

Memoirs of Longleat by Ted, G3JMY

The size of the attendance at the early Longleat Rallies was not great, 50 or 60 to start with. A shower of rain at one early Rally forced everyone to shelter in the only tent on site - the flysheet of my Family frame tent ! The Raffle table was in there too !

Ted

We had a splendid aerial for our top-band talk-in one year. It was a half-wave of aircraft dinghy aerial attached to a 4' met balloon. When it came time to pack up, Vic, G3CHW, swiftly unhitched the wire from the ATU. I was outside the tent at the time, about to reel in the wire. To my amazement, and the hilarious incredulity of the surrounding onlookers, it was snatched from my fingers by the met balloon, which swiftly disappeared in the direction of Frome !

We used to run a Concours D'Elegance for those mobile operators with pride in their rigs. Vehicles of all types from bikes and motor scooters to Jags and Bentleys were presented. Marks were awarded for originality, appearance, neat arrangement of gear (few, if any visible wires etc), ergonomics of controls and a few more which escape me. Some really impressive mobile rigs were entered. The proud winner received his prize in the late afternoon, when Raffle and other prizes were presented.

There was, at first, a prize awarded for the amateur travelling the furthest to attend the Rally. It started quite modestly with the Midlands, then Scotland. It seemed to peter out when it was seen that amateurs from say, Canada etc. had clearly not travelled that far to attend the Rally. However, there has always been a recognition of the attendance of amateurs from distant places.

Some very enterprising amateurs turned up with unusual aerial systems. One in particular I remember was that of Chris, G8GYQ, Harry's (G6GN) son-in law. It was a stacked omni cloverleaf for 2m, based on a QST design - very eye-catching. Some of the loaded whips for top band were auto-tuned, using motor-driven, sliding contacts on the huge loading coils. There was evidence of painstaking work at a time when craftsmanship was the driving force.

There were games for the children to play and things for them to do at many of the rallies. There was an Electronic Maze, a corkscrew of copper wire and a metal loop that had not to touch as it was guided along the corkscrew. There was a "Treasure Hunt" - put a peg in the ground inside a marked-out rectangle. The "Balloon Race", with small hydrogen-filled balloons, was always popular. One balloon landed in France, with a prize awarded to launcher and finder.

In the early Rallies, Raffle prizes were mainly donated by firms in the Bristol area. Lord Bath ~~did his stuff~~ at those relatively informal Rallies by presenting the prizes at the close of the Rally. All very laid back.

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When the time came to cope with really big attendances, the Committee had to devise a more satisfactory method for distributing the tickets for the Raffle prizes, which by then had greatly increased in number and value. Some 10000 tickets were necessary. Eventually the present system was introduced. It involved every Committee member (G4UZ, "uncle Len", was Chairman) in some hours of fitting 5 unrelated tickets into each envelope. The "winning numbers" had to be "invented" after all the envelopes were sealed.

It was realised early on that a separate Raffle was required for the ladies. One such Raffle resulted in a lady winning a somewhat flimsy nether garment. When the ticket was drawn the undaunted Vic offered to fit the garment ! Decorum was satisfied by a polite refusal.

The "tump" outside the witchet gates of Longleat was used for a few years for the 2m talk-in. The operators had to carry all the gear required, including car batteries to the top quite early in the day. Once up there they had little opportunity to visit the Rally, although the site was very good. Soon Heaven's Gate became the site and I fancy that it was accepted as a reasonable alternative. On the topic of talk-in stations, I remember one year when I ran an 80m talk-in from my caravan. The aerial was a quarter-wave vertical in the shape of a 50' Telomast with a 17' whip (derived from an Army field aerial) on the top. It was, without doubt, a very satisfactory aerial. The wire fence around the Hippo pen was used as an untuned ground-plane !

There was always plenty to interest everyone at the Longleat Rallies. I remember when Lord Bath first introduced the Lions, with the attendant "white hunters". He was on the gate, taking the money, when we went through. Then there were the Morris Dancers on the side lawn, near the lake. The House was a focus of a lot of attention - that was where the only toilets were located for one thing !

Among the competitions I remember was the Top-band Aerial Field Strength Competition. This was devised and run by G3CHW. The contesting station would radiate from Heaven's Gate, having been entered for the contest via the talk-in. Vic would be down on the site, with suitable equipment to measure the field strength of the signal. When the winner was announced it resulted in a rush of amateurs to view the loaded vertical on the winner's vehicle. I did wonder on a few occasions how many watts of power had actually been generated to produce some of the amazingly strong signals !

I have no doubt that everyone who has attended will have their own memories of that Rally of Rallies Longleat Mobile Rally !

Ted, 9/3/97