

New and Different (Or Not . . .)

From moonbounce on the beach to contesting in a minor league ballpark, this year's "Take it to the Field" special is just packed with amazing articles about the different ways in which our readers bring their radio hobby with them to unusual and fascinating places. Our emphasis this year is on some of the less-traditional approaches hams have found to portable operating. Also on our menu for this month are six project articles, all tied into our main theme (nine, if you add in the three more in the CQ Plus portion of our digital edition). We hope these articles will inspire you to try something new and different in ham radio, even if you're not aiming a Yagi across the ocean toward a rising moon or paddling a sea kayak across Puget Sound.

My personal goals for this summer include doing more portable HF operating, both on-foot and on my bicycle. Back when my bike and I were much, much younger, I mounted a bracket to the rear reflector and attached an SO-239 antenna socket (see photo A) so I could plug in a $5/8$ -wave 2-meter antenna (which I still have someplace) and run the cable forward to my TR-22C (which I still have, too) in the handlebar bag.

For you "newbies" with less than 30 years in the hobby, the Drake TR-22C was a 1-watt, 12-channel, crystal-controlled 2-meter FM transceiver. Predating the now-ubiquitous HT, it was one of the earlier ham rigs designed for the user to "take it to the field." It had a built-in telescoping whip, plus a standard SO-239 in the back for connecting an external antenna. As you can see from the photo, that connector behind the bike seat is pretty much shot, and besides, most of my portable gear today uses BNC connectors. So my goal for the bike is to replace the corroded SO-239 with a dual-female BNC "L," which will allow me to choose between using a (new) cable to the handlebar bag or plugging in a longer cable to operate my rig from, say, a picnic table while using the bike as an antenna support. The idea here is to be able to ride someplace with the rig and antenna in the handlebar bag or a backpack, then set up and tear down quickly at my chosen operating location. The use of interchangeable cables will also allow me to use my HT while riding, and have it connected to an external antenna.

The More Things Change...

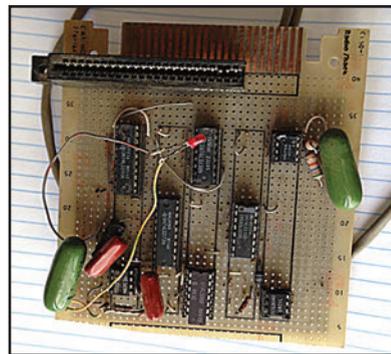
While digging around to see if I already had a BNC "L" adapter, I came across a circuit board that I'd built sometime in the early 1980s (photo B). I think I kept it because it was the first project I'd built from scratch (rather than a kit), and as best I can figure, its purpose was to be some sort of audio interface for my Timex-Sinclair ZX-81 computer (if you don't remember the ZX-81, look it up!). Beyond that, I can't remember what it was for. Trying to create a schematic from the circuit itself is too tedious, so I guess it will have to remain a museum piece, alongside my TR-22C and my Heathkit Twoer.

But ... thinking about the ZX-81 and the TR-22 got me comparing 1980s technology to today's. In some ways, the advances have been mind-boggling, but in others, it seems that the more things change, the more they stay the same. My portable HF gear today is about the same size as the TR-22, with about the same power output, and two of my three portable QRP rigs are also crystal-controlled. My smartphone is about one-third the size of that ZX-81 and immensely more

Photo A. The 30-year-old antenna connector on the back of W2VU's bike is more than ready for an upgrade!



Photo B. This board was built as an add-on for the now-iconic Timex-Sinclair ZX-81 computer. Beyond being some sort of audio interface, its purpose is lost to the sands of time. →



powerful and capable. But ... it basically has a membrane keypad just like the ZX-81. Each is equally frustrating to use!

One big difference I noted: The ZX-81 was built with experimentation in mind—expansion ports and add-on boards were the order of the day as users were encouraged to stretch the limits of the computing power then available. They did, with relish, and changed the world. But the result is likely not what those innovators imagined. The result is a world of amazing but hermetically-sealed devices for which the only possible "add-ons" are a pair of headphones and a power cord. Creativity today is channeled into "apps," which is great, but experimenters and developers are still tied to someone else's hardware. Try building an add-on card for your iPad!

There are those who fight back, of course, and they make up the core of the maker, fixer and open-source cultures. For us hams, though, this is nothing new. We have always been makers and fixers, and the "open-source" philosophy has long been a cornerstone of our culture as well. We freely share ideas and projects, encourage others to improve on what we've done and then share it as well.

Some manufacturers specifically encourage this in their web "communities," but our primary means of sharing this type of information is in your hands ... CQ and all the other ham radio magazines that have occupied our bookshelves (and now, for some of us, our screens) over the decades. We continue that tradition in this issue by sharing the creativity of our readers and with no less than six project articles.

Even if taking ham radio "to the field" isn't on your personal list of things to do in the hobby, I'm confident that you'll find plenty of interesting reading in this issue. And I hope you find time this summer in your ham activities to try something new and different ... or, as in my case, to update something old and find new pleasure in it!

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