YARA's Busy Year

By Scott Williamson, YARA President

YARA is a busy group, and 2007 was one of our busiest years ever. During maintenance trips, we've upgraded seven repeater sites including Horsecamp Hill, Mt. Deceoli, Pilot Mountain, Montana Mountain, Hayes Peak, Mt. Sima, Mt. Berdoe and Ferry Hill to support APRS (Automatic Position Reporting System). APRS is a system that uses the repeater network to transmit position reports (from a GPS) and short messages between properly equipped mobile stations and into an Internet gateway. For instance, YARA's Suburban is APRS-equipped—using the Internet we are able to see where our vehicle is throughout a significant portion of our coverage area. This could prove extremely useful in an emergency situation.

Thanks to a partnership with DFO and Discovery Helicopters, we've added a new repeater at the top of Atlin Mountain. The elevation of this site gives excellent coverage and it is linked to the repeater network via Mt. Panacea. Marine radio is now available from the site, and we hope to add it to the linked marine system this year.

Two helicopter trips to Mt. Panacea at the south end of Bennett Lake added another site to our network. Mt. Panacea provides the link to the network for Atlin Mountain as well as excellent coverage on Bennett Lake, the South Klondike Highway corridor towards Skagway and the Canadian side of the Chilkoot Trail. We hope to complete this site with a Comshel and a more robust power system, as it went offline shortly after the snow started in the fall.

In Fall 2007 we installed a new repeater on Haeckel Hill. This site, which has AC power with battery backup, provides excellent coverage in Whitehorse and is also connected to IRLP (Internet Radio Linking Project). Using VOIP technology and the Internet, this repeater can be connected to thousands of other radios around the world. Also, the sensitivity of this repeater allows easy access from handheld radios from inside buildings in downtown Whitehorse.

YARA installs a new repeater on Haeckel Hill.

Our repeater system now includes the following linked and local repeaters.

Linked system:
    Atlin Mountain – 147.34+
    Chilkat (Haines Rd) – 146.52 simplex remote base
    Dawson Lookout – 146.82-
    Ferry Hill (Steward Crossing) – 147.06+
    Hayes Peak (Johnsons Crossing) – 147.06+
    Horsecamp Hill (Beaver Creek) – 146.52 simplex remote base
    Montana Mountain (Carcross) – 146.82-
    Mt. Berdoe (Carmacks) – 146.82-
    Mt. Deceoli (Haines Junction) – 146.82-
    Mt. Panacea (Bennett Lake) – 147.24+
    Pilot Mountain (Whitehorse) – 146.94-
    Rose Hill (Faro) – 147.06+
    VY1RM (Whitehorse) – 147.18+

Local only:
    Haeckel Hill (Whitehorse) – 146.88- PL100
    Haines Junction – 146.88-
    Mt. Sima (Whitehorse) – 147.28+
    Transport Mtn (Watson Lake) – 146.82-

During the two major power failures in early May 2008, the entire network and the local repeaters in Whitehorse all continued to function.

YARA played a significant role in the 2007 Canada Winter Games. Our members contributed hundreds of hours, from constructing the radio system used during the Games to providing radio training courses to all volunteers to distributing and supporting the radio system. Last year we also completed the cleanup of the former club station on Grey Mountain. Given our new repeater on Haeckel Hill and the HF remote site, this location was no longer necessary.
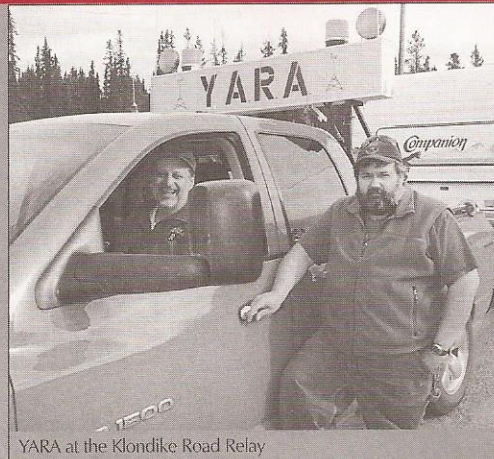
A new HF remote site has been constructed at the home of one of our members. Using Internet based radio remote software and VOIP services our members are able to completely control the radio and antenna from anywhere in the world. The location of this site on the North Klondike Highway allows for better signal conditions than what are often available from most Whitehorse homes. This also gives HF access for those members who do not have the resources or space to install their own system.

Our members showed up in force to assist the sandbagging operation during the flood at Marsh Lake. Several members spent their evenings and weekends putting their backs to work for the benefit of our community.

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YARA's annual participation in the Kluane Chilkat International Bike Race and the Klondike Road Relay provides opportunities to test our radio systems as well as assist race organizers with communications and race time and data entry. Our members set up their own equipment at each of the race checkpoints, and they push the limits of that equipment as well as our repeater network for the duration of both events.

Last fall YARA members were offered the Basic Amateur Radio Operator Certificate course, and it was a major success. The enthusiasm of our members and the energy gained from this workshop has made our association an interesting and exciting group. Attendance at YARA monthly meetings and weekly Saturday breakfasts is at an all-time high. We are looking forward to further success and many more projects in the coming year.
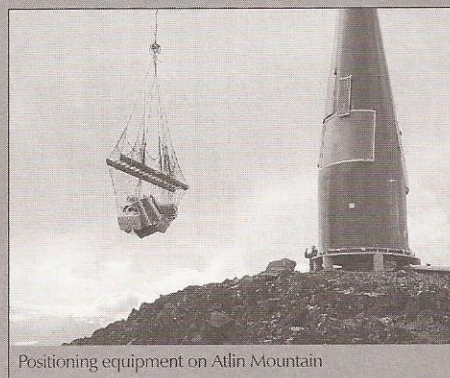
Yukon Amateur Radio Association – www.yara.ca.
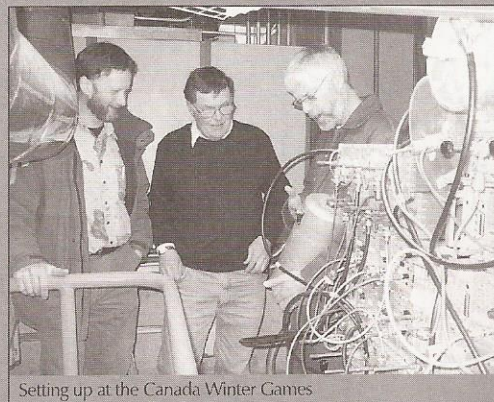
YARA at the Klondike Road Relay
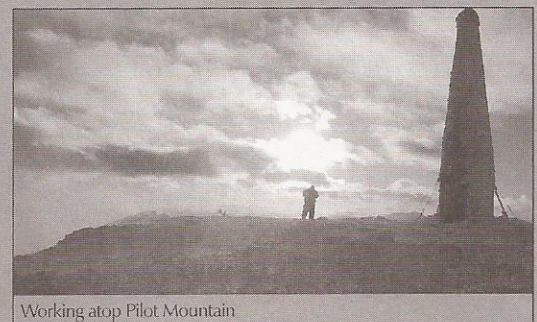
Members sandbagging at Marsh Lake
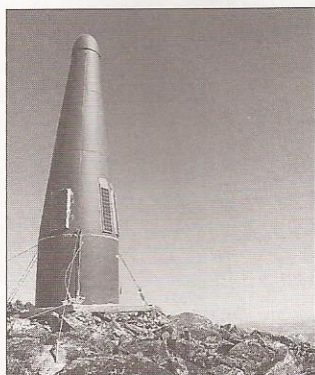
Positioning equipment on Atlin Mountain

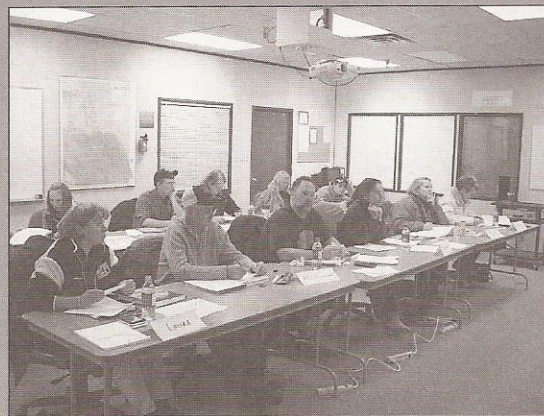YARA volunteers at the Kluane-Chilkat Bike Relay
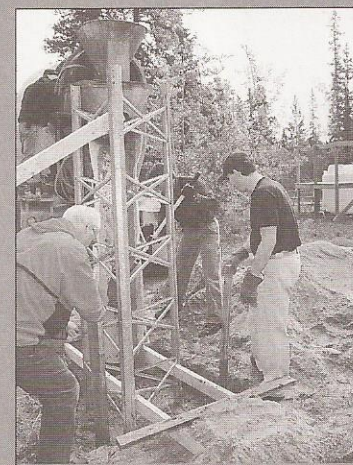
Setting up at the Canada Winter Games

Working atop Pilot Mountain

YARA repeater on Montana Mountain

Members taking a training course

Installing a HF remote site