

An Old Friend Returns

We've all probably had this experience at one time or another: We bump into an old friend we haven't seen in years, and after a few minutes of catching up, pick up our relationship as if there'd been no interruption at all. I had that experience during the CQ World Wide SSB Contest at the end of October. You may know my old friend ... its name is 10 meters.

I didn't have a whole lot of operating time this year in the CQWW. Here in the northeast, we'd had a freak October snowstorm that dropped heavy wet snow on trees that still had most or all of their leaves. The damage to limbs, and to power lines, was worse than we've seen here in decades. Fortunately, we didn't lose power at our house, but my in-laws did, so a lot of time was devoted to getting them (and what could be salvaged from their refrigerator) moved into our house for a few days. But I did manage to get in a little operating time on Saturday night and Sunday.

I'd been hearing rumors that the higher sunspot numbers were bringing long-distance propagation back to my long-time favorite band, so on Sunday morning when I got back to the radio, I figured I'd give a listen to 10 meters. I didn't leave for the rest of the day (except for my two final QSOs, but more on them later). Not only was 10 meters open, it was open to Europe and it was packed! With my 100 watts and a vertical, I didn't work anything exotic, but for the first time in at least five years, I was working east-west paths on 10 meters. In the afternoon, I worked Hawaii and Alaska, and heard (but didn't work) several stations in Japan and New Zealand.

One of my favorite things about 10 meters is how you can watch the propagation move as you go through the day. At my location in the northeast, you start out working Europe in the morning, then the Europeans drop out and the US west coast starts to come in, followed by the Pacific and Asia as evening approaches. But you lose that at solar minimum. I looked back over my logs from 2006 to 2010. There were very few 10-meter contacts there at all, compared with other bands, and every one of them was on a north-south path—the Caribbean, Central America, and South America.

Don't get me wrong. There's plenty of great DX to be worked in those places. But as anyone who's been on 10 during the peak of a sunspot cycle can tell you, that's not what 10 meters is all about. Ten meters is all about worldwide DX with flea power and a wet noodle for an antenna. My colleague Richard Fisher, K16SN, was telling me how he'd recently worked Japan from southern California on 10-meter FM simplex with 50 watts and an indoor dipole. That's what 10 meters is all about!

Something Different

There's something different in this rising sunspot cycle, though, than in the past. This time around, for the first time ever, *every licensed amateur in the United States—700,314 of us as of October 311—has operating privileges on 10 meters, including voice privileges on the hot DXing frequencies of 28.300 to 28.500 MHz.* General Class and higher licensees have the whole band available, but at the risk of repeating myself, for the first time ever, *every U.S. ham is invited to the party!*

Don't let antenna restrictions get in your way. A 10-meter dipole cut for 28.4 MHz (the center of the Tech/Novice phone band) is only 16½ feet long. Put one up in your attic or garage (if you don't have one of those, get creative and find a place) and get on the air. Ten-meter verticals for your car are readily available and today's versions are much more compact than the 108-inch CB whip you may remember. Check our ads or your favorite ham dealer.

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Predictions are that the peak of this sunspot cycle will be relatively brief. The "official" prediction is for a peak next year, in 2013; CQ Propagation Editor NW7US thinks we've got a little more time than that (see his column on page 98). But regardless of whether the cycle peaks in 2013 or 2014, it won't be with us for long this time around and we don't want you to miss out on all the fun this wonderful band has to offer. Get (or build) a radio that operates on 10 meters. Get (or build) an antenna, and *get on the air!*

Oh yes, about my last two contacts during the CQWW: Ten was still open but I'd worked just about everybody who had a chance of hearing me, so I switched over to 15 meters and the magic of sunspots was obvious there as well... I had time for only two QSOs—and here's one advantage of a vertical antenna—my first one was a ZD8 on Ascension Island in the South Atlantic, followed almost immediately by a VY1 in the Yukon. Ahhh ... the warm glow of sunspots!

New Friends

As much fun as it was to spend time with my old friend, ten meters, I had just as much fun soon afterward with some new friends—of the human variety. The weekend after the CQ World Wide, I was invited to join the NYC Resistor "maker" group in operating a special event station in the middle of New York City. It was one of several stations operating that weekend to highlight efforts to purchase inventor Nikola Tesla's Long Island laboratory and turn it into a science center (see <<http://www.teslasciencecenter.org/>>).

I'll be writing a full article about it in an upcoming issue, but we were operating as N3Y from a balcony on the 38th floor of the New Yorker Hotel in midtown Manhattan. The NYC Resistor folks tend to be in their 30s, heavily into technology (including ham radio) and enjoy building things. I was one of three older hams in the group and was energized by the enthusiasm of these younger hams as they set up and operated on two HF bands plus satellites. We plan to do more in CQ in the future to help bring together the "maker" and ham radio communities. Stay tuned.

Doin' Digital

I can't wrap this up without coming back to last month's topic of our new digital editions. When I wrote last month's editorial, the first issue of CQ in digital form had not yet "hit the streets." Well, now it has, and while I really enjoy looking at the magazine on my computer screen, I am totally blown away by reading it on my wife's iPad®. The image quality is incredible and, if small type isn't your thing, a simple swipe of the fingers is all it takes to blow it up to whatever size you'd like. Plus, on all devices, just touching or clicking on the name of an article in the table of contents takes you right to it; likewise any links in articles or ads.

As of now, the features are still pretty basic. But as we, our writers and our advertisers learn more about what we can do with this new medium, I'm sure we'll see more and more enhancements.

And what about print? I still love the look, feel and portability of a printed magazine and probably always will. For me, the digital edition is going to be a valuable *add-on* to the print edition. Each has its distinct benefits and drawbacks, but the combination is unbeatable!

Best wishes from all of us at CQ to you and your families for a happy, healthy, safe, and prosperous new year!

73, W2VU

Note

1. Licensing statistics from <www.ah0a.org>