a connecting radio, the FT1D. I have checked into the "Wolfden" room (WO1VES spoke to us about hotspots a number of years ago) and one of their nets, and mostly listen to a very popular America – Kansas City – Wide room. Not sure I have all the terminology correct. This is mostly

internet “radio” but on my end the radio part is from my first floor our out in the yard to the node station in the basement. Stations from all over the world check in.

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September 2024 VHF Contest – as N4NIV, by Steve Hewlett, W1NIV.

I participated in the September VHF Contest and made a total of 37 contacts on 6 meters and 2 meters. I had ten multipliers (unique grid squares per band) which worked out to 370 points. Enhanced propagation was mostly absent, though there was a little 2 meters ducting a couple of times. On both 6 and 2 meters I worked FN53 in Harpswell, ME which is a little north of Portland, ME and is a fairly rare grid as the vast majority of it is Atlantic ocean. On 6 and 2 meters I also worked FN43 in Henniker, NH. On 2 meters I worked FN32 in Mt. Greylock, MA; FN41 in Dartmouth, MA; and FN44 in Lisbon Falls, ME which was my furthest contact of the contest. I had some equipment issues - see below - but overall had a very good time.

On 6 meters I used my MFJ 9406 radio powered by an old Icom IC-3PA power supply from the 1970s. I used a TE Systems 6 meters amplifier and was putting out about 125 watts to a PAR Electronics OA-50 omnidirectional antenna up 26 feet, using 60 feet of LMR-400 low loss cable. I had equipment problems on 6 meters that started showing up Saturday evening and became quite annoying by Sunday evening.

The first problem was that my microphone connection wasn't working well. The MFJ-9406 has a rather flimsy microphone connector on the circuit board and over the years with use the connector has become a little wobbly. The microphone connection is nowhere near as sturdy as those on the big 3 Japanese manufacturers' radios. As a stop gap measure I shimmed the mic cable connector so it was absolutely level with the mic connector on the radio. A more permanent fix is in order. I don't think there is enough room on the radio front panel to install an Icom or Kenwood connector but we will see. If there is I will do that and attach the mating connector to the mic cable and wire it properly.

The second problem manifested itself as an intermittent reduction in receive sensitivity which became much more frequent towards the end of the contest. I checked all my connections, including to the amplifier and all seemed well. In the last hour and a half of the contest I came to suspect that the IC-3PA power supply was not properly grounded. I swapped the IC-3PA out with an Astron RS-12A and that seems to have solved that problem. The permanent fix to the Icom IC-3PA will be to replace the two prong power cord with a three prong power cord as a first step and see if that solves the problem.

The third and final problem with the MFJ-9406 was that the main tuning knob appeared to come loose on the main tuning capacitor shaft and was no longer synced to the tuning arrow pointer so I had no idea what frequency I was on as there is no digital frequency display on that radio. That happened with about 25 minutes to go in the contest so I threw in the towel. I originally thought the two set screws that fasten the tuning knob to the capacitor shaft had come loose. Post contest, after removing the tuning knob I realized that the tuning knob had been securely fastened to the inner shaft of the air variable reduction drive main tuning capacitor. The problem was that the inner shaft no longer meshes well with the outer shaft of the tuning capacitor, probably from wear and tear due to age. I have a replacement part.

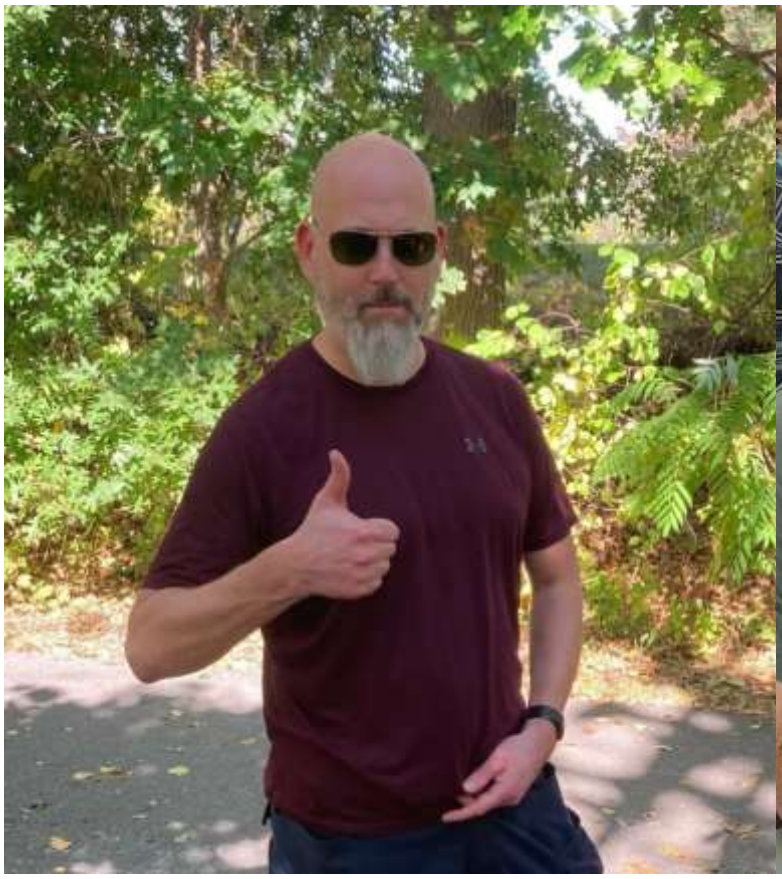
On 2 meters I used my Kenwood TR-751A radio powered by another Astron RS-12A power supply I have. I ran 25 feet of Davis RF 9913 Bury Flex low loss cable to two phased PAR Electronics OA-144 antennas, the tallest one being up 26 feet and the other antenna is 53 inches below that. I was putting out 25 watts on 2 meters SSB. There were no equipment issues with that setup except a little bit of frequency drift to a slightly lower frequency when the rig was first powered on. After a few minutes of use the frequency drifted up to where it was supposed to be and stayed there as long as the rig was powered on. I will have to investigate that problem and it may be that a crystal(s) in the rig are losing a little stability due to ageing. After the contest I tested the Astron RS-12A power supply I use for that radio and found that it reads 13.78 volts when first turned on without load and reads the same after being used for a while under load; so I don't think the power supply is the cause of the frequency drift problem.

The accompanying photo shows my modest antenna farm for the 2024 Sept. VHF contest. I really enjoyed doing the contest in spite of the equipment issues. It's a great opportunity to meet new people over the air and to renew old acquaintances. This was my first major VHF contest effort since January 2022.

Above: Figure 1 – On the left is the PAR Electronics OA-50 omnidirectional antenna and on the right are the two stacked and phased OA-144 omnidirectional antennas at W1NIV's station.

More photos:


Above: Figure 2 - Joe N1JIW, Steve N1MH, and Steve K1STK pondering the best toppings for hotdogs on 09/28/24




Above: Figures (left) and 4 right)
Figure 3 - Bob KC1OXG, giving thumbs up to the hotdogs (and the ham radio hobby) at Zippitty-Do-Dog on 09/28/24
Figure 4 - Jonathan W5GI, pondering which radio to buy next.

Above: Figure 5– Fred AB1OC, and Leandra AF1R, pondering how to get fresh hotdogs to the next contest (as a rover) or field day operation.

Above: Figures 6 (left) and 7 (right).
Figure 6 – Barbara KC1KGS, and Jim WB4EJR.
Figure 7 – Leandra AF1R, Barbara KC1KGS, and Steve, K1DNZ.
All enjoying hotdogs at the Rail Trail at Zippity-Do-Dog on 12/31/24. They were open as part of the Cochituate Rail Trail New Year's Eve event

Regular Meetings: FARA regular **c**lub meetings are held on Zoom on the 1st Thursday of each month at 7:00 PM, and some meetings will also be hybrid, usually at the McAuliffe branch of the Framingham Library. We take July and August off. Always check the webpage first. Members will get an email invitation before the meeting. **Members should be sure that they opted in for email notifications and that their email on record is accurate!** Non-members may request an invitation from president@w1fy.org.

Club Nets:

- FARA Net: Sunday, 7:30PM, output frequency 147.15 / input frequency 147.75, - **NOTE: PL tone is now 100.** Social/chat, emergency preparedness, amateur radio questions, Echolink enabled. W1FY-R
- FARA Net: Wednesday 7:30 pm, Informal Check-in Net: Echolink enabled, W1FY-R.
- Scanner listeners are invited to let us know you follow the nets by sending an email to contact@W1FY.org

Club Web Site: W1FY.org

Social Media:

- https://www.facebook.com/FARAW1FY/

Dues: Flat rate of $20 per year per person or family, and no separate repeater fee. Paid members will be posted on the web page. You can join/renew/pay online at http://w1fy.org/membership-form

Testing: Exams on hold while city offices are unavailable.

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