



Certainly the cell phone has changed the convenience factor of communicating with our friends and families. But there are times when the lack of cell phone coverage, convenience, or just fun factor make amateur radio the way to go. One of the prime “selling” factors of the General Class license is allowing transmissions on the HF

frequencies when no other way works.

Our fellow Club member Chuck Steward, AI7V, has these comments on operating from Mexico with amateur radio.

Keeping in Touch

by Chuck Steward, AI7V

HF ham radio offers a great way for cruisers to keep in touch. Last year, Peggy (KE7KFY) and I sailed *Alert* down the coast to Mexico for the winter months; and thanks to radio, we were able to keep in touch with family and friends in the Northwest on a regular basis. For the first few days on the ocean after leaving Seattle, we checked in on 3.865 MHz to the Northwest Boaters Net and into 3.870 MHz with the Great Northern Boaters Net. Both of these are morning nets and go year round. We gave our position and visited with contacts.

As we reached California, we needed longer range than 75/80 meters (3.5MHz), so SYC member Bill Whitney (WO7O) and I visited most days on a 40 meter (7 MHz) frequency. This worked all the way into Mexican waters where we switched to even longer range on 20 meters (14MHz). Further down into Mexican waters, we switched to 17 meters (18MHz) where the bands were less crowded. It was wonderful to talk with Bill almost every day and have him ask, “Is there anything we can do for you today?” Most days we were just glad to have him there, but later on our trip he also played a key role in organizing a delivery of parts via other SYC members Chris Warner (K7PAN) and Dwight Shaw (WA7DS) – but that’s a whole other story.

This year Bill and I have been monitoring a couple of other boats sailing south and one west toward Hawaii. I could monitor these boats from my boat here in the Northwest and also from my home QTH. Bill has a fantastic home station with directional antennas and more power and can often keep contact even when I can’t quite hear or get out from home. Several other hams have joined in on these daily schedules, and it offers a learning opportunity about propagation and radio for those who have not used HF radio over the miles – and the boats on the other end have learned too!

We also used radio for sailmail/winlink email, position reporting, and getting weather information. The Internet (when connected) helped in harbors, and Skype became our main phone link both with other cruisers and to call back home. Our Iridium phone came into play very little. HF radio was the first choice and almost always worked well.



Alert's navigation and ham station

Boater’s nets, on marine SSB and HF ham frequencies in Mexican and other cruising waters, prove very useful for weather, port conditions, and general information. We often had regular check-ins among cruisers we met who were in nearby areas and used both HF ham and SSB. (Some of this was explained at the December ARC meeting.)

Here in the Northwest, we often use ham VHF/UHF for our nets and contacts. The morning Puget Sound Boater’s Net and the BC Boaters Net are very useful for local contact. But longer range cruisers go to HF. Even this summer, when we headed up to Canada for a month, several of us checked in on HF with WO7O and others to keep in the loop.

If you’ve taken the big first step, have your Tech license, and learned the basics on how to use a radio – keep on going. Study for that General License and join the extended use of HF radio. 📶

W7SYC – For more information about the Seattle Yacht Club Amateur Radio Committee or getting an amateur radio license, contact Dan Withers, dwithers@rodaxwireless.com or call (206) 947-2303.

