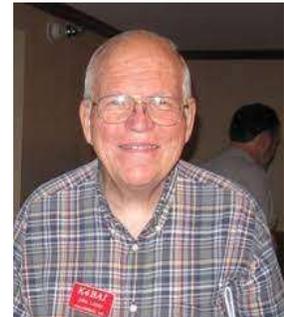


John and Jeff's Excellent Adventure

North Carolina QSO Party 2021

Every year following NCQP, many of our participants share some great stories. These include mishaps, near death experiences, operating firsts, and other wild and wooly tales that make their NCQP experience memorable. Here's one we thought you'd enjoy. It came to us from John Laney, K4BAI of Columbus, GA and his mobile operating partner Jeff Clarke, KU8E of Ellerslie, GA. John and Jeff operated mobile under the South East Contest Club callsign W4AN.

We had run the SCQP full time on Saturday and had planned a full-time entry in the NCQP on Sunday. We were using Jeff's TS 590 SG and mobile whips. We had two mag mounts on the trunk of my 2017 Toyota Avalon and could instantly QSY between 40 and 20 during the day, and 40 and 80 during the hours of darkness, by changing the resonator on one antenna. We had minor RFI problems that stopped our computer rig control, but not our computer keying from a Dell laptop. We worked only CW and ran 100W.



We found a Holiday Inn Express in Spartanburg to stay Sunday night. Surprisingly there were few rooms available, apparently due to some nearby sports tournament (volleyball?) and a lot of Norfolk Southern Railway construction workers. So, the hospitality industry was flourishing in Spartanburg. We usually take our antennas off the car at night and take the radios and computers into the hotel room. (Our backup rig was my K2 and our backup computer was my Dell laptop.) We did have keying available with a Bencher paddle and the internal keyer in the rig, but used it only occasionally. Most of keying was from the computer "F" keys. Activity on 20M from Europe and the West Coast was fair during the day. Also, good signals from the W5, W0, and some W1 and Eastern Canada stations. That band never got very short. A few like N8II and K9NW got through weakly on some sort of scatter I guess. 40M was the bread and butter band until about an hour before dark both days. After that, 40 and 80 were both very active. We were impressed that OM2VL got through to us very early in the afternoons on 40 and later also on 80. DL3DXX also worked us on 40 and 80 in some counties. Near the end, we worked W6OAT in WA for our best DX to the west on 80M. Rusty. W6OAT, is a good friend of mine since high school (when he was K4BVD, which he now holds as a club call) and he needed all-time 5 counties in SC and one in NC. We put all six on the planned routes and worked him in all 5 SC counties. Unfortunately, due to the incident I will now relate, we couldn't get to the last one Rusty needed in NC - Graham. Fortunately, on Monday after the contest, Rusty worked W8SP passing through Graham county, so he got all he needed in the Carolinas, although it took one more day.



After we had taken the antennas off the trunk at the motel in Spartanburg Saturday night, I noticed that the back windshield of my car had been shattered. You could see that it had shattered, but all the pieces were still in place. We don't really know for sure what happened to it, but our best guess is that it was hit at a weak point by a coax connector jumper that had been installed near the trunk lid in the coax running from one of the mag mounts to the rigs. It seems likely that I closed the trunk with that coax jumper and connector outside the trunk near the trunk hinge and it had enough extra length to swing hard against the back window. We will take care not to do that again! As Jeff moved the car to the parking place for the night, a part of the back window caved in. We thought it would be hard or impossible to drive the car without a back window and it would have been foolhardy to try to drive it with a hole in it and the rest of the windshield cracked into very small sections. So, I called my insurance company (I have a small deductible on glass comprehensive coverage. They automatically sent me to a company affiliated with SafeLite Auto Glass and I spent over an hour on the telephone with their representative, who could only say that they could find no one to repair it on the weekend, and no one to repair it in or near Spartanburg before the following Thursday. By that time, operating in the NCQP



seemed out of the question. Jeff was looking for auto glass companies on the internet trying to find one that would come to our hotel and do the repair on the weekend. After all, we were about a five hour drive from our homes and I have to work most days (although sometimes via computer from home or a motel) and we had thoughts of having to drop the car off at some repair place on Monday and renting a car to drive home and coming back on Thursday to pick it up after repair. I then called AAA and they tried to find someone who would help us on the weekend. Jeff found a company on the internet that said weekend replacements by appointment. The lady from AAA called them and got no answer, not even an answering machine. So, we gave up for the night and I had

a very worried and mostly sleepless night. I reported to my XYL what had happened by telephone. After breakfast at the motel on Sunday, I called the number of the place we had tried the night before and got a repairman who said that his company had one in stock and he could repair it between 11 and noon on Monday and it would take about an hour. So, we called Randy, W8FN, to tell him that we would not be able to meet him for breakfast on Monday morning as we had planned. Jeff and Randy are friends from when they were both in Ohio. And, when Randy was in TX, he operated with us from PJ4A on CQWW CW. He turned in a real good score in NCQP this year and is planning a beam installation at his new home there.

After breakfast, we went back to the car and the first thing I knew Jeff was breaking out the window that hadn't fallen in on its own. There was some possibility of rain and the repairman had suggested taping some trash bags over the back window to protect the interior. The hotel was nice to give us some large plastic trash bags and also loan us a broom and dust pan, which we used to get up the majority of the glass that had been broken out. Someone in the parking lot kindly mentioned that a nearby car wash had a vacuum that could be operated with coins and we drove the car there and cleaned up most of the glass we could find. Of course, I knew from my wife's experience with a broken side window (another long story) that we will be finding bits of glass in the car for at least a couple of years despite our (and the repair guy's) best efforts. We then went to a Lowe's and bought a plastic painter's drop cloth to tape across the window. We did notice that we were able to drive around with no back window, with the trash bags or the drop sheet taped over the window with no real problem and it wasn't raining. So, after lunch, we started out to NC to do as much of the NCQP as we could. This really was KU8E's idea. I would probably have stayed at the motel and sulked if left to myself. So, we missed a little more than half of the NCQP, but made the most of the last four hours and 23 minutes. We turned around and came back toward Spartanburg before the contest was over so we repeated one county I think, and spent a lot time in Buncombe (Asheville) due to delays from highway construction. But it was fun and certainly raised my spirits.

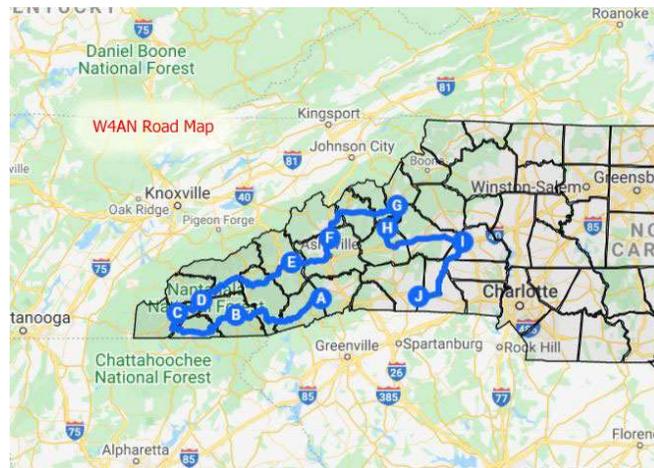
We realized from this experience that we could have driven home with no back window and gotten the repairs done at home. But we had an agreement with the SC glass repairman and I thought we should honor it. So, we waited at the motel on Monday. He came a little early. He said we were very lucky in that they had a lot of front windshields in stock and almost no back windshields in stock, since people seldom break them. He installed the only one they had in stock and did it in a very workmanlike manner. I think my insurance company will pay only about 1/3 of what it cost since they will reimburse only what their "provider" would have charged them to do it during regular business hours, less the deductible of course.

Randy, W8FN, drove to Spartanburg from his QTH in Columbus, NC and we had lunch instead of breakfast with him. We called N4UQ and canceled our planned side trip to pick up my repaired Alpha 78 due to time constraints. When we got to Jeff's house and unloaded, the windshield had settled and the cement was dry so we were able to remove his temporary tapes. They left no marks on the car, but the duct tape we had used earlier had left some residue on the car. Jeff cleared it right off with a Rainex product he had on hand.

I forgot to mention that the painter's drop cloth sheet wouldn't stay across the back window at highway speeds, so we ran the contest with the back window completely open. Jeff has a video he shot from the front seat of me operating in the back seat in front of the open window. It got only a little cool on the return trip and we ignored any cold due to being buoyed up by the experience. We did tape it back in place over the window when we got to the motel. That was a good thing as it rained during the night. We did get some of the back seat and trunk interior damp the next morning while removing the temporary covering, but I don't think we will have any damage from that.

I might mention that we were called on 40 and 80M by many NC stations and we appreciated every one of those QSOs.

73,
John, K4BAI



Editor's note: 746 QSO's / Activated 11 Counties. Not too shabby given the limited time and experiences they had. Well done !