

THE RAYNET HF TEAM

A very active team ensure an HF capability is maintained within the RAYNET community



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History

The concept of the HF team started in Zone 10 in 1998 with the intention of developing HF as a Inter-County resource. The initial 'leadership' was Eric Walton G4FSN and Paul Gaskell G4MWO and a list of about 40 interested members in the North West was drawn up with initial communications made by post. The concept of 'Near Vertical Incident Sky-wave' communications was receiving some interest and the group has concentrated on holding nets, initially twice a month on 80/40m, growing to four times a month with the introduction of the 5MHz allocation and finally five times a month to include a 'non-voice net' to allow practice with data modes and CW.

Postal communications did not have the immediacy required to keep the interest of what was a fairly large group so an electronic mailing list was set up within the first six months and this has been the prime method of communication and 'defining' membership of the Team since that time.

The Team has always known that international communications could be a requirement but opportunities to practice this were limited until the setting up of the IARU 'EmCom Parties on the Air' in November 2006. RAYNET has had a good participation in all the exercises held and have always worked on the concept of letting all stations who wish to take part to do so. This is in contrast to some IARU member societies who are not fully engaged with emergency communications who only put their flagship HQ station on the air.

Membership

In the same way as RAYNET as a whole, anyone who is sympathetic to the need for HF emergency communications can join the mailing list. Beyond that things are a little different though. The membership of the list comprises Network, RSGB, International and even Professional members. As such the team/list can be described as a 'constructive anarchy' with no constitution, officers etc. If anyone wants to try something, then just post to the list and see if you get any volunteers to help!

Because of the varied membership the list has always striven to remain apolitical and neither the Network or RSGB logos are used on the website and the Generic 'RAYNET' is used when referring to the team.

At the time of writing there are around 130 members of the mailing list and the geographical distribution of the UK based members is shown in Figure 1.

Signing up to the list/team is via <http://lists.raynet-hf.net/mailman/listinfo/raynet-hf>, if new members would include their callsign as well as their name in the signup form it would be helpful as all new subscriptions are checked to keep 'spammers' off the mailing list and maintain the fairly high 'signal to noise' ratio on the list.

Operation

The original idea was to investigate the possibilities for a Regional/National HF capability and as such the team has remained an ad-hoc grouping. Nets are held according to the following schedule and the time of the net varies according to the day to allow propagation to be tested at different times. Currently on working days the net is at 2000 local time, weekends and Bank Holidays it is held at 1400 local time.

Day of the Month	Band/Mode
1 st	80m or 40m Voice
7 th	5MHz Voice
14 th	80m or 40m Voice
21 st	5MHz Voice
28 th	'non-voice' this may be one of many data modes or CW depending on interest.

The net has adopted the RAYNET Voice Network procedure and the message handling capacity has been tested in conjunction with an exercise in Cheshire where VHF messages were onward relayed during a scheduled HF net that afternoon, this kind of activity together with the Global Simulated Emergency Tests (GlobalSET) begins to demonstrate to international stakeholders that Amateur Radio has, or is building the capacity to meet their needs. The new CW and Data procedures will also help to bring some structure to communications within the team and with our international colleagues.

Conclusion

The mailing list provides a useful shop window

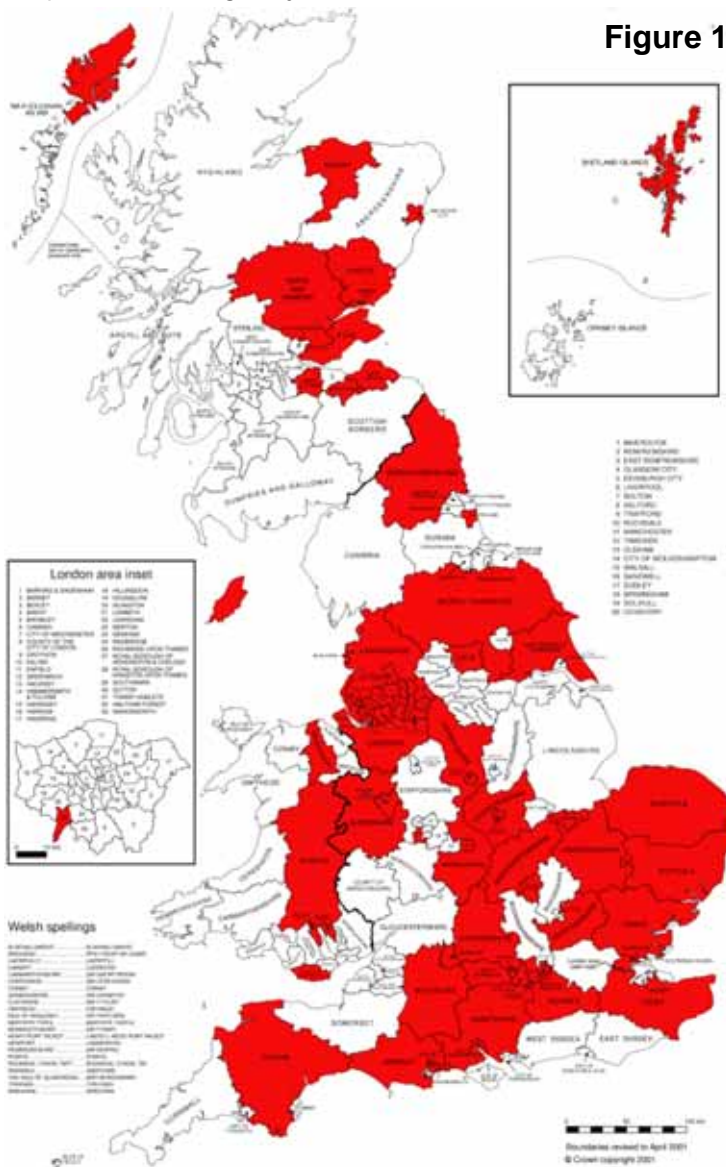
to indicate to non-members who may not be immediately interested in RAYNET activities what is happening and what is available within RAYNET. The team as a whole through their participation in events such as GlobalSET promote the name of RAYNET to international partner organisations. This is at no cost to either the network or RSGB as the operation of the website and mailing lists are privately funded.

The size of the team and the increased 'self awareness' from events such as GlobalSET has started to provoke a debate about how we run our nets and how we would be called upon in an emergency. This may lead to a move away from the 'constructive anarchy' which currently exists, though any final structure would need to be agreed and remain acceptable to all of the members.

The RAYNET HF team is not the only group organising HF activities and the tireless work of the G4NRC team in transmitting the RAYNET news on 80m every Sunday morning, groups such as Greater Manchester who have used Ground Wave HF capability to link the Standedge Tunnels portals for exercise purposes and many others should also be recognised.

HF has moved on since its widespread use by RAYNET in earlier times, new data modes and VoIP to HF gateways such as that operated on an experimental basis under NoV by Steve G4HPE of IRESC add new dimensions to HF operations. The hoped for return of Sunspots and the start of a new solar cycle will hopefully increase activity on HF and increase the diversity of frequencies used by RAYNET to provide emergency communications. □

Figure 1



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