

Serrana Bank Snafu

DXpedition Rivals the "Perils of Pauline"

BY FREDERICK J. LAWSON,* K6JAN

VERY possibly the last KS4 operations have been completed from Serrana Bank. This fact alone should make the QSL's extremely rare, but when the complete story is told of the hardships and frustrations suffered by the three hams who made it all possible, those QSL's should be worth plenty. During November 1-3, 1972, Serrana Bank was placed on the air as KS4KZ by three Americans (Fred, K6JAN; Pete, KZ5PW; and Jerry, KZ5JF) who in a little over 48 hours of operation worked almost 2,000 stations on 10 through 80 meters. This operation will very possibly be the last KS4 operation and the last operation from KS4 Serrana Bank. Word has it that the United States has entered a Treaty¹ giving control of Serrana Bank to Colombia and that it will be included as an HKØ (since the island is within a 225 mile range from San Andres Island HKØ). This has already happened with Swan Island (KS4) between the United States and Honduras. This is the paramount reason this particular DXpedition was so important to the operators participating.

Organizing The DXpedition

The original group of operators chosen for the DXpedition included K6JAN, KZ5PW, KZ5JF, KZ5ZZ, KZ5PN, and

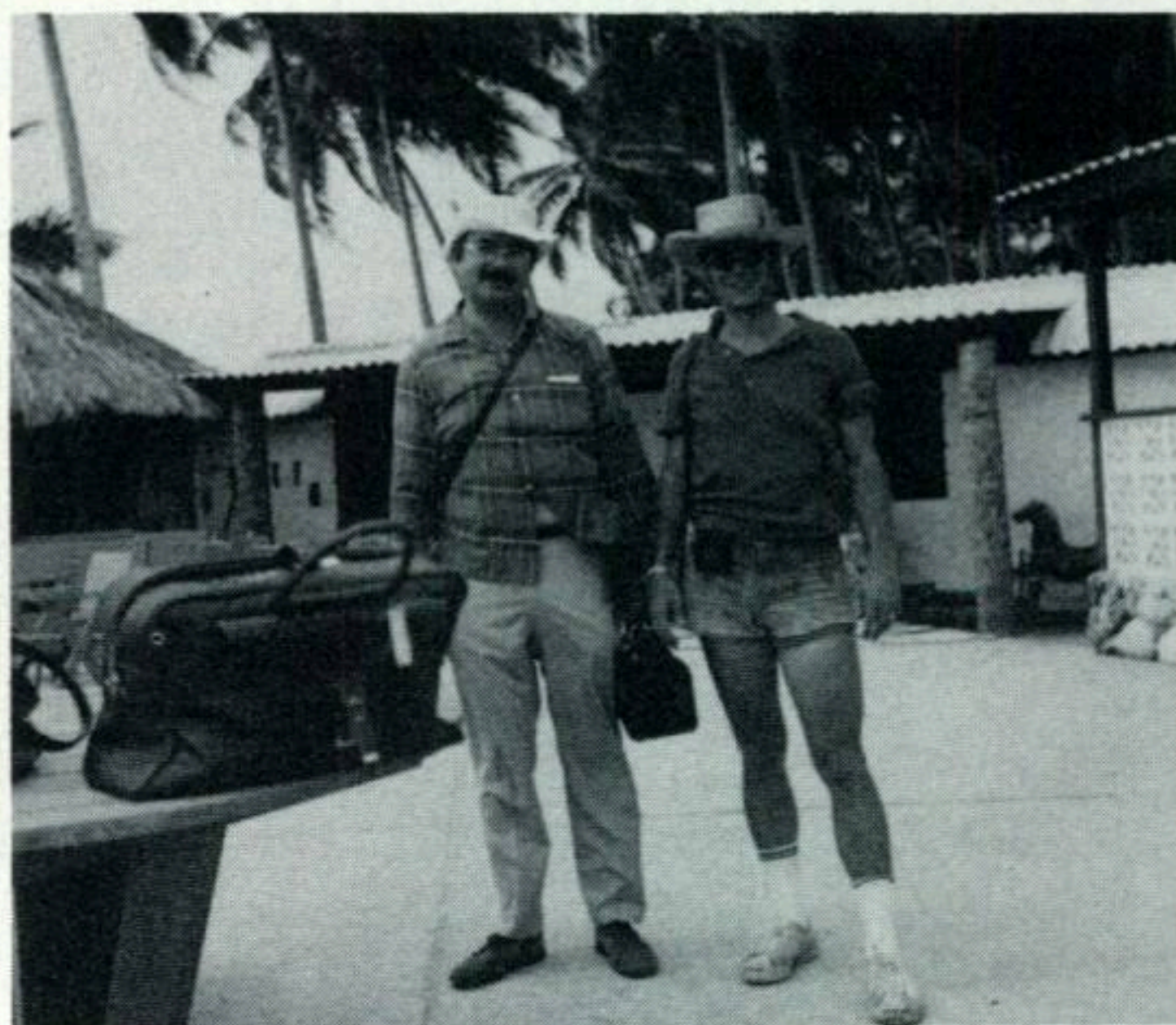
*12011 Salem Dr., Grenada Hills, CA 91344.

¹A check with the US Department of State Treaty Affairs Division prior to press time reveals that the US-Colombian treaty effecting the transfer of Serrana Bank and two nearby islands to Colombian possession is tied up in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and no action to ratify the treaty seems likely in the near future. Apparently, counter-claims to the ownership of the islands have been made by Nicaragua, and rather than side with either party, the US has chosen to delay any action, in hopes that the two latin nations can arrive at an understanding between themselves, possibly through the World Court. At the present time, therefore, Serrana Bank is still a possibility for additional KS4 operations, though in view of the politics involved, not a very likely one.

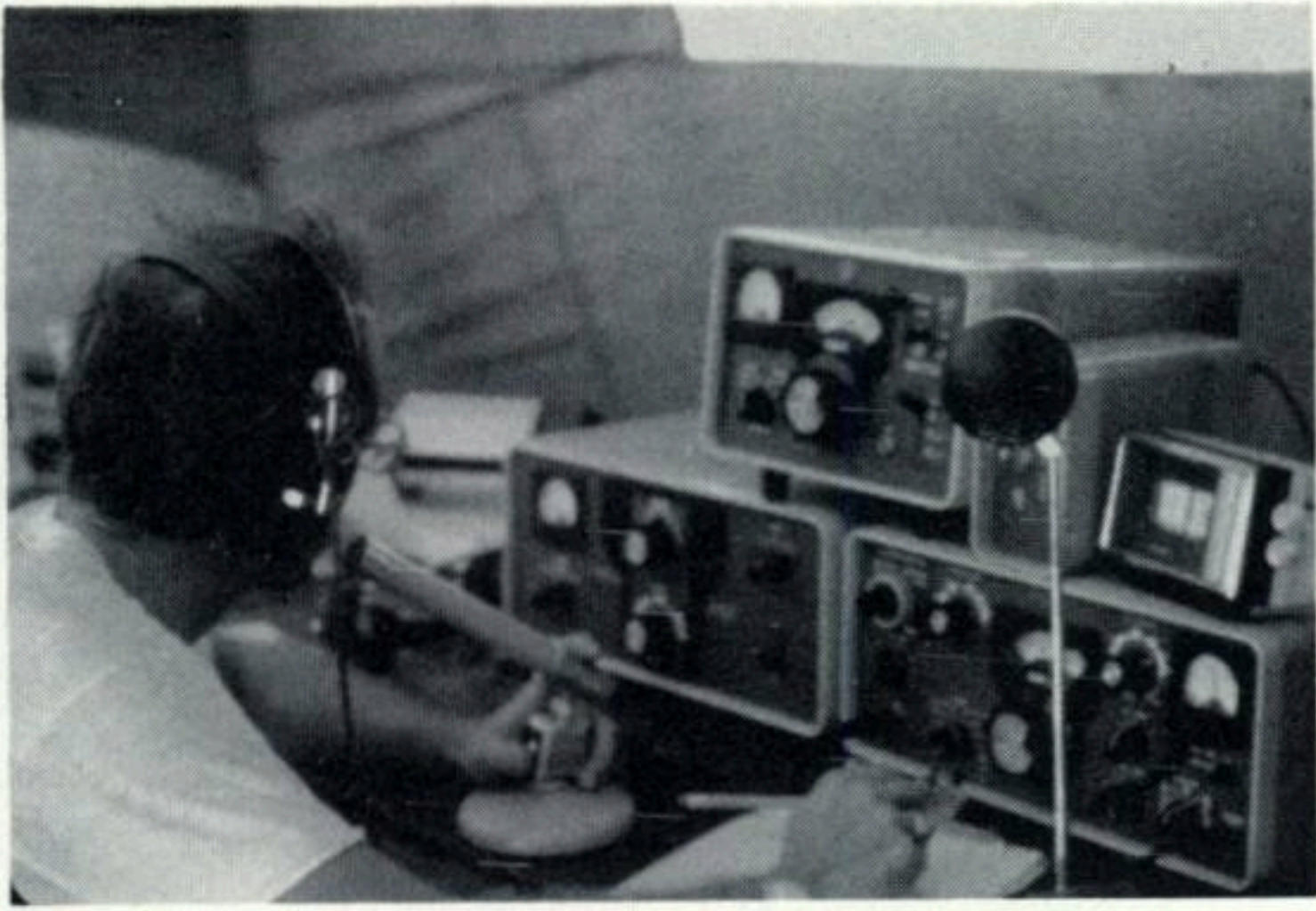
KZ5HS. The group included one lawyer (K6JAN), one medical doctor (KZ5HS), one electrical engineer (KZ5ZZ) one mechanical engineer (KZ5PW), one Captain in the United States Army (KZ5JF), and one high school student (KZ5PN).

The group that eventually succeeded in operating from Serrana Bank consisted, however, of the lawyer, the mechanical engineer, and the military Captain, and, ironically, each was required to practice his profession at one time or another during the DXpedition. But more about that later.

Each of the original six participants played an integral role in organizing the DXpedition. There was much to be done in obtaining licensing, equipment, transportation, etc. All parties donated much time and money. The DXpedition was planned for October 26 to November 1 to coincide with the CQ World Wide DX Phone Contest, and at first everything went smoothly. On October 23 1972, four of the six operators left early from Panama to San Andres Island, most of whom were accompanied by their wives, for what was hoped to be a couple of days of vacationing while mak-



KZ5HS and author K6JAN (right) pose for a snapshot on San Andres Island prior to departure for Serrana Bank . . . departure number one, that is. KZ5HS did not make the second attempt.



Before the storm, Fred, K6JAN operates KS4KZ from Serrana Bank. A short time later the Collins gear was to be disabled by wind driven rain—inside the tent.

ing final preparation for the boat transportation to Serrana Bank from San Andres Island and to obtain Colombian authority to operate from the Bank using the FCC-obtained KS4 license.

The very well liked and affable well known ham, Francisco, HKØBXX, met our group at the airport on San Andres Island. Francisco is that very rare type of person who enjoys helping people for the pure joy of just being nice. He is "number one" to anyone who has had the pleasure of his friendship and he is known and respected by literally everyone on the island. His wife, Linda, is from the identical mold, and when leaving the island, one's chief regret is having to say goodbye to Francisco and Linda.

Francisco's importance to the DXpedition was first realized only moments after landing at the airport. It appeared that a new policy at the airport adamantly required certain passport documents rather than Tourist Visas. We were not going to be allowed to proceed with our DXpedition; that is, until Francisco appeared, smiled and said a few words to the officials, and immediately we were all politely escorted through customs and to our awaiting gear. Our gear consisted of over one ton of sophisticated ham paraphanelia, including one Signal One CX7A, two KWM-2's with separate v.f.o.'s, one Drake Line, two Collins 30L-1 linears, two 3 kw generators, 1,000 feet of long wire antenna, one vertical antenna, one 3-element beam, dipoles, tents, tables, chairs, cables, antenna tuner, meters, coax, etc., etc., etc.

Awaiting us at the airport was a truck from the beautiful Bahia Marina, owned by Mr. Tod Hoffman, the American from whom we were chartering a 32-foot Grand Banks Cabin Cruiser. Very efficiently our gear was loaded aboard the marina truck and we were taken to Tod's very beautiful marina to stow the gear and inspect the craft that was to play a very discouraging role in our DXpedition. Tod and Joan Hoffman are two of the most affable young Americans in the entire Caribbean. Their family of three boys is very close and all members seemed intent on making our stay pleasant and enjoyable. Tod is soon to become a ham and I know his presence on the air will add much to our hobby as well as to provide many stations with a new HKØ call.

On October 25th we met the remaining two KZ5's at the airport and proceeded immediately to the marina for departure to Serrana Bank. The crew of our boat consisted of a pilot, navigator, and a cook. We had loaded the boat the night before, so we loaded last minute items and departed by 2:00 P.M. from San Andres Island for Serrana Bank. The trip was supposed to have taken about 18 to 20 hours, but after 30 hours at sea the navigator finally admitted he was lost. We faced very high seas and everyone had experienced sea sickness, some more seriously than others. In fact, three of the party never raised themselves from their bunks (except to empty their stomachs into the sea). So at about midnight of the second day out, a vote was taken, and by a 5 to 1 majority, it was decided to return to San Andres Island.

[Continued on page 73]



Winds up to 80 m.p.h. buffet the tent housing the KS4KZ operations on Serrana Bank.

PEP. The cost is higher than that of the all aluminum type array, the difference being offset, however, when weight, windload and strength are considered. This type of construction could lead to some really lightweight Long-Johns. When fiberglass poles become available in longer lengths spectacular low band, highly directive, full sized arrays are entirely feasible. ■

Math's Notes [from page 49]

crystals can be handled by this method by simply adding two more resistors per crystal.

Fig. 5 is a schematic diagram of an r.f. switch that could be used to switch various stages in a receiver or transmitter into and out of a multiplier chain for example. With negative d.c. voltage at the control input, CR_1 will be reverse biased and L_1 and C_1 which should be chosen to resonate at the operating frequency, will offer a high impedance to the energy at the input. The two r.f. choke coils are used to present a d.c. path for the diode voltages while C_3 assures that L_1 will not shunt any diode current.

Now, when the control voltage is made positive, CR_1 is forward biased and conducts. This effectively shorts out the tuned circuit allowing r.f. to easily pass through the circuit.

By coupling two such circuits together as shown in fig. 6, a very simple antenna change-over switch can be made that should be very useful in portable equipment as its power drain is minute. See you next month.

73, Irv, WA2NDM

RME Story [from page 33]

tional and Hallicrafters, and the company decided to make a low cost version of the RME-69 which incorporated metal tubes and a noise silencer. The new receiver was named the RME-70 and had a very short life, as production was abruptly stopped after war was declared. The company switched over to military work, producing signal generators and ship radio equipment for the Navy on a 7-day-a-week basis, employing as many as 120 employees at the peak of production.

After the war, RME brought out the RME-45 and RME-50 receivers as well as the VHF-152 converter for 6 and 2 meters, in addition to a variety of other products (fig. 9).

However, as Shaw recollects, the original owners had been in business for 22 years and by 1953 Shaw decided to return full time to Bradley University to take up the work he had so abruptly dropped in 1928. The



Fig. 8—E. G. Shalkhauser (left) and R. M. Planck examine the post-war RME-45 receiver at the Chicago ARRL Convention of 1948.

owners looked about for some sort of merger or consolidation with another manufacturer who could carry the load and allow them to live at a more leisurely pace. Finally, the company was merged with *ElectroVoice* in 1953 and Shaw returned to teach and work at the University until 1969, when he retired to devote his full time to ham radio, fishing and photography. Russ Planck stayed with the RME division of *ElectroVoice* for a number of years. The factory was moved to Washington, Illinois. Gradually, as the electronics picture changed, the name RME faded out of the picture, as happens in so many mergers, until all that was left was the memory of the fabulous receivers, still a talking point when old timers get together to review the Golden Years of amateur radio! ■

Serrana Bank [from page 29]

The navigator had become so lost in the Caribbean that he was not able to find San Andres, and it was only by spotting the lights of San Andres 62 hours after departure, that we were able to find the Island on our return. The navigator lost his license and was last seen scurrying for the next flight out of San Andres.

I was convinced that the trip was worth salvaging and that all we needed was a good navigator. Unfortunately, because of time and other problems, (namely XYL's), only

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two others could be convinced to join me in another effort. Tod was great and decided he would cancel all other charter commitments and provide the boat again for our use. He agreed to absorb most of the expenses from the first unsuccessful effort. Just to be safe, he examined the fuel tanks and learned that there was *not* a drop in the tanks! He discovered a fuel leak and had it repaired at the last moment. Francisco located another navigator through his good friend Alfredo (also an HKØ). Now, already too late for the CQ contest, we set out again for Serrana Bank on October 30th, and by November 1st we arrived at the "Bank" and began loading our rubber raft with equipment. To our chagrin, we discovered the outboard motor would not start, so we were forced to devise a makeshift rope-pull system to the Bank. A contingency of four Colombian Marines had been detached to the island to protect its waters from poaching fishermen, and to welcome the American DXpedition. Fortunately for us they were extremely helpful in pulling the equipment to the higher ground near the lighthouse structure. It took almost four hours to land sufficient equipment to put a station on the air. However, we soon discovered that our generator would not function, so back out to the boat we went to get our second generator.

On The Air

By nightfall we were on the air! We had each made a contact, when, without warning we had 50 mile an hour winds and a tropical down pour. The wind blew rain into the tent and shorted our Collins equipment in a matter of minutes. Now, with three contacts in the log and pile-ups standing by, we drew straws to determine who would venture into the dark night, trek down the hill, climb into the raft, and travel back to the boat through heavy seas and shark infested waters for a new rig. Pete lost! By 11 P.M. we were back on the air to stay. However, Pete had learned from the boat crew that the engines would not start and that we may have problems in trying to return to San Andres. What an understatement that turned out to be!

Pete's uncanny mechanical abilities allowed him to fix almost everything including our generators and previous minor boat engine problems. But the boat engine prob-

lem required parts and materials unavailable on Serrana Bank. Pete was unable to return to the boat that day due to severely swollen ankles and feet as a result of sunburn and exposure. I took a look at the engines and could only shake my head in utter despair. There was considerable water in the fuel tanks and even I knew that water and diesel fuel don't mix. Besides, the pilot had run the batteries down, so there wasn't enough juice left to start anything. But, Pete spent the last day on the island trying to do the impossible, and he almost did! On October 3rd, Pete spent nearly 8 hours working on the engines, and finally he succeeded in getting it started, just long enough for us to load our gear aboard and travel about 100 yards into the dark night. Then, to our chagrin, the engine stopped and we slowly and helplessly drifted away from our only refuge, Serrana Bank. Two days later we were picked up by a Colombian gun boat. It was the trusty and reliable Signal One CX7A that kept us in maritime mobile communications with San Andres Island and Canal Zone to direct a rescue effort, that is, until the last evening when our last generator finally gave up and refused to operate.

When told by the Colombian Government on San Andres Island that a rescue operation would cost him 30,000 pesos (\$1,500.00), Tod Hoffman just gulped and said "Go get the boys," and so we were picked up by a Colombian gun boat and taken, guess where? Right back to Serrana Bank. We were told that we would be put back to shore, and our hopes of seeing home seemed thwarted again. But, at the last moment, we were told that the gun boat had finally received orders to tow us back to San Andres.

The officers and crew of the Colombian gun boat were very friendly and treated us as honored guests. The Captain even made a personal visit to our disabled vessel, just to see the "wonder rig" he had heard so much about, the Signal One. He was very impressed. Captain Jerry (KZ5JF) seemed to know quite a few top Colombian officers, and this, together with his fluent Spanish, facilitated and made more pleasurable our return to San Andres.

In spite of all the above problems, we all came out of it healthy and satisfied with the knowledge that the three of us had given almost 2,000 Amateurs throughout the world a chance to work KS4 for possibly the last and final time.

Oh yes, one thing remains, a settlement or lawsuit with a certain large United States Oil Company that was responsible for providing watered fuel to a bunch of hams on a DXpedition. An examination of the engine and fuel tanks by Colombian officials revealed 30 gallons of fresh water in the fuel tanks. This last matter is my responsibility.

On the return trip to Panama from San Andres Island the two engine aircraft developed engine problems and had to make the trip on a single engine, and, in landing, had to cut even that engine and glide to a landing. The sight of the runway filled with ambulances, fire equipment and other rescue equipment seemed an ironic, yet appropriate way to conclude our trip. ■

Announcements [from page 8]

swap tables. Prizes for the entire family! Contact: Lee L. Kanarian, K4WXS, 6100 Gulfport Blvd., So. St. Petersburg, FL 33707.

Wabash, Indiana

The Wabash County Amateur Radio Club presents its 6th annual Hamfest on May 19th, 1974. It will be held at the 4-H Fairgrounds, Wabash, Indiana. Rain or Shine! Flea Market, Bingo, & Hourly prizes from 10am to 2pm. For more information contact: Jerry Clevenger, WA9ZHU, RR 4, Wabash, Indiana 46992.

Trenton, Tennessee

The Annual Humboldt ARC Hamfest is Sunday, May 19, at Shady Acres City Park, Trenton, TN. Ladies Activities, Flea Market, and a playground for the children. For information contact: Hugh Wardlaw, WB4SLI, 2678 Cole Drive, Humboldt, TN, 38343.

Covington, Kentucky

The Northern Kentucky Amateur Radio Club Ham-o-rama will be held Sunday, May 26, 1974, at Boone County Fairgrounds, Burlington, KY. The hours are from 8am to 5pm. Indoor exhibits, Prizes and Flea Market. For more information contact: W4PII, 601 Rosemont Ave., Covington, KY 41001.

Greenville, South Carolina

The Blue Ridge Radio Society of Greenville, S.C. will hold its annual Hamfest on May 5, 1974, at the Recreation Building in Cleveland Park, Greenville, S.C. Prizes and Flea Market, from 9am til 3pm, for more information contact, Don Rose, W4ZKH, 11 Ivanhoe Circle, Greenville, S.C. 29607.

Kansas City, Missouri

The P.H.D. Amateur Radio Association would like to announce that the Fifth Annual North West Missouri Hamfest will be held at Kansas City, Missouri on Sunday, May 5th. Activities will begin from 9am to 4:30pm at the Kansas City North Community Center, 3930 No. Antioch Rd. For more information, contact: Gordon Wright, KØHAS 5404 N. Bennington, Kansas City, MO 64119.