

Of Power and Propagation

Life is beginning to return to normal in most parts of New York and New Jersey affected last October by Hurricane Sandy. I am writing the first draft of this column on a train to New York City from my home in New Jersey—the first day of normal operations for my train line—three weeks to the day after the storm struck.

CQ's offices are right in the middle of the storm zone and all of us here were affected to one degree or another. All of our Long Island-based staff members were without power in their homes, some for as long as two weeks. Our office was closed for three days after the storm, knocking everything off schedule. Even when power began to return, though, things were hardly normal. First, there were long lines for gasoline, with many stations offline due to lack of power, closed ports for bringing oil and gas into the region, closed roads making it difficult for delivery trucks to reach gas stations, long lines of people with gas cans for their generators, and panic buying for cars wherever fuel was available.

The lines have disappeared now, thanks to a combination of more power coming back and odd/even rationing. Mail delivery continues to be erratic, even three weeks out. At home, we had no mail at all last Wednesday, then a ton on Thursday. My November issue of *CQ* arrived on November 17, as we were preparing to close this January issue. And these disruptions and inconveniences are absolutely nothing compared with the total devastation faced by families and businesses on the Jersey Shore, Staten Island, and many other parts of New York City and Long Island. Our prayers are with those families as they try to rebuild their homes, businesses, and lives. (Among those suffering considerable flooding damage was *CQ* Contesting Editor George Tranos, N2GA. He hopes to be able to resume his column next month.)

When All Else Failed (Yet Again)...

From our perspective as hams, all of this again points up the frailty of our society's wired and wireless lifestyle, as well as the resilience of the ham radio network. Without power, Wi-Fi didn't work, cell phones couldn't be charged. Cell sites that did work were often overloaded during the peak of the storm or ran out of battery backup power as the electrical outages dragged on.

For the first time in my memory, businesses that did have power offered "emergency charging stations" for cell phones and laptops. A society that is increasingly dependent on "mobile devices" grinds to a halt when none of those devices, be they electronic or mechanical, are able to function. (See AA6JR's "Magic in the Sky" column on page 62 of this issue for Jeff's take on our society's "addiction" to electrons in motion.)

But as always, that "old-fashioned" ham radio with its "outdated" analog transceivers kept on working, providing backup communications throughout the areas hit by the storm. As we prepared this issue, many of those support nets were still operating, so we haven't yet received detailed reports on activity in the New York-New Jersey area. Public Service

Editor Richard Fisher, KI6SN, begins our coverage this month (page 54) with a report from Massachusetts. We hope to have reports from New Jersey and New York by the next issue.

The Joys of Unpredictability

One of the signs of returning normalcy was that I was able to spend much of this past Sunday afternoon and evening on the radio, operating Sweepstakes. As a casual contester, one of the things I most enjoy about contest operating is a high enough level of activity on multiple bands to actually observe differences and changes in propagation.

It was a delight to hear 10 meters open across the country (with a little bit of DX thrown in for good measure), and 15 meters accounted for more of my contacts than any other band. What surprised me, though, was how short the skip was on 20 meters in the middle of the afternoon, allowing me to work states I'd expect to hear on 40 at that time of day. I couldn't work California on 20 that afternoon, but I could (and did) work Ohio and Tennessee. I haven't checked yet, but I'm sure I picked up at least a few new, close-in states on 20 meters if I ever decide to pursue single-band states awards.

To me, this unpredictability of propagation is one of the most enduring appeals of ham radio. Propagation Editor Tomas Hood, NW7US, says to expect good conditions this year (see page 98), but predictions by their nature are general and a matter of percentages. About as precise as you can get is that, for example, there's a 60% chance that this band will be open to this location on this day, with the best chance at this time of day. But the bottom line is that you cannot know with certainty which band will be open to where from your location at a specific time until you turn on the radio. And you never know when Mother Nature will throw a curveball and present you with a delightful propagation surprise.

In This Issue

In addition to our Hurricane Sandy coverage, this issue begins our transition to the new contest reporting schedule that we announced in October (see full schedule on page 96 of this issue). The SSB results of last year's *CQ* WPX Contest appear in this issue (p. 18), along with a report (p. 13) by the editor and publisher of our Brazilian edition on operating the WPX Contest from China at B1Z.

In addition, Riley Hollingsworth, K4ZDH, takes a close look at the FCC's recent proposal to, among other things, allow former hams to be relicensed without retesting. We've also got a preview of this year's "Take it to the Field" special with articles on operating from Route 66 as well as the middle of New York City, a project to update a vintage Heathkit VTVM (Vacuum Tube Volt Meter), and the intriguing topic of "Marshmallows and DX."

Happy New Year

Best wishes from all of us at *CQ* to all of our readers for a very happy and healthy 2013. And may the weather this year be less exciting than the propagation.

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