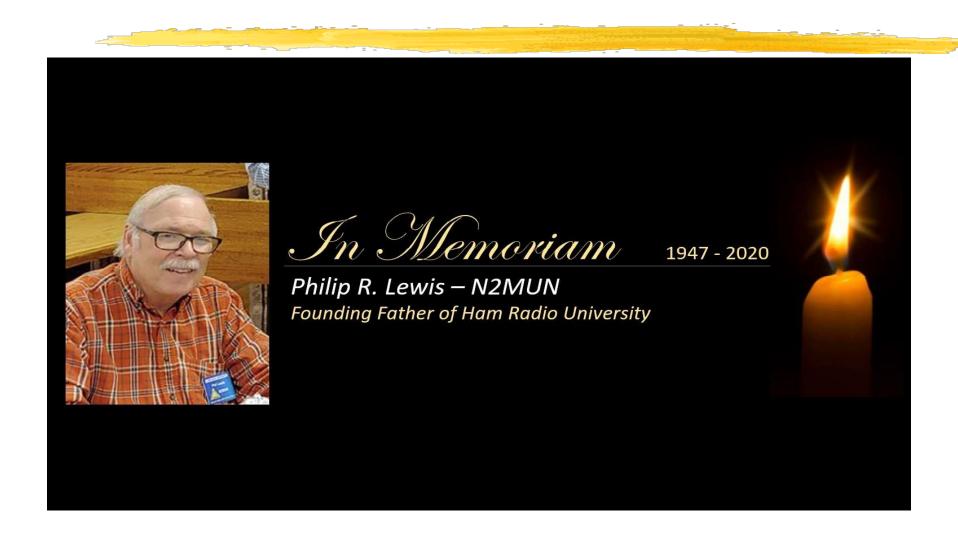
## **Basics of HF Operating**

# Bands, modes, propagation, on-air procedures, and using rig controls to get the most out of your HF transceiver



Mel Granick - KS2G Ham Radio University January 9, 2021



#### Who's Out There?

- Three quick polls:
  - License Class?
  - HF Operating Experience?
  - Where Are You Located?

#### **What Are The HF Bands?**

#### Ten Frequency Ranges Between 1.8 and 30 MHz

- 160 Meters ... 1.8 to 2.0 MHz
- 80 Meters ... 3.5 to 4.0 MHz
- 60 Meters ... 5332 to 5405 kHz (5 Specific 2.8 kHz Channels)
- 40 Meters ... 7.0 to 7.3 MHz
- 30 Meters ... 10.1 to 10.150 MHz
- 20 Meters ... 14.0 to 14.350 MHz
- 17 Meters ... 18.068 to 18.168 MHz
- 15 Meters ... 21.0 to 21.450 MHz
- 12 Meters ... 24.890 to 24.900 MHz
- 10 Meters ... 28.0 to 29.7 MHz

### Why So Many Bands?

- Each HF band has particular <u>propagation</u> characteristics:
  - Long-range vs. Short-range
  - Daytime vs. Nighttime
  - Summer vs. Winter
  - Top vs. Bottom of Sunspot Cycle
- Also:
  - Noise Levels
  - Types of QSOs Found Most Often

#### "Lower" vs "Higher" Bands

#### Generally Speaking.

- Lower Bands (160-40 Meters)
  - Better in Winter than Summer
  - Better at Bottom of Sunspot Cycle
  - Local/Regional Daytime -- DX at Night
- Higher Bands (30-10 Meters)
  - Better in Summer Than Winter
  - Better at Top of Sunspot Cycle
  - DX Day and Night (at top of cycle)
  - DX Day Closed at Night (bottom of cycle)

#### **HF Sub-Bands**

- Each HF Band is divided into frequency ranges for specific:
  - Modes -- cw, digital/data, phone
  - License Classes
    - Novice / Technician
    - General
    - Advanced
    - Extra

### **HF Sub-Bands by Mode**

#### **CW**

- Permitted on any frequency on any band
- Generally found in lowest part of each band

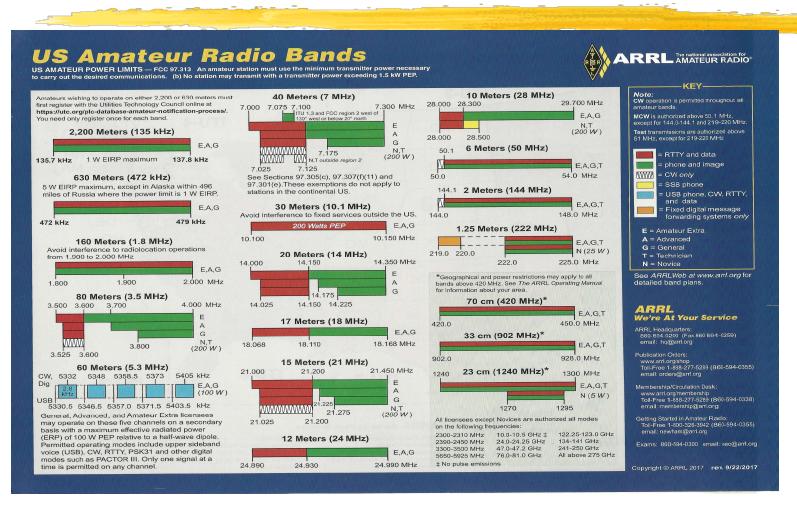
#### Digital/Data

- Permitted in lowest part of each band
- Generally found just above cw

#### Phone

- Permitted in the upper 1/2 to 3/4 of each band
  - LSB on 40 Meters and below
  - USB above 40 Meters

## **HF Sub-Bands by License**

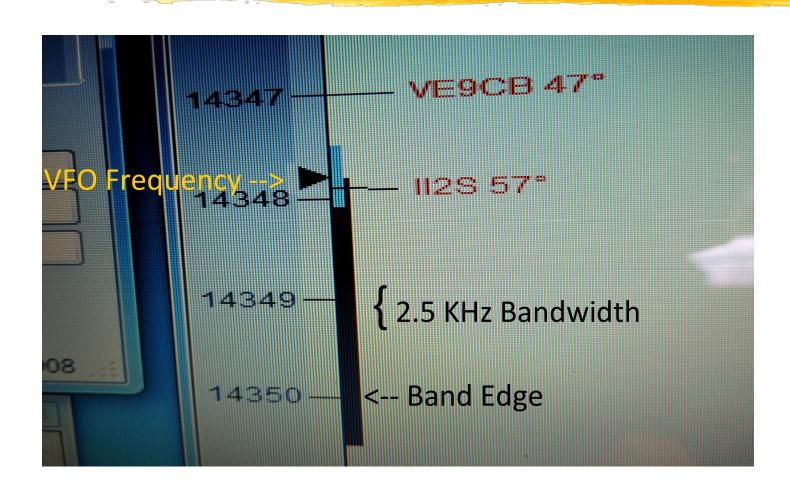


http://www.arrl.org/graphical-frequency-allocations

# **Be Aware of Band and Sub-Band Edges**

- On SSB, Bandwidth typically is 2.5 3 KHz
  - Therefore ... stay at least 3 KHz from the edge of band or sub-band
  - On LSB ... 3 KHz **ABOVE** the bottom edge
  - On USB ... 3 KHz **BELOW** the top edge
- Examples:
  - **Bottom** of 40-Meter General Phone Sub-Band is 7.175 MHz. Transmit **no lower** than 7.178 MHz.
  - **Top** of 20-Meter Phone Band is 14.350 MHz. Transmit **no higher** than 14.347 Mhz.

#### **Out of Band!**



## What Modes Where On Each Band

#### The Considerate Operator's Frequency Guide

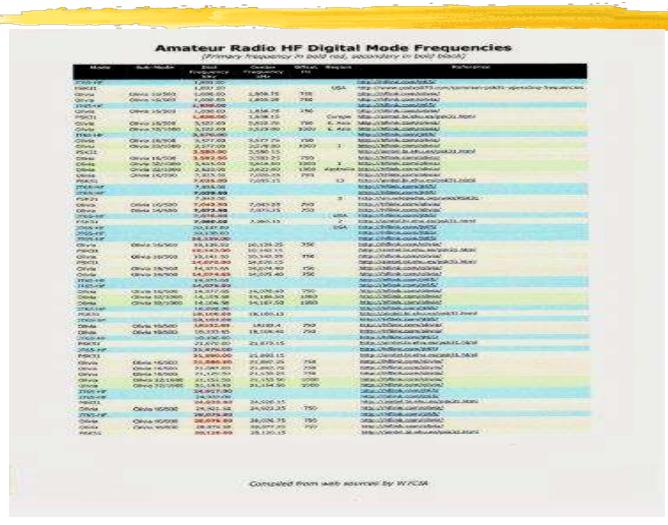
The following frequencies are generally recognized for certain modes or activities (all frequencies are in MHz) during normal conditions. These are not regulations and occasionally a high level of activity, such as during a period of emergency response, DXpedition or contest, may result in stations operating outside these frequency ranges.

Nothing in the rules recognizes a net's, group's or any individual's special privilege to any specific frequency. Section 97.101(b) of the Rules states that "Each station licensee and each control operator must cooperate in selecting transmitting channels and in making the most effective use of the amateur service frequencies. No frequency will be assigned for the exclusive use of any station." No one "owns" a frequency.

It's good practice — and plain old common sense — for any operator, regardless of mode, to check to see if the frequency is in use prior to engaging operation. If you are there first, other operators should make an effort to protect you from interference to the extent possible, given that 100% interference-free operation is an unrealistic expectation in today's congested bands.

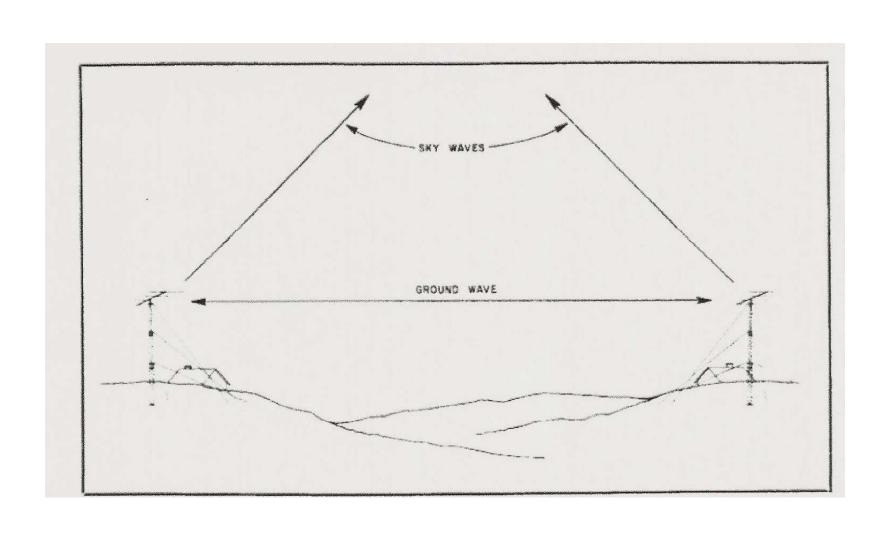
Frequencies	Modes/Activities	Frequencies	Modes/Activities
1.800-2.000	CW	14.233	D-SSTV
	Digital Modes	14.236	Digital Voice
1.800-1.810		14.285	QRP SSB calling frequency
1.810	CW QRP calling frequency	14.286	AM calling frequency
1.843-2.000	SSB, SSTV and other wideband modes	14.200	Aw canny nequency
1.910	SSB QRP	18.100-18.105	RTTY/Data
1.995-2.000	Experimental	18.105-18.110	Automatically controlled data stations
1.999-2.000	Beacons	18.110	IBP/NCDXF beacons
1.999-2.000	Deacons	18.162.5	Digital Voice
3.500-3.510	CW DX window	To the state of th	
3.560	QRP CW calling frequency	21.060	QRP CW calling frequency
3.570-3.600	RTTY/Data	21.070-21.110	RTTY/Data
3.585-3.600	Automatically controlled data stations	21.090-21.100	Automatically controlled data stations
3.590	RTTY/Data DX	21.150	IBP/NCDXF beacons
3.790-3.800	DX window	21.340	SSTV
3.845	SSTV	21.385	QRP SSB calling frequency
3.885	AM calling frequency		
3.985	QRP SSB calling frequency	24.920-24.925	RTTY/Data
3.903	Qrti COD caming modulation	24.925-24.930	Automatically controlled data stations
7.030	QRP CW calling frequency	24.930	IBP/NCDXF beacons
7.040	RTTY/Data DX		
7.070-7.125	RTTY/Data	28.060	QRP CW calling frequency
7.100-7.105	Automatically controlled data stations	28.070-28.120	RTTY/Data
7.100-7.103	SSTV	28.120-28.189	Automatically controlled data stations
7.173	D-SSTV	28.190-28.225	Beacons
7.285	QRP SSB calling frequency	28.200	IBP/NCDXF beacons
7.290	AM calling frequency	28.385	QRP SSB calling frequency
7.290	Aivi calling hequency	28.680	SSTV
10.130-10.140	RTTY/Data	29.000-29.200	AM
10.140-10.150	Automatically controlled data stations	29.300-29.510	Satellite downlinks
10.140-10.150	ratoriationly controlled data states	29.520-29.580	Repeater inputs
14.060	QRP CW calling frequency	29.600	FM simplex
14.070-14.095	RTTY/Data	29.620-29.680	Repeater outputs
14.095-14.0995	Automatically controlled data stations		
14.100	IBP/NCDXF beacons	ARRL band plans for frequencies above 28.300 MHz	
14.1005-14.112	Automatically controlled data stations	are shown in The ARRL Repeater Directory and on	
14.230	SSTV	www.arrl.org.	

# Digital Mode "Watering Holes"

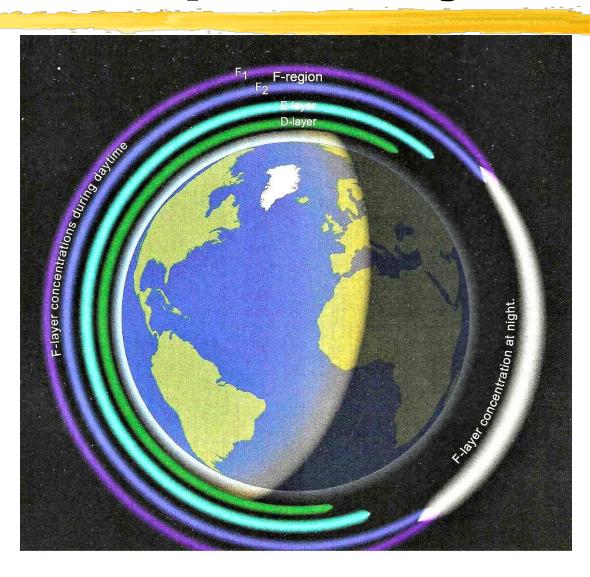


https://www.wx4car.org/digital-modes.html

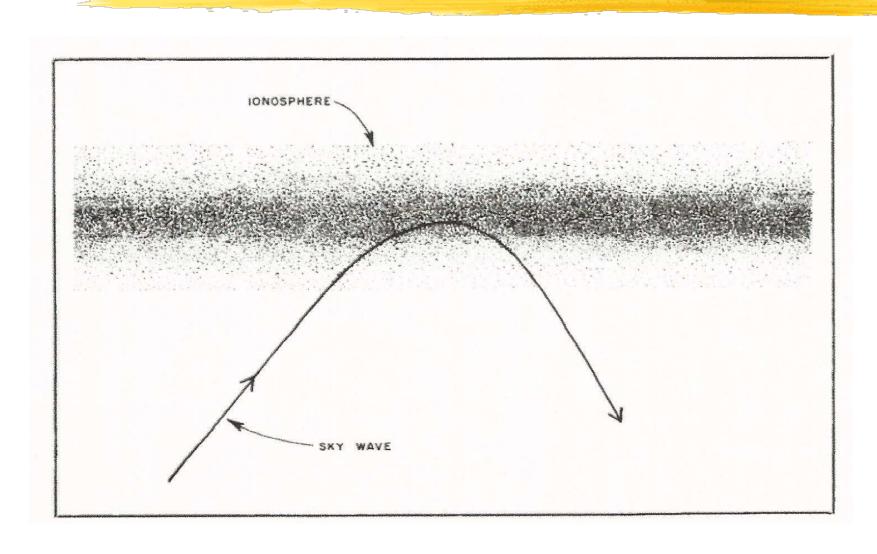
# **HF Propagation: Ground Wave / Sky Waves**



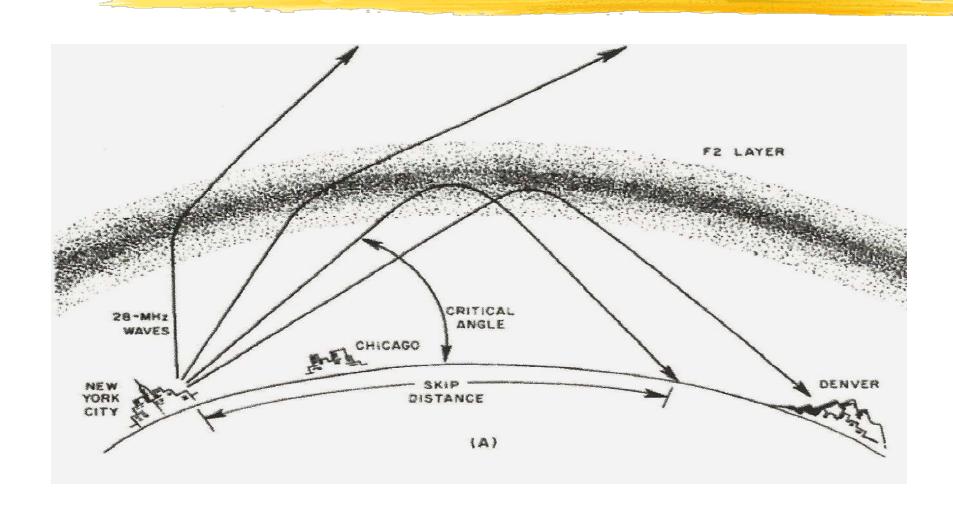
## HF Propagation: The lonosphere Layers



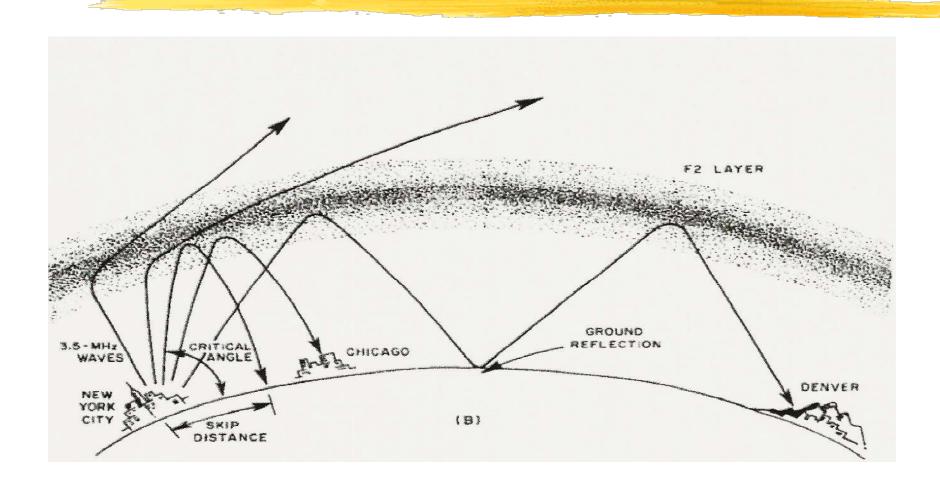
# The Ionosphere Can *Refract*Sky Waves



## Sky Wave Refraction: Long-Distance "Skip"



## **Multi-Hop Propagation**

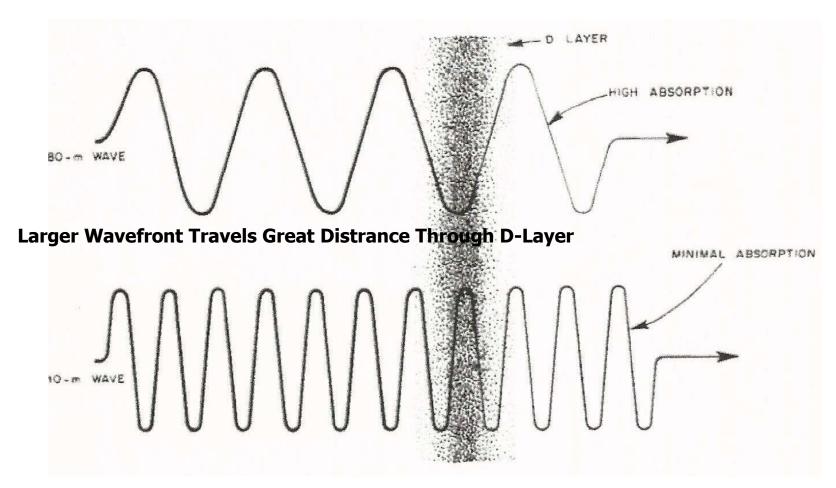


#### Which Bands When?

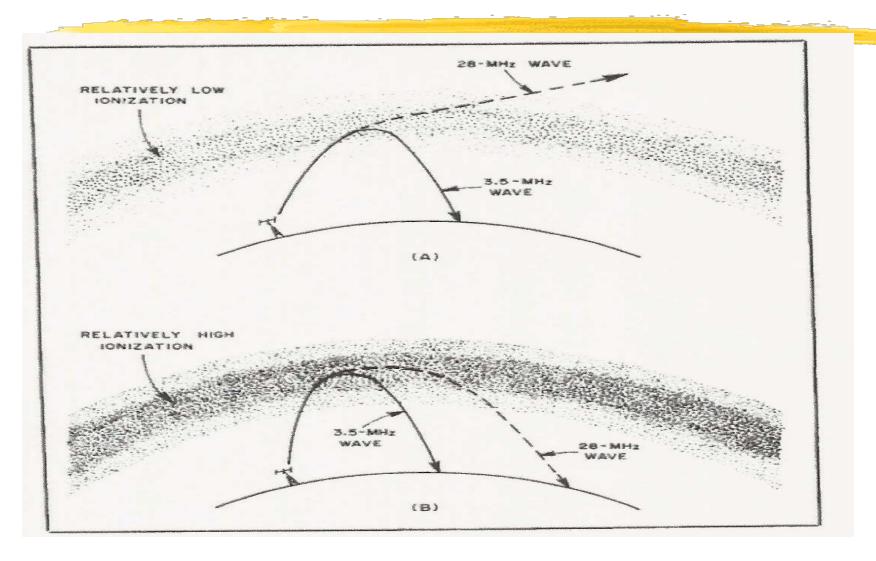
- Lower Frequency Bands
  - 160, 80, 60, 40 Meters
    - | Ground Wave Daytime (Local / Regional)
    - Sky Wave Nighttime (DX)
- Upper Frequency Bands
  - 30, 20, 17, 15, 10 Meters
  - Both Ground Wave & Sky Wave Day and Night (When Open)

### **D-Layer Absorption**

**Lower Frequency = Higher Absorption** 



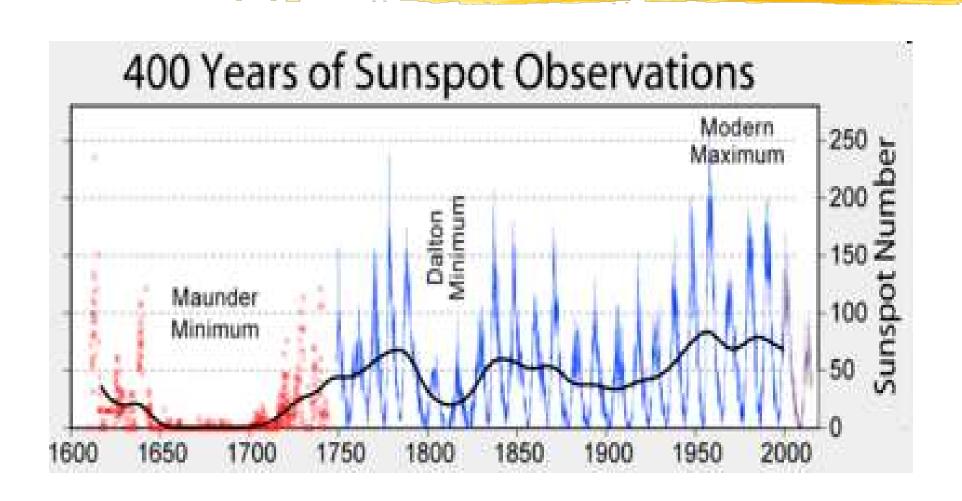
# Frequency and Ionization Level



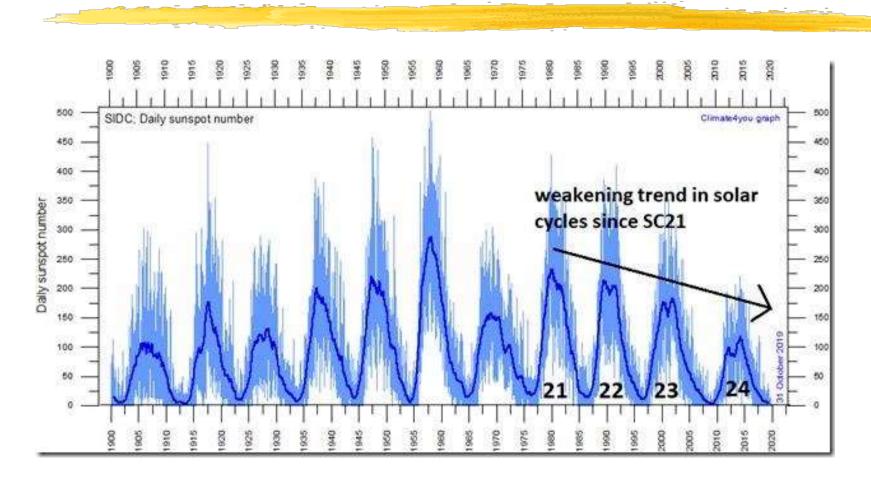
### **Sky Wave & Sunspots**

- Ionization Determined by Sunspot Activity
  - More Sunspots = More Ionization
  - More Ionization = More DX at Higher Frequencies
- Sunspots Rise and Fall in 11-Year Cycles
  - Discovered in 1843 by Samuel Heinrich Schwabe, who retrospectively started a numbering scheme with 1755-1766 as Cycle #1

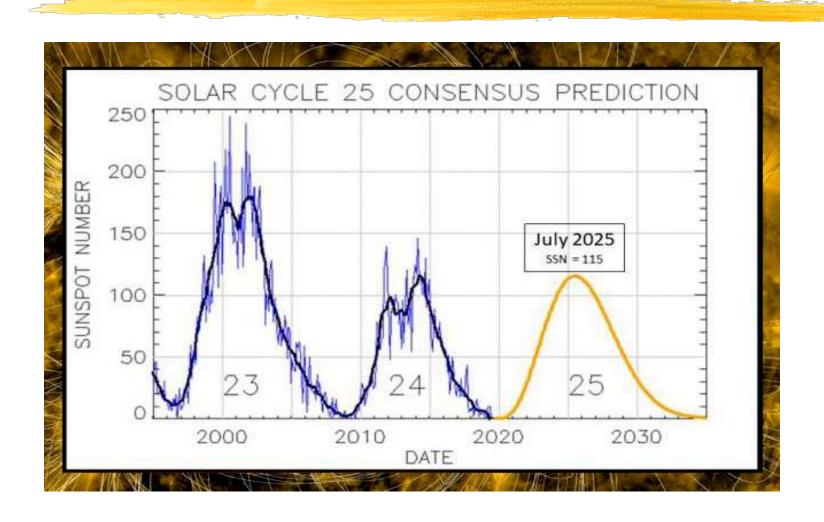
# Modern Sunspot Maximum Was 1959 - Peak of Cycle 19



# Strength of Cycles Has Been Declining

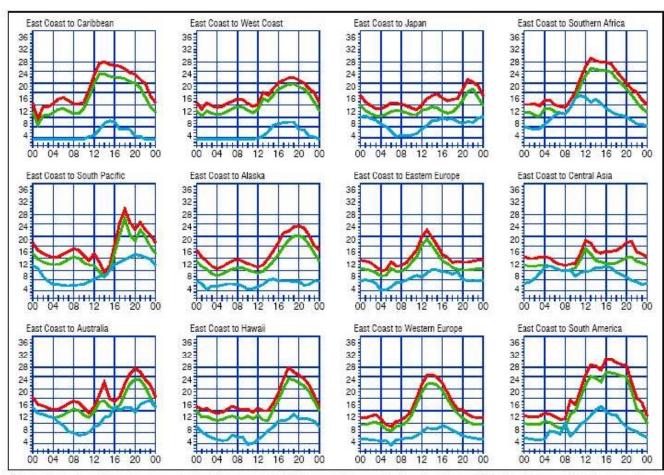


## Solar Cycle 25 Began In December, 2019



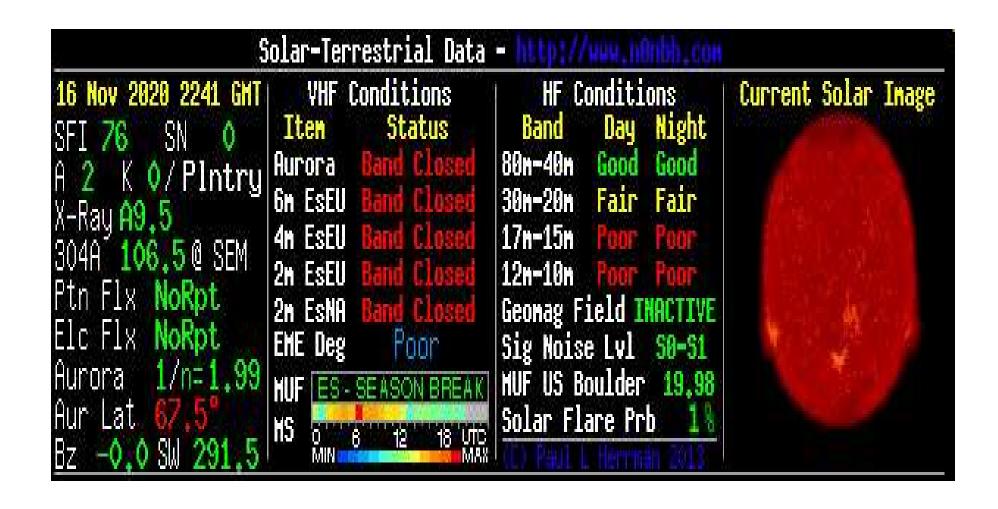
#### **How Do I Know Which Band To Use?**

#### Back In The Day... Monthly Prop Charts In QST

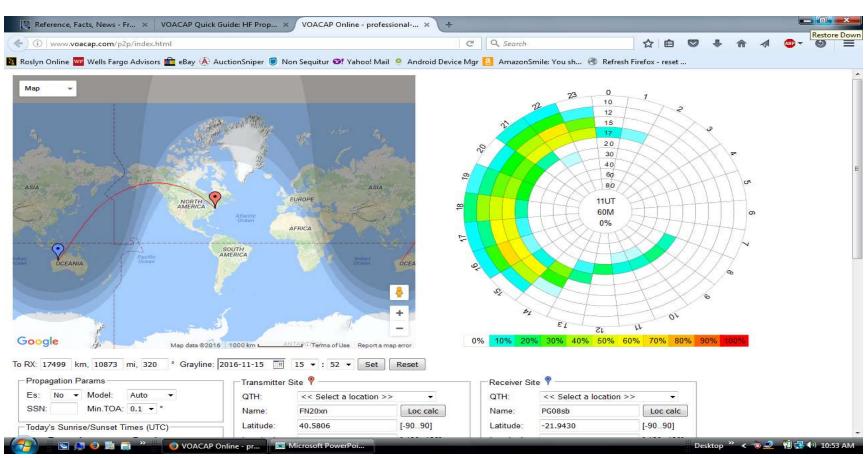


When are the bands open? These charts, generated using CAPman, show probabilities for average HF propagation in the month of January 2007 for the paths indicated. The horizontal axes show Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), and the vertical axes frequency in MHz. On 10% of the days of this period, the highest frequencies propagated will be at least as high as the upper red curves (HFF, highest possible frequency). The blue curves show the lowest usable frequency (LUF) for a 1500-W CW transmitter. For SSB or a lower transmitter power, the LUF will be somewhat higher than the blue curves indicate. See Oct 1994 QS7, pp 27-30, and Feb 1995 QS7, pp 34-36, for more details. The predictions assume an observed 2900-MHz solar flux value of 73. This is a Very Low level of solar activity. See the detailed propagation tables on The ARRL Artenna Book CO-ROM.

## Solar Conditions Vary Day-to-Day ... Even Hour-to-Hour

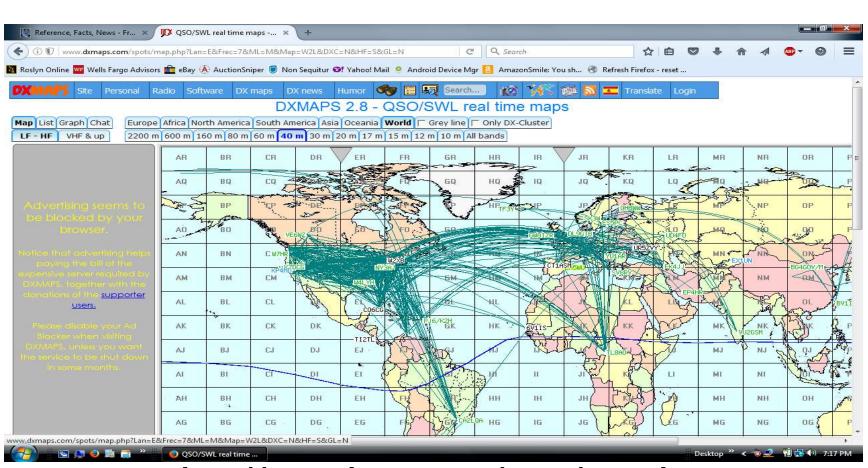


## **Propagation Calculators**



http://www.voacap.com

#### **Real-Time Path Views**



http://www.dxmaps.com/spots/map.php

### **Making Contacts**

- Proactively:
  - Call CQ
    - Tune The Band
      - Get a "feel" for conditions and activity
    - **LISTEN** for a clear frequency
      - ASK "Is the Frequency in use?"
        - QRL? On CW
      - Because of how HF propagation works you often hear only one side of a QSO. So what appears to be a clear frequency may be occupied by a QSO in which you're not hearing one (or more) of the stations involved

#### **Typical CQ Format**

#### On Phone:

CQ, CQ, CQ calling CQ 20 meters. This is KS2G calling. Kilo Sierra Two Golf, KS2G near New York City calling CQ 20 meters. Hello CQ, CQ, CQ calling CQ 20 meters and standing by for a call.

#### On CW / RTTY:

CQ CQ DE KS2G KS2G CQ CQ DE KS2G KS2G K

### **Making Contacts**

- Respond to CQ's
  - "Casual" Contacts
    - Phone: W2HF This is KS2G OVER
    - CW/RTTY: W2HF DE KS2G K
  - DX Pile-Ups & DXpeditions
    - Just Give Your Callsign
      - Phonetically on Phone
    - Is the DX Station Operating "Split?"
      - Almost All Dxpeditions Operate Split

## **Operating "Split"**

- Split-Frequency Operation
  - Transmit and Receive on Different Frequencies
  - Like the "offset" of repeater input/output
- Almost All DXpeditions Operate "Split"
  - DX Station Will Say "Up 5" or "Up 5 to 10"
    - He's listening 5 or 5-to-10 KHz up from his transmit frequency
  - DX Station on 14.160 MHz Will Say "200 to 225"
    - He's listening 14.200 to 14.225 MHz
- Learn how to use your rig's dual VFO's

## **Working Contests**

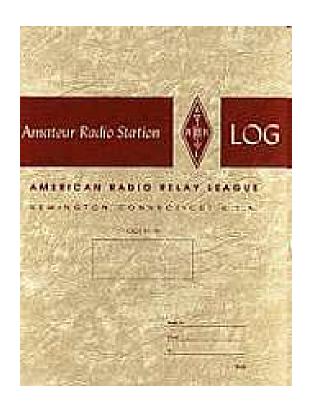
- Competitive Operating:
  - Work as many stations as possible, in as many places as possible, as quickly as possible
  - Check Contest Rules For Contest "Exchange"
  - Run" -- call CQ
  - "Search & Pounce" -- Tune the Band and Respond to Stations That Call CQ

### Logging

- No Legal Requirement To Log (since 1983)
- Useful Record of Operating Activity and Information Required For QLS'ing\*\*
  - Date & Time in UTC\*\*
  - Frequency Band/Mode (cw, ssb, rtty, etc.)\*\*
  - Callsign of Station Worked\*\*
  - Signal Report
  - Notes -- Name, QTH, Equipment, Power, etc.

## Logging - "Old School"

#### On Paper:





# **Computer Logging**

General Purpose Loggers:

DXLAB RumLog (Mac)

DX 4 WIN MacLoggerDx (Mac)

DXKeeper TWlog (Linux)

Specialized Contest Loggers:

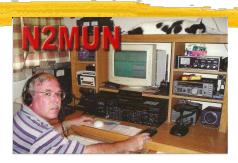
N1MM-Plus Skookumlogger (Mac)

WriteLog Xlog (Linux)

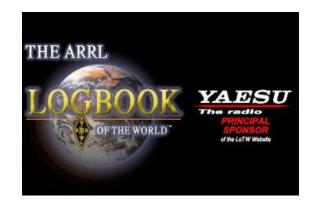
# QSLing: Confirmation of Contacts

- Direct Printed Cards
  - SASE or "Green Stamps"
- QSL Managers
- QSL Bureaus
  - ARRL Outgoing QSL Service
  - 2nd District Incoming QSL Bureau
    - North Jersey DX Association
    - Purchase Return-Envelope "Credits"
- Electronic
  - ARRL Logbook of the World (LoTW)
  - eQSL
  - Club Log

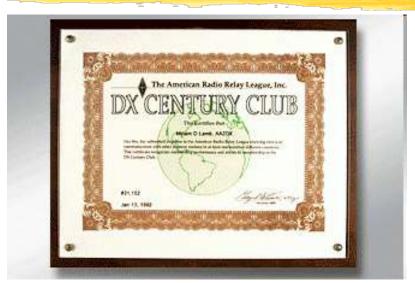








# **Operating Awards**







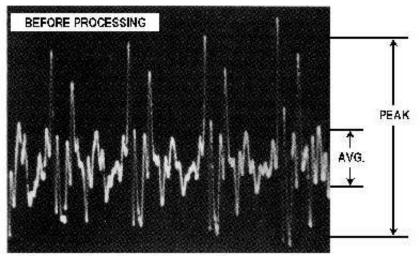


# Getting The Most Out Of Your HF Transceiver

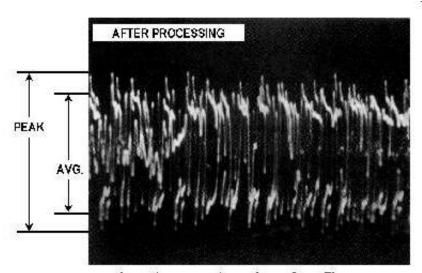
- Transmitter Controls:
  - RF Power Output cw, digital, ssb
  - Microphone Level
    - Speech Processing / Compression
      - Increases Average RF Power & Adds "Punch" To Audio
      - Observe ALC (Automatic Level Control) Limit
    - Transmit Audio Equalization
      - Control "Highs" & "Lows" For Maximum Intelligibility
    - Transmit Audio Monitor
      - Listen To Yourself As You Transmit
    - Ask For Audio Reports From Stations You Work

## **Speech Processing**

# Also Known As Audio Compression Increases SSB "Talk Power"



Actual speech waveform photograph with no processing, as it exists at the TX mike input. Note the very high peak amplitude when compared to the average levels.



Correctly processed speech waveform. The average amplitude *relative to the peaks* is now much higher. This is a dramatic increase in the average power output, but without the risk of distortion because the peaks have been limited by diode clipping.

### **Transmitter Keying Controls**

- VOX (Voice Operated Transmit)
  - Transmitter is Keyed By Sensing Speech
    - Sensitivity / Delay (Hang) Time / Anti-VOX
- CW Break-In
  - Automatic Switching Between Transmit & Receive
  - Full Break-In (QSK)
    - Switches from transmit to receive immediately when key contacts open
  - Semi-Break-In
    - When key contacts open, switch to receive is delayed by a set duration (usually controlled by VOX setting)

#### **Automatic Antenna Tuner**

- Automatically "matches" out-of-resonance antenna impedance to 50 ohms
- Maintains Full Transmitter Power Output
  - Modern Solid-State Transmitters "Fold-Back" (Lower) Output Power to Mismatched Antenna Loads To Prevent Damage To Final Output Power Transistors

#### **Receiver Audio Controls**

- AF Gain
  - Audio Frequency Gain Volume Control
- RF Gain
  - Radio Frequency Gain
  - Manually Adjusts Receiver Sensitivity
  - Usually Left at Maximum in Conjunction With AGC
- AGC Automatic Gain Control
  - Automatically Adjusts Receiver Sensitivity In Response To Changes In Signal Strength
  - "Fast" Response For CW / "Slow" Response For SSB

#### **Receiver Sensitivity Controls**

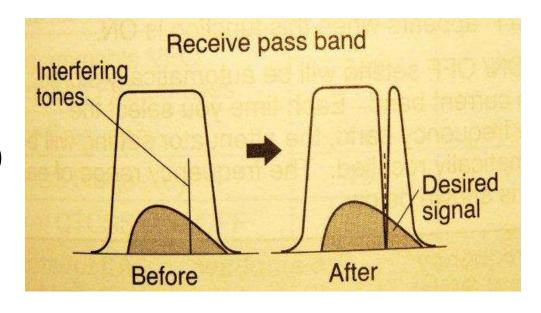
- RF Attenuator
  - Reduces Receiver Sensitivity By A Set Amount
- RF Preamp
  - Increases Receiver Sensitivity By A Set Amount
- Squelch
  - Mutes Receiver When No Signal Is Present
  - Leave "Wide Open" Except For FM

# **Receiver Tuning Controls**

- RIT
  - Receiver Incremental Tuning
  - "Clarifier" on Yaesu Radios
    - Changes Receive Frequency Without Changing Transmit Frequency
- XIT
  - Transmitter Incremental Tuning
    - I Changes Transmit Frequency Without Changing Receive Frequency
    - Sometimes can be used for "split" in the absence of dual VFO's

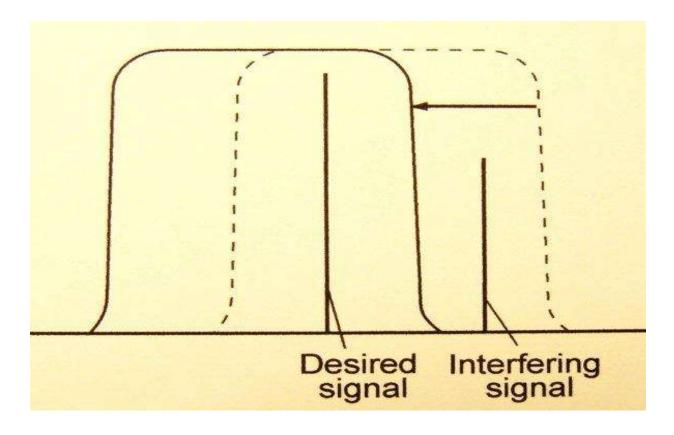
#### **Interference Controls**

- Noise Filter / Noise Reduction
  - Reduces Steady Background Noise
- Noise Blanker
  - Reduces Pulsing Background Noise
- Notch Filter
  - Nulls" Specific
    Interfering Signal
    (e.g. Heterodynes)



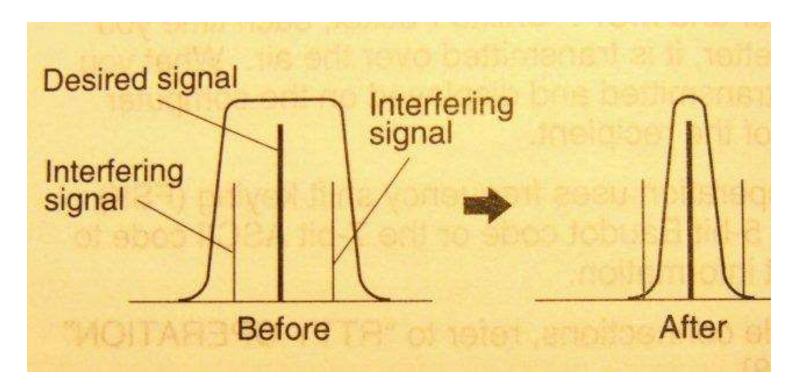
#### **Bandwidth Controls**

- IF Shift
  - Shifts Center Frequency of Pass Band



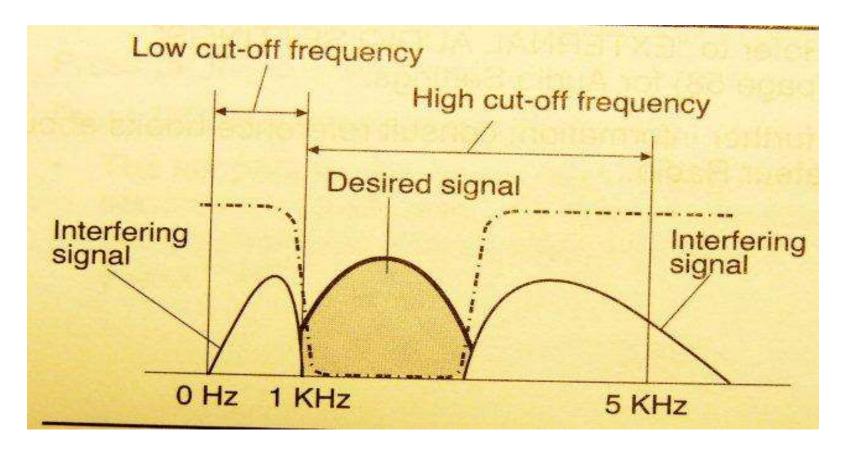
#### **Bandwidth Controls**

- Wide / Narrow (DSP & Roofing) Filters
  - Fixed Bandwidth (CW & FSK)



#### **Bandwidth Controls**

Variable Bandwidth Filters



### 73, CU On The Air!



If You Want This Deck, or Have Any Questions Email Me: ks2g@arrl.net

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