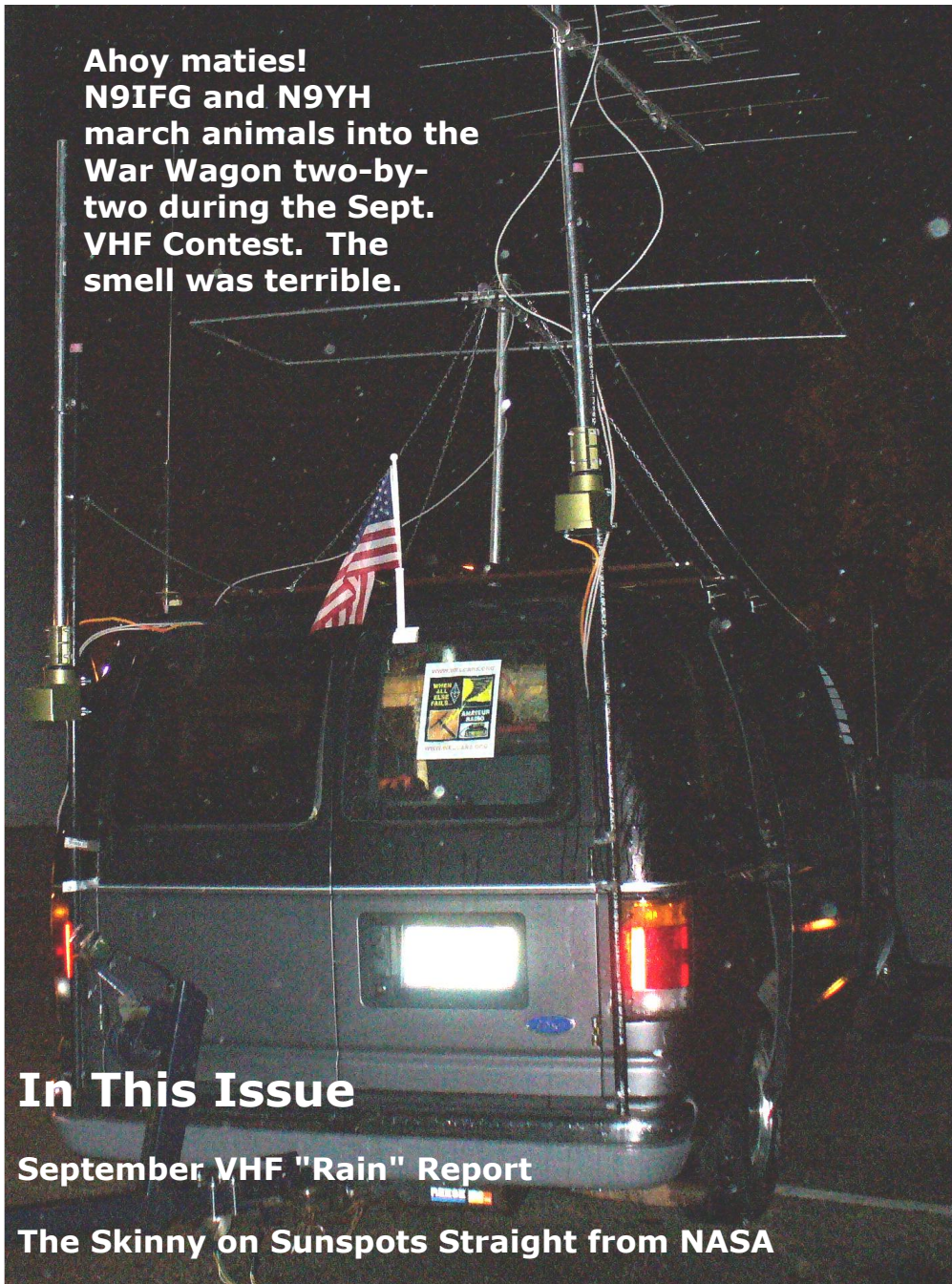


Lake County Ham Radio Journal

October 2008

Ahoy mates!
N9IFG and N9YH
march animals into the
War Wagon two-by-
two during the Sept.
VHF Contest. The
smell was terrible.



In This Issue

September VHF "Rain" Report

The Skinny on Sunspots Straight from NASA

Plus...

Local and National Amateur Radio News

Contest and Event Calendar

The Official
Newsletter Of

WelCARS



W9WLC

www.welcars.org

Stoned Monkey VHF

Amateur Radio Club



N9UHF

www.stonedmonkey.org

Upcoming Events

WeLCARS Officers

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Secretary/Treasurer

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Wendell - N9REP
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LCHRJ Editorial Staff

Editors

Tom - K9TMS
Chris - N9YH

Contributors

Joe - N9IFG

WeLCARS Meeting Schedule

General Meetings

October 1, 29 - 7PM
Fox Lake Community Center
23 South St., Fox Lake

VE Test Session

Fall 432 Sprint
October 8 - 7PM
Fox Lake Community Center

Antenna Project Meetings

October 15, 22 - 7PM
Fox Lake Community Center

Hamfests

Lake County ARC

October 11 - Crown Point, IN
www.qsl.net/w9lj

Decatur Old Fashioned Hamfest

October 18 - Decatur, IL
www.cenois.com

Amateur Radio Fest 2008

November 1 - Milwaukee, WI
www.mrc91.org

Other Events

Lake Co RACES Meeting

October 6 - 7PM
Lake County EOC

MCWA Meeting

October 7 - 7:30PM
Nunda Township Hall

McHenry Co RACES Meeting

October 28 - 7PM
McHenry County EOC

Contest Calendar

EU Autumn Sprint

Oct 4 11AM - 3PM
3.5-14 MHz Phone
www.eusprint.com

California QSO Party

Oct 4 11AM - Oct 5 7PM
1.8-144 MHz Phone, CW
www.cqp.org

Fall 432 MHz Sprint

Oct 8 7PM - 11PM
432 MHz Phone, CW, Dig.
www.svhfs.org

Worked All Britain

Oct 11 7AM - Oct 12 7AM
14-28 MHz Phone
www.worked-all-britain.co.uk

Pennsylvania QSO Party

Oct 11 11AM - Oct 12 5PM
1.8-144 MHz Phone, CW, Dig.
www.nittany-arc.net/paqso.html

Worked All Germany

Oct 18 10AM - Oct 19 10AM
3.5-28 MHz Phone, CW
www.darc.de

Fall 50 MHz Sprint

Oct 18 6PM - 11PM
50 MHz Phone, CW, Dig.
www.svhfs.org

Illinois QSO Party

Oct 19 2PM - 8PM
1.8-144 MHz Phone, CW
www.w9awe.org

1915-2004 QST Archives Online

from the ARRL

With just a mouse click or two, ARRL members can now access the online QST magazine archive. This new benefit -- a service of the ARRL Technical Information Service (TIS) <<http://www.arrl.org/tis/>> -- provides PDF copies of all QST articles from December 1915 through December 2004, enabling members to view and print their favorite article, project and more. Access to the new online digital QST archive is free for ARRL members, and is for their personal use only -- material in the archive may not be freely distributed or copied. [I guess that means no stealing for the Journal! - Ed.]

The ARRL Periodicals Archive and Search lists every article for QST from 1915 to the present, QEX from 1981 to the present, Ham Radio from 1968 to 1990 and NCJ from 1973 to the present (please note that beginning in 1998, each issue of QEX covers two months). Only ARRL members will be able to download and print copies of the QST articles.

2009 ARRL Handbook Available

from the ARRL

If you've been a ham for more than two weeks you already know what the ARRL Handbook is, so we'll cut to the quick and let you know what's new in this version. According to the ARRL, revisions to the 2009 Handbook include updated material on amateur satellites, including details for today's fleet of operational satellites, as well as updated versions of accessory software on the CD-ROM included with the book.

New projects in the 86th edition include the RockMite QRP CW transceiver that's been expanded to cover 80, 40, 30 or 20 meters; an audio interface with audio and mic connections for two operators sharing a radio; a remote power controller for high current devices; and an "Audible Antenna Bridge" that allows you to tune for the lowest SWR by ear.

The softcover edition of the Handbook sells for \$44.95; the hardcover sells for \$59.95. Both editions are available now.

Third Annual ARRL On-Line Auction Set for October

from the ARRL

The Third Annual ARRL On-Line Auction kicks off October 23, running until November 1 on the ARRL Web site <<http://www.arrl.org/auction>>. This is your chance to pick up one-of-a-kind Amateur Radio items. To see what the Auction will offer this year, be sure to check out the Auction preview that begins October 16. Proceeds from the auction benefit ARRL education programs including activities to license new hams, strengthen Amateur Radio's emergency service training, offer continuing technical and operating education, as well as creating instructional materials.

This year's auction will again include many transceivers and other items that have appeared in the QST Product Review column and have thus been thoroughly tested by the ARRL Lab. There will be many vintage items offered, as well. Also, returning by popular demand will be four ARRL Lab unique "junque" boxes. These boxes have a starting bid of \$50 and have almost anything you could ever possibly imagine in them. No one -- except the ARRL Lab staff -- knows what exactly is inside each box, but each is guaranteed to be full of things that the Lab staff consider valuable (but keep in mind that they collect just about anything). [Sounds like stuff you might find in N9IFG's garage. - Ed.]

Jahnke said that due to many requests last year, "all product review items in the On-Line Auction include a link to a PDF file of the actual Product Review, as well as a reference to the QST issue that the review appeared in."

New Look for the Journal

You've probably noticed by now that we've done some sprucing up of the newsletter. Later on this month we hope to have a website just for the Journal up and running to go with it.

Like it? Hate it? Let us know! Send us an e-mail at chris@n9yh.com or k9tms@mindspring.net or give us the word through the WeLCARS Yahoo Group. And, as always, we welcome - make that strongly encourage - your submissions to the Journal. Anything vaguely ham radio related is fair game. We'll take plain text, HTML, Microsoft Word, Open Office, PDFs, just about anything you've got. Just send it in an e-mail and you, too, can have the fame and glory that comes with publication in the Lake County Ham Radio Journal.

Thanks and 73!
Chris N9YH
Tom K9TMS

Just a little note...

After reading [the September] Journal, I just wanted to add to the news regarding the VE testing. My son Nathan was one of the new Technicians, thus earning the call KC9OCE, as well as the lucky kid who walked (more like jumping and skipping over walls, ceilings and anything else in his excitement!) away with the ICOM IC-V8 Sport.

Needless to say, his younger brother now wants his ticket and ***GASP!*** the XYL mentioned that she would like to get hers.

Last Note: Nathan has been looking for other kids on the air with little luck. Maybe we can figure out a way to start an organization, net or whatever for the younger hams (who in many cases want to talk radio with other kids).

73

Slade Smith
KC4WVL

Status of the Community Center aka WeLCARS Worldwide Headquarters

Joe Serocki, N9FG
President, WeLCARS

Georgette and I met with Lt. Joe Gliniewicz of the Fox Lake PD over the basement. Joe runs the Fox Lake Police Explorer Post, and does one heck of a bang-up job. #1 in the entire state! He has dozens of kids that go through a version of Police Academy (no, not the movie). I think what he is doing is great.

We will be sharing the space. Period. So don't whine. We can use their space as long as we respect it, and they ours as long they respect it.

They are taking our room and putting in showers, which we can use if we want. Something to think about at the end of a long contest weekend... J. They are getting the bathrooms fixed, which will be nice to at least have working traps in there and not smell the stench during rainy season. They are putting in workspaces, cubicles as it were, which will be good for testing. They are putting in a PowerPoint Projector (their term, bless their hearts, I love technical people) that will have a fixed projection point, which will be totally nice.

We get our own keys to the building and a separate key to the basement area that only Joe's team gets as well. We don't have to check a key in and out. That will be totally cool. [UPDATE: As of now Joe, Keith N9QDS, and I have keys. - Ed.]

They meet on Wednesday and Thursday nights about half the year. During this time I am pretty sure we can meet upstairs. We will still get full use of the building during TechFest, which will remain once a year in February. Aside from that we are still in a period of transition. We don't have all the answers, except that we need to work together to make this a good thing for all of us. [Hey, even if you don't like it - at least they're not tearing the building down! - Ed.]

September 2008 VHF Contest "Rain" Report

Chris Burke, N9YH



"When it rains, it pours," ought to be the new Stoned Monkey and WeLCARS contesting motto as for the third time this year the weather put the kibosh on our contesting plans. Despite calls for rain over the weekend we proceeded with our Friday setup plans. I hopped on over to Tom K9TMS' house in Joe N9IFG's Geo Tracker pulling one of Joe's homemade flatbed trailers where we made short work of loading up some towers and conveying out to the farm. The rest of Friday consisted of getting some equipment delivered and partially setting up the 222 and microwave tower and getting the computers moved into the shed. Feeling good about our progress, Tom, Good Joe KC9LFP, Jay KC9NJZ, and I stopped for the evening just as Larry W9LGP arrived. That night, though, brought steady rains that turned the farm into the Everglades, and reluctantly the crew decided on Saturday to pack up and head for home.

Joe N9IFG and I made an effort on Saturday using the War Wagon. Joe worked the K9NS Mt. Frank Superstation early in the afternoon, then we met up around 7PM to give it another go. I called CQ steadily for over an hour on 6,

2, and 440 and managed to work only Dave KA9OZP of MCWA Newsletter fame on 6 and 2 meters. Checking the SMC e-mail reflector after I got home revealed lots of other stations with the same complaints: conditions were terrible and nobody was on. So, I guess the one good thing to say for the weekend is that we didn't miss too much!

So with the plug pulled on our third contest effort this year, the only logical thing to do is plan for the next contest! The November Phone Sweepstakes are coming up November 15 - 17, and we're still planning a group effort of sorts from the WeLCARS Worldwide Headquarters. Next on the agenda are the January VHF Sweeps, generally on the third or fourth weekend of January.

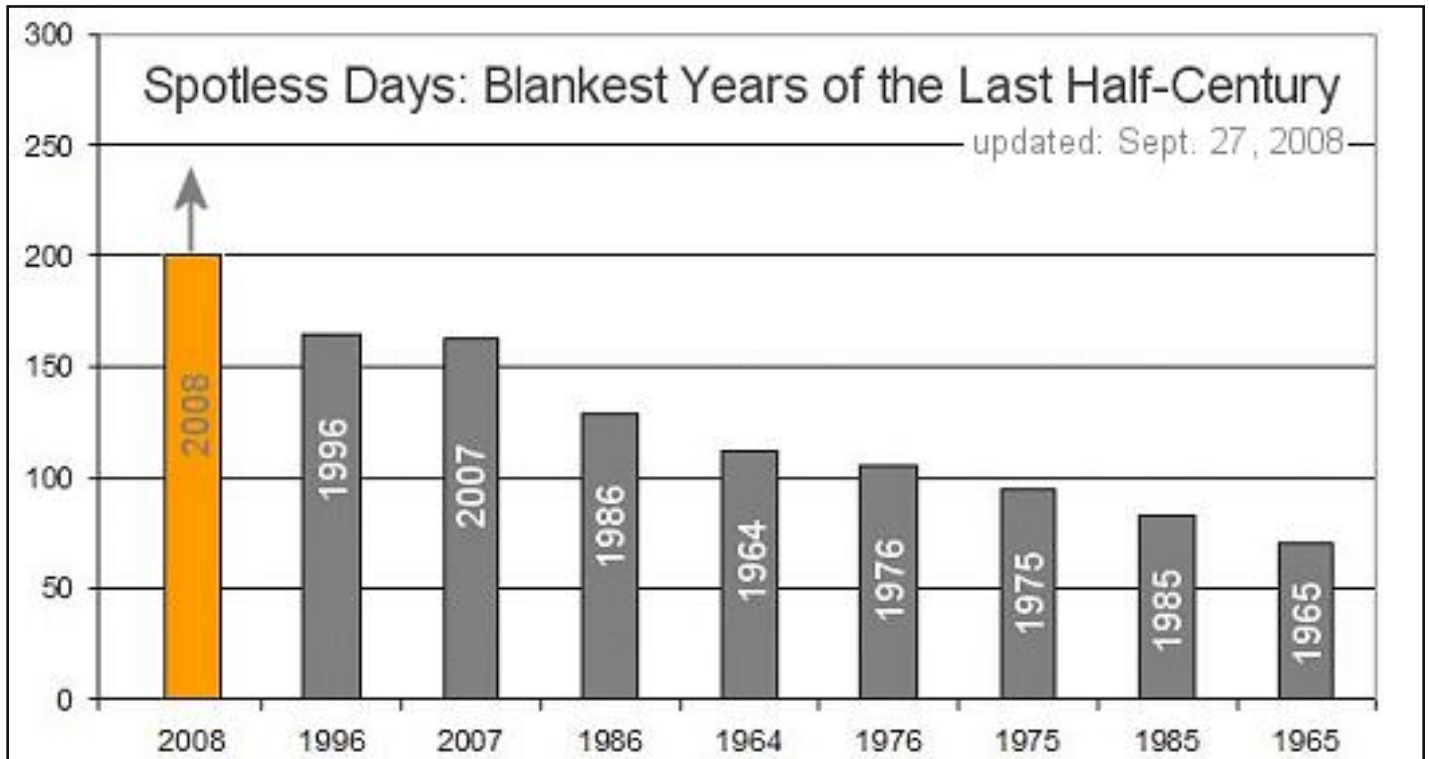
The plan for January will likely be a little different than what we've done in the past. With the potential for Monkey freezing temperatures, the idea is to have a band of rovers instead of a monster fixed station. Contest Commandant Tom had this to say about the January plans. "January can be such a problematic month to plan things around in regard to operating portable at the farm. If the weather were to go back to global warming conditions and it was nice out then we could plan a fun stripped down effort at the farm. That said after last week end I am not sure I wanna wait to find out."

"I think what would be best is the following to happen," Tom continued. "For those that don't want to or can't rove get a portable setup at the farm with a set of decent antennas on a Hula tower or two at most. Most likely figure 6,2,432, and 223.5 FM. For those that can rove we get out as many as we can."

If we can get a group of rovers together, either with or without a fixed-station setup, we can still put the Monkeys on the map for the Affiliated Club Competition.

Spotless Sun: Blankest Year of the Space Age

Dr. Tony Phillips, Science@NASA



Astronomers who count sunspots have announced that 2008 is now the "blankest year" of the Space Age.

As of Sept. 27, 2008, the sun had been blank, i.e., had no visible sunspots, on 200 days of the year. To find a year with more blank suns, you have to go back to 1954, three years before the launch of Sputnik, when the sun was blank 241 times.

"Sunspot counts are at a 50-year low," says solar physicist David Hathaway of the NASA Marshall Space Flight Center. "We're experiencing a deep minimum of the solar cycle."

The image to the right, taken by the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) on Sept. 27, 2008, shows a solar disk completely unmarked by sunspots. For comparison, a SOHO image taken seven years earlier on Sept. 27, 2001, is peppered with colossal sunspots, all crackling with solar flares. The difference is the phase of the 11-year solar cycle. 2001 was a year of solar maximum, with lots of sunspots, solar flares and geomagnetic storms. 2008 is at the cycle's opposite extreme, solar minimum, a quiet time on the sun.

And it is a very quiet time. If solar activity continues as low as it has been, 2008 could rack



Sept. 27, 2008 - a spotless day for the sun

up a whopping 290 spotless days by the end of December, making it a century-level year in terms of spotlessness.

Hathaway cautions that this development may sound more exciting than it actually is: "While the solar minimum of 2008 is shaping up to be the deepest of the Space Age, it is still unremarkable compared to the long and deep solar minima of the late 19th and early 20th centuries." Those earlier minima routinely racked up 200 to 300 spotless days per year.

A histogram showing the blankest years of the last half-century is below. The vertical axis is a count of spotless days in each year. The bar for 2008, which was updated on Sept. 27th, is still growing.

Some solar physicists are welcoming the lull.

"This gives us a chance to study the sun without the complications of sunspots," says Dean Pesnell of the Goddard Space Flight Center. "Right now we have the best instrumentation in history looking at the sun. There is a whole fleet of spacecraft devoted to solar physics--SOHO, Hinode, ACE, STEREO and others. We're bound to learn new things during this long solar minimum."

As an example he offers helioseismology: "By monitoring the sun's vibrating surface, helioseismologists can probe the stellar interior in much the same way geologists use earthquakes to probe inside Earth. With sunspots out of the way, we gain a better view of the sun's subsurface winds and inner magnetic dynamo."

"There is also the matter of solar irradiance," adds Pesnell. "Researchers are now seeing the dimmest sun in their records. The change is small, just a fraction of a percent, but significant. Questions about effects on climate are natural if the sun continues to dim."

Pesnell is NASA's project scientist for the Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO), a new spacecraft

equipped to study both solar irradiance and helioseismic waves. Construction of SDO is complete, he says, and it has passed pre-launch vibration and thermal testing. "We are ready to launch! Solar minimum is a great time to go."

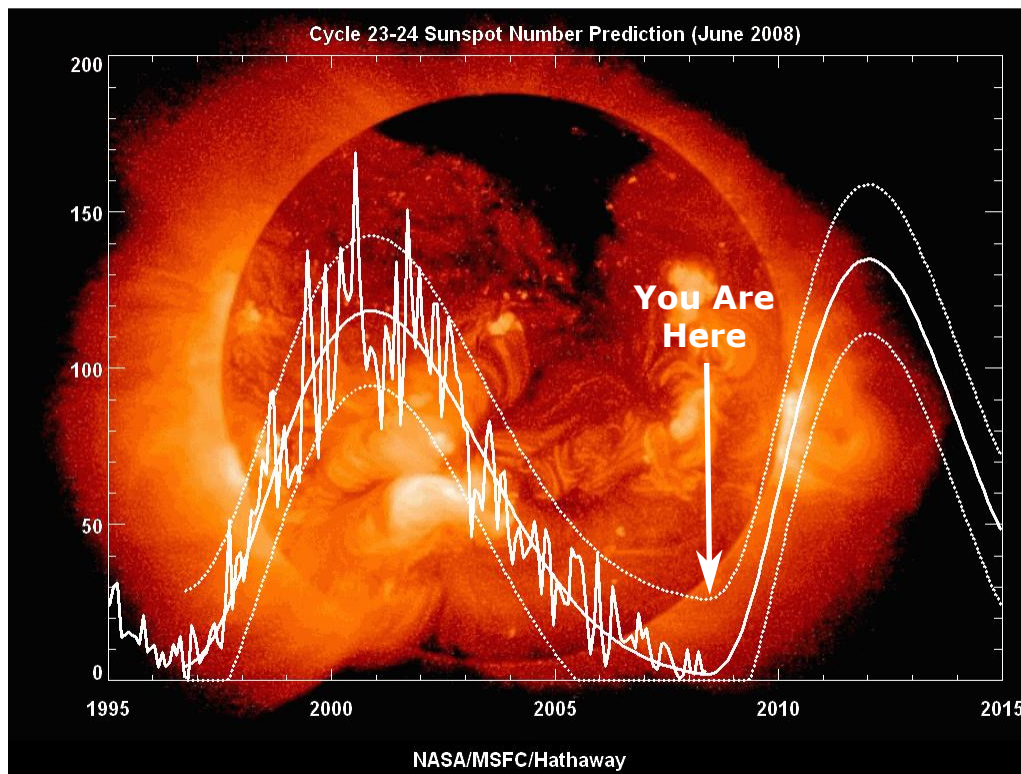
Coinciding with the string of blank suns is a 50-year record low in solar wind pressure, a recent discovery of the Ulysses spacecraft. The pressure drop began years before the current minimum, so it is unclear how the two phenomena are connected, if at all. This is another mystery for SDO and the others.

Who knew the blank sun could be so interesting? More to come...



What's Wrong with the Sun? (Nothing)

Dr. Tony Phillips, Science@NASA



Stop the presses! The sun is behaving normally.

So says NASA solar physicist David Hathaway. "There have been some reports lately that Solar Minimum is lasting longer than it should. That's not true. The ongoing lull in sunspot number is well within historic norms for the solar cycle."

This report, that there's nothing to report, is newsworthy because of a growing buzz in lay and academic circles that something is wrong with the sun. Sun Goes Longer Than Normal Without Producing Sunspots declared one recent press release. A careful look at the data, however, suggests otherwise.

But first, a status report: "The sun is now near the low point of its 11-year activity cycle," says Hathaway. "We call this 'Solar Minimum.' It is the period of quiet that separates one Solar Max from another."

The graph above represents the solar cycle, 1995-2015. The "noisy" curve traces measured sunspot numbers; the smoothed curves are predictions. Credit: D. Hathaway/NASA/MSFC.

During Solar Max, huge sunspots and intense solar flares are a daily occurrence. Auroras appear in Florida. Radiation storms knock out satellites. Radio blackouts frustrate hams. [Those hams are never happy! - Ed.] The last such episode took place in the years around 2000-2001.

During Solar Minimum, the opposite occurs. Solar flares are almost nonexistent while whole weeks go by without a single, tiny sunspot to break the monotony of the blank sun. This is what we are

experiencing now.

Although minima are a normal aspect of the solar cycle, some observers are questioning the length of the ongoing minimum, now slogging through its 3rd year.

"It does seem like it's taking a long time," allows Hathaway, "but I think we're just forgetting how long a solar minimum can last." In the early 20th century there were periods of quiet lasting almost twice as long as the current spell. Most researchers weren't even born then.

Hathaway has studied international sunspot counts stretching all the way back to 1749 and he offers these statistics: "The average period of a solar cycle is 131 months with a standard deviation of 14 months. Decaying solar cycle 23 (the one we are experiencing now) has so far lasted 142 months--well within the first standard deviation and thus not at all abnormal. The last available 13-month smoothed sunspot number was 5.70. This is bigger than 12 of the last 23 solar minimum values."

In summary, "the current minimum is not abnormally low or long."

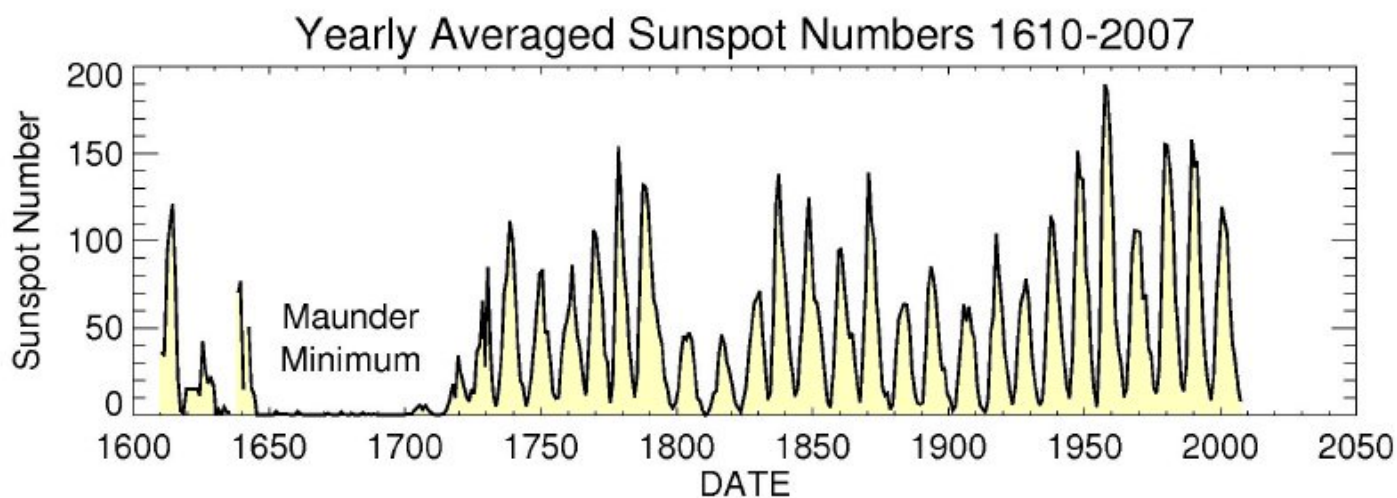
The longest minimum on record, the Maunder

Minimum of 1645-1715, lasted an incredible 70 years. Sunspots were rarely observed and the solar cycle seemed to have broken down completely. The period of quiet coincided with the Little Ice Age, a series of extraordinarily bitter winters in Earth's northern hemisphere. Many researchers are convinced that low solar activity, acting in concert with increased volcanism and possible changes in ocean current patterns, played a role in that 17th century cooling.

For reasons no one understands, the sunspot cycle revived itself in the early 18th century and has carried on since with the familiar 11-year period. Because solar physicists do not understand what triggered the Maunder Minimum or exactly how it influenced Earth's climate, they are always on the look-out for signs that it might be happening again.

The quiet of 2008 is not the second coming of the Maunder Minimum, believes Hathaway. "We have already observed a few sunspots from the next solar cycle," he says. "This suggests the solar cycle is progressing normally."

What's next? Hathaway anticipates more spotless days, maybe even hundreds, followed by a return to Solar Max conditions in the years around 2012.



Odds and Ends

This week 10/8 we'll go over our inventory of antenna building supplies and make sure we have everything we need to finish. Then I'm thinking we can finish on 10/15 instead of going out to Dino's or Freddie's or wherever, then we'll have 10/22 to fall back on. To make up for the lack of a "social" meeting day this month the club will be buying pizza.

After that Keith N9QDS will be getting the portable/arrow antennas ready.

Either before or after the arrow antennas, depending on what comes together first, Joe N9IFG is going to have a club microwave antenna project so when we get all set up with 33cm radios we can bang the antennas out quickly and cheaply. We will do one set first, tune the project as needed, and then move into production as needed. These come to about \$15 per antenna. After that we'll work on station accessories, put in your requests now so we can all start looking for stuff.

N9IFG is opening an IRLP net on our homebrewing stuff. Joe is thinking 1800CST Sundays. Send your feedback to Joe at joeserocki@gmail.com or through the WeLCARS Yahoo Group.

Also currently in the works is a new log for November Sweeps based on the VHF software model Tom K9TMS already have written. Work is progressing slowly but at a steady pace. As it turns out checking this contest requires a lot less code. [But a lot more talking. Precedence, year licensed, mother's hat size... Cripes! - Ed.] Tom hope to have a running model of this by month's end and will need assistance with testing it. Please let Tom know if you are interested at k9tms@mindspring.com or through the WeLCARS or Stoned Monkey Yahoo Groups. Tom estimates he's about 25% complete. Once working this log will be made available to all Stoned Monkey and WeLCARS members.

The Second Annual WeLCARS Holiday Party, "Awards" Ceremony, and Junta Coup (aka elections) Spectacular is just around the corner! The tentative date is Wednesday, November 19 at 7PM at the R Corner Bistro on Grand Ave. in Fox Lake, just a couple blocks from the Worldwide Headquarters. Send your award nominations to Chris N9YH at chris@n9yh.com. Don't use the group - these are supposed to be surprises!

Joe N9IFG will be handling the nominations for our officer elections, aka the yearly Junta Coup. The following positions will be up for grabs:

President	Vice-President
Secretary	Treasurer
Contest Chair	Program Chair
Youth Training Chair	

or any other position you think we can't live without. Send your nominations to Joe at joeserocki@gmail.com or in person at a meeting. The final deadline is the holiday party, where we'll have the elections.



I WANT YOU!
To Write for the Journal!

send your submissions to
chris@n9yh.com
k9tms@mindspring.com