

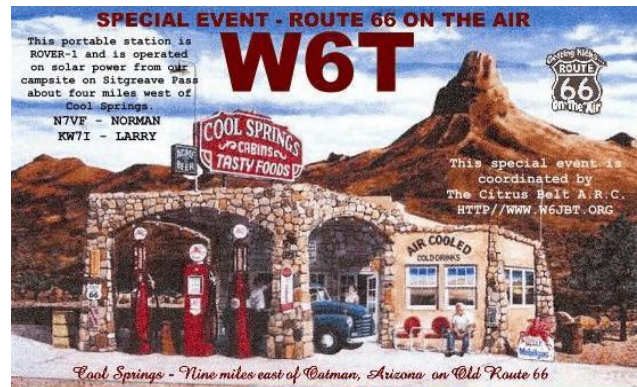
THE 2011 WHISKEY - SIX - TANGO ADVENTURE

Route 66 On The Air 2011

with

Larry Francis (KW7I) and Norman Vandiver (N7VF)

This special annual amateur radio event commemorating Historic Route 66 was sponsored and organized by the Citrus Belt Amateur Radio Club of San Bernadino, California. There were eighteen stations operating along Route 66, with seventeen of them operated by members of the various clubs along the way. The special event one-by-one call signs began with Whiskey-Six-Alpha (W6A) in Santa Monica, California, and ran through Whiskey-Six-Quebec (W6Q) in Chicago, Illinois; our assigned call was Whiskey-Six-Tango (W6T). We were given the designation of "Rover 3". Last year there were three "Rover" stations, W6R, W6S and W6T. However, this year we were the "Lone Rover", as the other two rover stations did not materialize.



Our special event QSL card



Rover 3 all set and ready to begin the event

Norman Vandiver (N7VF) and I, Larry Francis (KW7I), did "Route 66 On The Air" last year and enjoyed it so much that we asked for the W6T spot again this year. We called this our "Mini-DX Expedition and International Field Day." In order to last the full ten days in moderate comfort, I brought my motor home down from Oregon. We then set up the radio station under the awning to shade us from the sun. We basically ran the station on emergency power. Small arrays of solar panels were used to charge our gel cell batteries, and with the solar panels on the motor home, we had plenty of power for the radio, miscellaneous peripherals, and the computer.

Our operating location was right on Old Route 66, about 25 miles west of Kingman, Arizona, four miles east of the old mining town of Oatman. The place where we parked is called Memorial Point and is right at the summit of Sitgreaves Pass in the Black Mountains. About nine miles east of the pass is a tourist place named Cool Springs; in years gone by this was a service station stop. We made it up the steep grade, navigating the 10-mile-an-hour switchbacks, from Cool Springs to Sitgreaves Pass, by having Norman go ahead



Norman checking the coax

with our car and using the mobile radios to let me know of any oncoming traffic.

The panoramic view from Memorial Point was extraordinary, as we could look down across the Colorado River and see Laughlin, Nevada, to the northwest and Needles, California, to the southwest. Due west we could look out across the Mojave Desert. At night we could see the lights of the towns along the river between Laughlin and Needles, but they weren't bright enough to disturb the wonderful night time view of the sky.

On Friday we erected our little antenna farm that included Norman's homemade 20-meter directional antenna, and wire antennas for 10, 15, 17, 20, 40, and 80 meters. Everything seemed to be in order... Or so we thought. During the night we had a strong wind storm that came through, causing a couple of the wire antennas to come loose, twisting the wires together like we had run them through an eggbeater.

By nine o'clock Saturday morning we were on the air, with our first contact being K6RPM on 80 meters in California. At this point we discovered that the computer and radio were not talking to one another, which forced us to use a paper log for several days. We had over 600 contacts on paper before I got the computer logger going. We never did determine the problem. Then on Sunday evening we had another logging problem; a strong wind gust came though just ahead of a big thunderstorm, ripping several pages out of our paper log! We thought those pages were gone forever, but several days later we spotted the pages scattered along the mountainside below us. Norman carefully worked his way down and retrieved the wrinkled, water faded, but still usable, pages.



Norman replacing a water logged coax in the rain

The lightning thunderstorms were quite spectacular as seen from the mountaintop. They were very slow moving, pounding us with lots of rain. It was good that we routinely brought all of the electronic equipment into the motor home at night, because by daylight everything outside was soaked, even leaving a small river running under the motor home.



View of Memorial Point looking westward

All day Monday the rain came down, while wild winds rocked the motor home. By nightfall there were some pretty good ruts washed out in the parking area. The river under the motor home was sometimes six inches deep and six feet wide as the water ran towards the road. Needless to say, we moved the radio station inside. Due to the lack of sun we ran the motor home generator to keep the batteries charged.



Today Norman and Larry operated inside the motorhome

During the night the storm finally blew itself out. Tuesday was a better day, though the 65^of was much cooler than the 100^of we had expected! As I recall, it never got above 65^of degrees. As the week progressed our outside temperatures climbed back to closer-to-normal for Arizona, and by Saturday and Sunday it was near 95^of with clear blue skies.

We did lose nearly two full days while Norman was in the hospital at Kingman. During late night on Wednesday he began having trouble breathing, so by 3:30am Thursday, he decided he needed to go to the emergency room. So away we went down the mountain to the hospital...After the initial examination they decided to keep Norm for further testing that day, with the nurse saying the doctor would likely keep him overnight. So, I left my contact information and headed back up the mountain to our station.



Larry at the W6T operator station

I slept my way through most of the remainder of Thursday, but I forgot to turn off the radio, computer and other things running off the batteries. Of course, I also forgot about keeping the solar panels turned toward the sun!

Friday morning when I started the radio and computer, I found I had four dead batteries, forcing me to run off the generator for a couple of hours while the batteries built back up. I checked with Norman at the hospital to get caught up on events there; the doctors still wanted to do a stress test before talking about releasing him. However, around 6:00pm he called to say the doctor was ready to sign the release and he was ready to get out of there and back to "Route 66 On The Air."

Saturday morning we had bright sun, full batteries and we were raring to go on the radio. We had a good day, everything went well,



Catching the afternoon sun with the solar panels

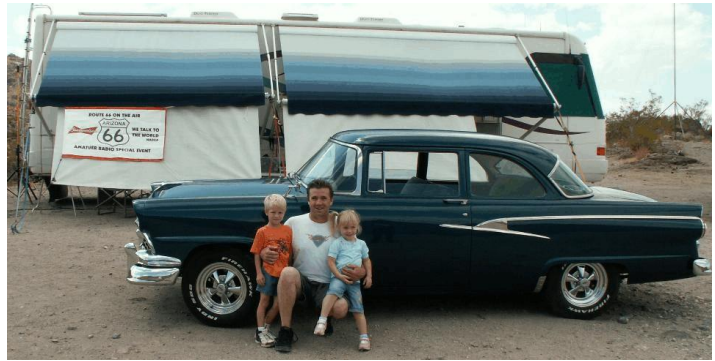
and we logged over 180 contacts. The people playing the "Route 66 On The Air" had been looking for us, so for the remainder of the event we tried to be as available as we could, operating on the most productive bands. Then, more trouble...we ran into problems finding a hole in the bands during the weekend. There were a number of other special events, with numerous stations competing for a spot on the bands, slowing our rate of contacts down.

By Sunday evening our count totaled 1534, of which 160 were duplicates. We did not discourage people from contacting us multiple times, as we were happy to talk to them a second and third time. Over the week we did talk to 14 of the Whiskey-Six" stations.

Our contact count by state, province or country:

<u>STATES:</u>		Pennsylvania	42
Alabama	14	Rhode Island	2
Alaska	2	South Carolina	14
Arkansas	22	South Dakota	5
Arizona	41	Tennessee	27
California	221	Texas	155
Colorado	34	Utah	11
Connecticut	12	Vermont	1
Delaware	8	Virginia	36
District of Columbia	1	Washington	90
Florida	50	West Virginia	6
Georgia	32	Wisconsin	19
Hawaii	5	Wyoming	9
Idaho	6		
Illinois	54	<u>CANADA:</u>	
Indiana	24	Alberta	9
Iowa	21	Alberta	9
Kansas	35	British Columbia	11
Kentucky	11	Manitoba	5
Louisiana	17	New Brunswick	3
Maine	8	Prince Edward Island	1
Maryland	11	Ontario	20
Massachusetts	8	Saskatchewan	1
Michigan	25		
Minnesota	40	<u>MEXICO:</u>	
Mississippi	12	Nuevo Leon	1
Missouri	45	Colima	1
Montana	14	Mexico City	1
Nebraska	12		
Nevada	11	<u>Other Countries</u>	
New Hampshire	7	Armenia	1
New Jersey	17	Brazil	1
New Mexico	12	Ecuador	1
New York	31	Germany	1
North Carolina	38	Italy	1
North Dakota	6	Japan	1
Ohio	53	New Zealand	1
Oklahoma	60	Puerto Rico	1
Oregon	31	Russia	1

The "Mini International Field Day" part of this event included numerous visitors that stopped by. People from all over the world come to the United States to travel Route 66 and they found our location at Memorial Point a good viewing area. People stopped to look at the scenery and, giving us a great opportunity to visit with them. They came from all over, but most spoke American English well enough that we could carry on an enjoyable conversation.



Dad and the kids out for a drive from Kingman, Arizona



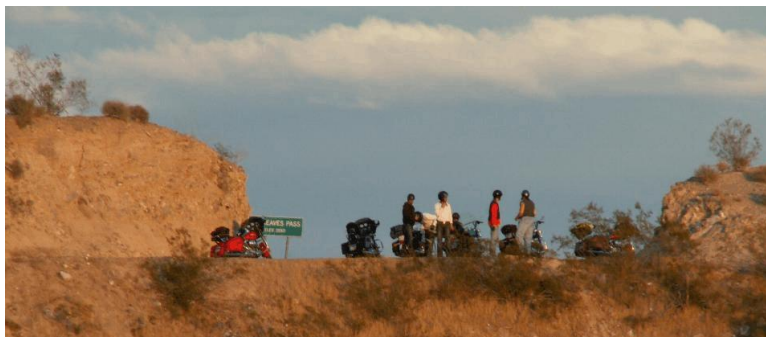
A German family on holiday touring Route 66

We tried to keep a Visitor Log to record our varied visitors, but only managed to get about 120 actually listed. We only got 25 percent of the people that stopped; they were primarily from Western Europe, Scandinavia, British Isles and Germany, plus a few from Austria, France, Spain, and Italy

We had many groups of motorcycles, ranging from a single bike to over forty bikes, most with pillion riders. Many of them had started at one end or the other of Route 66 and were riding the entire route. The larger groups were accompanied by support teams and were well organized. Some of the smaller groups were just a



A large motorcycle group from Switzerland



Motorcyclists at the very top of Sitgreaves Pass - Route 66

few fellows out enjoying the world, such as the five hearty fellows from Finland that looked like they were from the credit card advertisement on TV with the band of Vikings. At times we would hold up on radio contacts because of the noise made by passing motorcycles.

Many visitors were just a couple or small family group traveling by car, but we did have a half dozen rental motor homes with an assortment of people in them. There were several car clubs driving their vintage cars through the area.



A large motorcycle club winding down the grade to Oatman, Arizona

A young couple from Switzerland stopped by for a rest and very nice visit they were doing the entire route on their bicycles! They were headed west for Santa Monica, having left Chicago two months earlier, enduring the summer heat as they traveled through the heartland of North America.



The young Swiss couple rested and ready to go

One of our more unusual visitors was Leon Zhang from Shanghai, China. He signed our guest book in Chinese and told us calling him Leon was fine. He was traveling Route 66 with another Chinese-descendent fellow from California. Leon was involved with the "AutoCar" magazine in China, doing research for an article on Route 66. Leon's fellow traveler was the trip photographer. They spent an hour interviewing Norman about Route 66 and the amateur radio connection. Leon said he was amazed at the number of visitors from around the world that were here touring Route 66.



Norman the visitors from China

We also had several visits by some locals... some Big Horn Sheep! They did not appear to be taken aback by our presence in their territory. There were two groups, one with six sheep, and the



A watchful eye toward Norman



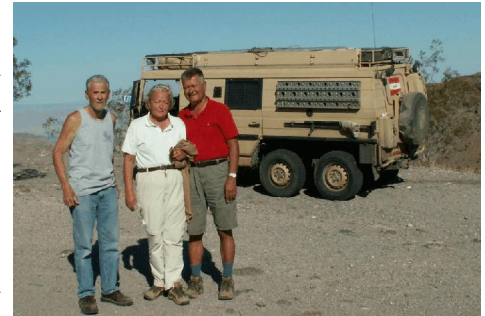
This seems to be the main herd leader



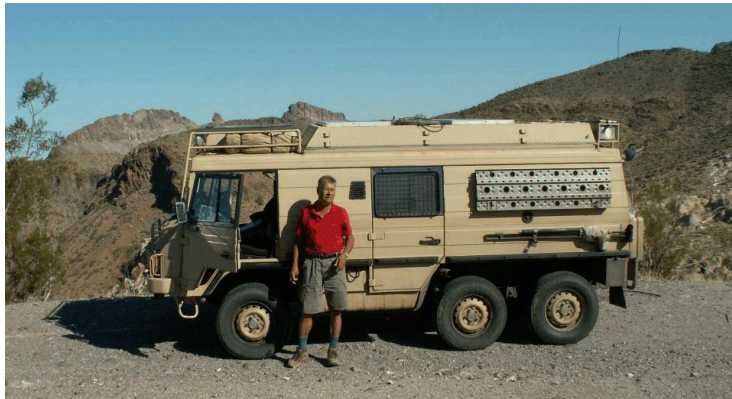
Question - "Down or around?"

other with sixteen sheep. They grazed their way around the Memorial Point knob, then off to the east, over the ridge.

On Monday, after "Route 66 On The Air" was over, we had another couple stop by to admire the view. Their vehicle was very interesting; it was an off-road thing with tandem axles and looked like European military surplus. It turned out that they were from Austria and were traveling the world with their vehicle. They had come from South America and were headed generally for Alaska. They had traveled all over Africa, Asia, and Australia in this compact and very specialized motor home. The lady, Johanna, asked if she could look in our bigger motor home, thinking



Norman, Johanna and Gunther



Gunther (OE5NMM) and his All-Terrain RV

maybe she would talk to Gunther about one like ours for some of their travels. But Gunther said he still preferred theirs because they could go anywhere they desired with it. Gunther was also an amateur radio operator, OE5NMM.

As Norman and I were finishing breaking camp, another couple from Berlin, Germany drove in. I introduced them to Gunther and Johanna, gave them chairs and water, and the four of them carried on a nice visit in German while Norman loaded the last of our equipment and prepared to head back east on Route 66 for Kingman, Congress, and Camp Verde, Arizona.

So...that's how another of our memorable adventures came to an end. 73's! From Larry and Norman.



Looking west from Sitgreaves Pass - Route 66 Arizona