

## **Life In The 160-Meter Lane: A Kelso Dunes Adventure**

The 160-meter band has been with us since the dawn of amateur radio, but “The Top Band” is hardly tops when it comes to activity.

It behaves much the same as the commercial AM band, with good opportunities for DX contacts on winter nights. The rest of the year, as LVRAC member Matt, K7XMD puts it, “The 160-meter band is not a very active band. It’s more of an achievement just to operate there. A good working antenna is no small feat. With the limitation of a nighttime only band, it’s not very user friendly. The anemic conditions of 160-meters is a far cry from the hustle and bustle of the 20-meter band.”

Despite the band’s reputation and history, Matt was curious to learn more...

And to find out what he could do on 160.

“Around the holidays of 2024, Steve Loomis (K7EAU) had talked about working the CQ160 contest in 2025. (CW in January and SSB in February.) Up until that point, getting on 160 meters hadn’t been a thought. Maybe I was bored that day, but it got my gray matter stirred up. Why not?

“Making a 160-meter antenna was no small matter. But if someone could connect an antenna tuner to a corrugated steel roof of an outhouse and make contacts, then why can’t I come up with a simplified (heavily compromised) 160-meter antenna?”

So Matt got to work, determined to explore “The Top Band.” He was intrigued by experiments conducted by Ron, KJ7PAQ, in Big Daddy’s Antenna and Speed Shop. Around the same time, Ron was experimenting with rewinding Hustler resonator coils.

“The thought hit me, why couldn’t two of them be put together for a 160-meter vertical? It would be heavily compromised, but this was the completely absurd solution I was looking for. After that, I started asking people questions and researching it more. A couple of months later, another ham offered me a second 80-meter resonator he had but didn’t want. I had what I needed.”



Matt pushed forward with backyard experiments, adjustments and enhancements.

“February 7<sup>th</sup> was a day that I spent swapping pieces and components for different configurations to see which would work best. In the afternoon I hit on a combination that had good results. I called up Ron and asked him to come over and review my findings. He looked at the numbers I had and the antenna itself and said it ought to work.”

The backyard dry runs gave Matt an opportunity to unlock the versatility of his trusty Wolf River Coil (WRC) antenna. It also helped him open the door to operating on 160-meters.

“Everything on it is connected with  $\frac{3}{8}$ ” x 24 threads, so it’s a very modular design. It can be disassembled and configuration changes made at will, as long as the new pieces have the same threads.



“The final 160-meter antenna uses several pieces of the Wolf River Coil antenna, with a few more added to the mix. While testing, I hit on the combination of one Hustler 80m resonator and the WRC. This was the pair that made the whole idea come together.

“Things moved ahead quickly after that. The convenient tuning ring on the WRC coil, made retuning of the 160-meter antenna a simple operation. This would come in handy on an antenna that requires retuning after every frequency change, much like the basic mag loop antenna.”

Soon it was showtime. Matt was ready for the 2026 CQ 160 Contest. The narrow bandwidth of his antenna and the need for quiet operating conditions prompted him to plan an outing to the Kelso Dunes, located within the Mojave National Preserve, for the competition



“I had been there before and knew it was an electrically quiet operating location. Thinking about the dunes, I put the word out to the club and see if anyone else wanted to join in on the fun. To tell you the truth, I was surprised to see that a couple people expressed an interest. I really figured it was too far of a drive for most people. Glad to have the company along.”

Matt was joined by LVRAC members Tim, WA8YXY and Ron, KJ7PAQ.



Like many other portable outings, where we find ourselves enjoying the outdoors and eyeball QSOs with our friends, Matt didn't go hog wild trying to make contacts.

But the antenna worked just fine and he did have QSOs with 160-meter operators in Colorado and Arizona. Mission accomplished.

"I won't be getting charged up about 160m operation," says Matt, "But I have the capability if needed. Maybe in 2027, I'll give the CQ160 contest another try and see if I can make enough contacts to warrant submission of some official logs. We'll see what happens from here."