

OE9/G3VGR/P QRP in Austria

By Dave Aldridge G3VGR

Although I have a few QRP portable rigs made from kits, I rarely take them on my travels, as I never seem to find much time or inclination to use them. This year, I decided to make an effort and used the club's Antenna Night to test out a 40m station. The rig is a DSWII-40 from Small Wonder Labs. It's a 40m CW transceiver with an output of 3 watts when run from 10 AA cells and weighs only 12 ounces. Choosing just one band to operate simplifies things and I chose 40 instead of 20M at this stage of the sunspot cycle.

The complete station consisted of the DSWII-40, 2.6Ah NiMh Battery pack, Palm mini paddles and some ear buds. The antennas were a halfwave wire with parallel-tuned ATU and a 40m dipole. All this was packed into one of my rucksacks as I headed off to the Montafon Valley in Austria to enjoy some alpine hiking before the 2006 Friedrichshafen Hamfest. I flew from London City Airport to Zurich then took a train to Bludenz. Luckily, Swiss Airlines don't rigorously check baggage weights as my big rucksack weighed 22 kilos and the carry-on daypack was 13 kilos.



Arriving at the campsite at a farm near Bludenz, there were few other campers about, so I picked out a good spot near a useful tree to pitch my tent. After my evening meal, accompanied by Lidl's finest (€1.99) South African Shiraz, it was time for aerial erection. Using my 14ft telescopic fishing pole, I was able to get the halfwave end-fed wire between 2 trees at a height of around 15ft – good enough for NVIS propagation.

I adjusted the tuner for zero SWR, but noticed the RX seemed a little deaf. I tried calling a few stations, but had no replies. Being unable to work Germans on 40 metres was a totally new experience to me and I retired to a pub to ponder this strange phenomenon. After a few glasses of Fohrenburger, the local beer, I remembered the words of an old-timer, G5SH, "It takes a good aerial to beat a dipole".





The DSW-II QRP station set up outside my tent

On returning to camp the next evening, I was shocked to find an old gentleman from Leipzig had parked his caravan in my antenna farm. After cooking myself another gourmet meal, accompanied by a bottle of Lidl's finest (€2.29) Australian Shiraz, it was time to take down the longwire and put up the 40m dipole.

The Opa from Leipzig seemed quite shocked at my antenna erecting antics and didn't look too reassured when I shouted "*Ich bin funkamateur*" by way of explanation. Firing up the rig, 40m now sounded quite lively. I heard DL8FD calling CQ and he came straight back to my first call, giving me RST 599 from near Saarbruecken, about 300 miles distant. This was an encouraging start and now I was in business with my 3 watts QRP. After another 2 QSO's, the Shiraz ran out, so I QSY'd to the local kneipe for more Fohrenburger.

Over the next few days, more QSO's were made with ease in the early evening, much to the bemusement of my neighbour. I had now graduated to Lidl's finest (€2.49) Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon to accompany my operating periods. I didn't hear any UK stations at strength, but worked mainly DL's, HB9's and Italians. It was noticeable that quite a few people who operate CW can't really read morse code. When using the convoluted OE9/G3VGR/P call, many people had problems reading it, even at 22wpm. I experimented by calling with my own call, then using the full call after they'd taken the bait.

After an infusion of Stroh's 80% Rum one evening at a pub in Bludenz, whilst cheering on the Swedish football team against England, the decision was made to take the rig up a mountain and make some QSO's. So next morning, I packed the rig, ATU and longwire, caught the bus to Brand and headed up the mountain towards a saddle between two mountains called the Amatschonjoch, close to the border of HB0-land and at a height of 2028M.

There was a lot of snow on the approach and I had to use crampons and an ice-axe to get up to the saddle, but the view from there was well worth the effort because I could see down into two beautiful valleys.

After eating some lunch, I planned to use Velcro ties to fix the fishing pole to a hiker's signpost and use the longwire, (which now had a different coax lead to fix the original deafness problem), however the sky was darkening and the wind was increasing. Although the longwire had been a poor receiver of 40m signals at the campsite, I was quite sure it wouldn't have any problems as an efficient lightning conductor. An exposed position high up on a mountain is not a good place to be when a thunderstorm arrives, so I headed down into the next valley. Naturally, after descending steeply about 500 metres, the dark clouds disappeared and the sun was shining again. The long descent was a little tricky due to some awkward passages across snow, but I made it to a tiny village called Nenzinger Himmel around 3PM.



The village is at the end of the nowhere and my plan was to catch the hiker's bus to Nenzing, then the train home. When I asked the waitress at the hotel about the bus, I found I was unable to hardly understand her extremely odd dialect. It seemed to bear little relationship to German. Eventually, I established that there was no bus that day, due to the only road being closed for most of the day for reconstruction. Not wishing to stay the night, even though I was tired from all the earlier tramping through snow, I started-off on the 16 mile walk to Nenzing.

About 3 miles down the road, cursing the extra weight of the rig in my pack, I heard what sounded like a cat crying. A tiny black kitten jumped out of the grass near a bridge and was very pleased to see me. My new friend followed me down the road for about half a mile, then flopped down and cried. Not wanting the little chap to be supper for a buzzard, I wrapped him in my fleece and headed back to the village. After depositing him with a farmer's wife near the village, who I now nominated as his new protector, I realized it was after 6PM and I was a long way from home.

Luckily, two foresters in a 4WD turned up and gave me a lift to the station at Nenzing. After seeing the route the road took, I was certainly glad of the lift, otherwise I probably would have ended up sleeping out in the open.

For the rest of my stay, I only operated from the campsite. Indeed, I remembered from previous experiences in New Hampshire's White Mountains, operating a radio up a mountain is a strange way to behave when surrounded by beautiful scenery and it adds nothing worthwhile to the experience of being there. I did, however always carry my VX150 as a safety aid and was impressed how easy it was to access distant repeaters with that HT.

Arriving back from the pub on my last evening at the camp, I saw a car festooned with antennas parked by the entrance. It was owned by OE9GJD, who was partaking of a few beers at the camp's riding stables. He showed me his mobile setup and returned the next morning to see my rig & present me with his QSL. I broke camp around 10:30, packed up and headed for the station to catch the train to Lindau and meet up with the two John's for a few days at the Friedrichshafen rally.



G3VGR impersonating a pack animal heading to Friedrichshafen

73

Dave G3VGR
E-mail: g3vgr@lefars.org.uk