

THE BLACK HOLE



Celebrating 20 Years of Contesting from the Midwest

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20 Years - Almost Unnoticed

by Brian Maves, K9QQ

As I was adding a link to this year's W9DXCC convention on the SMC website, and started putting together this issue of the Black-hole, it sunk in. The SMC is 20 years old, and this milestone has almost gone by unnoticed.

Twenty years ago, my good friend KS9O (now N4KM) and I (then an NIU senior) went to our first W9DXCC, partially for the program, but also to meet up with some guys starting a new contest club. We had some great discussion with Steve, NA9D, and Mike, NOBSH, and eagerly joined the new club. Later that night, we got *stuck* at a banquet table with some older guys we didn't really know. John, K9DX, and Bob, W9KNI, seemed to know everybody else though, and they were very gracious to a couple of W9DXCC newbees. But that's another story.

The club started with a basic premise. An ARRL circle centered on Northern Illinois, and capturing the tri-state area, contains the

Member Profile: W9RE

by Jerry Rosalius, WB9Z and Howard Dybedock, AK9F

This is the 5th in our series of SMC Member Profiles, and features a Hoosier, Mike Wetzels, W9RE. Well known to virtually anyone that contests regularly, the call W9RE appears on practically every log and probably enjoys a footnote in the log, "Big Signal". Mike's station over on the Southeast side of Indianapolis is known for generating one of the most competitive signals originating in The Black Hole. An engineer, Mike has designed and constructed many of his antennas, including a big 80-meter 2-element Yagi, now residing at 150 feet. But like many hams in what was originally a rural location, Mike is having to deal with increasing noise levels from nearby residential developments, and even more serious, the possibility of BPL. Let's sit back and enjoy the W9RE perspective on the world of contesting.

SMC - Mike, you have been around a long time, how old were you and how did you get interested in radio?

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third largest population base in the country. By organizing the contesters across that area in a large contest club, we could easily compete with the established clubs on the coasts. The intent was never to replace local DX and contest clubs, but instead to provide a larger organization that raised the level of competition and built some respect for the talent in the Midwest.

Now here it is 20 years later, and I'm sitting here impressed with how well we've followed through on the club's original vision and goals. Our membership has grown to over 300 contesters. We've chalked up five unlimited gavels in the SS and a bunch of ARRL 160 and 10 meter contest club victories. We've managed to keep everyone "looking over their shoulders" in all the major contests over the last 20 years, and done our part to raise the level competition nation-wide. One or more SMCers have represented the U.S. in each of the four World

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W9DXCC 2005

September 17, 2005

Holiday Inn Chicago - Elk Grove, Illinois
<http://www.qth.com/w9dxcc/>

The Black Hole



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EDITOR
Pat Barkey, N9RV

Material for **The Black Hole** should be forwarded to:

pambarkey@comcast.net

Membership in **The Society of Midwest Contesters** is open to all persons with a bona-fied interest in amateur radio contesting. The club doesn't collect annual dues, but instead funds everything through member donations. For more information contact one of the following officers:

PRESIDENT
Paul Gentry, K9PG (847) 819-3000
Paul@k9pg.com

SECRETARY/TREASURER
Jon Ogden, NA9D
na9d@speakeasy.net

CONTEST ACTIVITIES COORDINATOR
Paul Gentry, K9PG (847) 819-3000
Paul@k9pg.com

AWARDS COORDINATOR
KJ Morehouse, W9RM (847) 696-2828
kjm@ProbeElectronics.com

ILLINOIS STATE COORDINATOR
Gary Hornbuckle, K9MMS (630) 377-0884
k9mms@aol.com

INDIANA STATE COORDINATOR
Greg Clark, K9IG (317) 535-0282
k9ig@k9ig.us

IOWA STATE COORDINATOR
Dave Andersen, K0RX
k0rx@uiowa.edu

MISSOURI STATE COORDINATOR
Steve Lufcy, K0OU
k0ou@comcast.net

WISCONSIN STATE COORDINATOR
Gary Sutcliffe, W9XT (414) 644-8876
ums@nconnect.net

SMC Needs Your Financial Support

As one of the top contest clubs in the nation, we continue to sponsor plaques for a number of major contests including Sweepstakes, ARRL DX, CQWW, and CQWPX, as well as make monetary donations in the interest of promoting radio sporting.

A few years ago, we decided to eliminate formal dues of \$10 per year, and instead, maintain funds through member donations. We encourage all members to consider making an annual donation to the club. Your generous donations allow us to continue to expand our support of radio sporting.

You can make your donation two ways:

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The VHF Column

By W9GKA, Kevin Kaufhold

Another VHF Advisory Committee. At a recent ARRL board meeting, a resolution was passed creating a new VHF/UHF Advisory Committee to study VHF Contesting. The resolution cited the two-year-old efforts of the VHF Ad Hoc Committee. That committee initially recommended broad, sweeping changes to the VHF Rules structure, but then substantially reduced their final recommendations following tremendous criticism from the contesting community. The new committee has not yet been formed, but will probably include representation from all radio districts (which the AD Hoc committee did not). Less clear is whether any of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc committee will be adopted for the time being. Some observers believe that the ARRL action signaled another full round of discussion on the state of contesting participation. If so, rule changes possibly may not occur in the interim.

Meanwhile, the VHF reflectors are buzzing with discussions of pack roving, grid circling, and captives. Recently, the tide seems to have shifted against the concept of pack roving, and many negative comments are also being made regarding captives, most of which are impliedly (or even expressly) directed towards the activities of one unlimited multi operation in the NE corridor. Others feel that people will always find a way around any rules changes designed to limit or ban either pack roving or captives. Still others believe the entire subject is anti-rover in nature. Last year, in a poll of SMC members, no one was then in favor of extensive changes to the rover rules, but that was before several additional instances occurred of very sophisticated and coordinated pack roving that has repeatedly blown away all rovers throughout the nation. Many rovers are even starting to complain of the continued pack roving adventures of a few people. It looks like the new committee will have much to consider.

The Perseids shower. The shower peaked between 1600 and 1900 Zulu on the 12th of August. John, W9SE, spent several hours listening, and felt the shower was below expectations. He worked a few grids out to 1000 miles on both 6 and 2 using FSK441a for meteors. Bob, K2DRH, worked the shower in the Friday evening time slot, but had both computer problems and power supply output difficulties. Bob worked K7BV on 6 meters, WZ1V on 2 meters as well as NQ7R in DM42. He heard but did not work W7OJT at 1400 miles. Gary, WX9T, had bugs with his new sound card, but managed to make his MS contacts on Sunday morning, working OK, CO, NJ, and NY. Of note is that K1JT tailed ended a contact to Gary (This technique allows one to squeeze in a contact with someone who is still work-

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Illinois QSO Party October 16 - 17, 2005

Mel, KJ9C, recommended checking out this site from experienced PA QSO Party mobiler, W1NN. It shows how easy it is to go mobile for a QSO party.

www.japancorporateresearch.com/W1NNMobile.html

ARRL UHF Contest

By W9SZ, Zack Widup

This contest was a blast! I only wish I'd had more time in it. I got set up on a hilltop in EN50rl as the sun rose on Sunday. I had to QRT around 1630Z in order to be back in town around 1 PM. So it was about 4-5 hours of operating time.

The hilltop I was using is about 10 miles west of Gibson City, IL. The site is a winner! It is probably the highest point in east central Illinois at ~ 955 feet above sea level. I had a clear view of the entire horizon. I had a little digital

| Band | QSOs | Grids | |
|--------|------|-------|----------|
| 222 | 6 | 4 | |
| 432 | 8 | 6 | |
| 903 | 4 | 4 | |
| 1296 | 6 | 5 | |
| 2304 | 2 | 2 | |
| 3456 | 1 | 1 | |
| 5760 | 1 | 1 | |
| Totals | 28 | 23 | 3,450pts |

QRM of some sort on 432.098 from somewhere northeast of me, but it didn't interfere above that frequency.

All other frequencies were clear. The nearby microwave tower didn't turn out to be a problem. The actual hilltop is in a farmer's field about 100 feet or so off the road. There is a dirt road and a clearing on the hilltop. The farmer had given me permission to use it and even stopped by a few times to see if I was OK.

Here's my results:

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When were you first licensed and tell us about your "elmer".



Mike, at the operating position of his competitive station

W9RE - I got interested in radio at age 10 and finally got my ticket at age 13 in 1962. A friend of my dad's (W9VGG) who had a monster vertical and a big AM station got me interested in radio.

SMC - For those that don't know you well, what were your first calls and how did you get interested in contesting?

W9RE - First call was WN9BWY and then WA9BWY with W9RE in 1976. In the fall of 1963 using a Viking II and an SX-110 on AM, I had a 3 element beam on 15 meters and was tuning around one Saturday evening and ran into short skip to 1, 2 and 3 land and the SS contest. Since I was in demand under those short skip conditions, I was the hunted and had my first run and it was exciting. The next week I added a micro switch that controlled a relay to automatically flip the plate switch on the Viking II and mute the receiver together for quicker operation.

I distinctly remember the 1963 CQWW SSB contest where I operated a single band 15 (only yagi antenna) and I remember working about 50 stations the whole weekend with a few Africans but not a single European in the log.

SMC - You were around some heavy hitters in your early contest days like, WA9AUM now K1TN, W9SU, W9ZRX. Who else motivated you and got you "fired up"?

W9RE - K1TN was probably the one that egged me on. We had been friends since high school and in the early 1970s Jim lived here. We both ended up with Signal Ones and I started to put together a station for contesting. First one was in 1972 at a rental house where I put up a 64' tower and a

triband, 4 element quad, a sloper system for 40 and a zepp for 80. With this modest setup I placed 10th in the ARRL DX contest one year and this told me that I could do even better with a little more elaborate setup.

Since about 1986, N9RV and I have been very good friends and for the years that Pat didn't have a station (until about 4 years ago) he also egged me on to put up more antennas and he also helped me out here a lot on the antennas.

I did run some m/m at W9SU and W9ZRX's and got some experience from those operations.

SMC - How long have you been at your present location?

W9RE - I built my house in 1975 and started putting up towers. I have 9 acres, not really enough for decent Beverages on 160.

SMC - Mike, you're on the outskirts of Indianapolis... what are the advantages and disadvantages to your QTH compared to other areas in the "Black Hole"?

W9RE - In 1975, this was all farmland on this side of the city (because there were no city utilities) but they finally brought the utilities out here in the 80's and this area now is going nuts with development. Two years ago there were 49 subdivisions under construction at one time here. So it use to be a quiet location but now I have many, many houses on all sides of me with their inherent noise which limits me somewhat. I know areas farther west don't have as good of propagation to Europe so it's not too bad here. Obviously the farther east you go the better!

SMC - How many towers do you have up now and how many HF yagis are up in the air?

W9RE - I have 4 towers up now-108', 150', 160' and 170' with a total of 20 yagis.

SMC - You build all or most of your own yagis. What is the best antenna or antenna system you have, or which are you the most proud? I would think it has to be your 80 meter yagi! Looking at it on your web site, it sure looks like a work of art. Tell us a bit about that monster?

W9RE - Yes, the 80 was a project that I started and just had to go ahead and finish it. K9XV really helped me with it mechanically as far as design and machine shop knowledge. I never planned for it to be in the air this long (since 2001) without a mechanical failure. It is our own design, weights #350 and was put up in 3 pieces without a crane. In fact no crane has ever been used here and even the 3 element 40 was put up with just 2 people.

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Mike applying the finishing touches to his antenna design



The 80 meter beam finished at 150'

SMC - What other antenna systems do you have planned to get more "fire power"?

W9RE - Last year I put up an 8 vertical receiving array (W8JI) for 160 since the Beverages I have don't work very well and I am really impressed with the vertical system. I am going to try a modified one for NE on 80 meters.

For about 5 years I had a noise problem to the NE (about 5 s units) only on 160 that the power company was unable to find until I got the directivity of the receiving verticals going. Then we found it at a substation about 2 miles away and finally it was fixed last April so this coming year will be the first year without that noise in a long time. I still can't hear as well as Jerry or John (DX) but at least it is better than before. (Ed. See page 8 of this issue for more on Mike's new vertical array.)

SMC - Mike, this is a broad subject, in your opinion what is the best rig out there for contesting on CW and SSB?

W9RE - I am partial to my 781's, I've used the 1000 series and they are also good radios. If I were to get a small radio, I would get a K2. I had one for a week and was really impressed with it.



The entire W9RE Indianapolis wall of equipment

SMC - Mike, which contest accomplishments are you the most proud?

W9RE - I think it was the 2000 ARRL DX CW contest. I stayed up the full 48 hours, barely beat K1ZZ and came in 4th. Another one was a couple of years ago, coming in 10th in the CQWW CW contest, not being a natural CW op that is an accomplishment for me.

SMC - You were at WRTC, tell us about that.

W9RE - That was a great experience; also teaming with K7JA was memorable. Unfortunately, it was a bad conditions contest and we only worked a handful of JA's from Seattle. That is unheard of out there. Being 2nd was an accomplishment.

I may apply to go to the WRTC 2006 in Brazil.

SMC - You have been down to PJ4 and PJ2 contesting lately. What other DX locations have you operated from and how do you compare operating from the "other side" as compared your home station?

W9RE - Those are the only 2 locations that I have operated from, PJ2T once and PJ4R twice. I always said I didn't want to go on an expedition because I was afraid I would come home and not want to utilize my station as much as before, but I reached an age now where not that many full time contests are left.

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SMC - You are an electrical engineer, and you have your own company, tell us a bit about your work.

W9RE - I left a large company in 1979 to join with 2 other fellows to start a consulting engineering firm and it only lasted 6 months (very bad economy). Ann was pregnant at the time and I just thought I would stay home until after the baby was born. I started getting a little bit of work here and there and it just continued and expanded. I am a registered P.E. in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois and do plan and specification preparation for commercial and industrial buildings for contractors to bid.

SMC - How do you find time for all the contests you operate? Your XYL Ann must be very understanding?

W9RE - Yes, Ann has been super, super understanding. Since I have worked at home for the last 25 years, I've been able to adjust work schedules and home schedules to fit in with the contests. Ann has also been at home full time so that helps immensely.

SMC - Are you still supplying kits to modify and beef up the Cushcraft 2 element 40 meter yagis?

W9RE - If badgered I will but the need has dried up and I am out of some of the U-bolts and can't reorder them because of quantities needed.

SMC - What other hardware do you sell that we maybe be interested in?

W9RE - I've got a lot of used miscellaneous tubing that I've collected, irrigation and 6061-T6 that I will never use and would like to get rid of some.

SMC - What do think of the future of contesting and ham radio in general?

W9RE - Contesting seems to be growing in Europe, declining in Japan and about level in the US. With the competitive nature of individuals I think contesting will continue but we need to advertise and promote at every opportunity.

SMC - Do you think we will win the BPL battle?

W9RE - In talking to some people who have had some experience with BPL usage, I am still surprised that money is being pumped into it as their experience indicated it was not viable. I sure hope it dies in it's present form because we have enough noise (man made) to keep us busy eliminating.

SMC - Thanks, Mike. I'm sure our SMC readers will find all your experiences and insight most interesting. To get a more detailed look at the W9RE antenna farm, Mike's web site has many detailed pictures and descrip-

tions of his various antenna projects. Click on <http://home.comcast.net/~w9re/index.html> The subject of our next SMC Member Profile will be Sam Effinger, K9SD. Be watching for it.



P40GY (K9GY), P40QX (KE9I), and P40C (AJ9C) waiting for the boat shuttle pickup for the morning snorkel sail on the Mi Dushi (wood sailboat).

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Radiosport Team Competition (WRTC) Championships since the 1990 inaugural event in Seattle. We've taken our place next to PVRC, YCCC, NCCC, SCCC, FRC, and MRRC as a major force in contesting.

So where do we go in the future? The signs are already there. W9GKA's passion for VHF contesting seems to have sparked enthusiasm and people are starting to take notice of our activity and contributions in contesting above 50Mhz. On the reflector recently, Pat, N9RV, tossed out the idea of an incentive program to increase overall SMC activity in contests. The PVRC has a highly successful program called the 5 Meg Award that could serve as a starting point, we just need someone to take the lead to develop and implement something similar, tailored for the SMC. Finally, after losing some steam, the fire seems to be burning again to retake the Unlimited gavel in SS. We have the same membership that gave us the titles in 00,01, and 02, but the operator skills and stations have all improved. It will just take leadership and organization to mount a successful attack on NCCC to retake the title.

So let's look to the future and celebrate SMC's 20th year by regaining the Unlimited title, and not let this milestone go unnoticed.

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ing, or just finishing with, another station). Gary thus had 3 schedules and 4 QSO's, far better than his SSB MS experiences, with maybe a 25% success rate. He was quite impressed with the JT digital technology. Brad, W9FX, used FSK441 (in fact, all MS reports sent in were with K1JT software. Is there any SSB MS activity left, at all?). Brad ran during the peak on the 12th and again on the 13th, but results were not overly impressive. He had heard that the 6 meter MS contingent had much better success on the shower, however.

Overall, the shower did not seem to be overly strong, but everyone is raving about the JT series software. There have been many reported instances of the WSJT modes working deep into the noise level, pulling out signals that simply cannot be heard by the human ear. Exciting stuff.

On the August UHF, Zack, W9SZ was active from a hill in EN50, from 222 through 5.7G. He ended with 3,450 points. K2DRH was on through 2.3G, and has been working on 3.4 G. Jerry, WB9Z totaled 10,293 points, being on 222 through 1.2G. WO9S made 40 contacts on just 432, for a total of 2,400 points. Good job! K9JK once again went roving, and totaled over 152 K's and 24,756 points.

The 2005 CQ VHF. Bob, K2DRH once again ran a significant score, with 76, 692 point in the SO category. Ralph, K9ZO had 11,830 points in the SO, while WB9ZX ran some time, and K9GY/4 amassed 8,892 points in the QRP class, running from the Shennadoah Valley. Sean, KX9X ran the contest, too (I think he ran from WB9Z's location for this contest, I don't know for sure) but noted that there was not much activity at all. The VHF reflectors had similar reports throughout much of the nation. AJ9C also indicated that there was little or no activity.

DXpedition. Who says Dxpeditions can only have HF equipment? Several SMC members ran from Aruba in August, operating the WAE CW contest. In their spare time, K9GY, AJ9C, KE9I, and N9LAH had 6 meters with them and were looking for contacts. No news yet on how they did, either in the HF contest, or on 6 meters. I want pictures!

June VHF SS. The paper logs are now being reported on the ARRL on-line service, and we are up to 28 entries, and 801,493 points. This puts us in 4th position in the medium club competition, behind PVRC, at 31 members and an amazing 3,670,000 points; Mt. Airy, 17 members, 1.6 Million points; and NEWS, 14 members and 944K. The Pack Rats are gradually accumulating more individual entries in June, shifting their strategy somewhat from having only one large multi at Camelback Mountain. This means that they may become more competitive in June. We will thus have our work cut out for us if we are to maintain the 2nd place

slot we have held in both 2003 and 2004.

We may place ahead of all other Midwest clubs including, NLRS, Badgers, and Chippawa Valley. Interestingly, Mt. Frank entered as its own local club this year instead of running with SMC as they have done in past years. They may finish #1 in the local club competition!

Jan VHF SS. As reported previously on the SMC reflector, we finished 5th in the medium category in the 2005 January VHF SS. Mt. Airy once again was the only club posting an unlimited entry. Overall, we did well in the medium club competition this year, with this being the 4th year in a row that we have finished either 5th or 6th among the clubs. On the individual efforts, Bob, K2DRH, won the national title in the SOLP for the 5th straight year in a row, and several other SMC members placed very well, too, including Gene, N9TF, 6th nationally, M-L; Barry, N2BJ and Marshall, W9RVG, 9th and 10th nationally, M-U; Jerry, WB9Z, 15th nationally, SOHP; and WA1MKE, 1st in the Indiana section, SOLP.



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My equipment was mostly working quite well. I had a problem with the T/R antenna relay on 903 but had a replacement with me and it worked fine.

Several people told me I was weak on 222 and when I got home I found out why. One of the wires on the balun to the T-match had broken, so I was feeding only half of the T-match. Yet I managed QSO's with KC9BQA in EN63 and W9GA in EN53 on that band with 10 watts (my best DX on that band). I also worked KC9BQA on 903 and 1296 and W9GA on 1296 - best DX for those bands! I think we made each others' days.

Everything else worked fine. So Murphy just had a couple near-misses this time.

I worked K3SIW all the way through 5760. We tried 10368 but no go. At the same time I was trying to work Garry, I heard W9ZIH calling CQ on 10368. He didn't hear me, though. Does anyone have W9ZIH's e-mail address? I'd like to make some skeds with him.

K2DRH was quite loud on 2304 where I was. We chatted on SSB on that band for a bit. Where was N2BJ?

So thanks for all the QSO's of those I worked and sorry I missed some of you. I'd hoped to work N0DQS, N9TZL and WB8BZK but never heard them.

Maybe in September?

W9RE 160 mtr Vertical Array

Ed. In this month's SMC profile Mike talked about his most recent antenna project, a steerable vertical array for receiving on 160 mtrs. Mike sent the following pictures and description of the array:

“The verticals are simple and even the matching is not very complicated once you know what you are doing. You are adding 'L' to bring the resonance to 1830 and adding 'R' to bring the impedance to about 75 ohms (all 75 ohm coax). I really didn't engineer anything-W8JI designed it and it is on his web site. He does not give much in the way of details and I actually had to go to his place to figure it all out. It really is pretty simple. It is also in the latest ON4UN book. It is a combo broadside -endfire array and 2 front verticals are combined along with 2 rear verticals and the rear ones are delayed thru the delay line. Also there are combining transformers and a phase invert transformer along with all the switching. But basically you are just using 4 of the 8 verticals and all rotate



The array consists of eight short verticals (21') in a circle with a diameter of 350'.



There are three top hat wires about 33' long and three buried radials under each one.



The box at the bottom (with resistors and small inductors) resonates the vertical to 1830 and brings the R value up to 75 ohms. The feed line goes to a center matching, switching, delaying unit.

SMC Stuff

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by NV5A

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Price: \$14.50 (includes s&h).

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KC9FD

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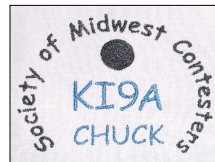
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