2019 Puddle Jumper Classic

On Saturday June 8th, eight club members and three hams from the community spent the day providing communications for the 25k and 50k Puddle Jumper Classic trail runs. The club prepared extensively for the event with multiple site visits, meetings, and online information sharing.

The club used their UHF repeater that was stationed close to the race location for the majority of communications with some additional VHF simplex use.

Each station manager was responsible for outfitting their stations with gear and transportation of gear and personnel to the stations.

The day started a bit cloudy and cold but warmed up as the day went on. The amateurs had not previously met many of the volunteers at the station locations and a rapport was quickly developed. The atmosphere was jovial yet businesslike.

Everyone came away from the event with positive feelings about our contribution and our time at the event.

Here is a description of the four stations:

Cliff Gilker

At Cliff Gilker Park, Gord VA7GRF, Barry VE7YEE, and Patrick VE7HZF setup their station a bit too close to the DJ and later had to move further away from the speakers:



Good thing we brought comfortable chairs and a small table...



Randi (the race organizer) was very busy all day and often came to us with traffic for the other stations, or to ask for updates.



Aid Station 1

At Aid Station 1 (49.42969, -123.55971), Bryan VE7HXN, Alan VA7AGG, and Robert VE7RBE had to manage two loops, and a few injured runners. The day started out cloudy and cold. We brought coffee and instantly made friends at the aid station. We stood around the solar charge controller watching the numbers change like we were watching a camp fire. The station had a cowboy theme with bails of hay, cowboy hats, country music, and BBQ. Our station never had a dull moment and we got an idea of the limits of our portables when we sent VE7HXN on a hike to find an injured runner.



Aid Station 2

At Aid Station 2 (49.45311, -123.58193), Bill VE7RG and Marc VE7TBP were logging runners as the 25k went one way back toward the finishing line and the 50k continued on to Aid Station 3.

Aid Station 3

At Aid Station 3 (49.46238, -123.63411) Jim VA7JJR and Sieg VE7LEH saw the last runners from the 50k race run by as they ended toward the finish line. They also had to deal with a few injured and exhausted runners.

Mobile Support

Steven VA7SMI provided communications for the mobile support station that was dispatched to different Aid Stations all day. Installing the Kenwood with APRS enabled was a really good idea. For the first little bit, we were able to follow Steve around using APRSDroid on our phones. Unfortunately, due to technical issues, that radio stopped working later that morning.

Debrief

Here are the notes I sent to Randi regarding what could be improved for next year. In no particular order:

- Higher contrast bibs. The red bibs were easy to read, but the yellow ones were pretty hard. Black on yellow would have probably worked much better than white on yellow.
- Have a different sweeper for each race instead of one sweeper for both races and make sure they each have a cellphone so they can communicate with us.
- Share a list of key volunteers (station managers, marshals, first aid attendants, etc), their functions, locations, and contact info. During the “emergency” at Aid Station 1, it would have been easier for us to dispatch help sooner if we had had this information.

A few points I would add for us:

- Set up radio station away from DJ. The music / announcements made it very difficult to operate. That being the case, we'd probably need a small tent to provide shade or shelter in case of rain.
- Review radio operating procedures. Some of our radio communications were a bit confusing because some of us were not following the agreed upon protocol and were sharing too much information before waiting to be acknowledged. This is important because it's something that's very easy to do, but also very easy to forget since we all know each other and can easily fall back to casual chit chat. At one point, there was a lot going on at the Cliff Gilker station: Randi on her phone getting information to be relayed, the DJ doing his thing, other people showing up and asking for updates, etc. It was extremely important for stations calling to wait to be acknowledged before sharing any type of information so that they can be asked to stand by or go ahead depending on priority. Most did, but some didn't which led to some confusion.
- Related to this, I would also add: acknowledging every transmission even if it's just a “roger standby”. Some times, I would request information and be left with a silence because of the time it takes to gather the information. But I couldn't tell if my request had been heard or not.
- The last point I can think of is for us to take turns operating one radio (at a time) per station instead of all of us having our radios on at the same time. The feedback from a nearby radio while talking can be pretty distracting.

Overall, I think it was an excellent experience for us and we did really well. I know Randi is very grateful for our help. I hope we get to do something like this again soon...