

An Amateur Radio Adventure Closer to Home

Al Duncan, VE3RRD

One does not need to travel great distances or join a DXpedition to find excitement in our hobby – setting up in a park or on a beach or at a lighthouse can also be fun and fulfilling.

For the past several years, members of the Barrie Amateur Radio Club have taken part in the International Lighthouse Lightship Weekend (ILLW; <https://illw.net/>) by activating the Victoria Harbour range light under the club VE3GCB call sign.

A few of us arrive early to put up a dipole in the trees and set up equipment beside the small lighthouse which was decommissioned in the 1990s and is now a tourist attraction. Although we usually only operate for five or six hours – from 9 am or 10 am until mid-afternoon on the Saturday of this 48-hour event – it has become popular with club members and is now a fun annual August event. Victoria Harbour is located on Georgian Bay, east of Midland, Ontario.

Several of us were looking for a new “ham adventure” that we could also do later in the year which wouldn’t be too far a distance to travel. I happened to read about the Beaches on the Air (BOTA) program (<http://www.beachesontheair.com>) and thought it might be something for us to take part in.

Some other good programs are Parks on the Air (POTA; <https://wwff-kff.com/>) and the World Wide Flora & Fauna (WWFF) in Amateur Radio (<http://wwff.co/> and <http://www.qsl.net/va3rj/veff.html>).



A little Internet research showed that the Wasaga Beach Provincial Park on the shores of Georgian Bay filled both the WWFF and BOTA requirements – and it wasn’t far from Barrie. This is the longest fresh water beach in the world with 14 kilometres of sand so there should be somewhere within the park that we could set up.

Wasaga Beach is very popular and attracts large crowds from as far away as Toronto and beyond. The spot we were thinking of using (Beach Area 1) is one of the more popular locations and thus is quite crowded during the summer season. In addition, day parking in the beach area is very expensive (around \$20 per vehicle) so we decided to wait until after the park and beaches officially closed on October 9 – then parking would be free!

Now the wait was on – watching the weather reports and HF propagation to

try to give at least one day warning of our park activation. October 18 became “the day” with a forecast of sunny and +19C or better and with HF radio propagation looking quite good.

I had decided that we would use a full 100W transceiver and a good multiband dipole to cover 20 metres and 40 metres. We would use SSB so everyone could have fun operating and visitors to our site could hear what was going on. My VE3RRD call would be used for all contacts.

Our main equipment was my Elecraft KX3 with KXPA100 100W amplifier (with internal auto tuner), which was powered by a 50 Ah battery kept charged with a 100W solar panel. A 25A battery-boost regulator from TGE (<http://stores.tgelectronics.org/the-new-n8xjk-boost-regulator/>) was used to provide 13.8V to the transceiver for full power output (MFJ offers a similar unit, the MFJ-4416). I have found that most 100W transceivers don’t like to operate on battery voltages below 12V or even a little higher.

The antenna was a half-sized G5RV from Maple Leaf Communications (<https://mapleleafcom.com/>) which works very well. I use an LDG 1:1 balun (the RBA-1:1) with this antenna for better efficiency.

We managed to set up the antenna between two trees about 35 feet high or so using a slingshot/fishing reel and then ran 75 feet of RG-8X coax down to the ground and back to the picnic table operating position.

Note: More information can be found in my article “Slingshot Launcher or How to Get that Dipole Antenna High Enough in the Tree” at [http://barrie-wax-group.dyndns.org/files/Slingshot Launcher.pdf](http://barrie-wax-group.dyndns.org/files/Slingshot%20Launcher.pdf).



To: VE3WEX This confirms our 2-way SSB QSO
Date: October 18, 2017 Time: 14:43 UTC
Band: 20m UR Sigs: 59
Wasaga Beach Park VEFF-0426 & BOTA



Operators were AI, VE3RRD (holding the mic), Ian, VA3QT, beside him and Mike, VE3MKX (taking the picture and including his finger in the photo as proof he was there).

Our first contact was shortly after 10:30 am (1430 UTC) and our last was just after 1:30 pm (1730 UTC).

We took turns working a total of 65 stations and there were pileups once we were known to be operating from a

never-before activated WWFF location (number VEFF-0426).

It was very exciting being at the other end of a pileup with four or more stations all calling at once. Those worked were in Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, the United States and Canada. After three hours of fun, the bands were starting to drop out so we decided to pack up and go to a nearby Tim Hortons to talk about our experience over a coffee. We all agreed that we must definitely do this again next year!

Another idea we are considering is to activate an island and I don't mean Islands on the Air (IOTA; <https://www.iota-world.org/>),



although those of you who live on the British Columbia coast or in the Maritime Provinces can do that. Even Vancouver Island, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, for example, have IOTA numbers so those living there can activate from home!

The Canadian Island Activators (<http://veislandactivators.blogspot.ca>) is for those of us living inland like here in Ontario. Canada has many large and small islands which can be activated under one of these programs. Many islands are accessible by car or on foot so you don't even need a boat to get to them – unless it's the local ferry. And if you are visiting or vacationing in the US, there is a US Islands Awards Program at <http://usislands.org/>.

For those of you living near mountains, there is Summits on the Air (SOTA; <http://www.sota.org.uk/>) which has become popular. There are no recognized mountains in Ontario listed for SOTA, but there are for Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia.

Note: For more information on Summits on the Air please see the article on page 49 of the September-October 2017 TCA.

If you don't already have HF privileges, you should consider rewriting the Basic exam and upgrade – most of the fun is on HF. And while you're at it, learn CW; much of the portable QRP (low power operation, usually 5W or less) activity is using Morse code. Switching from SSB to CW can result in at least two "S-units" of improved readability at the receiving end. There are many computer programs and apps for your phone or tablet to help you learn Morse code.

Joining in on a club activity like the ones mentioned earlier – and don't forget Field Day – allow Amateurs with only Basic Qualification to get on HF and learn what it's all about. There just needs to be a properly qualified "control operator" sitting nearby. Of course you wouldn't be able to use your own call sign when operating on bands you are not qualified for, but often a club call will be used for club activities (or the control operator's call could be used).

When I wrote this article we questioned the Beaches on the Air organizers about the lack of Canadian beaches in their online numbered list of beaches. The response was that no one had sent them a list of beaches in Canada to enter into the database. I have since submitted a list of 783 beaches located in the province of Ontario which they plan on using. So next year when we activate Wasaga Beach, it will be under both BOTA and WWFF official numbers – and it will give us an opportunity to have fun activating other BOTA recognized beaches in the Barrie area.

So go find a lighthouse, beach, island or a provincial or national park to activate. Maybe like us, you will be the first one to officially put it on the air. This is an aspect of our hobby many of you may not be aware of – and it's fun and can get you and Amateur Radio out of the house.



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AI Duncan was first licensed in 1983 as VO1RD, then as VE4AOA from 1985 to 1988 and VE3RRD from 1988 to the present. He retired in 1989 after serving 20 years in the military where he was in the communications and electronics trades. He then worked as a Bell Mobility RF Field Maintenance Technician from 1989 until his retirement in 2008. He has served on the Barrie Amateur Radio Club's Executive for nine years. He teaches the club's Basic Amateur Radio Qualification course and is an Accredited Examiner. He has also created a special interest group in the Barrie club called the Wireless Amateur Experimenter Group (WAX Group) to foster learning how to build things for the hobby rather than just buying "ready-made".

