

# 2013 MCC MQP Rover Entry

Jeff Smith, VE1ZAC and Ron Cunningham r1

Not much excitement this year. It must mean we had everything planned pretty well.

New rules this year requiring at least one move. A determination to make last years all band vertical work properly and Ron's spanking new ( well, new to Ron) VW camper van were the theme for this year's outing.

The rule change meant we really did have to move and not just think about it, and the contest was 12 hours start to stop. Not a bad idea that 12 hour change, for mobiles anyway. Makes for a long day when you figure driving to and from remote sites, even with the shorter contest. We elected to visit the optimum 4 county site we discovered last year which covered Halifax, Guysborough, Hants and Pictou counties, plus make a stop on the way up at Musquodoboit River park in Halifax county for the additional site. We figured no one would be in the park early in the morning and we would not interfere with park activities or cause too much consternation by erecting antennas and generally doing what very few folks do these days. Turns out, we picked the big day for the local Beaver-fest and there was a steady stream of cars and kids arriving soon after we pulled in. Interestingly a few carloads of folks thought we were part of the day's activities! We did do a bit of ham radio explaining. (Actually Ron did.. he really should get a license soon.)

Ron's van provided a much more comfortable operating environment, but we still took a second car as Ron was worried about the van's reliability. (Good thing we did that, it turns out.) The van has a nice pair of swing out tables that made perfect operating desks. One for the rig and keyer, and one for the computer. The top of this van pops up and you can stand up inside.. a mighty nice feature for a stretch.



After making some early 40 meter contacts, we moved up to the 4 county site and spent the rest of the contest setup there. Next year we plan on getting on the road more with a little more of a 'quick stop and operate' setup, and operate in a different part of the province. Maybe Cape Breton.. we haven't been up that way yet.



The equipment was tested carefully after last year's fiascos. This year's antenna was the same as last year.. a 30 foot collapsible vertical with 8X 25 foot radials tossed around the base, fed by an SGC239 auto tuner and a parallel stub. The stub detuned 40 and 15M a little, but improved the match on 80 and 20M, taking some of the stress off the tuner. Throughout the day, this little auto tuner worked perfectly. We worked everybody we could hear.



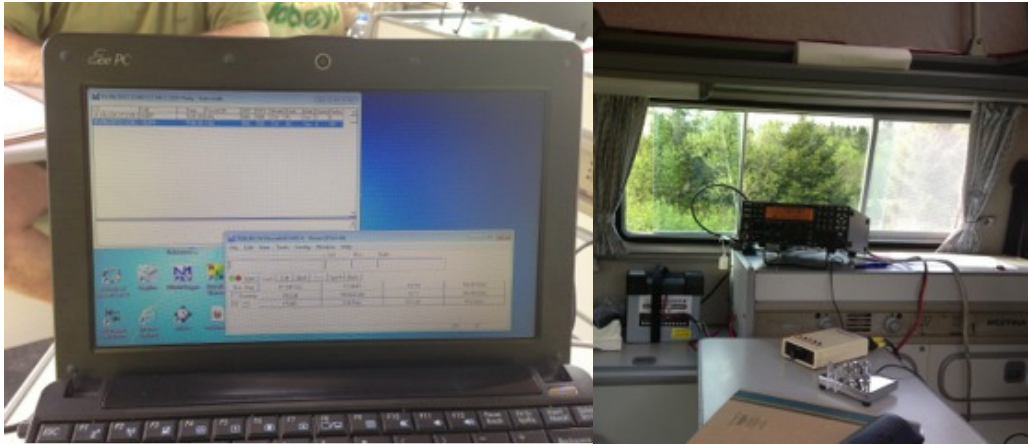
This is the antenna base during testing in the backyard.



The inside of the base container showing the stub, the choke and the MFJ927 that destroyed itself last year. It's now replaced by an SGC239 Smart tuner, with the addition of a bias T and some RF connectors. ( Note, there is a detailed explanation of this antenna, plus problems encountered with the first MFJ auto tuner on my VE1ZAC website)



Last year we had a logging problem when an update to N1MM caused us a really embarrassing problem with getting the K3 rig control to work. It turns out the problem was the small and odd sized screen on our little netbook. We missed that computer as it drew very little power from the vans battery. We found out later the problem was the N1MM configuration screen had a missing button off the bottom of the screen, and the N1MM folks changed the default screen size to solve the problem. They are very good at responding to these sorts of problems! This year we tested N1MM and the netbook thoroughly before heading out, and had no problems with it.



The K3 and a CMOS-3 keyer did the CW job for us again. We had two large deep cycle batteries and a smaller gel cell battery for power for the rig. There were no problems with battery power for the whole 12 hours. Well, in fact when you subtract the move and the setup, we operated for about  $9 \frac{1}{2}$  hours of the contest period.

One little mishap that did occur involved the radials. We had made 9 X 25 foot radials with banana plugs and plastic wind up jigs, that could not be found at the first setup! Panic and blame to VE1ZAC for leaving them behind. However, we did have some extension cords and a lightweight 40M dipole with 300 ohm twinlead that were promptly chopped up into radials. They worked fine at the Musquodoboit Park site. When packing up to move, didn't we find the bag of radials? Yup, they were covering in the bottom of the food box. We did get to use them at the 4 county site. All forgiven.



Here I have just discovered the missing radials from the first setup! Oops.

This 30 foot vertical with radials, stub and SGC230 auto tuner are the favoured portable antenna at VE1ZAC for 80M to 6M. Very lightweight and easy to setup on the ground or strap to a car rack. It takes less than 10 minutes to set it up.



The log was thinner this year, but steadier in some ways. A couple of US hams found us everywhere and band-moved us several times for extra multipliers. At the beginning of the run on the four county site, there were a lot of repeat requests for the complex four county exchange we were sending, but then the requests really died down and the ops were working us quickly. We found out later that someone had spotted us on the cluster and entered the 4 county exchange in the notes section. After that, the callers believed it when we sent back four counties, it seems. 40M and 20M were the work horse bands this year. Propagation wasn't terrific. Very little Eu DX like the run we had last year on 40M late in the evening. We worked a few Eu stations but 40M wasn't very hot when we closed up shop at 9PM. The bulk of our contacts were the SE, NE, and midWest states. A decent handful of Ontario and Quebec stations, and very few Maritimers. Probably because of our vertical and the skip zone. Maritimers included VE9MCC, VE9MC and VE9CRM.

Bruce, VE1NB, the MCC scorer, fooled with our logs a while after the contest to figure out the best way to score the individual site logs, and in the end it looks like we were in the 16,000 + point category. Here is a 'not' official summary.

Band	QSO's	Pts	Multipliers
40 m	16	32	13
20 m	35	70	22
15 m	2	4	2
Totals	53	106	37

We never went to 80 meters, 10 m or 6 m, and never looked for any SSB contacts. Probably we should have. Mostly we ran, and worked the bejeezuz out of the poor little CMOS-3 keyer !

Jeff personal notes:

The extras included lots of black flies, and mosquitoes for a while, plus Ron's wife made us another great pot of chili. Might have been a few cigars lit up to beat back the black flies. And, Ron's van decided to have over heating and coolant problems all the way back. The return trip turned into an overnight adventure for Ron. He is a real trooper. I hope the van is going to be in good shape for next year. We would like to do a few more stops and use just the one vehicle. This VW van is really well setup for a rover contest operation.