

2008 VHF/UHF contests – the trials and tribulations of contesting

an in-depth report by Pieter ZR6AHT

When the going gets tough, PARC perseveres

During the third full weekend in September, the final leg of the VHF/UHF contest was held. Once again the PARC competed and we had a title to defend. Being the category winners of 2007 and having a near disastrous first leg, we had to do something to defend our reputation.

First leg: March 22/23

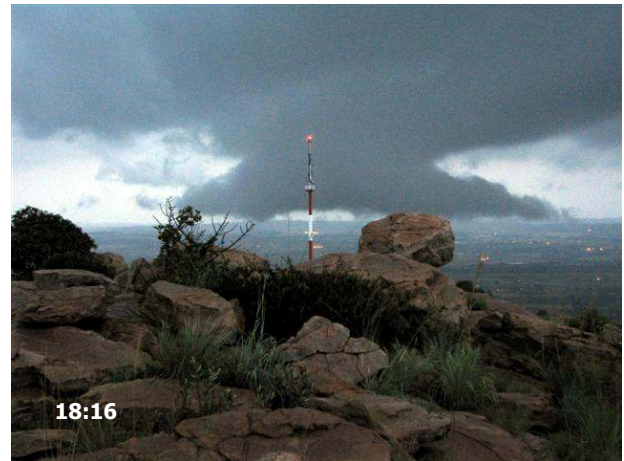
The pictures of the first leg will speak for themselves! A massive "cut-off low" hit Gauteng during the weekend while PARC was camping on the mountain near the Donkerhoek mine, 30km east of Pretoria.



The rain started pouring down from about 17h00 Saturday and continued right through the night and the next day.

After an estimated 50mm of soaking rain, the decision was taken to pack up and head home for some dry clothes and hot coffee.

Everything was soaking wet! However we managed to win the leg with limited number of contacts made in about 4 hours.



At 08h00 the next morning the decision was taken to pack up as it was raining non-stop. Needless to say *we were soaking wet and cold.*

To all the team members, Lynette-ZR6LHT, Hans-ZR6HVG, Willie-ZR6WGR, Pierre-ZS6PJH and Pieter ZR6AHT a big thanks, you all deserve a merit for courage!

Second leg: September 19/20

Highly motivated we met early Saturday morning, 19th Sept, at the Donkerhoek site for the second and last leg of the contest.

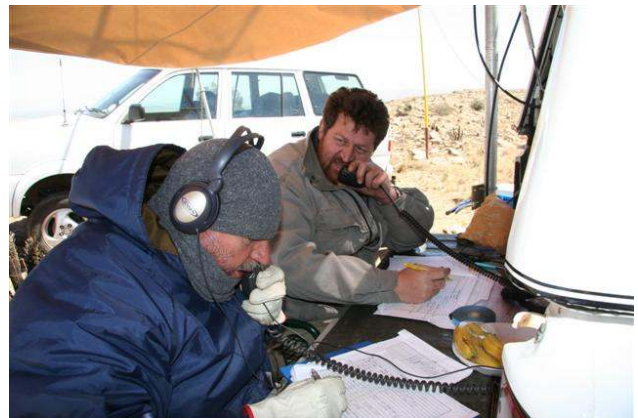
Min het ons geweet wat vir ons wag! Antennas is gemonteer, maste is opgetrek en toe begin die wind waai, en die wind waai sonder ophou! Lynette het op 'n stadium die anemometer (windspoedmeter) uit gepluk en 'n paar lesings geneem. Met tye was daar 'n pieke gemeet van 35km/uur.

Maar saam met die wind uit die weste kom daar toe ook besoekers aan, Lourens - ZS6KRT en Hannes – ZU6HDT. Almal luister aandagtig toe Pierre kontak maak met die 11 jaar oue Mitchell ZU6M, dit word later 'n QSO nadat meer as net die nodige ruitverwysings en seinsterkes uit geruil is. Wel gedaan Mitchell, hou so aan.

Later die middag soos die son sak en die wind draai na die suide, tref die tweede plaag ons: KOUE gemoduleer teen 20km/uur! Teen 21h00 besluit ons om te gaan inkruipe nadat die "occasional" kontakte ook begin opdroog het. Al die frekwensies was stil, ons was ook stil en stokstyf van die koue.



Improvised brake lock



Hans het probeer water kook vir koffie op die gasstofie maar was nie baie suksesvol nie as gevolg van die wind wat die vlam bly doodwaai. Baie traag het ons die volgende oggend ontwaak, begroet met 'n termometer wat op 4 grade gestaan het, binne Hans se voertuig, en die wind waai nog sonder ophou!

Luckily the contacts started rolling in from about 7h30 the next morning and there were a rejuvenated spirit among the stiff and cold team members, specially after the contact made on 1296Mhz with Carl - ZS6CBQ in Krugersdorp. After contact was establish on 10w the power was reduced to 3w, maintaining voice on FM and SSB, at a distance of 79km.

In general participation was very disappointing, contacts on all the bands were considerably down except for 1296Mhz. New kids on the bloc on 1296 were Johan ZS6JPL and Pine ZS6OB.

With the clock ticking towards 12h00 the end was in sight, but the wind was still blowing to such an extent that we had to request backup to get the main mast down. Backup came in the form of Lourens ZSKRT who assisted us with the winch on his vehicle to slowly let the mast down.

To all the team members, Craig ZS6RH and family, Lynette ZR6LHT, Hans ZR6HVG, Pierre ZS6PJH and Pieter ZR6AHT, you have established yourselves as a formidable team that can work together under any conditions and we eagerly await the outcome of the 2008 results. Thanks to all of you out there that made contact with us during this year. Last a big thanks to Johan ZS6JPL and Pine ZS6OB for the equipment that was made available to us during the year.

Beaming into the future --2009

What was disappointing was the number of contacts made with our own club members. Apart from personal satisfaction, winning this competition, is also winning it for PARC. This can only be achieved with the participation of all the members.

For those of you who have never participated in a field station, the scale of operations before the first contact can be made is huge, not to mention the financial burden. Personal satisfaction will always be the key motivator for success in any sport or event.

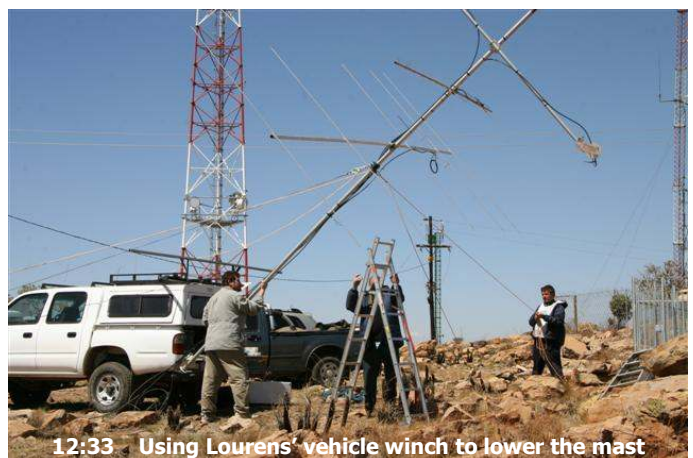
For the next year let us all see this as a chance to test your own operating skills and your station's functionality. This does not just imply making contacts from your home station. Your mobile can also qualify as a station. Turning back the clock many years, during the late 80's Chris Burger ZS6EZ and his team used a chopper to do some grid hopping, setting up a small station at various high sites. It will be a great day if his can be achieved again in the future.

Earlier, mention was made about the financial implication. The monetary value of a well equipped VHF/UHF field station can easily reach R100k. This can only be achieved with the merger of equipment and resources from a group of radio amateurs.

This PLEA for participation extends far beyond the boundaries of PARC members but to every other radio club and individual radio amateur in South Africa. Maybe it is time to revisit the rules and dates of the contest - only you can tell us.

I will prepare a number of proposed rule changes for publication in WATTS, which can be in turn be debated at a future club meeting. Also on the cards for the new year is a slide show and discussion on setting up a field station for contests.

73's



12:33 Using Lourens' vehicle winch to lower the mast