

# Public Service / Amateur Radio Emergency Service

## The Head of the Trent Regatta: A Peterborough ARC Tradition

Martin Ackerman, VA3OMW

Long sleek rowing sculls sit stacked high on their trailers, gleaming in the cool fall morning light surrounding me as I navigate a maze of rowers and piles of heaped rowing gear.

I am at the Head of the Trent Regatta in Peterborough, Ontario on the weekend of October 5 and 6, 2019. I am one of the volunteers with the Peterborough Amateur Radio Club (PARC) who are here to provide the race radio communication event support.

The regatta is in its 49th year and is a Trent University tradition that will host 520 boats and 1,500 participants, from ages 8 to 80, over two days. The participants race a five kilometre distance on the Otonabee River, which is part of the Trent-Severn Waterway, a 386 kilometre long national historic canal route that connects Lake Ontario to Lake Huron.

The Peterborough ARC has been providing radio communication support for the regatta for 41 years and the race has become an integral part of our own club tradition. Our tasks are: to set up a 2m communications network of five stations, covering the course from end to end; to relay information to race marshals and event officials on the location of boats along the course; to monitor weather conditions; and to note boat start times, report penalties and confirm finishes.

Throughout the race the waterway will be opened and closed as races take place and lanes will be reset and we will transmit waterway closures as well. Our role will assist in keeping the course and boats safe and in order. Should other issues arise we will assist as required.

This is my first year at the event and also my first year as a certified Amateur. The radio/race weekend is about to provide quite an education for me in how

Peterborough ARES Group  
Coordinator John, VE3VL,  
at the Boathouse Station.



Canal view of the race from the Boathouse Station.

Amateur Radio operators help in the community in active field conditions.

My role this morning is to float from station to station with my handheld radio (HT), giving operators breaks and helping out wherever needed. Tomorrow I am scheduled to run a station on my own for the morning.

This year's setup is different from those in the past as our local repeater VE3PBO (146.625 MHz), that we usually use for the event, is out of commission because the water tower it normally operates on is being repaired and painted.

For this weekend's event, the repeater has been installed temporarily at a nearby club member's home and we will run it from there.



### Club Participants

(# of years participating is shown in brackets)

#### Finish Line Station:

Rick, VE3IQZ (41); Bob VE3RVZ (3)

#### Athletic Complex Station:

Nina, VE3IRK (41); Bill, VE3MEW (40);  
Martin, VA30MW (first year)

#### Boathouse Station:

John, VE3VL (9) and his wife Lou

#### Pontoon Boat:

John, VA3NW (6)

#### Starting Line:

Dave, VE3SD (4); Randy, VE3DIV (3)

### Station Details:

Locations sequence from Start to Finish Line in order of placement along the race course

**Start Line Station:** The station was housed in an open tent located five kilometres from the Finish Line. It was powered by a generator and consisted of a VHF/UHF car mobile. The antenna was a quarter-wave ground plane mounted on top of the tent. The station operated at 15 watts.

**Pontoon Boat Station:** The location changed throughout the day but the station was primarily situated in between the Boathouse and the Start Line. It was powered by a boat battery and consisted of a car mobile VHF/UHF radio. The antenna was a wire J-pole mounted on a 30-foot mast until it collided with a tree and was shortened to 15 feet.

**Boathouse Station:** Situated alongside water within close proximity of the University rowing team boathouse, the station was housed in a three-walled tent and was powered by a generator and consisted of a car mobile VHF/UHF radio. Two computers were used to monitor weather and there was one mobile hotspot. On Day 2 this side of the river was used for boat launching. The antenna was a dual band VHF/UHF Comet mounted on a 15-foot telescopic Purple Martin pole.

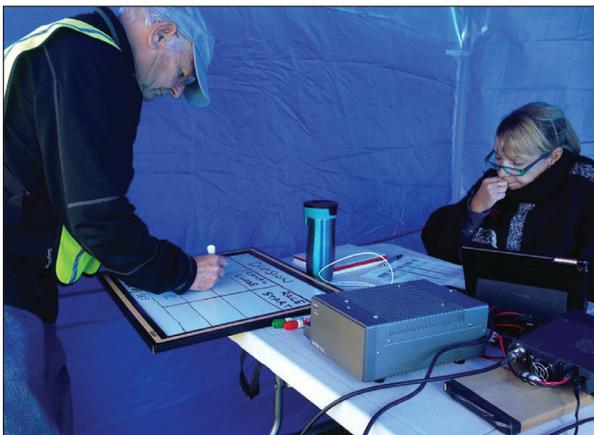
**Athletic Complex Station:** Situated alongside the river in close proximity to the athletic complex, the station was a member's car equipped with a mobile and it used the vehicle's antennas. On Day 1 boats were parked here and carried to the water for launching and teams staged boats and gear in this area prior to the races.

**Finish Line Station:** Situated on the second floor of the Great Hall building, the station operated at 5 watts and was powered by power supplies connected to the building AC. The antenna was a Diamond X50A Fibreglass 5/8-wave vertical.

My own equipment consisted of a 5-watt HT mounted on a portable tripod with a handheld mic and an extended whip antenna.

**John, VE3VL, and his XYL Lou updating race start times and lane opening and closures at the Boathouse Station.**

It doesn't take long for the first complication of the day to present itself. It's still pre-race and we are finalizing our radio setup at the finish line but radio reception is poor with our antenna setup. Our finish line setup is on the second floor in a school common room with our antenna setup outside on a patio.



A few days ago we radio-tested this location on the ground with good signal reports, but now it seems that on the second floor other towers from this building are impeding the signal.

All buildings at the university are constructed of poured stone and concrete and buildings are clustered together. The architecture is very impressive but has always been problematic for our radios. A quick run home by Bob, VE3RVZ, produces a 5/8-wave vertical fiberglass whip antenna and some upgraded feedline which remedies the problem.

It is 7:30 am, still pre-race and our club Activities Coordinator John, VA3NW, is preparing a mobile station in a pontoon boat. All seems good and our mobile marine stations sets out on the water to assume a monitoring position further up the river.

At 8:30 am, the racing is in progress and I get my first orders of the day not by radio but by my cellphone. The 30-foot antenna mast on the pontoon boat has been hit by a tree overhanging the water and our marine mobile is out of commission until VA3NW can fix it. It takes 40 minutes to effect a repair by shortening the mast and swapping out a radio, that was rattled by the collision, with another radio to get our mobile station back up and running again.

Day 1 progresses from this point fairly smoothly with the exception of a boat flipping over in the canal and the occasional pleasure craft that halted the race as they passed through the canal (shepherded by Race Safety craft) along this shared waterway to Lift Lock 21 to the south.

**Dave, VE3SD, on the radio at the Start Line station as Randy, VE3DIV (at right) consults with a Race Official at the water's edge.**



Throughout the day I circulate from station to station. Nina, VE3IRK, runs me through her station details at our Athletic Complex Station that I am scheduled to run for the morning of Day 2.

Day 2 has me up early. The location to launch boats has been moved to the other side of the river so my duties today have changed and now I am helping John, VE3VL, set up the tent for our Boathouse Station. Later, I sit in and take some calls as the day passes.

There is a lot of activity taking place at this location with crowds and officials. Some of the shorter sprints start at this point so there is a lot of staging going on and officials passing messages to us to forward to the start and finish lines. The wind has picked up and there are occasional light showers, but Day 2 runs its course without any complications.

This race weekend has been a full one for me. I had the opportunity to be involved in a large club event that required a lot of on-the-spot technical problem solving.

Our group established a chain of stations and maintained effective communications along the racecourse and provided a major contribution to the success of the day. Not everything worked out as expected but, as one of our club members



**John, VA3NW, and the section of antenna mast that was damaged when the pontoon boat hit the tree.**



**Martin, VA3OMW, and his mobile HT setup in a rowing team staging area.**

says, "we are a resourceful bunch and will figure it out". Planning that was made ahead of time enabled us to effectively deal with issues that arose.

Race organizers are considering growing this event into a 900-boat, two-day event in the future and new and more effective communications plans are already being discussed by our group for next year.

It was an exciting experience to be involved this year with the Regatta and I certainly plan to be involved next year as well. A new tradition for a new Amateur.

–73, Martin, VA3OMW

*The Peterborough Amateur Radio Club dates back to 1937. Our club logo contains an image of the Peterborough lift lock which is Lock 21 (115 years old built in 1904) on the Trent-Severn Waterway and is the world's highest lift lock and is a well-known local landmark. Our club operates five repeaters: four 2m repeaters and one 440 repeater – VE3BUY, VE3PBO, VA3PBO, VE3TJR and VE3APL . For more information visit [www.peterboroughamateurclub.ca](http://www.peterboroughamateurclub.ca).*