

Australian 2009 Winter VHF/UHF Field Day

20 June 2009

Let me start my report on the 2009 WFD by stating that this was not a particularly good scenario for a field day outing : the forecast was for rain, the temperatures were down... and as it turned out, the previous details probably meant that participation was down. I had the 4WD all packed by about lunch time on Friday the 19th, with the only exceptions being food, drink and spare clothes.

I departed for the site at Beechmont Plateau that I used for the 2009 Summer Field Day at about 8.30AM, drove the 100 (+/-) KM and arrived at my initial destination in rain. I waited and it continued to rain, and then it rained some more. Finally by about 10AM, it lifted enough for me to get out of the car and look at the ground. I took a few photos and considered my options. If you visit my Summer Field Day and John Moyle Field Day pages, you will note that my normal field day accommodation is a nylon RV shelter plus a couple of blue polytarps. With the rain that had fallen since I arrived there, there was no way that I was going to stay dry "under nylon". I set off to find an alternative venue for the outing. I drove the road north up to Lower Beechmont looking for something suitable to shelter in and the only thing I spotted along the way was the public shelter at Rosins Lookout, QG61OV, so I returned to it.

Note to self : Over the autumn 2009 months, I built up a camper trailer with many add-ons - - - consider taking it as a portable "shack" next time a field day rolls around... It doesn't take very long to put up the basic camper and there is always a bed to settle on if the QSO possibilities/quantities are down !

Location : Rosins Lookout, Beechmont Plateau, SEQ.

Grid : QG61OV Latitude 28.1169S (28D07M1.212S), Longitude 153.2027E (153D12M9.408S), Height 541M ASL.



Screen shot from my GRIDLOCWMM software

(click on any image for larger view)

The weather was still unkind so, still in the rain, I unloaded my plastic carry boxes into the shelter and started to set up the equipment. Part way through that, the rain stopped so I quickly unloaded the antenna hardware off the roof bars and started to assemble the yagis. It started to rain again so I took shelter again. That process happened a few times as rain/showers passed but finally the antennas were up in the air, coaxes fed down into the shelter shed and I had the radios powered up. The time was 12.04PM, 4 minutes after the start time of the event, when I was finally on-air and starting to make my first field day calls.

The number of operating stations was few and considering that I was operating on 6SSB, 6FM, 2SSB, 2FM, 70cm SSB and 70FM, making contacts was seriously hard work. Add that I had to duck out into the rain to rotate the yagis into the appropriate direction from time to time and it wasn't the best field day event for me. The wind came up as the day passed and the temperature dropped considerably. By 4PM it was downright cold and having to duck out into the rain periodically was quite depressing... By 5PM, it was dark. Despite erecting polytarp wind shields, I had had enough by about 6PM so packed up early, rather than waiting for the 8 hour mark.

It became quite a public event with my being set up in a public shelter shed, the only one along that stretch of road, and with the only public toilets located nearby. During the course of my time there, I had a number of people come and look at the setup and ask what I was doing. Others passed by on their way to take photos at the lookout over the Numinbah Valley, looked - and said nothing. Fortunately, I have a supply of the WIA brochures "Calling CQ..." that I take with me on such outings and I can give them out as required. One fellow settled in for a 5 minute chat so that slowed things down from an operating point of view but was good PR for amateur radio.

The field day outcome for my station in the 8 hour portable section was 567 points accumulated over 41 contacts, a poor showing from my point of view.

Band	Locators Activated	Locators Worked	QSOs Made	Total	Band Mult	Band Total
50	10	30	8	48	1	48
144	10	60	28	98	3	294
420	10	30	5	45	5	225
TOTALS			41			567

The following images were taken as captioned - scroll over them with your mouse for larger views :



Original location at QG61OU during a break from the rain. The 2 long booms (6&2) plus the telescoping mast and the 3 x 6 metre yagi elements (ref + 2 dirs) are fastened onto the roof bar along the passenger side of the vehicle. The black whip on the front is a 40 metre Mobile One helical (M40-1).



Slightly different view of the vehicle at the original site, as last used for the 2009 Summer Field Day

Due to the continuing weather, the original site was considered unworkable so the new site was Rosins Lookout, Beechmont Plateau...



The alternative location at Rosins Lookout, QG61OV, toilet block at LHS, shelter shed just to RHS (off picture).



Shelter shed, open to the east (unfortunately also the direction of the prevailing wind on the day)



The masting pipe mount base had to be changed to allow the mast to tilt towards the back of the car - achieved by removing one of the 2 retaining bolts and then swivelled around.
(Note to self : drill an extra hole in the 90 degree position to make it easier in the same situation at any future event).

The indicator "compass" placed over the base plate before the mast tube fitted. Note the magnetic compass at the N position makes it easy to set up the correct direction.
(Note to self : try to find another material to make the compass from : the cloth became saturated with rain / mud and the permanent marking pen markings "ran")



Compass in place, red direction pointer fitted onto the bottom of the mast tube.



Yagis assembled and in place on the mast tube ready to be lifted vertical



Antennas in place. This time around, the top 70cm yagi is plain horizontal, the 2m yagi is used for both vertical (2m FM) and horizontal (2SSB) (or - as per photo - can be set at around 45 degrees thus giving access to both !), the newly-added lower 70cm yagi is used for FM only and is thus vertically polarised, and of course the 4 element 6m yagi is always horizontal. The whip on the top is one of the old 5/8 wave 2m fibreglass mobile style that works well on 6m FM.

The minimal clearance from the shelter shed roof to the 6m yagi was undesirable however the coax lengths have been set up for the "normal" mode rather than hiding in a shed !!!



Side/Rear view of equipment on the operating table.



The operating position in the shelter shed - as far away from the eastern/rainy side as possible. From RHS : notebook computer for logging, Icom IC-7400 for 6SSB (on Ant2) / 6FM (on Ant1) / 2SSB / 2FM (both on same dedicated 2m ant port), IC-718 driving a Microwave Modules MM432-28 transverter with a 40W homebrew linear on top of the stack. Yaesu VX-7R for 70 FM.

To make things easier, the main operating frequencies are stored into adjacent channel memories eg 144.150 SSB, 146.500 FM, 50.150 SSB, 52.200 SSB (for Standard licences), 52.525 FM in the IC-7400 and the relevant 28 MHz frequencies (for transversion to 432 SSB) into the IC-718 memories.



GMC 850 watt 2 stroke generator 'hidden' the outside opposite end of shelter, just out of the rain - used to charge the dual 12VDC batteries plus the notebook battery (240VAC)

Final note : I purchased an unlocked USB wireless modem card early in the week before this Field Day and bought a \$10 pre-paid Virgin mobile broadband starter kit (which included 300MB for the 1st month). I set up the software on the notebook and had it operating at 3.6MB/s at home, set up shortcuts to VKLogger and thought I would be able to watch activity and do an occasional post from my field day site. It did work - finally - but there are some things for others to note to avoid the same issue that I encountered. { Note : I only intend to use the wireless mobile account for specific occasions such as field days or travelling holidays and will not be using it each and every month - so the fact that all "unused" time expires monthly is part of the concept. If I can get remote access on a FD for a \$15 fee, that is far less than my typical fuel cost ! } [Post note : Broadband mobile from Virgin use the Optus system which uses the Optus Dual Band (2100MHz/900MHz) Network. In reduced coverage areas, the wireless modem system falls back to the Optus GSM/GPRS Network]

Firstly, if you are using VKCL software with OmniRig and a serial port, you may find that you cannot access the USB wireless modem port (in my case, which appeared as COM7:) - Access Denied. I encountered the same effect when I wanted to run my GridLocWM software - the software came up with an error 5 message - where it worked previously to my starting OmniRig.

It appears to me that with OmniRig running, spare COM ports are sometimes "gobbled" up. The fix is to stop OmniRig using the button on the VKCL Config screen then minimise VKCL, run the broadband dashboard / control panel software and connect to the wireless broadband ISP, and in my case, start GridLocWM which uses a USB to serial port adapter (as COM6:), before returning to the VKCL screen and starting OmniRig again. The wireless broadband connection still works, as does GridLocWM, and so does the communications between VKCL and, in this case, the Icom CIV device. If you have a software crash and have to make it all work again, use this same process each time.

The other issue was that the only "broadband" connection I could get was at 53KB/s via a GPRS connection instead of the 3.6MB/s I had at home. It still worked, I was still able to watch VKLogger and still "posted" as well - but things were a little slow. I guess if we go to our "remote" locations, we have to accept slow internet access..

Alternatively, as it has been pointed out to me, I could have bought a Telstra / Big Pond mobile broadband starter pack and had greater high speed coverage !

Roll on the 2009 Spring Field Day for more field day action

RESULTS : 6th Position in Section B, Single Operator, 8 Hours