



Second Century

Living at the Peak: Solar Cycle 25 in 2025

Back in 2020 when I joined ARRL as CEO, we had just begun a new sunspot solar cycle: Solar Cycle 25. Most predictions showed yet another lackluster forecast, much like Cycle 24. But one standout, with the science to back the claims, came from astrophysicist Dr. Scott McIntosh at the National Center for Atmospheric Research. His forecast for Cycle 25, in a word, was gumbusters!

In October 2024, NASA announced that we have reached the peak of Cycle 25. The bands are on fire, but it's all pretty much downhill from here. Across parts of North America, we knew that activity on the sun was extraordinary from our ability to clearly see the northern lights just after sunset on October 10. The huge solar storm that created this highly sought-after event gave hams the opportunity to make contacts on VHF using aurora for propagation.

What should you expect from these peak days of the solar cycle? Take 10 meters during October's CQ World Wide SSB contest. On Saturday around 1600Z, it was nearly impossible to find a clear frequency below 29 MHz! Contests, by the way, are a *great* way to test your station — just by setting a simple goal of making 100 contacts! You will get an indicator of how crazy 10 meters was during CQ WW if you look at the Multi/Multi stations. I looked at the station that appears to have won the category, CN3A in Morocco. This year they made an eye-popping 6,000+ contacts on 10 meters! Compare that to the low point of Cycle 24 in 2018, when they made only 470 contacts!

Or ask Fred Kemmerer, AB1OC. He and his wife Anita, AB1QB, have built a beautiful station in southern New Hampshire and have documented their experimentations on their blog. During the week of November 4, with a single seven-element LFA (loop-fed array) Yagi on 6 meters, Fred worked across Europe, into the Middle East, and on into India and Reunion Island. Also in November, the team at VK9CV on Cocos (Keeling) Islands reported openings to the other side of the globe into the Caribbean on 6 meters.

If you're a Technician, a ham with limited space, or someone who likes portable operating, this is extremely good news. One great antenna resource to look at is "Salty Walt" Hudson, K4OGO, whose YouTube channel "Coastal Waves & Wires" routinely features antennas that can be constructed with a

push-up mast and light-gauge wire. ARRL is working with Walt to bring his antenna experiments to life in an antenna workbook. But there's no need to wait. Building a simple end-fed half-wave (EFHW) antenna is a quick and inexpensive way to get on the air. ARRL offers an EFHW kit to make it easy. We've also partnered with Momobeam to create a lightweight 10-meter Moxon and 6-meter Yagi on the same boom for home or portable use. It's quick and easy to get on the air with just the antenna and a mast.

The explosion in sunspots has also brought an explosion in DXpeditions. Using DX news sources, VOACAP, dxwatch.com, Reverse Beacon Network, and PSK Reporter can help you find and work entities to add to your DXCC Challenge count. Yes, there has been some static about expeditions becoming dependent on FT8 to drive up the number of contacts while also giving modest stations the opportunity to work them, but overall there's an excitement about working those all-time new ones now that they're finally on the air!

The next couple of years will continue to be strong performers, and you should take advantage. Experiment with new antennas or radios. Get familiar with the tools online and use them. Make sure you leverage Logbook of The World for confirmations as well as tracking your DXCC, WAS, and VUCC awards status. Be radio active. Enjoy these great conditions. Be a connector! Make sure that the hams you know, especially those with modest stations, are chasing the DXpeditions. Looking forward to seeing you at Orlando HamCation next month!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David A. Minster NA2AA".

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Chief Executive Officer