

Preparing for the Oceania DX Contest

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With the Oceania DX Contest only a few weeks away we have started our preparations. A couple of weekends ago I went out to Mt Bluedog where we will be conducting our transmissions during the contest. VK2JDS and I adjusted the 80m dipole, made a backup 80m dipole, did some work on the hut, organised some battery friendly lighting, installed additional batteries into the battery bank, and figured out where we can put additional antennas when we have the additional assistance of VK2FSJE.

Adjusting the 80m dipole: Since initially putting up the dipole and testing it it has been raised and lowered a number of times to do some fine tuning. We intentionally started off with the dipole too long since it is easier to remove the wire than put it back. It is a nice simple design that ANYONE could construct consisting of poly pipe insulators and heavy galvanised fencing wire. It is raised to a height of roughly 7m on the water pipe mast on top of Mt Bluedog using the boom of the 2m yagi as a bit of a pulley for the rope. Whilst not ideal it is simple and easily repaired if something were to go wrong, plus it was using what was available at the time. A pulley will be going up the mast when we next lower it.

Another 80m dipole: I wanted one of my own... One that is easily transportable for when I want to go and play radios mountain-top somewhere (one of the activities VK2FSJE and I do seem to like). Made from some nice ceramic egg and rib-bone insulators and hard-drawn copper wire it performed beautifully across all of the 80m band, tuned for around 3.600 MHz. I also have made up a little kit to help install the antenna in remote locations. I found a good use for the balls out of old computer mice, when connected to a nice light line like "brickies cord" the mouse balls are very easy to throw up and over a limb of a large tree. This then allows the raising of a heavier line to then tie the dipole to :)

Work on the hut / lighting: Continuing with the current hut and making it a little friendly till we get the more serious structure built. This was mostly organising the work bench and looking into the lighting of the hut for night time use. Having scored some bayonet bulb holders for my LEDbased bulbs for automotive use we are now looking at the easiest way to mount and power them. The bulbs are 12V drawing just over 100ma (much friendlier than other forms of lighting we have been looking at) so power is no problem, just a matter of running the power line for them. Mounting them however is where the slightly more challenging part of this is. Originally thinking along the lines of screwing the bulb holders to something and then mounting that I am more inclined to keeping it simple. A light cord (no pun intended) going the span of the hut will easily hold the weight of the lights by wrapping the power line around the cord. The only problem with this is directing the light to where you want. So along came mk2 of this idea - making up some "mounts" using a bit of fencing wire and then mounting the fencing wire to the screws along the roof line. The fencing wire should be firm enough to handle the weight of the LED bulb, and thus give us the ability to direct the light to where we want :)

The battery bank: These suckers are heavy!!! But the battery bank is now in it's own enclosure - more for safety than anything else, but it does allow easier access to the batteries and they are definitely not in the way. We installed another few hundred amp hours of power, and we now hope that it will be more than sufficient (especially when supplemented by solar charging) to power a couple of radios for the entire contest.

Additional antennas: Once we have an extra set of hands available for the lowering of the mast we can put up the pulleys so that an additional dipole set can be installed. We also want to add 40m dipole to the current feed point of the 80m dipole for ease, but will make final decisions once we can measure out the space there, plus the trees that are suitable for mounting antennas on. This section of the last preparation weekend really suffered because of the weather. We wanted to get done the other bits and then quickly surveyed the area for ideas as it was FREEZING cold. Something I should be getting used to now for radio playing up Mt Ovens (with a ground covered in snow one time, and the usual freezing winds) - but you still never actually enjoy that part.

Obviously more to come as we further get set for the contest weekend. I will post some pics and further details once available.