Field Day … Plus 20

by WU6X/portable

So, here I was, just another Field Day I was thinking, with guys in shorts and high-top shoes throwing tools over tree limbs to get antennas more than a few feet off the ground … It had been 20-plus years since I participated in one of these “tests of emergency communications”, so to speak. Well, I was to discover things had changed … a lot!

The guy in shorts was still there (I’m hard to break old habits), but the other guys looked a lot different. First off, throwing wrenches with rope tied to the handle was old-tech these days. After watching me make several attempts, up walks this guy named Alan, I think, with this very high-tech sling shot that would probably take an eagle out at 100 yards … and asks, “Which limb would you like?” Well, I pointed to my target some 15 feet off the ground. Alan suggests, “Wouldn’t it be better, like higher? Say … that limb 50 feet off the ground?” “You mean that one waaaaaay up there, silhouetted by the moon?” “Sssure!”

Okay, so Alan steps back a couple paces and the next thing I know I’m fishing a small rope with one end of my dipole tied to it over a limb previously occupied by some kind of bird … I think … It was really too high to tell. Next thing I know, the other end of my dipole is being hoisted by a couple other guys who just dived-in to help. This Alan guy was deadly with that sling shot. Wow! … This was definitely NOT how I remembered Field Days of 20 years ago. Back then, there were tents, sleeping bags, mosquitos, drooping antennas, warm sodas and soggy sandwiches.

Yes, Field Day 2011 was a real hoot! … For those of you who missed it, you missed operating in style, RV-style that is. No more soggy sandwiches and no more drooping antennas that took your hat off while walking around in the dark. We’re talking motorhomes, easy-ups for shade, and plenty of batteries and generator power to charge them. And, lots of volunteers, so no one had to work too hard … Yes, plenty of time for visiting and napping, too.

No, Field Day for 2011 was a very different affair than I recall from years past. After the wagons were circled and the antennas were all up, good times began. Lots of good social time, followed by a few tests of communications, more social time, computers networked over a wireless network so a single log could be shared (no more duplicates!), some kind of “roast beast” cooked to perfection by Chef Donna, scalloped potatoes, smokin’ chili beans, salads, … simply more food than a bunch of nerds could ever hope to consume in one sitting. Did I mention Marion berry pie, brownies, cookies and other goodies for desert? I’m getting full again just writing about it.

Yes, somehow we did manage to test “emergency communications” despite the circle of motorhomes and all the visiting (and napping). We made over 350 contacts in 24 hours, 134 of them on CW, and over 200 on SSB, with the “get on the air” (GOTA) station and other incentives racking up extra points. I worked all my contacts on battery power, with only the laptop and wireless router running off a small and very quiet generator furnished by Dave, N6SHD. He and Wayne really rung up the points on 40m SSB, while Bob-WE6C and I nailed ‘em on 20m CW. Chuck-AE6LR, Al-NI2U, Gary, Dick, Carl and a few others kept the RF flowing almost continuously on 10m, 15m and even 80m … Checking the log, I see we even made a few 6m and 2m contacts. Okay, we did nap some after midnight … all that food does take its toll, you know.

I hated to see it end, really … So much good radio fun, and new friends to make and old friends to catch up with. 24 hours seemed to fly by. Propagation was good to the “right coast” on 20m, too. We made several contacts with New Hampshire, New York, the Carolinas, Georgia, Rhode Island and Florida; Alaska, Hawaii, and Canada, too, ay.

So, if you think you might like to try it next year, maybe get your code speed up? Mark the next-to-the-last weekend in June on your calendar and … we’ll save a piece of Tri-tip for you. 73, Dennis-WU6X