GBARC's annual on Flowerpot Is. station

By: Kelly Babcock

Some of us travel the world in search of adventure, some of us are homebodies. But, some people travel the airwaves and visit exotic places by talking to others around the world. Log books replace photo-albums and QSLs (contact confirmations) replace postcards. But there's more to this hobby of amateur radio than contacts and chatting, These guys are serious about learning and teaching, experimenting and supporting their communities with behind the scenes services. They also are prepared and willing to

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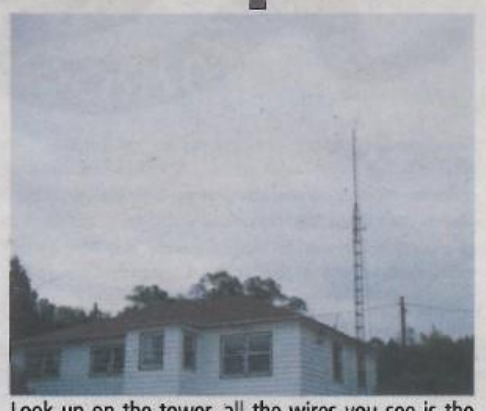
Many visitors on the deck helping to operate the radio equipment.

Special event station VA3FPI, live from Flowerpot Is.

A QSL cards confirms contact.

A sign made up years ago, by the host, to demonstrate GBARC.



Look up on the tower, all the wires you see is the antenna, called an multi band inverted V, it covers the radio band 20, 40, 80 meters

Cont. from pg. 1 They also are prepared and willing to provide services in emergency situations, when the need arises. While you and I go on with our everyday lives, hundreds of thousands of amateur radio enthusiasts are communicating with each other from places that range from the mundane to the unique. Many astronauts are amateur radio operators as well, taking time while in space to make contact with their earth-bound counterparts for fun but also as part of backup communications in case of emergencies.

Here in Owen Sound the Georgian Bay Amateur Radio Club assists with communications for the Santa Claus Parade, the Terry Fox Run and the MS walk. The GBARC, which is currently some fifty members strong, also organizes regular nets. These are moderated public meetings that take place on the airwaves. They are open to licensed radio operators, topics of interest to amateur radio operators are discussed.

The GBARC was brought to our attention because of an annual event they hold on Flowerpot Island. Travelling as a group they avail themselves of the hospitality of hosts Garry and Heather Keast. The Keasts volunteer at Flowerpot Island, taking care of the lightkeeper's house and maintaining the museum therein. The island is part of the Bruce Peninsula National Park and access to it is by tour boat or small private boat. Larger boats are warned to be cautious of the currently lower water levels as the approach to the island is somewhat shallow.

Each year, the first weekend in August finds the GBARC setting up equipment at the lightkeeper's house and moderating a net with the designated call sign "VA3FPI". While each operator has his or her own licensed call sign, the operators that participate in this weekend's activities all use VA3FPI for this event. The purpose is to allow amateur radio operators around the world to make contact with an island that is usually silent on the airwaves. Collecting a QSL or contact verification from Flowerpot Island is an achievement that is worth the effort for an amateur radio operator.

Keeping logs and controlling radio traffic, the GBARC members that attend make contact after contact, on various frequencies, throughout the weekend. Using different equipment for each band they cheerfully acknowledge the incoming traffic. As part of their ongoing interest in education they allow guests to try out the equipment under supervision. They answer questions and happily talk "radio" with any and all who show an interest.

In reciprocal radio transactions, operators, who prefer to be called amateurs though they sometimes call themselves "hams", collect incoming contact QSL's from around the world. The incoming calls are from amateurs who want to add to their list of contacts. Some amateurs collect contacts from lighthouses, some from islands, some from distant and foreign shores. For whatever reason, the Flowerpot Island net is a popular weekend event around the world.

This year the sole operator on Flowerpot Island was Bernie Mondrie. He spent the weekend on three different sets each operating on a different band. He amassed roughly 150 contacts by the end of the weekend. He tells me that he was scheduled with two others who, for unforeseen personal reasons, were

A quick made up sign to indicate log book contacts for the island visitors to see, that list was just compiled a few hours after start up.

unable to make the trip by rigid inflatable boat (RIB) from Tobermory to Flowerpot Island.

Bernie, who is 50, has been a member of the GBARC for more than ten years and has been a licensed amateur radio operator for half his life, 25 years and counting. His call sign is VE3BQM and he speaks positively of the amateur radio world and the services they provide. Along with supporting local events with communication service many members are certified weather spotters for Environment Canada and the CANWARN network. Another weather related service involves the local signal repeater operated by the GBARC. When ever there is a weather watch or warning issued the weather channels are rebroadcast by the repeater.

Bernie is also a proponent of the ARES or Amateur Radio Emergency Services program. In any emergency event, the ARES volunteers have procedures and a "chain of command" hierarchy already in place to facilitate communication between the affected area and the outside world. The GBARC's affiliation with ARES means they are prepared to assist in communication in the event of an emergency that leaves the current information infrastructure damaged or dysfunctional. Even if the existing systems are just inadequate due to the increased communication traffic that always accompanies a disaster or emergency, the ARES people are there. These guys mean business, they have self powered equipment that is able to reach out to whomever they need to contact. Under less than optimum conditions they are still able to communicate, reverting to Morse Code if the situation requires it. Natural disasters the world over have repeatedly proven the value of amateur radio and it's operators. To quote directly from the Radio Amateurs of Canada website "When emergency agencies are required in a zone of disaster, their regular means of communications can be affected by the same disruptive causes as others. That creates a need for a supplemental or back-up communications system, one that comes complete with equipment and trained operators who are licenced by the Canadian government, all at no cost to the public or the agency involved. In fact, these men and women are volunteers, members of the Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) sponsored and operated by Radio Amateurs of Canada."

Additionally, Bernie says "Education is the biggest thing" ... "we provide a lot of education to our members and that's why we have our meetings so we could actually teach our members more about communications [...] we teach each other basically". "It [Education] is a very big part."

It would seem that these amateur radio operators have been quietly preparing to be heroes while diligently working to make sure that situations that require heroes don't arise. To become an amateur radio operator or a member of the Georgian Bay Amateur Radio Club visit them online at www.gbarc.ca. To peruse the Radio Amateurs of Canada web site go to www.rac.ca where you can find information on the many clubs and services provided in Canada by these seemingly tireless technophiles.

Lighthouse hosts, Gerry and Heather Keast.

Radio equipment portaged to the site.

80 meters – 3.5-4 MHz (3500–4000 kHz) – Best at night, with significant daytime signal absorption. Works best in winter due to atmospheric noise in summer. Only countries in the Americas and few others have access to all of this band, in other parts of the world amateurs are limited to the bottom 300 kHz or less. In the US and Canada the upper end of the sub-band from 3600–4000 kHz, permits use of single-sideband voice; often referred to as 75 meters.

40 meters – 7.0–7.3 MHz – Considered the most reliable all-season DX band. Popular for DX at night, 40 meters is also reliable for medium distance (1500KM) contacts during the day. Much of this band is shared with broadcasters, and in most countries only the bottom 100 kHz or 200 kHz are available to amateurs. However, due to the high cost of running high power commercial broadcasting facilities; decreased listener-ship and increasing competition from net based international broadcast services, many 'short wave' services are being shut down leaving the 40 meter band free of interference for amateur radio use.

20 meters – 14.0–14.35 MHz – Considered the most popular DX band; usually most popular during daytime. QRP operators recognize 14.060 MHz as their primary calling frequency in that band. Users of the PSK31 data mode tend to congregate around 14.071 MHz. Analog SSTV activity is centered around 14.230 MHz.