Signals From The Point

Official Newsletter of the Caribbean Contesting Consortium
Editor: W0CG

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ARRL DX SSB Contest Report

Led by CCCer N1ZZ, the team from the Platinum Coast Amateur Radio Society (PCARS), Melbourne, Florida, reactivated PJ2T one year after their M/M win in 2020. They were the last team to operate from here before the pandemic and the first to return a year later.

It appears from claimed scores that this team kicked off PJ2T's post-pandemic operation in fine style, posting not only the high Multi/Multi score, but making the most QSOs in the world from our Signal Point shack.

L-R Vince (K4JC), Dan (N1ZZ), Don (AF4Z), Geoff (W0CG), and Walter (WB5ZGA).

This was Vince's first trip to Curacao, and at the end of the operation both he and Walter opted to become CCC members (more follows).

This team did an excellent job on the air, and were particularly rugged at putting in very large numbers of hours on the air with minimal sleep. Conditions were shaky compared to the CW weekend, but the team pressed on. 10 never opened except for a handful of QSOs in TX, one NM, and one AL, and the high bands were noisy with an auroral buzz all day Sunday. But everyone had the same difficulties, and this team's persistence enabled us to come out on top. Here is the line score (claimed) from 3830.

160:	364	49
80:	718	54
40:	2372	59
20:	2719	59
15:	2263	54
10:	21	3

Total: 8457 278 Total Score = 7,044,798

Notably, the team's leader, long time CCC member Dan Gravereaux (below) had his 82nd birthday at the QTH on March 3. He is showing NO SIGN of slowing down or of letting up on life. During the night shifts he handled 160 and 80, alternating operating positions and harvesting Qs on topband at the top of each hour.

N1ZZ contesting on 160

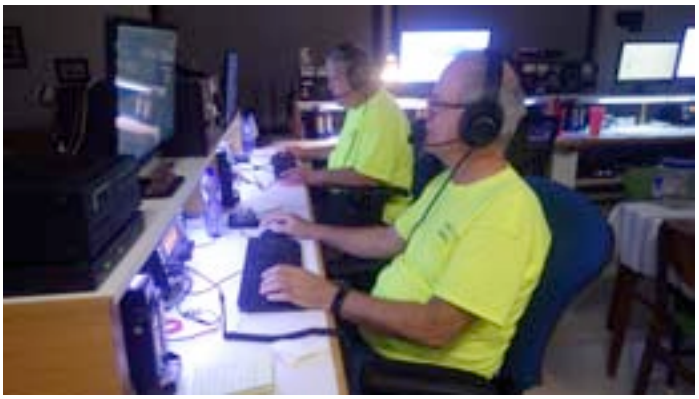
The photo (next page) shows me firing up the candles on Dan's cake (thanks Dorothy), one for each of his two years into the 80s.

N1ZZ's 82nd birthday, March 3, 2021.

Not to be outdone, WB5ZGA turned 64 on March 9, and we had a cheesecake to help in his celebration. Here's Walter serving up the ultra-high calorie birthday cake.

WB5ZGA on his 64th birthday.

Besides eating cake, we really did operate the contest. Here are Walter on 20 (foreground) and Vince on 40 (background) early in the contest.



Here's the team immediately after the contest, with Dorothy front and center in the position of honor because she kindly fed all six of us every meal, every day, for nine days, including all of the meal planning and shopping.

L-R K4JC, N1ZZ, Dorothy Dahlgren, WB5ZGA, AF4Z immediately at the end of the contest.

Finally, a team photo just prior to their departure for the easy, one-hop trip back home. This was the third year PCARS ops have handled the ARRL SSB contest. They are already signed up for 2022, and hoping to welcome Pete and other CCC members back along with them.

L-R: AF4Z, W0CG, N1ZZ, K4JC, WB5ZGA on departure day.

Travel Notes: How to Get Into Curacao

Getting into Curacao (and back out) is easy, even in the presence of COVID requirements. Dorothy and I went to our local Coeur d Alene hospital on Friday afternoon, February 12, for our tests, which were free with appointments. We launched off for Curacao at 3:30 AM Sunday morning, the 14th, and our test results showed up online by the time we got to our room at the Miami Airport Hotel that night after a stop in PHX. We uploaded the COVID reports to the Curacao web site, and filled out a simple tracking form, both of which are easy on their professionally done web site.

Here's our taxi driver depositing us at the Spokane (Washington) airport very, very early Sunday morning. He's a good sport to say the least, showing up even ahead of time to pick us up at home at 3:20 AM.

Arriving at GEG (Spokane) at 4:20 AM February 14.

The flight to Curacao was smooth and comfortable, arriving early to a quiet airport where we were the only flight on the line. Inprocessing works just as it always has, and looks the same also, except that the passport lady takes a look at the COVID report after checking the passport, and very quickly we were in baggage claim. At the time of our arrival our COVID tests were 68 hours old, close to the 72 hour limit, but that's because of our extremely long duration trip from the Pacific Northwest. The Florida guys arrived with time to burn on their COVID tests.

Because our flight was the only arrival at the time, luggage inspection was thorough, and I had to pay $71 duty on the Ring cameras and a computer monitor in my luggage. It was a slow process, but the amount was very reasonable. Our rental car awaited us at the airport, and we were off to Cost-U-Less for groceries and then home to Signal Point.

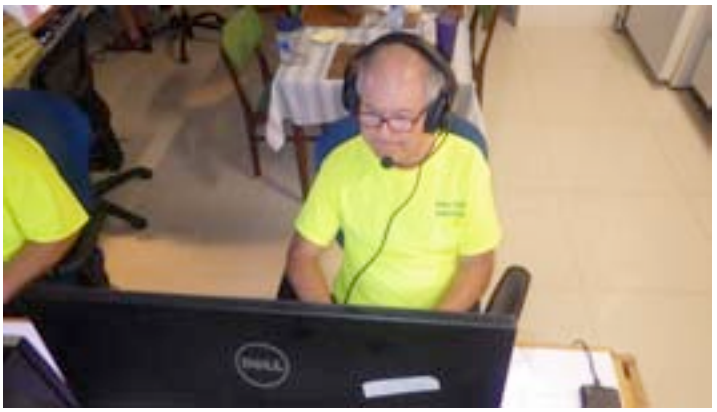
A quiet afternoon for our arrival at Hato Airport because we got in before the big Europe flights landed.

Returning to the U.S. requires a negative COVID test, but it is quick, cheap, and easy because an antigen test is acceptable to the U.S. The PCARS guys made appointments on-line the day before at ADC Labs, showed up for the test, and were in and out quickly at a cost of $20 each. The test results showed up in their E-mail within minutes. They were asked to show that test result entering the check-in area at Hato Airport, and upon boarding, but did not have to show it on arrival in MIA on the theory that if American Airlines let them board in Curacao, their test result was acceptable. It's fast and easy.

By the way, Cost-U-Less is now *very weird* because they have been bought out by a Dutch company. The store is much cleaner and neater, but about ¼ of the shelves are filled now with Dutch products, and we found the store less appealing than before.

Welcome New CCC Member!

I am thrilled to welcome Walter Aucoin Jr., WB5ZGA, to Full Member status in CCC. He lives in Melbourne, Florida, and is a member of PCARS. Walter has been here three times before, is an excellent SSB contest operator, an all around great guy, and a tower climber. This just happened yesterday, so I will have much more news about this in the next newsletter. He originally hails from Norlenz, so he can cook wonderful spicy dinners.


WB5ZGA running on 20 early in ARRL DX SSB.

We also have a verbal commitment from Vince, K4JC, that he will become a CCC member for the upcoming CCC Year 22. Vince is also a proficient SSB contester, and will help balance our modes in future CCC contest efforts.

Operating Report: ARRL DX CW 2021

Here are the comments we posted on 3830 after the CW weekend. Thanks to my being able to get my first vaccination shot early (thank you Nassau County, Florida)\, we got here in time to un-mothball the station and get on the air for the ARRL CW contest. Amazingly, the outcome was a second place claimed finish in Multi/Single.

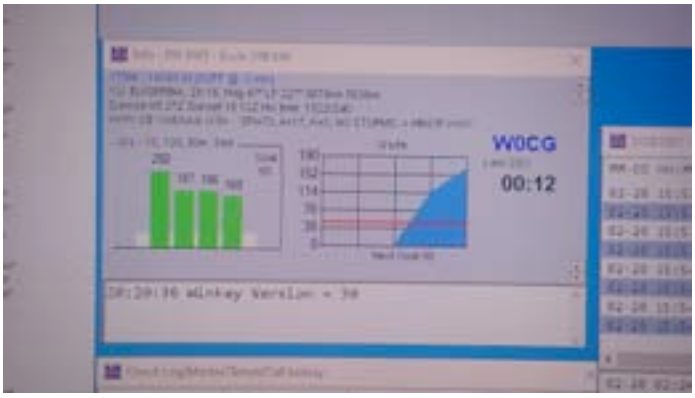
HUGE THANKS to Gene (KB7Q) and Jeff (K8ND) who jumped in with me to operate PJ2T as a Multi/Single in ARRL DX CW. We arranged this literally at the last minute, two hours before the

contest, via a Zoom meeting. Gene and Jeff participated in the M/S via remote from Bozeman and Columbus, and I was on site at Signal Point, Curacao. There was no plan, no operating schedule, and no competitive goal. After such a long time away we just wanted to get something, anything, on the air and raise the PJ2T flag.

Gene started at 0000Z on 40 via the remote. Following that, the three of us negotiated shift by shift via Slack chat, taking time on the air as our schedules allowed. I did all of 160 and 10 and some 20 from this shack, Gene did 80 and 40 and some 20 remotely, and Jeff mainly 15 with some 20 mixed in. It all worked out. Neither Jeff nor Gene had planned to devote time to the contest this weekend, and I'm extremely grateful to them for rearranging their schedules to be able to put in time on the air via the remote. We certainly were not on for all 48 hours, and did not plan to be, but we felt that under the circumstances any showing would be a good showing, and that line of thinking propelled us through the weekend.

Conditions were phenomenal. Signals were crazy loud down here all weekend on all bands, and 160 was particularly quiet the first night, as I gloried in the sound of radio noise and CW, being on the air for the first time in a year. I have zero station at our restricted condo at home in Idaho, so for 12 months I had not even heard even a dead band, much less real signals. This weekend was like an elixir for me.

10 opened big on Saturday afternoon, and I handled that band on site. Here's a shot of the N1MM data showing good run rates on 10 CW on Saturday. The pileups on 10 were epic, with a wall of 20 over 9 callers at almost all times. I did most of the 10 run with the bottom only of our 5 over 5 stack because the top antenna was still on the roof a year after I rebuilt it in February of 2020.



Gene and Jeff did the heroic part, dealing with data dropouts and slowdowns here and there on the remote, but hung in. We may have sounded slow, but it was a big pileup on nearly every "over," and grabbing a callsign out of a wall of 20 over 9 signals is a chore, pleasant a problem as that is.

Here's the final claimed tally.

Call: PJ2T
Operator(s): KB7Q K8ND W0CG
Class: M/S HP
Operating Time (hrs): 35

160: 387 51
80: 566 53
40: 971 57
20: 1148 57
15: 1336 56
10: 518 42

Total: 4926 316 Total Score = 4,666,056

Geoff and Dorothy Reopen Signal Point

This past year has been terribly stressful in all ways, and no less so for the owner of unreachable real estate 4200 miles away. We had received some photos from Zoom, Brett (PJ2BR) visited the QTH once, and our Ring surveillance cameras stayed up flawlessly all year. But that all said, we had little to no idea what to expect pulling into the QTH after over a year's absence.

Shockingly, we found things to be in much better condition than expected. There were no wire antennas down. One side of the driven element of the Pacific Tribander had broken off and was lying in the yard. But all other beams looked and tested good. The Ridge antennas and feedlines and the Beverages were all still good and operational. The house was in decent shape thanks to the very careful mothballing by KB7Q and Joyce in March 2020, and because Zoom had cleaned, plugged in the fridge, and made it look welcoming here. The yard was grown over with waist-high wabi weeds, but we had expected that from Zoom's photos via WhatsApp. See the Europe tower, following page, submerged in weeds.

Europe tower base, February 18, 2021

The moment of maximum stress and drama was opening the equipment safe. Would the battery still be good nine months after PJ2BR replaced it? Presto, I entered the combination and click, open came the door. Hugely relieved, I took out four K3s and four PCs and set to work assembling the station, made easier by Gene's thoughtful labeling of all the boxes.

All the radios and computers came up without problems. I took the time to open up every amplifier, not wanting to apply HV after who knows what had had a year long opportunity to move in. That all went well except for AL-1200 (5) at Station 1. Immediately at turn on the step start resistor exploded, and its remains burst into three inch high flames. No kidding. Dorothy is my witness. Being the clever engineer that I am I lunged at the "off" switch and set that amp aside for troubleshooting. (The story on that follows – we have it working now.) Dorothy helped me heft a couple other AL-1200s around, and soon all four stations were assembled, tested, and working correctly. Amazing, after a whole year of heat and humidity in the house. This is a far way away from the old days when we could only get a few months of service out of a used PC and only a couple of years from Kenwood and Icom transceivers. Modern SDR circuit construction is much simpler physically, and thus much more survivable in our salty air.

There will be equipment failures going forward as we resume hard use, but the return to Signal Point was not nearly as bad as I had expected.

We arrived to find several dead trees and plants, but that was also expected because the irrigation system had been down for nine months and beyond Zoom's ability to fix. That's all fixed also now.

Looking Around in the Neighborhood

As you know, 2019 was a year of great trauma in the neighborhood because the new owners of the Sunset Waters Beach Resort Hotel tore down the buildings entirely, raped the ground with bulldozers all the way up to Signal Point's west wall, destroyed our US/JA Beverage and buried feedline, cut "roads" into the upper hill, breaking out part of our Europe Beverage, and came within inches of wrecking the feedline to the Ridge. Now, much later, precisely nothing has happened on that project. The vegetation has come roaring back, and that's a very welcome development because it protects our antenna sites. This view looks toward the old hotel from the QTH, showing the return of, thankfully, thick weeds.

This means that we can again use the Flats to install the DXE four square on contest weekends, and can even reinstall the "lower" US/JA Beverage. I have reclaimed the 25 feet or so outside the wall as a side driveway and parking spot, and piled up cuttings to define that area.

We still have the mountain of rubble across the street that used to be a hotel, but it too has grown a coat of weeds and doesn't look so bad. Heavy weeds have re-grown across the street where our feedlines run to the Ridge antennas, and the white RX antenna distribution box across the road is intact and perfectly functional. Nothing has happened on the neighborhood entry gate, still awaiting installation of a drive motor. It is quiet again in the neighborhood, and again feels very safe and secure.

The Attack of the Wabi

I was acutely aware that the thick sticky wabi in the yard was a threat to tires. We did all we could to avoid driving on that stuff when we arrived, but alas we ended up with a flat on February 19, sadly discovered when we tried to go to Sol Food for a relaxing pizza lunch. So instead of eating pizza I spent the next couple of hours dealing with the flat tire (next page).

This was as far as I dared go on Day One.

Mounting the spare prior to going to Barber for tire repair, February 19, 2021.

A quick trip to the shop in Barber and a silly cheap $6 charge to patch FOUR holes in the right front tire and we were back in business.

Tower Splints

Here are two of the new half-shells being held in place on a leg of the Rohn 45 US/JA tower. I took a lot of care to be sure that these were correct when I had them made in Idaho, but nothing is ever certain until tested. As you see they fit perfectly, and we now have four complete sets of stainless steel splints on hand for the US tower. Thanks to Dorothy and her hands for this test fit.

PJ2A Rotator Work – VERONA

Making good on a longstanding commitment to PJ2BR, we went to town the week before ARRL DX SSB to put in a new rotor at VERONA, PJ2A. WB5ZGA and K4JC joined in this project.

Unfortunately the new rotor is a Yaesu, and does not fit the existing homemade mounting plate, nor would it grip the mast above. Walter and I worked hard on the tower for a couple of hours trying to work around these problems, finally declaring failure.

Brett and his son Joshua suggested a fix, and I will return to do the install once Brett fabricates an adapter.

WB5ZGA working on the VERONA rotor problem.

A very not happy W0CG after too long on the difficult to climb crankup tower at PJ2A, VERONA.

Microwave Oven

I was very surprised that all four air conditioners, the microwave oven, the water heater, and the refrigerator all came up working OK when we arrived. But that optimism was misplaced because the microwave oven died after about a week. This was frustrating because we got it new in December 2019. As you see on the following page, I dug into it (after drilling out cabinet screws) and was pleasantly surprised to find an excellent circuit diagram inside the cover. After some testing and tracing it was apparent that one of the three door switches was not “making” when the door closed.

As I prepared to permanently bypass this switch I discovered that jostling the connections brought this Proctor Silex box back to life, and it has been good since. How hard could this be? It's just a very simple radio transmitter!

Ridge Inspection and Maintenance

K4JC and WB5VGA joined me for the first trip up the Ridge in over a year. We found things to be in good condition, untangled the driven elements on the Bencher Skyhawk, tuned the antenna for 80 SSB, and inspected the full length of the Europe Beverage.

Looking closely below you may see the section of the Europe Beverage that W8WTS replaced after the bulldozers took it out. All is still intact with the Beverage, and the dozers are long gone.

W1BIH Legacy Chairs

AF4Z and N1ZZ spent several hours one afternoon rehabilitating several broken W1BIH chairs. THANKS Dan and Don.

Crawford

Steve seems to be gone, either passing into kitty heaven or hopefully moving into a nice penthouse in Amsterdam with an adoring new family. The little guy in the photo is Crawford, who latched onto Signal Point as a kitten in 2019. I had him fixed at that time and got him his shots. Incredibly, he is still around. He's not as cerebral as Steve, but Crawford has a great purring machine and likes people. He follows me like a puppy on my wee hours walks to the old hotel site.

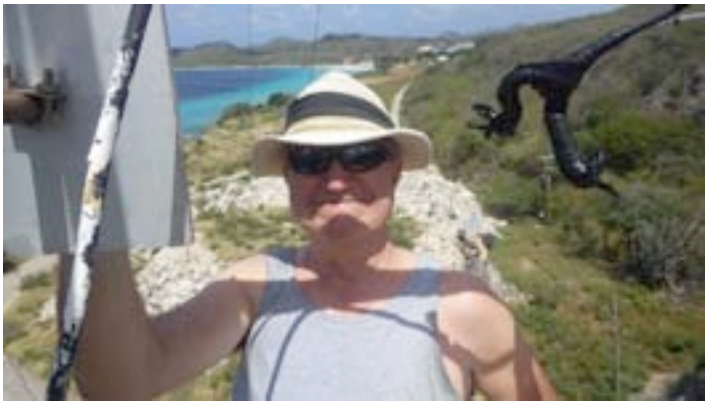
Pacific Tribander Repair

As Dorothy and I approached the QTH riding in from the airport, it was apparent that everything was still in the air except for half of the driven element of the Pacific Tribander. If anything was going to break, this was the best that could happen because the element was reachable from the tower, and the antenna would not have to come down for repair.

Several days later after hacking out the brush in the backyard I found the element half in the weeds. It had landed badly, and the tip was bent about 45 degrees. The element had broken off cleanly at the point where

it attached to the feedpoint cradle on the boom. This antenna is ancient. It's an old Mosley trap four element. N8LGP got it for the club second hand in the late 1990s from someone in Akron. We shipped it to the island and it ended up serving as the first Ridge Tribander for several years. When we switched to triplexer operation we needed a non-trapped beam because of the 4.5 KW that will be hitting the traps, and put up the Bencher Skyhawk donated by K2PLF (SK). The antenna was then repurposed for the Pacific. It would not be an easy repair because it is so old and the parts are specialized Mosley.

Prior to the ARRL SSB contest WB5ZGA went up the tower with me, with Don and others assisting on the ground. The nuts and screws came out easily because I had put on anti-seize when the antenna was rehabilitated when we swapped in the new Europe tower. We easily lowered the remaining side of the driven element to the ground. Here's Walter in place in the tower.



WB5ZGA at the Pacific Tribander**.**

A couple of days later the crew went to Porto Mari with Dorothy for lunch and a beach swim, and I stayed behind to tackle the repair of the driven element. I thought it was going to be easy, but the job ended up taking the better part of a day and a half.

In the next column you can see the bent element tip connected to the old trap. That tip broke immediately when I tried to straighten it, and worse, the plastic ring at the outboard end of the trap had broken in the fall, and the aluminum wire from the trap to the element also broke. This trap was not repairable.

For years we have had an assortment of Mosley traps on site. WB9Z had worked with me to harvest old Mosley parts at hamfests and from people's junk piles, and we had a big bag of them on site in the backyard wood pile. I dug through the slime, weeds, and bugs in back and found that bag, and amazingly there was an exact replacement trap, 24 turns, in that pile (photo).

Broken trap from the Pacific driven element together with a replacement trap from the PJ2T junk box.

It took a lot more digging through piles of old tubing along the wall line and in back, but I finally found the correct size tubing to replace the broken element tip as well as an insert piece for the inside to strengthen it for the future. After a lot more cutting and drilling and screwing this trap and element tip were finally repaired and ready for service.

Lots of tools and parts involved in repair of the Pacific Tribander.

Now for the problem of the broken element root. Mosley driven elements lie in a plastic cradle across the boom, and are fastened using a screw from the top through the element and down into that cradle. The old outboard screw, at the point of the tubing break, positively would not come out. After too much time wasted with Liquid Plumber and a variety of tools, I finally had to break off the screw and used the angle grinder to remove the screw that as protruding from the cradle so it would be flush with the new element. The rest of that screw is forever embedded in the plastic cradle.

It took seemingly forever to find proper tubing sizes from the junk piles, but finally I had the element pieced back together with the proper dimensions, a stiffener splice piece inside, Penetrox in all the right

places, and everything pop riveted in place using 1/8 inch rivets. All of this was very time consuming.

With the cradle screw gone forever, the only way to remount the element in the cradle was to put a stainless U-bolt over it with the flat strap under the cradle. This element is “hot”, so I used a couple layers of rubber cut from a tire inner tube from the trash pile across the street for insulation. Nearer to the element center I added a pipe strap for additional strength, also with rubber layers for isolation, and put the element back together. Then I found a coax pigtail from the closet with the proper lugs, hooked it up for test, and the driven element looked good on the AA-54 graphic analyzer.

The next day Walter and I went back up with excellent support from the ground guys and re-installed the driven element. This went easily with two people. I reconnected and weatherproofed the coax, and the job was done. Walter was a bit dumbfounded that I did not then rush into the shack to check the antenna, but I was totally confident that it would be good. The next day we made some QSOs on the antenna, and it loaded beautifully on all three bands. Job completed, using jerry rigged construction technique and all parts found in junk piles at and around Signal Point.

We seldom use the Pacific Tribander, but when we need a VK or ZL or something from Oceania they jump out of the radio when you push this button. Also, I have found the antenna very useful for working the West Coast on 10 and 15 late in the afternoons.

WARC Tower Sarcophagus

The 60 foot aluminum tower came with the house. For decades this was John Thompson’s only tower, and it has remained in good condition because it’s aluminum. That tower supports the WARC yagi, the 160 Inv L transmit vertical part, and the 30 meter inv vee. Also, it’s an important waystation for the huge bundle of overhead cables to the Europe tower.

Very long ago somebody tried to crank up that tower without untying the anchor at the top end, and by the time they realized this it was too late and the tower became slightly, but permanently, bent. The cosmetics are a problem but the functionality is not.

The problem is that the base assembly of that tower is all steel, and when we arrived here in 2000 it was horribly rusted and looked totally unreliable. K4LT and W9EFL and I cranked the tower up with our fingers crossed. Nothing broke, but we decided on the spot that this tower would never again be cranked down, and that we would even put some light guys on it. Following that, I built forms and poured a triangular shaped sarcophagus about 20 inches high, encasing all of the suspect base assembly in concrete and thus protecting it from ever failing.

Now, in 2021, the remaining steel structure above the sarcophagus has become very, very shaky, and I have been expecting the whole thing to fail any month now, bringing down that tower. Thus, this is now an emergency, as you can see below.

Closeup of massive rust under the steel support legs of the WARC tower**.**

As you can see from the photo above, the condition of this steel is terrible, very near failure. I have been coating it with epoxy for years to slow this process, but the time has come for drastic action. The only solution is another sarcophagus. The new concrete casing will sit atop the triangular concrete base in this photo, extending 32 inches higher such that only aluminum comes out the top and all of the failing parts shown in yellow and blue below will be stabilized forever.

The failing WARC tower base, coated in gold epoxy primer in preparation for pouring concrete. The next day a finish coat of grey epoxy was put on.

Prepping for the concrete pour was very material and labor intensive. Mike Maley (next door neighbor) very kindly gave me a partial sheet of ¾ inch plywood that was surplus to his needs. That took care of two sides of the triangular forms. I dug out pieces from the hotel

junk pile across the road and used three hunks to piece together the third side of the forms, seen in the photo during construction.

This old crank up tower used a screw mechanism. That screw was horribly rusted, so I tore into it with the angle grinder and cut it off so it would not protrude above the top of the new concrete cap.

Cutting off the drive screw.

Geoff dumping one of 24 wheelbarrows full of sand and gravel at the staging point.

The calculation showed that we'd need about 0.6 cubic meters of concrete. That's a lot of material. Asking around, it turned out that Dirk, our across the street neighbor, had some sand and gravel that he did not plan to use. It took almost 10 days until he gave me the go-ahead to come into his yard and get it, and when that call came I rushed out with the shovel and wheelbarrow. 24 heavy loads later I had marshalled a pile of the needed material across the road (photo) from our gate entrance. Dorothy worried over me and kept bringing water! This work shaved off a couple pounds for sure. I gave Dirk Nafl 150 for this material in appreciation. This saved us making many trips to town to buy and haul premix to Signal Point. One day while the SSB crew was here we dropped into Kooyman and picked up 7 sacks of Portland, and finally all of the materials were on site.

It took me two or so full days of hard work to fabricate the forms. We had lots of 2x6 and 2x4 lumber in the backyard "keep" pile, and I had bought a couple boxes of screws and masonry anchors for the forms. Half a meter of concrete is a LOT of hydrostatic pressure, so the forms have to be very, very stout. I used the 2x6s as backers for the plywood sheets, and then bonded the triangular 2x6 form backer pieces to each other at the corners using 3.5 inch x 5/8 bolts left over from the Europe tower project. (These were here because we used different guy brackets than we had expected.) The result was very, very strong forms built over two days after too many hours of hot work in the intense sun.

Here's a look at the forms prior to installing side three. You can see the prep of epoxy primer and finish paint, applied over two days for proper curing.

Inside the forms on the WARC tower.

The photo on the next page shows the detail at the nine corners of the back braces, using massive bolts to prevent bursting of the forms.

Mating of the outer form braces with heavy duty hardware.

Below is the finished product, ready for concrete. Note the 1x3 legs that support the considerable vertical wright of the forms, and the triangular outer braces made mainly from 2x6s. This will not burst!

WARC base tower forms, ready for the pour.

This newsletter will go to press before the pour, so I'll E-mail you the result photos. I've arranged to have two young and strong guys to come Monday evening, the 15th, to hand mix the 27 or so wheelbarrows of concrete and dump it into the forms using buckets and ladders. Doing that myself is pretty much out of the question because I couldn't move fast enough to keep the concrete viable. Good use of some of your station support dollars.

Concrete and form work does not seem very ham radioish, but this is imperative if we are to save this tower. We depend on it for 160 TX, WARC, and 30 meters. Losing it would be a disaster, and without this project that tower would have failed soon! I have had this project on the schedule for four years – finally it is getting done.

New Sliding Glass Doors Coming

My deal with Dorothy was that if she were ever able to spend extended time with me in Curacao, we would get serious about moving the house a notch or two above "filthy man-cave." That time arrived with her retirement last October.

Job one is to try to replace the rotted out and barely operable sliding glass doors. I had investigated doing this many times over the years, but our rough openings are non-standard, and I could never find products that would work. Dorothy jumped onto the phone and web a couple of weeks ago and did in depth research and discovered that several companies have recently popped up on the island that make sliding doors to custom specs.

On March 10 we visited five different potential suppliers, very impressed to find that two of them are so new that they were building showrooms when we walked in. One of the candidate companies is shown below, Curacao's Best Windows and Doors.

Above: Curacao's Best Windows and Doors

Vermaas (below) was clearly the Cadillac of island door companies, with fabulous products and not so fabulous prices.

Above: Vermaas Windows and Doors

Our third stop was Wiltraco. We spent time with an extremely competent sales rep whose English was perfect, toured their on site factory, and met the production manager. This was the clear choice, and by Friday we had returned to Wiltraco and ordered two custom made high end sliding glass doors, installed,

one for the East Porch and one the East Bedroom, paying the 65% preorder deposit. If this goes well we will do two more next year. They are expensive, but we're thrilled to finally have a trustworthy and professional source here. It will probably be October until these will be installed because COVID has slowed down their inflow of raw materials from the continent.

Wiltraco also carries a complete array of parts, as you can see from the roller assemblies in their showroom (next photo).

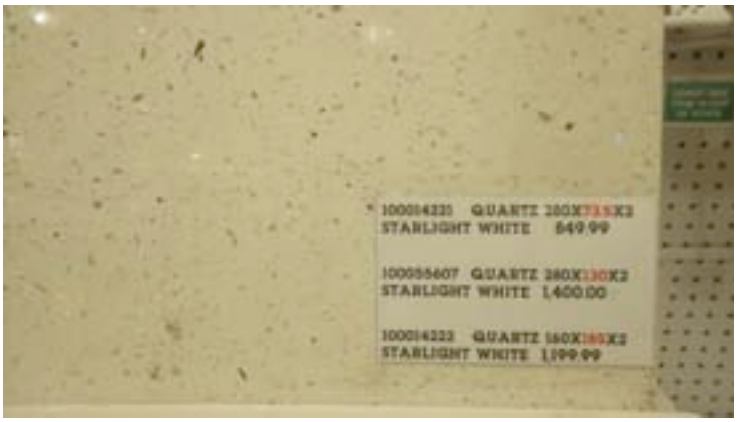
They also referred us to a sliding door expert who does contract work, and that guy has already been to the house and Sonny will return in a week and replace the bad rollers in the main West door and a couple in the East Sunroom PGT doors.

Sample of the great availability of door and window parts at Wiltraco.

Major Kitchen Improvements In the Works

You have the idea. Some major kitchen improvements are also coming. The next column shows the quartz countertop we ordered for the kitchen, Starlight White 280 x 73.5 cm. That countertop slab will be delivered here (March 15). We are assured that this material will withstand all forms of abuse, including soldering irons. Dorothy is still shopping for a sink and faucet set, and once that is all decided we will take steps to get one of the Kooyman recommended contractors here to do the cutting, polishing, and install. We'll also be getting new backsplash tile, but that is easy so I'll do it myself. Signal Point will look better and better on your future visits, and Dorothy is not done, now shopping for a new main room table and many other goodies that will make the place much more welcoming.

I've never seen quartz countertop material. Maybe it will oscillate and glow when we're on the air?



Signal Point's upcoming new quartz kitchen counter.

Repairs to Front Gate

We got the front gate in 2005. Previously, that entrance was two heavy mahogany gates, hinged at each side and opened manually. Cribal Automatismos came and welded the two gate halves together and installed a track drive and motor. That excellent Italian motor has performed flawlessly since, but it was a casualty of the COVID year and had quit working correctly. This is a professionally run company, and they sent a technician within a week of my request. He went off without comment with the control circuit board in his truck. That board returned after repair on March 15, the date of this newsletter, and the gate is back to normal. It would be wonderful if other Curacao contractors and companies were this straightforward to deal with.

Anonymous Gift to CCC

On January 30 I had the wonderful surprise of a check from a CCC member who wished to remain anonymous. The $1100 was designated for the real estate fund. This has been a gigantic help with the many startup and repair costs to the QTH, including for example the repairs to the front gate controller (above), a new irrigation control computer, kits to make new window screens, replacements for dead plants, tons of depleted cleaning supplies, fees to a sliding glass door specialist, spraying around the house to control pests that were killing trees, replacements for burned out bulbs and fluorescent starters, payment through Zoom for two helpers he had here to clean before our arrival, a share of the annual security camera server fee, and dollars paid on deposit toward new sliding glass doors and kitchen improvements. It was especially gracious of the donor to designate these funds for the house, inasmuch as there has been zero coming in because of no contest activity, and because the station support fund is in pretty good shape. THANKS mystery man! You have made a real difference.

Irrigation Repair and New Trees and Plants

This is on me. Many people would probably be just as happy with desert plants, native shrubs, and not much of anything growing at Signal Point. But I love the tropical "look," and that requires greenery, palm plants, and things that grow and blossom.

And all of that requires water. Almost all of Curacao's rain comes from mid-October through late December. In that time things grow beautifully with Mother Nature's free irrigation system. But in the dry months it is not uncommon to have not one drop of rain from late April until October. Not a drop. Thus, our plants require a drip irrigation system to survive.

The drip system is complex, with about 75 drip heads distributed all over the planter beds and lots of lineal feet of tubing. It requires a bit of periodic maintenance, but taking care of this is beyond Zoom's ability. The system stopped working in mid-summer at the driest time. He phoned me in a panic and said the controller was not working. It should be straightforward to get this handled, but not for our guy. I begged him to manually water the plants with the hose and sent some extra money for that purpose.

Sadly, though, a number of the trees and plants died during the COVID year. I arrived to find that Zoom has removed the irrigation controller from the piping in the laundry room and left everything hanging. Because of that, the washing machine would not fill because there was no water pressure, and we had no flow at all on the hot supply side in the house. I reconnected everything, and that brought back the washer and hot water, but found that the irrigation controller indeed was defunct, opening its valve only a tiny bit, not nearly enough to keep the plants alive. Being stubborn I tore the valve body apart. This unit is a very high quality German product from Gardena, and I figured I could probably fix it. The photo shows the electromagnet body and a rubber membrane valve that is at the heart of this electrical water valve. I applied 9 volts to the magnet, and everything worked as it should, but I still could not get more than a trickle of water flow.

Finally I was forced to conclude that the rubber control membranes in the valve system had become brittle and a bit inflexible, and the very precise mechanical tolerances needed for this unit to work correctly were no longer being met.

N1ZZ to the rescue. I found a good replacement unit on Amazon (below) and had it delivered to Dan's home in Florida. He brought it down in checked luggage. This beautiful new Gardena controller was only $74, much cheaper than in stores here ($350). It installed and programmed in only about 20 minutes, and that and a full day of my labor to rehabilitate all of the tubing and drip heads resulted in everything working perfectly now.

Last week Dorothy and I hit the nursery in town and came home with new plants and starter trees, all of which are now in the ground and providing renewed color and tropical beauty at Signal Point. I of course absorb 100% of the cost of irrigation water from my own budget.

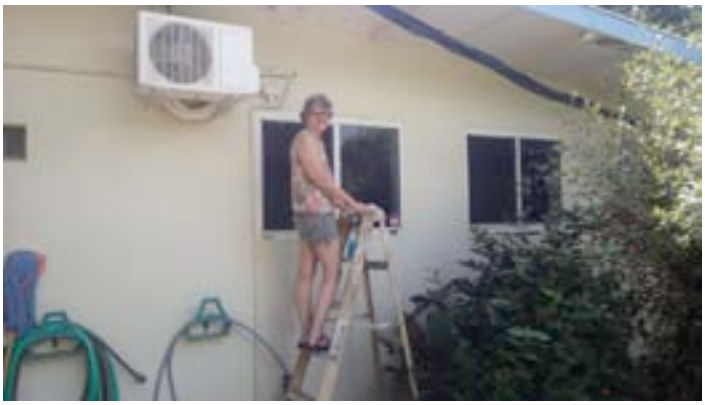
Here's (next page) one of those new plants in the Ocean Pavilion pot. The last one survived nearly 20 years, so here's hoping we will be as lucky with this new one.

Below is the drip system in operation supporting a new plant in a pot on the oceanfront.

Clean Windows and Improved Drapes and Blinds

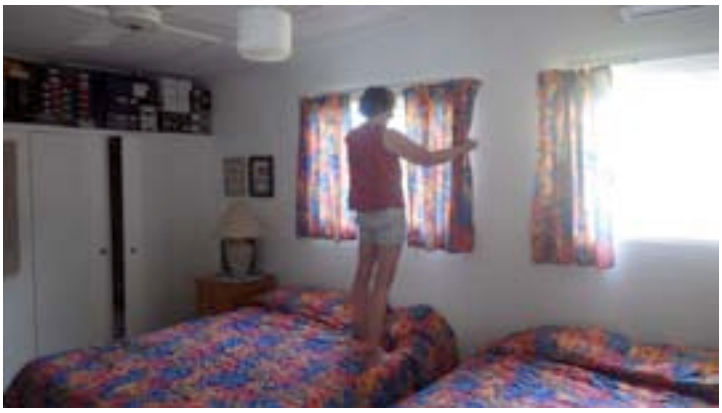
Things were filthy. Dorothy attacked the mess with energy and a smile. The window frames, drapes, and windows themselves in both bedrooms were a horrible mess. We couldn't find the key to get the bars out of the West Bedroom left side window, so I tore into that hasp with the angle grinder, and we put in a new lock.

She took down all the filthy drapes, cleaned everything, and did some touch-up painting. Below she is working on the West Bedroom windows.



Dorothy removed the hopelessly stained and ruined liners in the drapes in that bedroom and then patiently sat for hours hand-stitching new edge seams all around those four drapes.

With the liners removed too much light came through for day sleeping, so we found opaque pull-down blinds in town and installed those together with the re-habbed curtains in the West Bedroom. That space is now clean and habitable thanks to her.



Reinstalling a clean window.

Repair of AL-1200 (5)

N1ZZ and AF4Z troubleshooting AL-1200 (5).

I mentioned earlier that AL-1200 (5) had literally caught fire at its first power-up in over a year. The resistor that caught fire was the 20 ohm step-start resistor. The charging current for the HV electrolytics flows through this resistor for about 20 ms at startup to limit surge current. After that 20 ms a relay is supposed to close, taking the resistor out of the circuit. That relay closure did not happen so the resistor headed for orbit.

N7IR, KB7Q, and N1ZZ and I studied the schematic and concluded that the problem had to be either a bad relay coil or contact or, much worse, a shorted primary in the main transformer. Having about 10,000 other things to do, I put in a replacement amp and set this one aside for the PCARS guys to work on. Dan and Don (AF4Z) quickly ordered replacement parts from Ameritron (they did not arrive in time), and also brought some spares from their own shacks. These two guys worked VERY patiently off and on for three days on this thing, even drawing out part of the schematic by hand to better understand the problem. After a lot of time and patience and some more fried R3s, they found that the problem was the tube! It turned out that the 3CX1200A7 was showing a dead short from plate to ground.

Seeing this, it suddenly all made sense. This short was drawing such massive current at startup that there was not enough voltage to key the relay that bypassed the step start resistor so that resistor was, thankfully, functioning as a slow-blo fuse. We put in one of our spare AL-1200 tubes (the one we bought from W9KNI), fixed a soldering problem with one of the equalizing resistors on the HV board, and all is now perfect with this AL-1200. Our CCC member ND8L has a 3CX1200A7 for sale, and he has put CCC's name on that tube so we can replenish our spares after losing one. THANKS AF4Z and N1ZZ for all their time fixing this linear.

Exterior Lighting

Only two of our six exterior landscaping lights worked on arrival. Re-lamping and cleanup fixed three of these, but the fourth was a two hour project, as you can see from this work box after I drilled out fused screws.

The liquidtite connector to this box had broken off, so I had to cut off some of the conduit, put in a whole new box, and jerry-rig new hardware. It's working now and the terrace looks beautiful at night.

Report on Europe Tower

The new tower entered service on December 4, 2018. At the time we did everything possible to minimize future maintenance, and I am thrilled to report that the tower looks as good as it did on that first day!! This is in contrast to the original Europe tower, which turned brown within six weeks and had needed continuing aggressive maintenance ever since. By golly we did it. The new tower will need new epoxy paint every few years, as expected, but beyond that it looks fabulous, as you can see from the photos.

The W0CG custom Pacific tribander side mount plate and tower members, all in premier condition**.**

Looking up from the Pacific tribander, everything pristine in this third year of service. Whoopee.

The Battle of the Bank, Final

Jeff won. On March 3 I went to Maduro and Curiels bank in town for an appointment with Jeff's contact, prearranged after many, many delays and E-mails. This turned out to be a very formal meeting requiring paperwork, proof of identity, and visits to multiple offices. I deposited $50 into Jeff's account and finally, after months of effort, his on-line account access was unblocked. That worked, for awhile, and now they are requesting more documents from him, some of which requests are duplicates. Incredible.

More Vegetation

Another shot of the tangle of weeds in the backyard. This is all cleaned up now.

PJ2T License Renewal: Lots of Procedure

We're renewing the PJ2T license. Thus far there have been about 20 E-mails with three different people at the Bureau, five phone calls, multiple forms to be submitted including a copy of the excerpt from the Curacao Commercial Register for the Curacao Contesting Club Association, and more payments requested, now totaling over $300. I'll keep you posted. Nothing is ever easy here, but the bureau is being professional and courteous as we work through this together.

W8WTS' February Treasury Balance

The end of February balance in the Station Support fund is $4345.03.

10 Meter Beam Re-Installed

The top half of the 5 over 5 US/JA 10 meter stack started raining aluminum two years ago. When NR0X went up to remove it, the shaking caused more pieces to fall off. You read in an earlier edition of this newsletter that I spent several long, hot days on the roof in February of 2020 completely rebuilding this beam, the elements of which were badly corroded**.** But then COVID arrived and we all had to leave the island, so I left the rebuilt beam parked on the roof of the sunroom.

Enter March 2021 and the PCARS team. WB5VGA is a tower climber and offered to give a hand. We spent much of Friday, the day of the contest, rigging up to put up the antenna, and by late afternoon it was on the tram and ready to go (below).

L-R: AF4Z, Geoff, N1ZZ, and WB5VGA stabilizing the 10 meter yagi antenna on the tram line, March 5, 2021**.**

Here's the antenna riding up the tram, with Walter and me on the tower ready to do the install. Vince, K4JC, was on the pull rope in the backyard (next page).

K4JC, Signal Point's new Human Winch (sorry VE3CX), raising the five element monobander**.**

Everything went quickly and smoothly, and the antenna stack worked perfectly after this project. I thank WB5VGA, whose willingness to climb made this project much easier and safer.

The Tropics Will Eat ANYthing

Long ago I laid in a supply of parts for the lawn mower. In mid-February I needed an air filter, and was shocked to see that some critter had torn open the sealed plastic bag, eaten most of this Briggs and Stratton factory part, and left little but goo in the bag (second photo).

This used to be a foam air filter. The tropics turned it into trash. Thanks to N1ZZ who brought replacement filters in his luggage.

Member Spotlight? Missing

Here's hoping that this space will be filled next month with a radio bio from some of our newest members.

Finally, here's a reminder of the tropical beauty of this place, Dorothy having a quiet breakfast in the Crow's Nest. We will be here until April 16, working hard to make the QTH fully ready to support upcoming contest teams.We can't wait to welcome all of you back here.

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