METEOR SCATTER COMMUNICATIONS: THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE PINGS

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NASA METEOROID ENVIRONMENT OFFICE

MSFC AMATEUR RADIO CLUB NN4SA

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HUNTSVILLE HAMFEST AUGUST 2017



- What is a meteor?
- What scatters my signal?
- Where does my signal go?
- When is the best time to operate?
- What equipment should I use?
- What software and mode should I use?
- What does a QSO look and sound like?
- Tools to help make contacts
- Summary
- An operating event announcement
- Links

Science part

Radio part

WHAT IS A METEOR?

- Consist of small pieces (grain of sand, particle of dust) of mostly cometary (90%) or asteroidal (10%) material
- Meteoroids bits in space
- Meteors bits burning up in the atmosphere
- Meteorites hit the ground
- Visible light from a meteor comes mostly from the ionization of the atmosphere
- The free electrons from the ionization can scatter radio signals
- Sporadic meteors come from all over the sky (mostly), all the time but are most numerous near sunrise when we are on the front bumper of Earth
- Shower meteors appear to come from a point on the sky called the radiant
 - This is a perspective effect like looking down a railroad track

ALL SKY CAMERA VIEW OF PERSEID 12 AUG 2017



Tellus (04A)

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LEONIDS 1999

NOV-18-99 2:04:25 A

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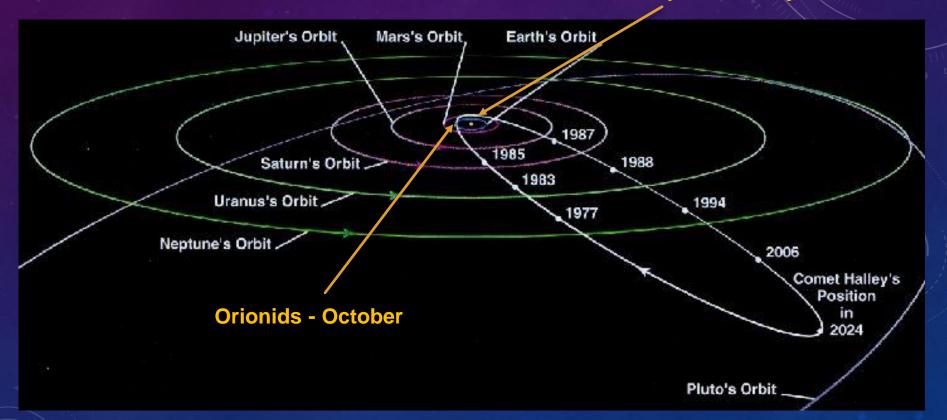
90% OF METEOROIDS COME FROM COMETS

Comet Halley 1986

COMET HALLEY

 Halley particles are responsible for 2 meteor showers every year

Eta Aquarids - May

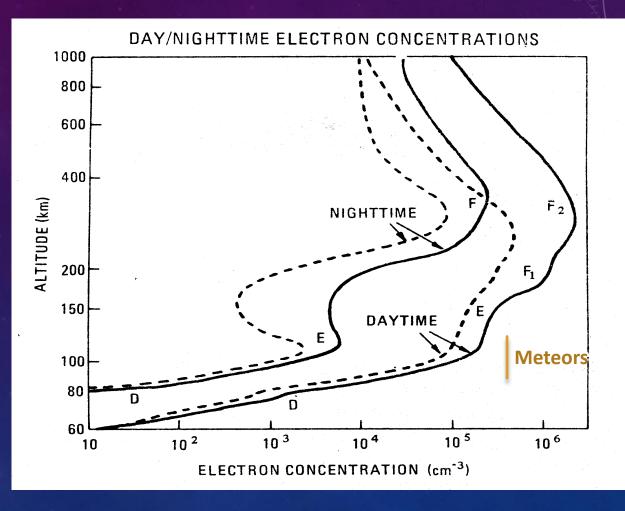


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COMPUTER MODEL OF LEONID STREAM

ClearSky: 1699 Data - Outer View Copyright 1998 David L. Clark 1998/11/03 10:52:39 EST

IONOSPHERE



9

WHAT SCATTERS MY SIGNAL?

- As the meteoroid enters the atmosphere at high speed (15 70 km/s) it ionizes the oxygen and nitrogen molecules generating ions and free electrons which scatter the RF (also makes light)
- This occurs between about 100 and 80 km, near the same altitude as sporadic E (Es)
 - The only relationship between Es and meteors is that the electrons responsible for Es are thought to come from metals deposited in the atmosphere from meteor ablation.
 - But Es is not correlated with meteor showers
 - During summer you may work Es while attempting meteor scatter QSOs
 - Es gives longer-lasting signals

6m FT8 Meteor Ping 7 August 2017 02:45:15

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TWO TYPES OF METEOR TRAILS

Underdense

- Weak echoes
- Short-lived (<1 second)
- Electron density is so low that individual electrons don't interact with each other)
- Scattering geometry must be specular

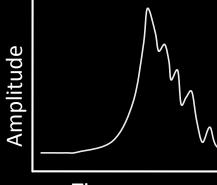
Overdense

- Strong echoes
- Long-lived (many seconds)
- Electrons act in concert like a metal tube

Amplitude

Time

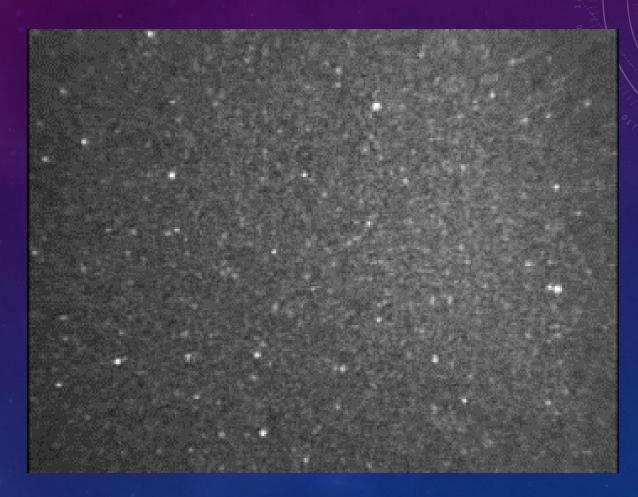
 Scattering geometry must be specular but upper atmospheric winds can "crinkle the tube"



Time

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UNDERDENSE EXAMPLE



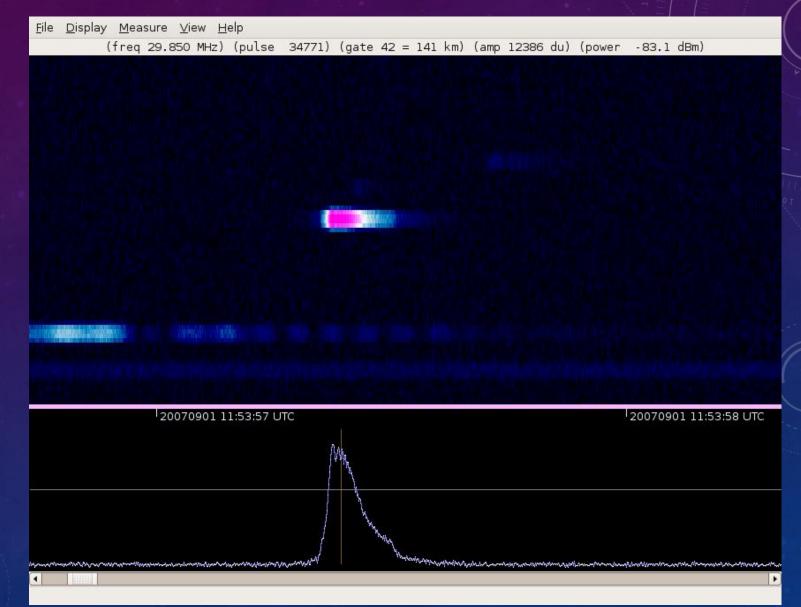
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ANOTHER LEONID



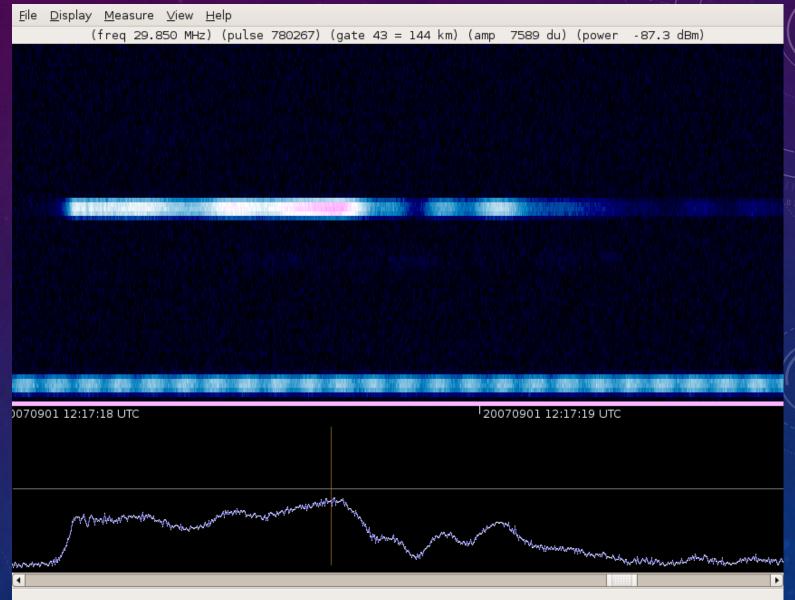
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Underdense echo



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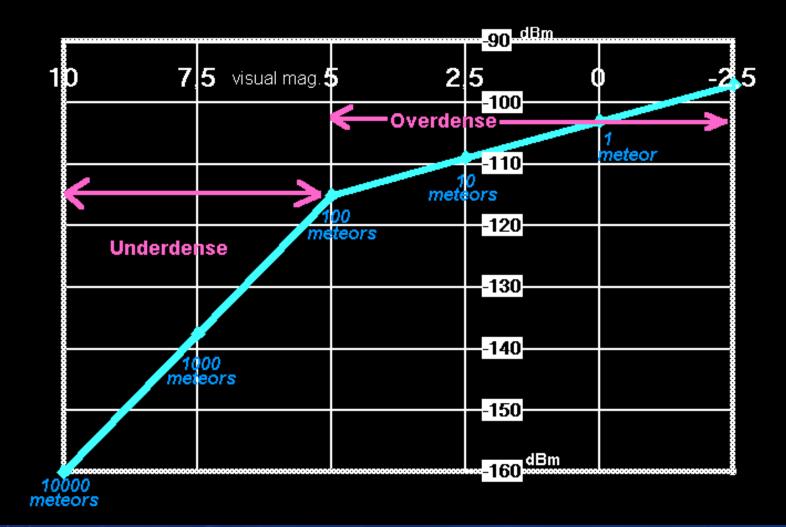
Overdense echo



From P. Brown, Univ. of Western Ontario

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APPROXIMATE HOURLY METEOR RATES



RETURN POWER

Important point is that the signal strength goes as the cube of the wavelength, λ , and the square of the electron line density, q

$$P_{R} = \frac{P_{T}G_{T}G_{R}\lambda^{3}\sigma_{e}}{64\pi^{3}} \frac{q^{2}\sin^{2}\gamma}{(R_{1}R_{2})(R_{1}+R_{2})(1-\sin^{2}\phi\cos^{2}\beta)}$$

= 5 × 10⁻³² $\frac{P_{T}G_{T}G_{R}\lambda^{3}q^{2}\sin^{2}\gamma}{(R_{1}R_{2})(R_{1}+R_{2})(1-\sin^{2}\phi\cos^{2}\beta)}$ watts

You want to use the longest wavelength (lowest frequency) possible. If you get into HF bands, lonospheric effects can dominate so lower VHF (40 – 100 MHz) is best. From McKinley, 1961.

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FREQUENCY DEPENDENCE

 Since scattered power is proportional to the wavelength³ or 1/frequency³ let's compare 2m to 6m

 $P \approx (144.2 / 50.26)^3 = 23.6 \text{ or } 13.7 \text{ dB}, \text{ more than } 2 \text{ S units}$

- But antenna gain is slightly easier at 2m
 - 3 element 6m yagi is 8 dBi (5 element ~ 16 dBi)
 - 11 element 2m yagi ~ 15 dBi
- But most HF rigs have 6m
- So 6m is favored especially if you don't already have the antennas and amplifier for 2m
- 10m should also work but is not typically used beware signaling rate limitations (1200 baud – 10m) below VHF

WHERE DOES MY SIGNAL GO? TYPICAL RANGE: 800 – 2300 KM (500 – 1400 MI)



WHERE DOES MY SIGNAL GO?

ТΧ

- Meteor must lie tangent to an ellipsoid with the transmitter and receiver at the foci
- This geometry favors certain path directions as the shower radiant moves across the sky
- The vast majority of meteors don't satisfy this "specular" condition and can't be used for communications

RX

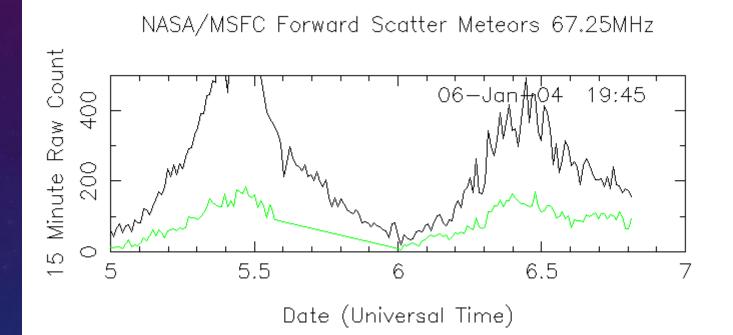


WHAT IS THE BEST TIME TO OPERATE?

- Morning diurnal variation like bugs on a windshield
 - Car (Earth) going 30 km/s
 - Bugs (meteoroids) going up to 40 km/s around the sun, some head-on
 - Impact speed is vector sum of these all hit windshield, only really fast ones hit rear window
- There are fewer meteors in the spring, +/- 20% annual variation
- During meteor showers there are more large meteors

Name	Peak Dates	Approx. Meteors/hour	Speed
Quandrantids	Jan. 3	120	43 km/s
Arietids	Jun. 9 (daytime)	45	41
Eta Aquariids	May 6	60	66
Perseids	Aug. 11-13	90	60
Orionids	Oct. 20-22	20	67
Geminids	Dec. 12-13	120	36

2004 QUADRANTID METEOR SHOWER



Initial radius – why fast meteors don't work as well

Initial radius

Ionization column

meteoroid

Radio signa

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From P. Brown, Univ. of Western Ontario

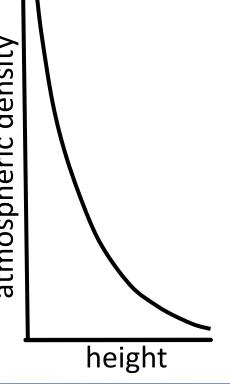
Initial radius

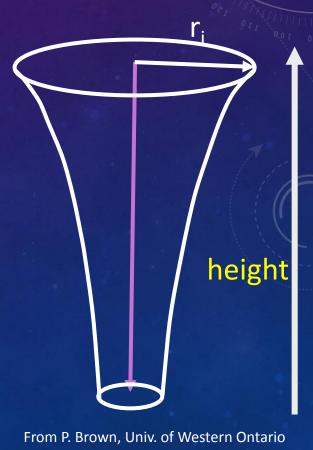
When the radius of an underdense trail is of the order of the radar wavelength, there is significant attenuation

Initial radius varies with height

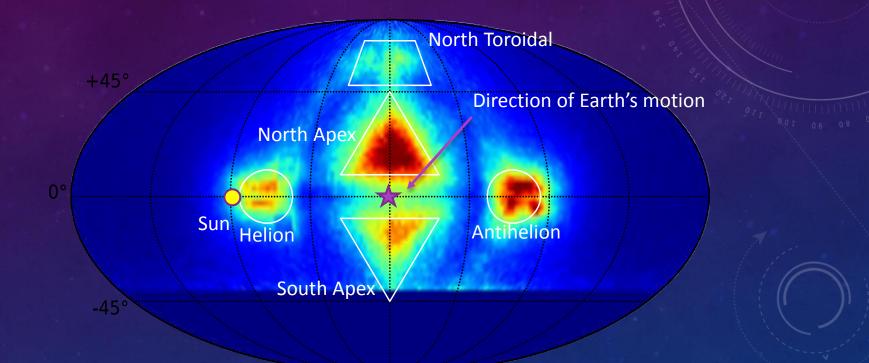
Since meteor ablation heights vary with speed (faster meteoroids ablate higher), the initial radius effect biases radio against fast meteors.

atmospheric density





SPORADIC SOURCE RADIANTS FROM RADAR



Meteoroid Flux as a function of direction as observed by Canadian Meteor Orbit Radar. Observationalbiases have been taken into account and results have been weighted by a constant limiting kinetic energy. Coordinate system is Earth-centered ecliptic.

WHAT EQUIPMENT SHOULD I USE?

- Most modern HF rigs include 6m
 - Throttle back from max power for high duty cycle like MSK144 (50 75%)
- Antenna gain helps 5 element beam on 6m is good
 - An amplifier and mast-mounted preamp help
 - It is possible to make contacts with attic-mounted dipoles be patient and make a sched with a big gun
- Most modern computers have adequate processing power.
 - May need to reduce Frequency Tolerance (FTOL below 200 Hz)
- Need a soundcard interface
 - Many new rigs have this built-in
 - SignaLink is very popular
 - Homebrew is fairly simple

WHAT SOFTWARE AND MODE SHOULD I USE?

- WSJT-X has the MSK144 mode which is the standard
 - Available for Windows, Mac and Linux
 - 15 second cycle is typically used, messages are 72 msec
 - Offset quadrature phase shift keying (minimum shift keying)
 - PC clock should be set accurately, within a second or so
 - The WSJT Yahoogroup is excellent but READ THE MANUAL FIRST
- Previous versions of WSJT had the FSK441 mode which has faded from use
- Longer format modes like JT65 and FT8 are too slow
 - Recall that most "pings" are a second or two
- CW and SSB are possible but are more difficult

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WHAT DOES A QSO LOOK AND SOUND LIKE?

- MSK144 sounds more like a grunt than a ping
- The QSO sequence looks just like JT65/JT9/FT8
- Operators' choice whether exchanging signal reports or grid squares
- Auto Sequence mode of MSK144 makes the QSO easy

LOCAL CONTACT USING MSK144

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WSJT-X v1.7.0 by K1JT

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SJT-X v1.8.0-rc1 by K1JT

File Configurations View Mode Decode Save Tools Help

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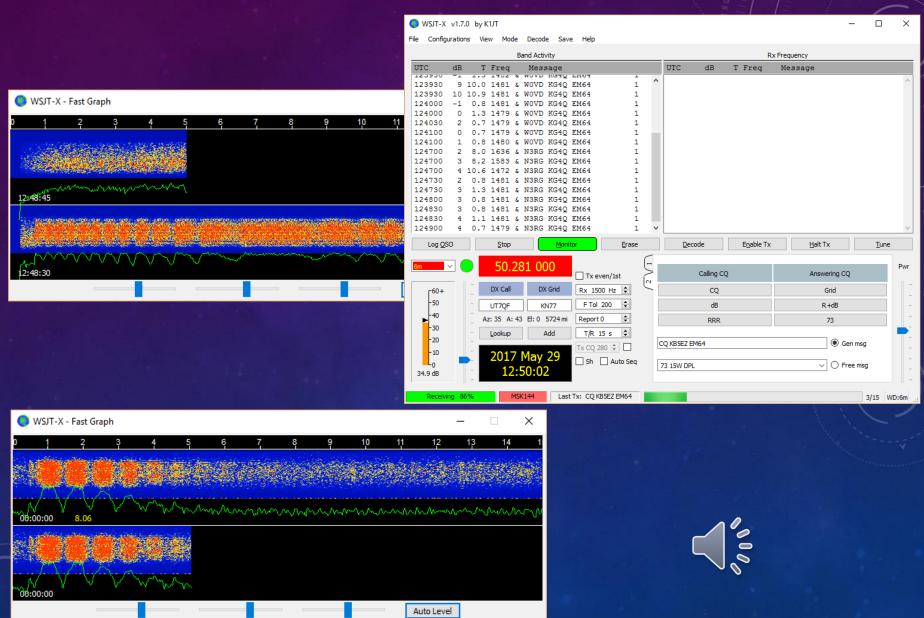
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Auto Level

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TOOLS TO HELP MAKE CONTACTS

Pingjockey.net

- Great way to setup a contact
 - Agree on frequency and timing
- DO NOT post info during the QSO if you want it to "count"
- University of Western Ontario radar site
 - Indicates which showers are active
 - 15 kW radar at 17.45, 29.85, and 38.15 MHz
 - The system can't see meteors from radiants directly overhead
 - It loses sensitivity for higher speed meteors (initial trail radius)

PINGJOCKEY.NET

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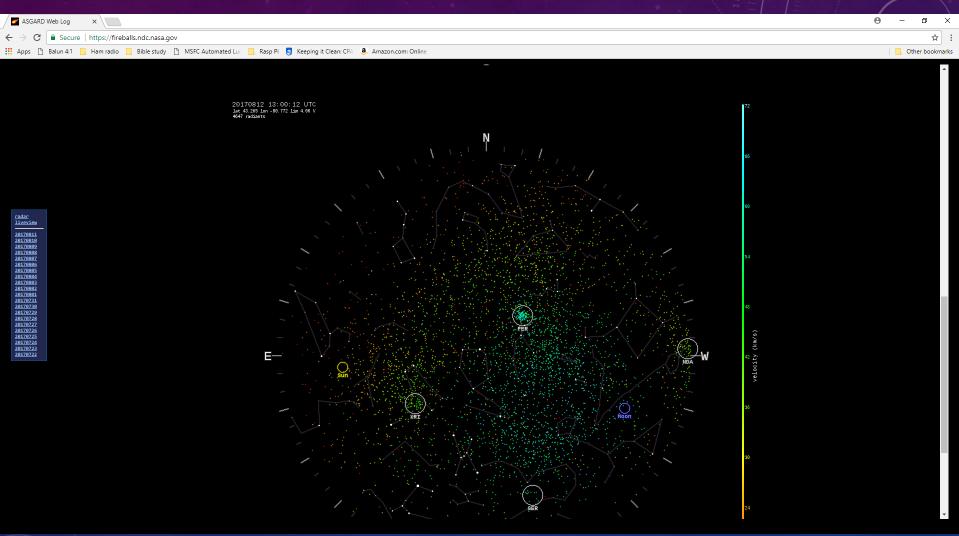
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UWO RADAR SITE - FIREBALLS.NDC.NASA.GOV

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Perseids 12 August 2017

Perseids 12 August 2017



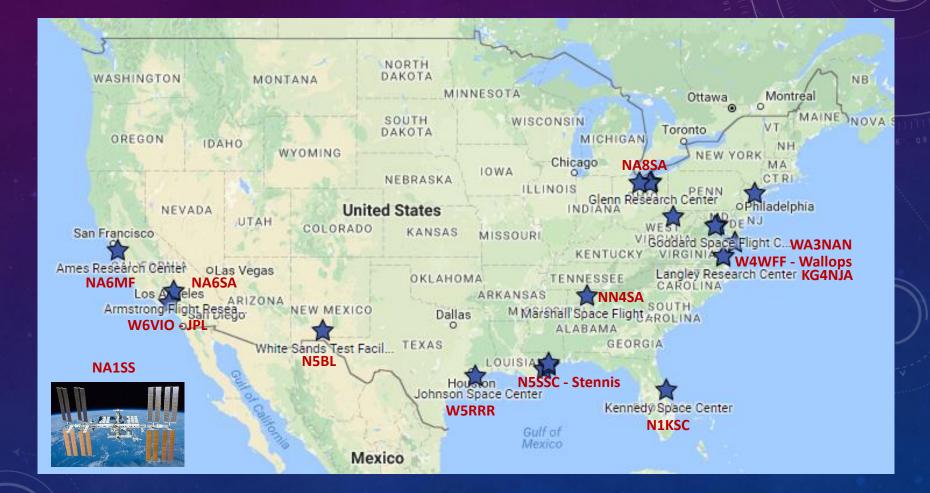
SUMMARY

- Meteor scatter communications is easier than ever thanks to digital modes
- You can make meteor scatter contacts anytime but they are easier during meteor showers and during the morning hours
- You don't need a super station but antenna gain, a preamp, and transmit power make it easier
 - Try it even if you are running 50w to a dipole
- Don't be afraid to ask for help on the Pingjockey and WSJT groups but do a little homework first
 - Get some experience with JT65, JT9 or especially FT8 on HF to get the feel for digital contacts and checkout your rig interface
- Give it a try and ponder what is happening when you hear a "ping" some dust particle has been wandering around the solar system for hundreds or thousands of years and then meets its fiery end to help you make a QSO

AN ANNOUNCEMENT - NASA ON THE AIR EVENT

- Beginning this December, 13 club stations at NASA centers and facilities will be participating in a year long event: NASA On The Air
- Points can be accumulated by working these club stations on various bands and modes, a web-based system will allow points tracking
- A downloadable certificate will be available at the end of the event in December 2018
- Various special events will also be celebrated including:
 - December 2017 45th anniversary of Apollo 17 last lunar landing
 - June 2018 60th anniversary of NASA
 - October 2018 20th anniversary of International Space Station
 - December 2018 50th anniversary of Apollo 8 lunar orbiting mission
- Stay tuned to QST and nasaontheair.wordpress.com for further details

NASA CENTERS AND FACILITIES – PARTICIPATING CLUBS



LINKS AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- <u>https://www.pingjockey.net/cgi-bin/pingtalk</u>
- <u>https://fireballs.ndc.nasa.gov</u>
- <u>https://physics.Princeton.edu/plulsar/k1jt/wsjtx.html</u>
- International Meteor Organization radio observation info http://www.imo.net/radio/index.html
- Check NASA Technical Report Server for these slides
 - https://www.sti.nasa.gov/
- Meteor Science and Engineering by D. W. R. McKinley 1961
 Meteor Science and Engineering



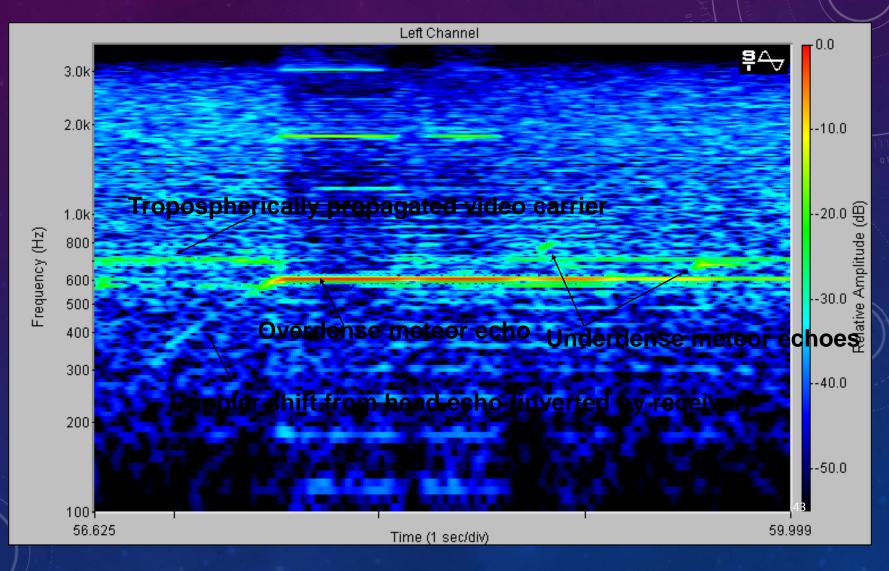


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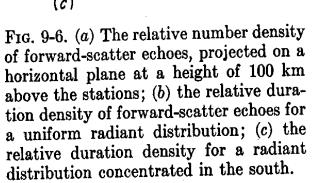
PARTICIPATING CLUBS

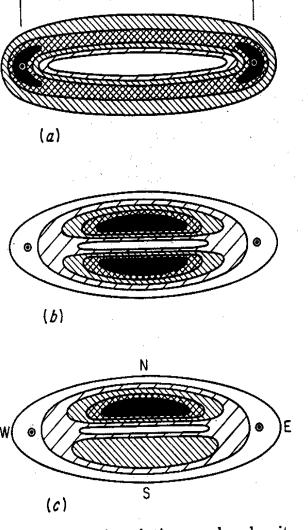
- Ames Research Center ARC NA6MF California
- Armstrong Flight Research Center AFRC NA6SA California
- Glenn Research Center GRC NA8SA- Ohio
- Goddard Space Flight Center GSFC WA3NAN Maryland
- International Space Station ISS NA1SS, etc. earth orbit
- Jet Propulsion Laboratory JPL W6VIO California
- Johnson Space Center JSC W5RRR Texas
- Kennedy Space Center KSC N1KSC Florida
- Langley Research Center LARC KG4NJA Virginia
- Marshall Space Flight Center MSFC NN4SA Alabama
- Stennis Space Center SSC N5SSC (to be requested) Mississippi
- Wallops Fight Facility WFF W4WFF Virginia
- White Sands Complex/White Sands Test Facility WSCTF TBD New Mexico

Spectrogram of "Bright" and "Faint" Meteors









1.000 km



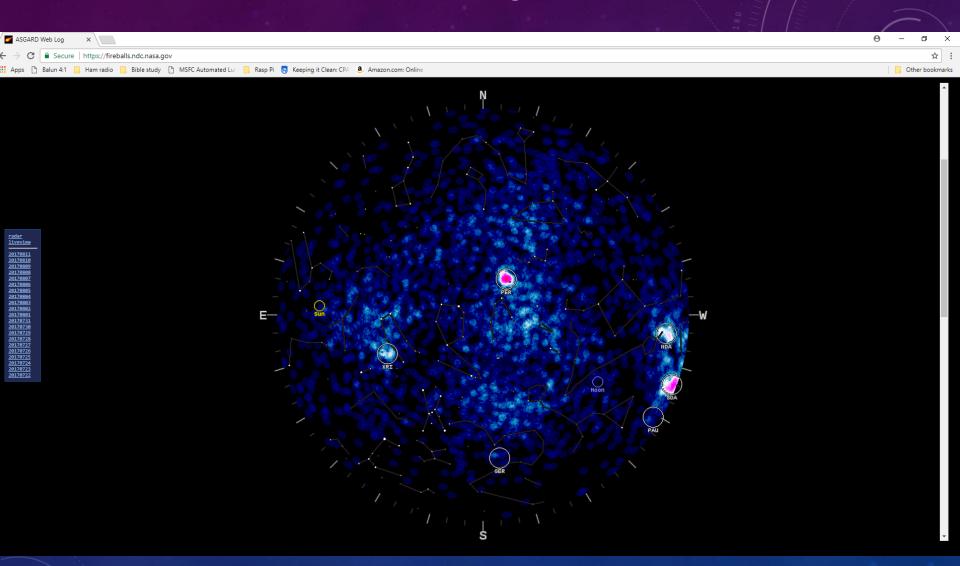
FORWARD SCATTER GEOMETRY

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FIG. 9-1. The geometry of forward-scatter involved in the calculation of f, the length of one-half of the first Fresnel zone.

From "Meteor Science and Engineering", D.W.R. McKinley

Perseids 12 August 2017

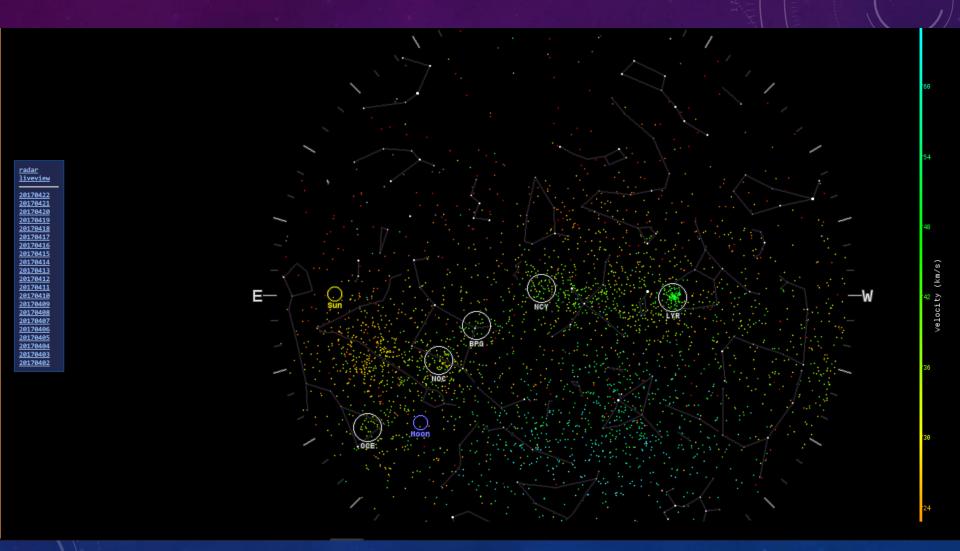


SJT-X v1.8.0-rc1 by K1JT

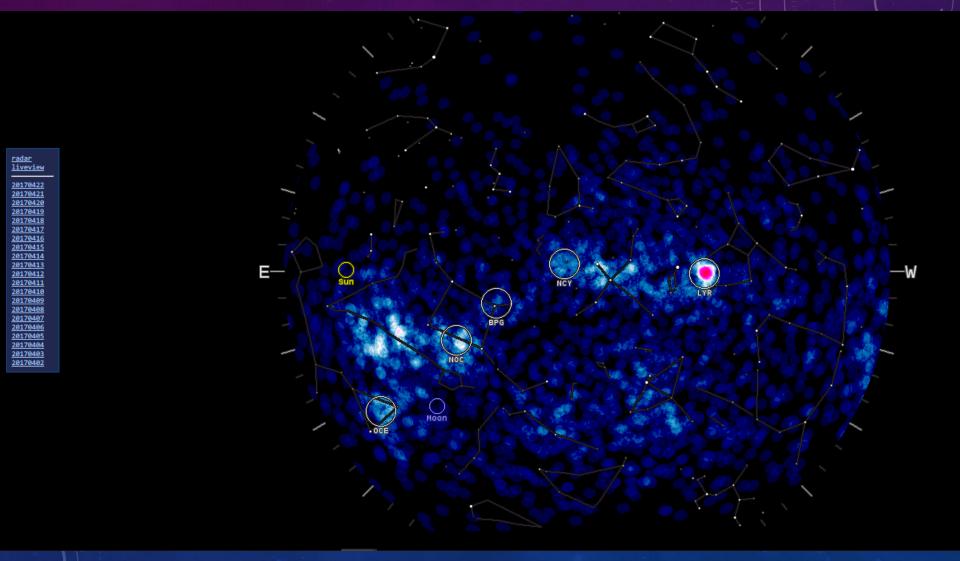
WSJI-X VI.8.0-rc1 by KIJI	● WSJT-X - Fast Graph -
File Configurations View Mode Decode Save Tools Help	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 1
Band Activity UTC dB T Freq Message	
UTC dB T Freq Message 134500 1 0.9 1517 & NX4E KC5WX 73 3 131415 2 6.1 1533 & CQ N2LEE FM18 1 1	
	13:14:15 ~ 2.45 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~
	13:45:45 Auto Level
Log QSO Stop Monitor Erase	Decode Enable Tx Halt Tx Tune ✓ Menus
6m ✓ 50.260 000 ✓ Tx even/1st	Calling CQ Answering CQ CQ Grid
-60 - Az: 37 A: 51 EI: 11 509 mi -40 - Lookup Add Tx CQ 280 €	dB R+dB RRR 73
-20 - 2017 Aug 12 □ Sh ☑ Auto Seq	Image: Constraint of the second se
170812_131415.wav MSK144	0/15 WD:6m

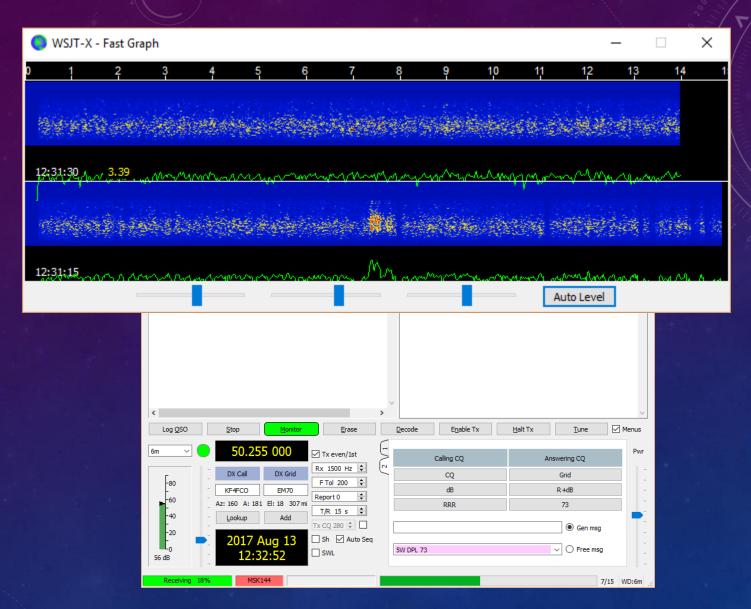
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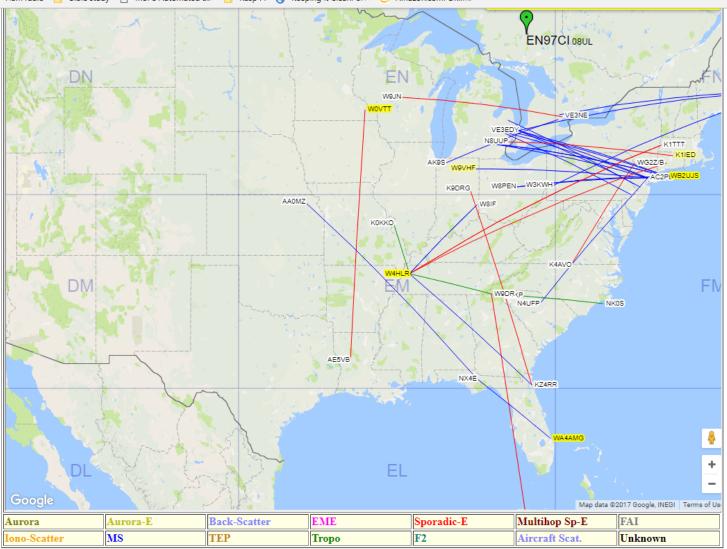
UWO RADAR SITE - SPEEDS



UWO RADAR SITE – FIREBALLS.NDC.NASA.GOV

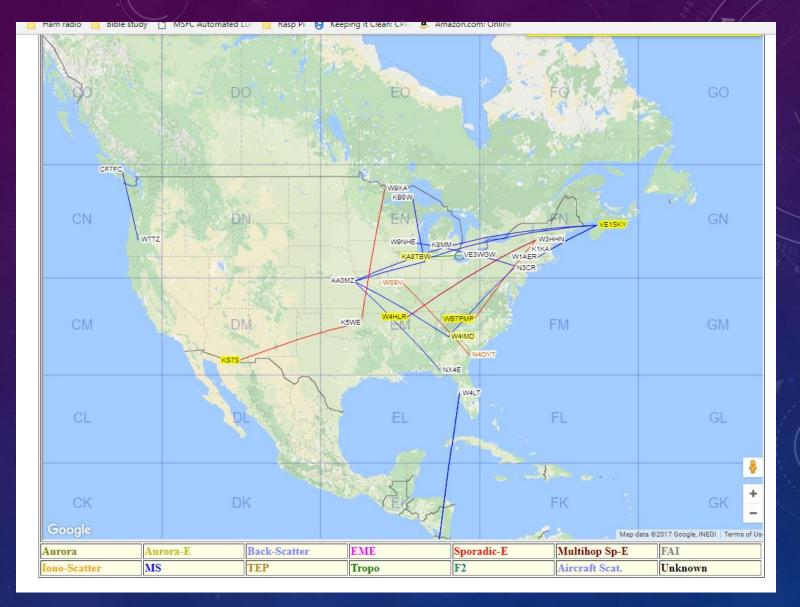


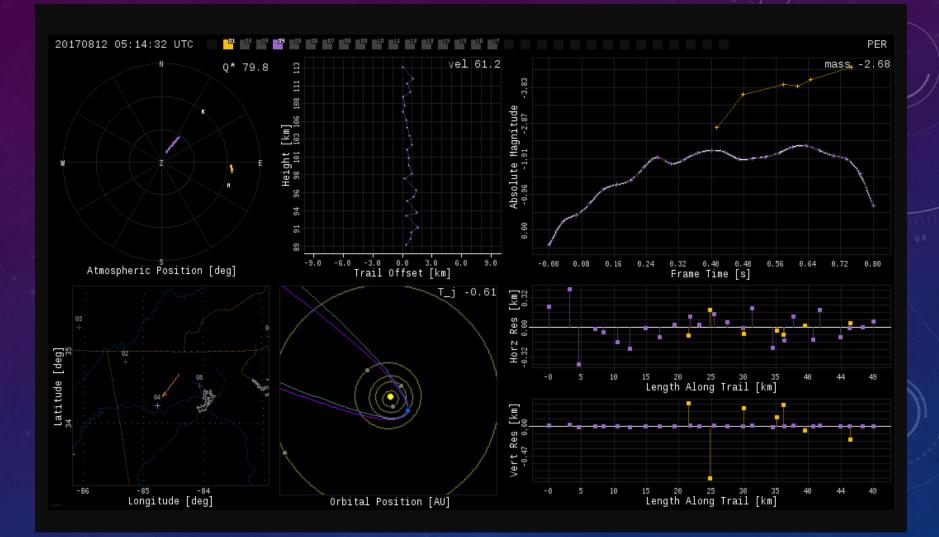




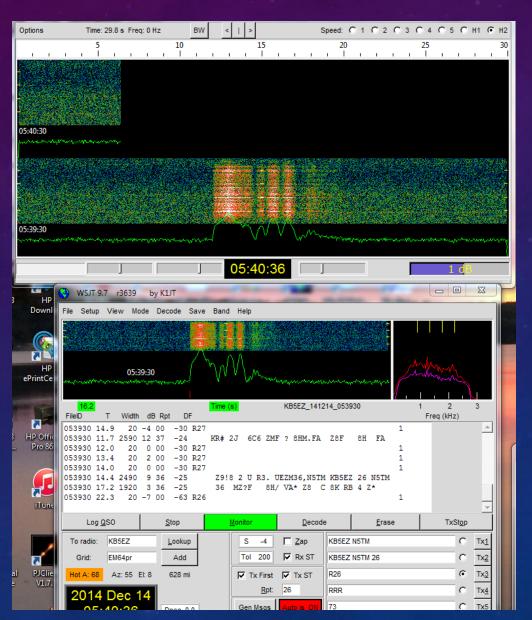
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Rob Suggs KB5EZ August 2017





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	Refresh Look back	Distance/Bearing Locator	Who's Earwigging?			
	Update User details AA1YN Callsign database *	** UNREGISTERED USER - POSTS DISABLED **	** Refreshed 12Aug 13:20			
		system, you will be unable to post any messages until you				
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		th America, 50.260MHz and 144.140MHz are calling no				
		re complete, invalidates the contact, and, if it's not HIGH		it doesn't belong here!		
To have your callsign and locator automatically appended to each message that you send, an html cookie can be stored by your web browser. The information that is stored in the cookie is your callsign, firstname, and Maidenhead grid locator. To enable this feature, please press the "Update User details" button shown above.						
Enter your message here	Gol					
12Aug 13:20 ACORA use TOL 200 as I am higher than u. 12Aug 13:20 KG5CCI any chance for me (WA5ZFP Ronald 12Aug 13:20 ***** CQ 144.146, west, 2nd, SH=on *****	LA EL4911 162.203.219.199)					
12Aug 13:20 RR Gary, Tnx try (W5LDA Larry OK EM15xu	192.169.27.149)					
12Aug 13:20 kc5wx 1469 1441 (<u>N0KK/6/2/KW</u> Kirk MN E 12Aug 13:20 KB0ZOM Ben, Thanks for a new grid on two! 12Aug 13:20 KC8YJB Not decoding you. Your CW ID FB.	73 (KU8Y/50THRU432 Ken MI EN61uw 104.5.18.2 (K5VWW Orville TX EL29fg 45.29.161.39)	55)				
12Aug 13:20 even got ur cw id! (KB0ZOM Ben NE EN00tn 12Aug 13:20 FM19 1 6 -0.6132015 8 2.2 1	24.159.170.45) 506 & CO W3IP FM19 1 1 -0.1132015 9	3.0 1485 & CQ W3IP FM19 1 1 -0.2132015	10 5.2 1471 & CQ W3IP FM19	9 (<u>KØTPP</u> Larry mo EM48rj 71.11.138.45)		
12Aug 13:20 131815 4 5.6 1474 & CQ W3IP FM19 12Aug 13:20 W7XU Arliss RR see you then (K10R John NH	1 5-0.4131815 6 5.8 1474 & CQ W3IP FM19 FN42ir 24.91.109.215)		FM19 2 13 -1.413194	45 0 9.2 1471 & CQ W3IP (<u>K0TPP</u> Larry mo EM48rj 71.11.138.45)		
12Aug 13:20 W5LDA-Larry, ni here too. The very much f 12Aug 13:20 NX4E - actually getting some pings on you.	(<u>W5TN</u> David TX EM00wf 38.97.13.36)	187)				
12Aug 13:20 wa4cqg running gl (ACORA/2M Wyatt IA EN4211 69.63.8.198) 12Aug 13:20 KUBY - tnx sir! (KBOZOM Ben NE EN00tn 24.159.170.45)						
12Aug 13:20 CQ 50.263 Beaming north first taker I can hear (KG5CCI Dave AR EM34st 107.77.198.225) 12Aug 13:20 AC0RA just as we want to stop - great rocks, Murphy has his way (<u>KC4PX</u> Ivars FL EL98qg 107.145.146.138)						
12Aug 13:19 k5bwx One way rocksI guess (<u>WWX/6/2/XW</u> Kirk FW EN35ha 97.116.188.174) 12Aug 13:19 131818 Tx 1500 & KB5E7 LVELE -02 On .255 (<u>NVIEE</u> Lee VA FM18hx 108.48.202.194)						
12Aug 13:19 K1OR How about 0400 UTC tonight? Will m 12Aug 13:19 RR Andy (<u>W5LDA</u> Larry OK EM15xu 192.169 12Aug 13:19 AC0RA good QSO (<u>KC4PX</u> Ivars FL EL98qg	Heet you on here. (W/XU Arliss SD EN131m /2.104.236 0.27.149)	8.244)				
12Aug 13:19 KG5CCI - Tnx for hanging in there Dave, Tn	x new Grid 73 (<u>K5WE</u> Jeff OK EM25ex 75.89.6.23)	E2 100 102)				
12Aug 13:19 W5LDA would like to try when available good pings here (<u>NTXT/6/2/222</u> Andy NJ FN20si 108.53.188.123) 12Aug 13:18 QRV 2m (<u>NAOGW</u> Tor MS EM53nk 104.8.40.200) 12Aug 13:18 ~-CQ 144.153 pointing NE 1st-w (<u>MAYZ</u>) Leff AL EM64ru 173.26.104.239)						
12Aug 13:18 w-CU 144.155 pointing NE 15tw (WHXL JETT AL EMb4FU 17.2.6.149.239) 12Aug 13:18 Kc4px tnx that was tough one (ACORA/2M Wyatt IA EN4211 69.63.8.198) 12Aug 13:18 KIOR Found reference that says NE-SN best 0100-0300, 0900-1100 LOCAL times. Not sure for E-W. (WTXU Arliss SD EN131m 72.104.230.244)						
12Aug 13:18 K24px sweet. log it (ACQRA/2M Wyatt TA EM4211 69.63.8.198) 12Aug 13:18 K24px sweet. log it (ACQRA/2M Wyatt TA EM4211 69.63.8.198) 12Aug 13:18 N2AMC GaryNot looking too promising at this distance (MSLDA Larry OK EM15xu 192.169.27.149)						
12Aug 13:18 W7XU Arliss need to leave now for charity car show. Pse send me an email on what you wud like to try. Completly open my end (<u>K10R</u> John NH FN42ir 24.91.109.215) 12Aug 13:18 NUJEZ Hanks Nike (<u>WaZ</u> Y Peter NJ FN2Ag) 22.21.128.44)						