

Operation Deep Freeze— The Last Chapter

In Canada's Northwest Territories, the November Sweepstakes takes place in the dead of winter. But even if the weather is cold—the bands are hot, hot, hot!

My Amateur Radio junkets often take me to remote, picturesque places. This trip north would be no exception. I couldn't think of a more fitting way to end my latest book, *Amateur Radio Up North: A Decade of Radio Adventuring in Alaska, Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories and British Columbia*, than to usher out 1999 by working the ARRL November Sweepstakes contest from Canada's remote Northwest Territories.

North of 60° latitude, snow blankets the ground from October to April. Beaches of snow, rivers of ice and mountainous landscapes carpeted in evergreens combine to form a perfect winter beauty.

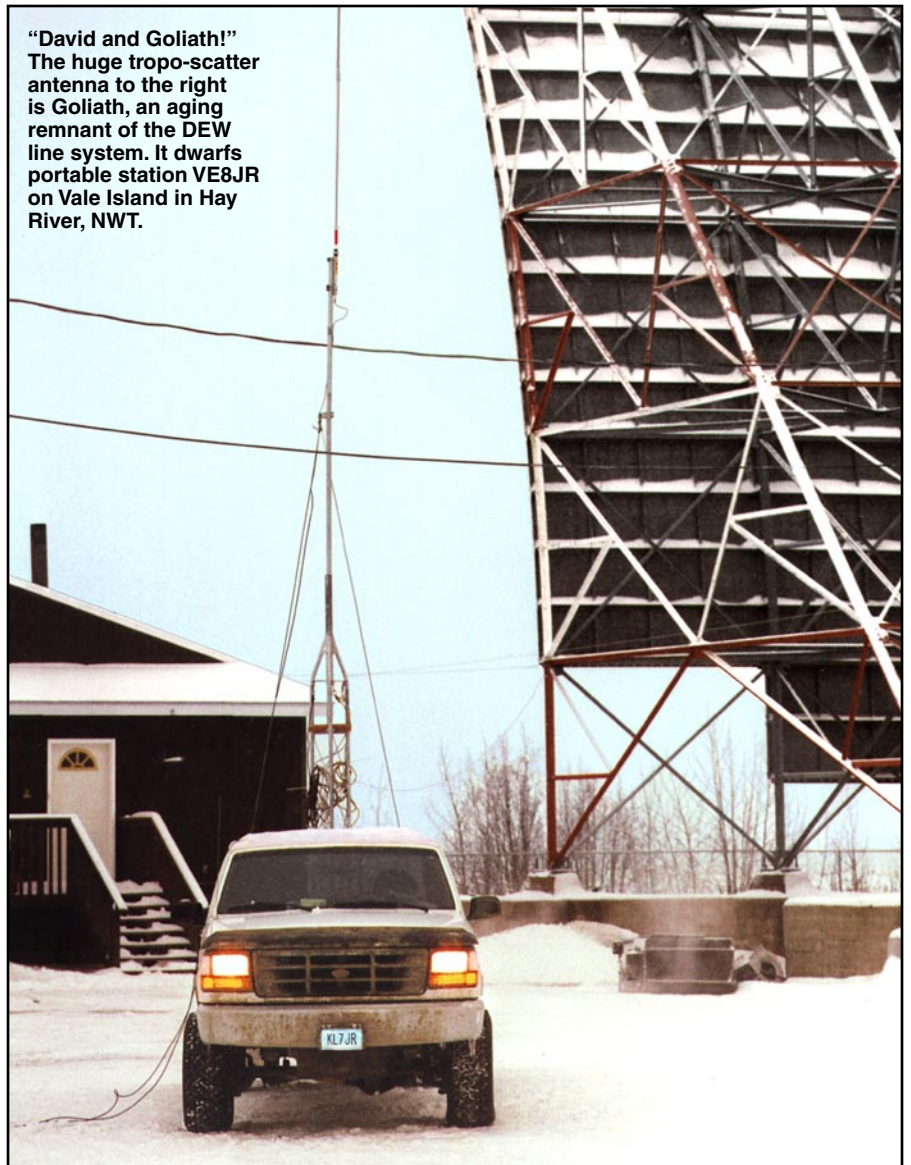
As you read this, the residents of western Canada are getting used to a boundary change. This vast region split into two separate territories on April 1, 1999. The western part remains Northwest Territories (VE8), but the eastern area is now Nunavut Territory (VY0). These are exciting times in Canada's frontier.

With three northern Sweepstakes under my belt (1990 NL7TB/VY1, 1991 NL7VJ/VY1 and 1993 VY1QST), it was time for a little QRM from the "other" rare Canadian multiplier, VE8.

Setting Up

Although the three-day drive from Seattle was scenic, my mind was on the contest and operating from the Northwest Territories. Propagation was terrible during my first two days "in country." Waiting for my partner, Mathew, VE8MN, gave me time to operate HF mobile. There was a slim chance he'd be able to get to Hay River from his bush location, but with the late winter, his

"David and Goliath!"
The huge tropo-scatter antenna to the right is Goliath, an aging remnant of the DEW line system. It dwarfs portable station VE8JR on Vale Island in Hay River, NWT.



“ice road” was still “open water.”

Band conditions greatly improved early the next morning. Ten and 20 meters were wide open. It was now time for me to get “serious”! The snow was impossibly white, impossibly clean, crunching under my insulated boots. Snow-laden jack pines dotted the landscape. A brisk Arctic breeze blowing carelessly off the Great Slave Lake irritated my face as I worked on the tower and antenna. The mercury had already dropped to -15°C . I didn’t even want to know what the wind chill factor was!

Months ago, my oldest son John, KC7FVA, designed and installed supports for a hinged base plate, bolted to the bed of my truck, that would accept a 10-foot tower “top section.” This is the same setup I’ve used from the roof of my motorhome to support a tribander!

My equipment included Kenwood TS-570D and Yaesu FT-747GX transceivers, a Vectronics VC-300M mobile tuner, a Solarcon A99 vertical (10-17m) antenna, an Outbacker 500 vertical (10-80m) on a magnetic mount, a 1-kW Honda “extra quiet” generator and a Rohn 10-foot tower top section with a 20-foot mast. I also kept a fully-charged 12-V RV battery handy to pick up part of the load and aid in starting the truck, if necessary. Under an icy dark sky and the aurora borealis, I was more than ready to work the world.

Ten meters was *crowded*, with strong signals up and down the band. When I announced I was on Vale Island on the Great Slave Lake, all heck broke loose. I vividly explained my operating position and the landscape in detail, including the government’s large tropo-scatter antenna located nearby. Some of the locals told me it was part of the “DEW line” anti-ballistic missile early warning system. It must have helped

me attract signals because I easily worked WAS and just missed Worked All Provinces (Yukon and NWT couldn’t be found).

Signal reports of 59 both ways were common, with several Japanese stations reporting 20 over S9! DX stations making the log included KL7, EU7, UA9, 9X, ZL1, FK8, HK3, KH6 and JA1-5.

Vale Island, the old village of Hay River, was qualified as NW-046 for the Canadian Islands Awards (CIsA) program. I purposely operated below 28.500 MHz to work new US Novices and Technicians. It paid off, as I was kept busy for about five hours giving many hams their first VE8 contact.

Dozens of contesters asked me where I’d be for Sweepstakes. This surely was free insurance for me, but 400+ QSOs had totally exhausted me. Hungry and sporting a nasty sore throat, I pulled the plug. Despite the aches and pains, the feeling of accomplishment was intense.

A few hours later I took advantage of the “heat wave” (it was -5°C and it should have been $-40!$) and hastily installed the A99 vertical on the second-floor balcony railing of my motel room. Northern proprietors are quite accommodating, especially while they’re being patronized!

The vertical was about 30 feet above ground and a snap to “hose clamp” to the railing. In the next two days I worked 10, 15, 17 and 20 meters from the Caribou Motor Inn in downtown Hay River. What a feeling to be able to create pileups on several bands! About 400 more hams made my logbook.

I was operating casually to save my voice for the contest. New DX stations included KH6, KL7, JA, YS, HL, RA, ZL, DU, OE, SM, LA, ON, IZ, DL, YL, XE, VK and HK. That’s not bad for a \$49 vertical, eh?

The Great White North

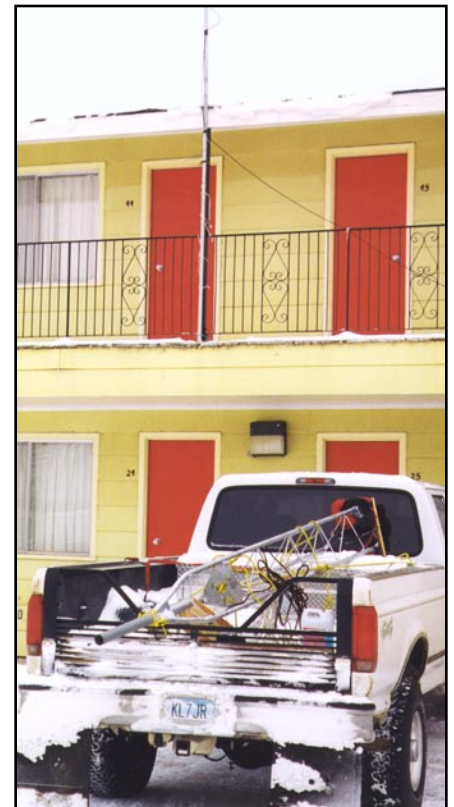
The Northwest Territories and Nunavut Territory include all of Canada north of the 60th parallel, except the Yukon and portions of Quebec and Newfoundland. From the 60th parallel these vast territories stretch 3560 km to the North Pole and 4256 km from east to west, covering almost 3.5 million square kilometers, including the islands in Hudson, James and Ungava bays. This vast land is home to only 64,000 people. Yellowknife, the modern capital city, has a population of about 18,000. Hay River is about 200 miles south of Yellowknife. A fast-growing town on the south shore of the Great Slave Lake, Hay River is the transportation hub of the north with a population of about 3400. Five or six communities spread out along the river actually make up Hay River.

CQ SS CQ SS DE VE8JR

Outside, fierce Arctic winds blasted everything in sight. My truck kept my motel room door from icing up (many others weren’t as fortunate). Inside, I was snug and warm, ragchewing with Butch, NN2T, an old Sweepstakes friend. He was informing the gang on 28.495 that he always works the “rare” multipliers first and that he’d



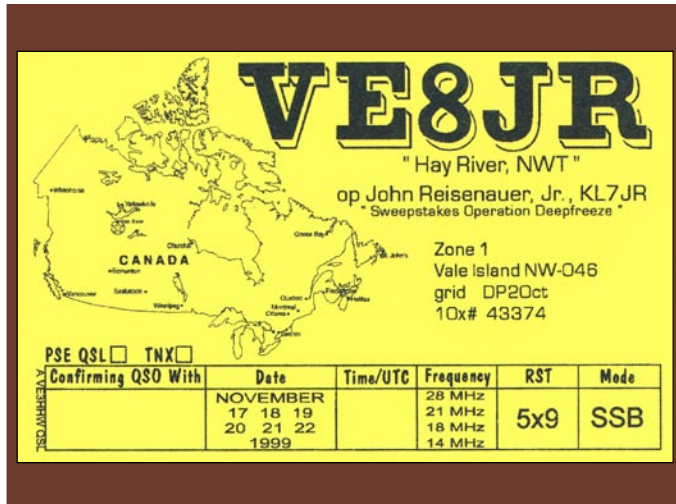
VE8JR mobile near Enterprise, NWT.



ARRL November Sweepstakes station VE8JR was housed at the Caribou Motor Inn, Hay River, NWT. Our A99 vertical antenna was clamped to the second-floor balcony railing (see top of photo).



The VE8JR motel room operating position during Sweepstakes.



The VE8JR "DXpedition" QSL.

soon have VE8JR in his contest log. It's a ritual with us!

The contest starts at 2100Z, about 20 minutes from now. Butch actually stacked up contacts for me, as did the packet spots, which explained the terrific rate I had at the start of the contest!

The action was fast-paced on 10 meters. Everyone wanted VE8, even early in the competition. By the next morning I'd heard "thanks for a clean sweep" at least 50 times. It was a good feeling—even if I was struggling for VE multipliers!

After 0100Z, 10 meters would often fade out and I'd QSY to 15 or 20 meters and work the weak signals present there. I really had to work hard, but it was better than no contacts at all.

Ten meters was definitely hot! Most commonly heard was, "Boy, I need you" and "Hold on, VE8, I'm turning the house

around!" More interesting comments were: "You guys (VY1/VE8) are easy this year"—K4WI; "I've worked VY1JA and you are my third VE8!"—NØIJ; "Boy, do I love you!"—VE3OGZ; "You are my first VE8 ever!"—AE5T; "Thanks a lot, you're a lifesaver!"—W9BS; "There he is!"—N4GU; "You'd better be in NWT!"—W7YAQ; "You answered my prayers!"—KI6CG; "You're a good man. God bless you!"—WN6K; and "Wow, you are easy!"—N6MJ.

I was pleased with the favorable propagation and the camaraderie on the bands. Several times operators would let other ops work me after I answered their CQs. You just don't find that kind of "bandwidth sharing" in other contests.

In 19 hours of operation I worked 650 stations (530 on 10 m) and 71 multipliers for my "best ever" SS effort! Thanks to a wild time on 10 meters, only four hours into

the contest I'd already made about 350 QSOs!

Time to Head South

Thanks go to all the ops who stood by for me, spotted me on packet or helped ensure my success in any way. Special thanks go to VE8MN for the local info, to VE8RZ for licensing, to K7LQY for the LL home and KL7KG and VE6CFD for the relays. I will always remember my turn-of-the-century Northwest Territories DXpedition. From a frozen winter wonderland of vast contrast, harshness and beauty, hearts were warmed and souls soothed in yet another exciting Sweepstakes competition. The North gets under your skin. You can't just walk away from it without feeling like you're missing something.

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NEW PRODUCTS

FINGERTAPPER KEYS FROM MORSE EXPRESS

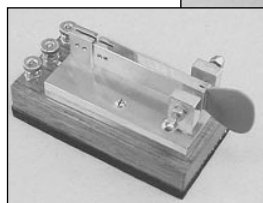
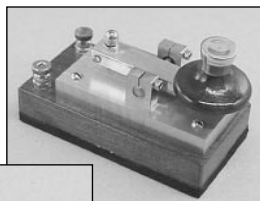
◇ Morse Express now carries a new line of keys that are custom built in California by Jim Richards, KD6VDH.

The FingerTapper straight key is a medium sized key with a machined solid brass action on a 1/2 × 2 × 3 1/4-inch polished hardwood base. The trunnion is mounted in full race bearings and includes adjustment screws. The knob is unique, with a tapered cylindrical brass cap and a hardwood rim. Radio connections are made at thumb-screw-type terminals positioned at the back of the key. A rubber pad is bonded to the underside of the base—the total weight of the key is approximately 14 oz.

The companion FingerTapper's single-lever paddle is similar in size, weight and style. It shares the same machined brass and hardwood construction. Contact spacing can be adjusted for a very light touch. This is one of very few paddles that are

still available in a single lever (non-iam-bic) configuration.

The FingerTapper straight key or paddle are priced at \$99.95. For more information contact Morse Express (a division of Milestone Technologies, Inc), 2460 S Moline Way, Aurora, CO 80014; tel 800-238-8205; fax 303-745-6792; sales@mtechnologies.com; <http://www.morsex.com/>.



STRAYS

ON-LINE DISTANCE CALCULATOR

◇ Pete Hoffswell, N9SSA, has developed an on-line QSO distance calculator. You can use this calculator to determine the distance between two points, as well as QSO Miles Per Watt (MPW). Check it out at <http://www.qsl.net/n9ssa/mpwcalc.html>.