

What do the wild waves say? ZL3AC Field Day 2010.

For many years we at ZL3AC have occupied a Field Day site on the banks of the Avon Estuary in Christchurch. The fact that the site was magical for radio propagation was never in doubt, but we would have liked somewhere a little more accessible.

So this year the team was excited to be trying a new site. We had discovered a different paddock, still surrounded by lovely estuary water, but so much easier to get to. Just one locked gate and spitting distance from the main road.

What could go wrong? The aerial poles went up with no problems, the tents and vans arrived on time, and all was set for a smooth win in the Midland region Trophy. Saturday operations started on time (unlike last year!) at 3PM and we soon got into the swing of half hour for each mode, with both bands operating. Our only problem seemed to be the generator not coping with both stations on the air. This was eventually traced to a slight lack of engine oil.

At 6AM on Sunday, the sun was starting to rise, and Brian ZL2BAT was called on his cell phone with the first news of an incoming Tsunami from Chile. Our site was one of the worst places you could be in a Tsunami, but what would be the effect of a 1m wave where we were? Probably not much, however we had the CD AREC communications van with us, and we did not want to be in the embarrassing situation of getting the AREC van swamped whilst we were having fun on field day.

At around 8.30AM we decided to leave the site and check on our own families preparations. We left the masts up, and loaded the antennas and radios into the AREC van.

Just to be safe, my family went up to Victoria Park, a high point on the port hills, and I had some very interesting conversations with some people there worried about the "big wave". Some girls could not be persuaded that they were safe, even at 400m elevation.

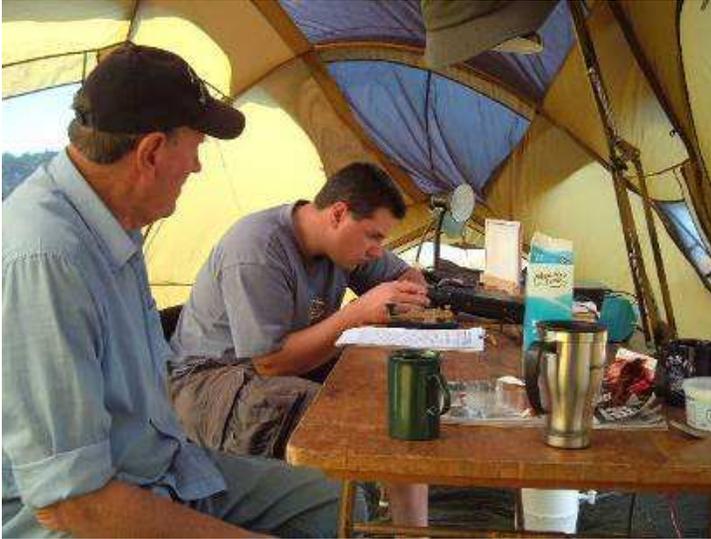
Once all the families were sorted, we agreed over a net on the local repeater to continue Field Day, and re-convene at another site. The place that came to mind, as we had once used it for VHF Field Day, was Mount Pleasant.

At an elevation of 500m it has a fantastic view of the estuary and Pegasus Bay, and would be safe from any tsunami. We set up some rough and ready dipoles at the very top of the hill and continued our day in the open air.

It has been in our experience, having carried out Field day from several sites around Christchurch, the high elevation sites have not performed as well as sites by water, and so it was with this hill top site. We could not penetrate the North Island stations as well as when we were situated by the estuary. At HF, it is all about Ground Conductivity. When we broke off operations from the site by the water we seemed to be ahead of all the others in contact numbers, but the break in operations probably lost us a couple of hours of contacts, so we probably won't be up with the leaders this year. However, it was a great weekend, and I think we all had a ball. Operating CW on top of a hill, with just a picnic table and deckchair, radio, key, dipole and battery is surely what Field Day is all about!

We have unfinished business at that new site by the estuary, so roll on next year. The Field Day team consisted of Brian Ramage ZL2BAT, Kelvin Barnsdale ZL3KB, Peter Heald ZL3AQN, Rory Deans ZL3HB, Geoff Cooke ZL2TGC, Richard Smart ZL4FZ, David O'Malley ZL3DO, Paul Layt ZL3TX, Des Rowe ZL3AK, Ken Judson No call yet.

Suggested Pictures below:



Above:
Top gun operator Geoff
Cooke ZL2TGC and Ken
Judson



Below:
Kelvin Barnsdale ZL3KB
with the bare essentials of
Field Day, on top of Mount
Pleasant.