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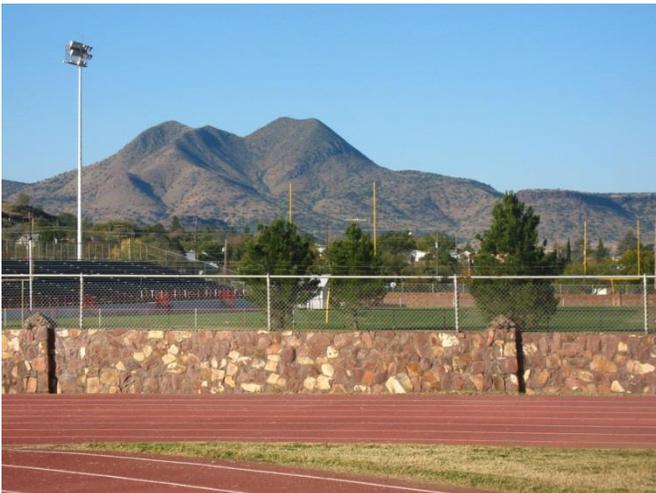
Newsletter of the Big Bend Amateur Radio Club, K5FD

October, 2015

Alpine, Texas

THE END OF AN ERA? TWIN PEAKS REPEATER SITE UNDER REVIEW

Another result of the graying of amateur radio, in addition to the lack of tower climbers, is the lack of mountain climbers. In the early years the BBARC had one repeater. Originally it was on top of A Mountain, overlooking Alpine. Coverage was limited, and we kept looking for a better site. Finally we settled on Twin Peaks (also known as Twin Sisters), which rise 2,000 feet above Alpine. Coverage was much improved and this became "the" BBARC repeater.



Twin Peaks seen from the Sul Ross athletic fields.

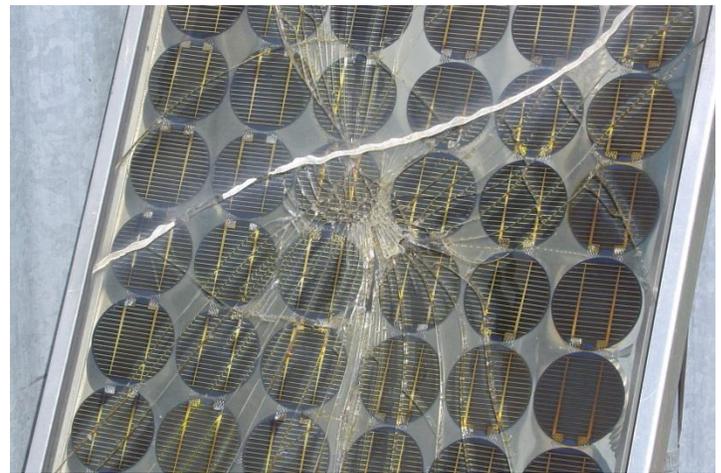
As can be seen in the photo below, it is a rather steep climb to the Twin Peaks repeater site. Some club members have made the climb dozens of times and have many good memories, and stories, of the trips. Members have made the trek in beautiful weather, hot weather, rain, sleet and snow and ice winter weather.



The 146.72 repeater atop Twin Peaks.

Over time we added more and more repeaters until we had the current linked system, which covers much of the Big Bend / Trans Pecos region of Texas.

Adding new repeaters is not as simple as finding a location and dropping off the repeater, duplexers, power system and antennas. Each of our sites are solar powered – hail can play havoc with the solar panels.



Twin Peaks solar panel after hail storm.

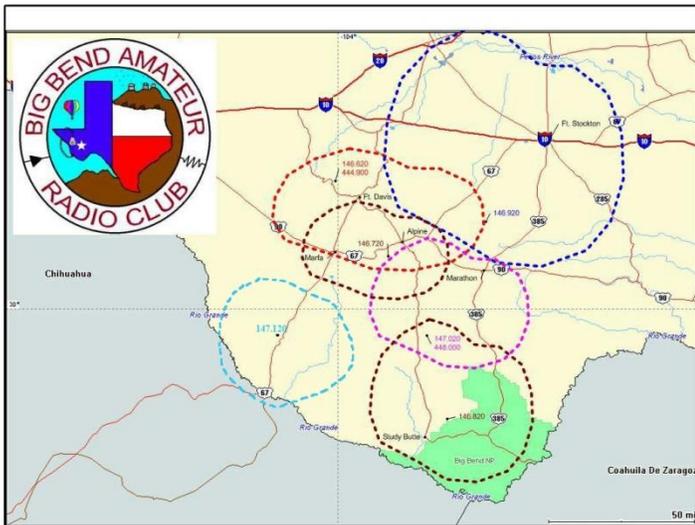
Other common maintenance issues that require trips to the repeater sites include filling batteries with water, antenna problems (often due to ice), and, the bane of our existence with solar power, damage to the solar panel controllers. The solar panel controllers prevent overcharging of the batteries and turn off the system when the battery voltage gets too low. But these controllers seem to be lightning magnets. While probably not true, it feels like more trips are made to replace solar controllers than anything else.

Most of our sites are difficult to reach, some require four-wheel drive vehicles, but none require the hike it takes to reach the Twin Peaks site. The hike is difficult because it is fairly long, but mostly because of the steepness of the climb. When you are carrying several gallons of water for the batteries, a new battery, or a replacement repeater, it becomes worse.

For the past twenty or more years the majority of the repeater work has been done by Doug, N5HYD, and Bill, W5ATO. Various others have helped, usually for one or two trips now and then.

The truth is we could use one full-time person doing nothing but keeping our repeaters up and running. While there is obviously no such person, especially since we can't pay anything, Doug and Bill have done an excellent imitation of a full-time repeater maintenance person.

With the recent problems with the 146.72 repeater, the situation has reached a breaking point. Doug and Bill feel that they can no longer make the hikes to that location. Looking at the repeater coverage map below, it seems that we could lose the Twin Peaks site and still have coverage from the 146.62 repeater at McDonald Observatory. But we would lose hand-held coverage!



Big Bend ARC repeater system.

If it is decided to leave the Twin Peaks site there appear to be three alternatives: A Mountain (in Alpine itself), Bull Frog Mountain (east of Alpine), and Big Hill (south of Alpine). Bill, W5ATO, has conducted a map survey of each site with regard to coverage. Here is his report:

All sites we have entertained will cover US 90-67 to the west as far as Twin Sisters. From Twin Sisters to Paisano Pass will be in the dark. For the west side of Twin Sisters we have lost almost all of US 90 between Alpine and Marfa. 146.620 covers a few miles, but not all. Coverage exists for State Highway 118 north to just past the High School, US 90-67 east to about Hillside Baptist road, and SH 118 south to about 1/2 mile north of the Sierra la Rana gate. It leaves N5DO, the hospital, the airport and 118 from the High School to the Girl Scout camp road in the dark. It leaves US90 east from Holiday Inn to the "Y" in the dark.

A Mountain will cover all of Alpine, SH 118 north to the Girl Scout camp road, 90 east to the 4-lane curve, and 118 south to the first curve on Big Hill. It covers US 90 west to Twin Sisters.

Bull Frog appears to cover all of Alpine with two shadows. One is a shadow on the SW side of town from A mountain, the other is the Hancock Hill shadow which shadows N5DO, WA5ROE, and the hospital. It may be workable from

indirect signal paths but we won't know until we try it. Bull Frog will give coverage on US 90-67 east out to the "Y" and north beyond I 10. It also will cover SH 118 south to the top of Big Hill.

Big Hill will cover US 90 west to Twin Sisters, east to the 4-lane curve, and SH 118 from the Girl Scout Camp road to the ridge between Loma del Norte and Mile High Road. The problem is it has a very large shadow in town that includes 118 south from US 90 to 1/2 mile south of Sierra la Rana, almost all of the one-way US 90-67, 5th street from Del Rio south, pretty much all of downtown including the EOC, and the east side of loop road.

Several of our members, including, KE5OG, N5DO, and WA5ROE, lament the possible loss of the Twin Peaks site (as do N5HYD and W5ATO). We remember when the repeater was on A Mountain and when it was on Bull Frog with limited coverage from both locations. We remember when Field Day was on Big Hill, and the lack of 2 meter coverage. But we also agreed that we were not going to make the climb any more to the top of Twin Peaks.



Beautiful view from the Twin Peaks repeater site (tin building and solar panels in the foreground). Will this become a memory of the past?

We will discuss the situation regarding the Twin Peaks repeater site in lieu of a program at the next BBARC meeting, Tuesday, October 13, in the meeting room in the West Texas National Bank at 7:30 p.m.

Some of our younger members may feel up to the challenge of making the periodic trips to the Twin Peaks site to keep the site operational. This meeting will be a time to discuss what is involved and how much repeater knowledge is required.

We will also discuss alternatives if it is felt that we cannot keep this site operating. Please plan to attend.

MIDLAND 60th ANNUAL ST. PATRICK'S DAY HAMFEST

The Midland Hamfest used to be **the** hamfest to attend in West Texas. Many would say it was **the** hamfest to attend in Texas. In recent years attendance has fallen sharply, like most hamfests nationwide.

Bill, KE5OG reports that for 2016, the Midland Amateur Radio Club is jazzing up their Hamfest. They are moving the event to what used to be called the Holidome. Now it is known as the Texas Inn. They have made arrangements for rooms for the event at \$80 per night, which should help with the expense of spending the night in the Midland / Odessa area.

They are going to raffle an Elecraft K3S, considered by many to be one of the top transceivers on the market. Only 300 tickets will be sold, at \$20 per ticket. The grand prize drawing which goes along with the entrance fee will be a Kenwood hf transceiver, another outstanding hf transceiver. There will also be hourly drawings for one of the little Chinese 2-meter rigs. And much more. Much more info to come too.

Same weekend ... Saturday, March 14. If it's been awhile since you have been to the Midland Hamfest, or you've never been, you might consider attending this one.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

There are many activities which will have details coming in the near future. Here is a partial listing:

Technician License class. There has been some interest expressed in another Technician License class. Details have not been firmed up, but likely to start in early November and finish in early December. If you are aware of anyone interested, they should contact Dave Cockrum, N5DO, at 837-3711 or n5do@sbcglobal.net.

General License class. Last spring we conducted a General License class in Alpine and a Technician License class in south Brewster County (the Lajitas – Studybutte – Terlingua area) . Interest has been expressed in a General License class in South Brewster County for this spring. We will work to set one up, with details to follow in January. Any suggestions for a location to hold this class are welcome.

Big Bend 50 Ultra Run. Held at the Big Bend Ranch State Park, we have helped with communication support for this activity since its inception. This year it will be held on MLK Weekend (with a holiday on Monday), with the race on Sunday January 17. Volunteers always needed; stay tuned for more details.

BIG BEND EMERGENCY NET REPORT From WA5ROE

“CQ CQ this is the Big Bend Emergency Net.

This is a registered net meeting every Sunday morning at 08:30 central time on 3922 kHz. This is a roll call net with a round table following roll call. If you can't stay for the round table please ask to be excused during roll call. Visiting stations will be asked to check in following roll call.”

Thus begins the preamble for the Big Bend Emergency Net. Not mentioned in the script, but known by many members, is that you can almost always get an “early check-in.” Usually W5NPR is on frequency (3922 khz) at about 8:05 a.m. on Sunday mornings to take any early check-ins. If he is not around, WA5ROE will be on frequency to take the early check-ins. Those stations with access to the Big Bend repeater system can check-in via two meters.

Many mornings there are as many early check-ins as the regular check-ins. So if you are in a hurry, or just want to get on about your day, consider stopping by and asking for an early check-in.

Date	Check-ins	Length	Remarks
Sept. 6	39	36 min	
Sept. 13	44	30 min	
Sept. 20	35	25 min	
Sept. 27	33	25 min	

Remember – the BBEN meets **every** Sunday on 3922 KHz at 8:30 a.m. Central time (either CST or CDT). Visitors always welcome.

THE BARK Newsletter of the BBARC

Big Bend Amateur Radio Club
1402 N. 5th St.
Alpine, Texas 79830

Publisher: Bob Ward, WA5ROE
[wa5roe at juno.com](mailto:wa5roe@juno.com)

Editor: Dave Cockrum, N5DO
[n5do at sbcglobal.net](mailto:n5do@sbcglobal.net)

BIG BEND AMATEUR RADIO CLUB <http://www.bigbendarc.com>

Meetings on the second Tuesday of each month at the West Texas National Bank Building in Alpine, 7:30 P.M. CST/CDT.

ARRL Affiliated Club

MEMBERSHIP AND NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTION

Annual membership is Jan. 1 to Dec. 31 each year. Dues are \$36.00 per year for individual or individual & spouse.

Membership allows you to participate in all club activities and vote at the monthly meetings.

Newsletters are available by e-mail for members, subscribers, and interested recipients. Send your e-mail address to [n5do at sbcglobal.net](mailto:n5do@sbcglobal.net) to be put on the list.

ABOUT THE BBARC

Founded December 17, 1974

ARRL affiliate since 1986

The BBARC is a 501(C)3 organization. Contributions are tax deductible.

Big Bend Emergency Net, 3.922 MHz

Founded September 18, 1977

Meets every Sunday morning at 8:30 A.M. CST/CDT

Controlled net format. Welcomes new participants and visitors.

Established by Bob Ward, WA5ROE.

Net Manager, Bob Ward, WA5ROE, [wa5roe at juno.com](mailto:wa5roe@juno.com)

Big Bend 2-meter Net

Founded July 9, 2008

Meets every Wednesday evening at 8:00 P.M. CST/CDT

Controlled net format. Welcomes new participants and visitors.

Established by Bob Ayer, KA1AAJ (SK)

Net Manager, Chuck Dobbins, KA5PVB, [charles.dobbins52 at yahoo.com](mailto:charles.dobbins52@yahoo.com)

BBARC REPEATER SYSTEM

All standard offsets. All repeaters require 146.2 Hz PL tone encoded on your transmit signal. All repeaters are linked.

147.120+	Shafter, Cibolo Creek
147.020+	Elephant Mt. south of Alpine. System hub
146.620-	Ft. Davis located at McDonald Observatory
146.720-	Alpine, Twin Sisters Peaks
146.820-	Terlingua
146.920-	Glass Mountains, Alpine / Ft. Stockton
145.230-	Emergency Repeater

BBARC CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October 13, 2015, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.
BBARC MEETING, West Texas National Bank Building
Program: Discussion of 146.72 repeater site

October 24, 2015
Marathon 2 Marathon Race
<http://www.marathon2marathon.net/>

November 10, 2015, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.
BBARC MEETING, West Texas National Bank Building
Program: To be announced

December 8, 2015, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.
BBARC MEETING, West Texas National Bank Building
Program: To be announced