

News of a Silent Key
Ron Graham/VK4BRG
Sad news in from Sue Graham that Ron Graham/VK4BRG -
has gone Silent Key.
Ron was finally vanquished by the Big C in Mackay on Sunday Afternoon
July 16th.

With Ron's passing we all suffer the loss of one of the forefathers in
Australia of -
Amateur Radio Direction Finding (ARDF),
Satellite Voice and Data Operations,
Long Distance rare contacts on the 6metre band (6m DX),
Packet Radio - both via terrestrial HF and VHF means and Satellite,
Repeater and Beacon building and operating,
and pioneering works in Amateur Radio Position Reporting System (APRS).

Ron worked in technical design, install and maintenance in the South West
Pacific, New Guinea and Northern Australia for many firms before
'settling down' at Yukon, a bit south of Sarina Central Queensland in the mid-1980s.
Apart from being heavily involved with the local SES and Bush Fire Brigade, Ron
was able to get more involved with the hobby of Amateur Radio.

It was here that Ron got serious with his love for long distance radio and set a
long path distance record with a confirmed contact with station 5H1HK in
Tanzania (Zanzibar) on the 50 to 54 megahertz band of 28264km - a contact
made in April 1989 that still stands today unbeaten as a Queensland
State Record.

Ron also ran a Packet Radio Bulletin Board system, which before the wide
spread take-up of the internet was the only way for Hams to do electronic
messaging between stations and to send and receive general bulletins.
Ron's BBS system originally utilised MSYS, then FBBS and sent and received
traffic via High Frequency Radio, Very High Frequency Radio and via Satellite
using the SatGate system. Ron was one of the first System Operators
(SYSOPS) to adopt the QNEWS TT-System, an information page system a bit
like Teletext but much more flexible.

Ron provided a way for many hams to practice and enjoy the art of
Radio Direction Finding through the development and production of
his RX-1 VHF ARDF Receiver and his variant of the HB9CV 2-element
compact VHF Directional Antenna (complete with steel tape antenna
ends to enable swift movement through dense vegetation without
breaking things). A modification of this combination for the EPIRB
121 megahertz emergency frequency was also produced by Ron under his
brand name RGE (Ron Graham Electronics) to enable accurate locating
of emergency radio beacons set off by aircraft, shipping or people
in distress. Demand for the EPIRB model became so great that Ron
eventually sold the design and production line to a commercial company
which continues to produce the equipment to this day, primarily for
equipping Police, SES, Aviation and Marine rescue groups.
(For more on Ron's ARDF kit see <http://www.eham.net/reviews/detail/1816>)

Ron also designed and produced some world class ARDF Transmitters to be
used in Radio Direction Finding Contests that operated in the 144 megahertz
and 3.5 megahertz frequency bands. These were used in many regional contests
and Ron donated a complete set of the transmitters (3 field transmitters
plus a home transmitter) to the Rockhampton and Townsville amateur radio clubs.

Ron also experimented with APRS, both with producing calibrated maps to
enable accurate tracking and also modifying emergent technology and producing
tracking equipment in a time when off the shelf trackers, interfaces
and data ready radios were unheard of. In collaboration with Frank/VK4CAU (SK)
and Wally/VK4DO (SK), Ron eventually fine-tuned his system to accurately
track vehicles and pedestrians in both urban and rural environments.

Many hams and travellers can remember Ron and Sue rambling around Australia in the big Winnebago with the portable but comprehensive workshop trundling behind, with Ron always happy to help someone out with a niggly technical or repair issue. Ron and Sue also put together travel notes of the places they had traversed which became invaluable to those travelling the highways for the first time.

Failing health caused Ron and Sue to throw the anchor out in the south-western suburbs of Bundaberg, with Ron keeping busy being an active member of the SES and the Bundaberg Amateur Radio Club (and the WICEN contingent). Ron started to experiment with 3-D printing, integrating APRS tracking with radio controlled model aircraft and drones (he designed and built several himself) and also being part of the HABE team at the start of the Bundaberg Amateur Radio Club High Altitude Balloon Experiments.

Ron and Sue moved to Mackay to be closer to medical care and family, with the medical side of things cutting into the time that Ron had to keep experimenting and developing new technologies. Time caught up with Ron finally on 16th July 2017.

Ron was a life-long member of the Wireless Institute of Australia, receiving many Awards of Merit over the years. Ron also helped found the Sarina Amateur Radio Club, which was eventually absorbed into the Mackay and District Amateur Radio Association. Ron was a member for a time of The Townsville Amateur Radio Club Inc. and attended many North Queensland Amateur Radio Conventions. For his tireless work, technical excellence and advancement of Amateur Radio Ron was awarded the Ken Robertson VK4KT Memorial Award for Outstanding Ability in the field of Amateur Radio Experiment twice, in 1995 and 1997.

Ron's funeral service will be held at Ian Phillips Crematorium, 18 Main Road (Bruce Hwy), Sarina Central Queensland, on Friday 21st July 2017 at 11am. Friends and acquaintances in the many fields that Ron was involved in are invited to attend and celebrate the life of a fellow that did not blow his own trumpet much, but was a giant in multiple areas of the hobby we know as Amateur Radio.

Vale Ron Graham/VK4BRG, Silent Key

(Sue Graham, Gavin/VK4ZZ)