



The grub looked better than last year's



Onlookers ready to perform CPR on repair man

## Field Day

Last year, as a relatively new initiate into the amateur game, I looked forward to Field Day with much anticipation. I thought I'd learn by observing the Club's professional amateurs in action, with the eventual goal of launching my own field ops some year. I showed up at Betasso Preserve to find an intensely operated station run into a trailer-mounted SteppIR. Surely this is what we would all want to be operating if the end of the world was at hand -- like in those survival films where the only other humans left on earth are Mel Gibson and Lady Gaga, working an old Collins rig on an abandoned army base. But as this year's Field Day approached, the end of the world did not appear to be near, and even if it was I decided I could live without Lady Gaga in my logbook. So I hatched my own plan for Field Day.

I live 300 vertical feet up in the foothills between Boulder and Lyons. A member of the landed gentry, who lives 100 vertical feet or so above me, owns 35 acres accessible to neighbors for dog walking and nature hikes. I guessed that he would neither notice nor care if I hung an aerial from one of his ubiquitous Ponderosa Pines, and operated PSK from a netbook PC on its internal batteries, into an FT-817 on its internal batteries. After all, two of the purposes of Field Day are to demonstrate the ability to communicate during emergencies when official infrastructure is lacking, and to publically demonstrate that and other uses of amateur radio. My wife kindly prepared a cardboard sign bearing the words "Amateur Radio Demo", which I would place next to the walking path.

On Friday before Field Day, my wife and I walked up there with my aerial -- a length of 14 gauge flexweave roughly cut to a half-wave on 20 meters and tied to a plastic insulator. My first plan was inspired by the biblical Nimrod: I would use a (kid's) bow and arrow to shoot the aerial over a suitable branch of a well-placed, totally denuded dead pine, remove the arrow and attach the wire to Dale Parfitt's nifty "PAR Electronics QRP End-Fedz 10-20-40" waterproof matchbox. This is a coupler that permits efficient end-feeding of a half-wave wire trimmed to resonance

any where between 10 and 40 meters, without use of an additional tuner. Attach a length of coax from the matchbox to my FT-817 and I'd be up and running. See the rave reviews at <http://www.eham.net/reviews/detail/5105>

Unfortunately, neither my wife nor I inherited Nimrod's archery skill. We both tried and failed to launch that wire. My wife does know her Bible, though, and suggested that we change allegiance from Nimrod to King David, who slung a rock to solve an equally serious problem. I didn't pack a rock when I left the shack, but rocks are not in short supply in the foothills. I found a suitable rock, tied the flexweave to it, and hurled it over the desired branch on my second toss without a kink or snarl in sight. This is another good reason to use flexweave wire instead of that gnarly copperweld crap (be advised that copperweld, like BPL, was invented by Satan). Once the euphoria wore off I realized that my eyes and nose were watering, a reminder that Field Day would mean Field Hay-fever unless I dropped some serious antihistamines first.

On Saturday, I took those antihistamines and walked up to the aerial, placed my sign, connected the coax and rig, and measured my reflected power at 1/4 watt. This sounds great until you consider that the forward power of an FT-817 on batteries is around 1 watt continuous. A bit of pruning got the reflected power down to 1/10 watt, and I started to search and pounce on 14.070 Mhz, the 20 meter PSK watering hole. Nobody came back. The passband was clogged with QSOs, and other guys running more ERP were having them. As I contemplated my options it started to rain. I quickly threw the electronics into my backpack and looked for a place to get out of the rain. The only potential shelter was provided by pine trees, but then I remembered being at the US Open golf tournament on a similar day in Minneapolis, when someone in the gallery got struck by lightning while standing under a tree. Some guys have all the luck, I thought -- at least he never had to write a column about Field Day without any QSOs to brag about.

I trudged back home, hoping to do better on Sunday. After wasting a few pleasant morning hours consuming sugar and fat at the BARC Field Day site, I took my pack back to the aerial, placed my "Amateur Radio Demo" sign, and started up again. Still no luck, so I adopted the time honored strategy of changing the aerial's direction, by hauling the low end 90 degrees away. The PSK panorama display showed my old buddy W8TTY, a self-employed office designer in Cleveland who types well-enough to engage in long ASCII ragchews with me. Even better, he had stuck the phrase "RAGCHEW" in his CQ, to ward off the damned contesters with their brutish, RTTY-like exchanges. I feverishly came back to his call by typing "Al, it's me! Save me from these contesters", and he did! My first QSO on Field Day was with a like-minded soul. I subsequently did manage to make a few QSOs with contesters, including one from Alaska -- a first for me.

So some guys have all the luck, after all. Oh, I almost forgot. Nobody walked their dogs past my post, so I didn't get to explain what I was doing. Of course nobody's dog had to chance to pee on my rig, either. Maybe next year.... still beats having to talk to Lady Gaga and Mel Gibson.



OK, still no QRP QSOs, so let me try my new Hy-Gain portable telescoping 160M – 10M whip with 23 dB gain.