

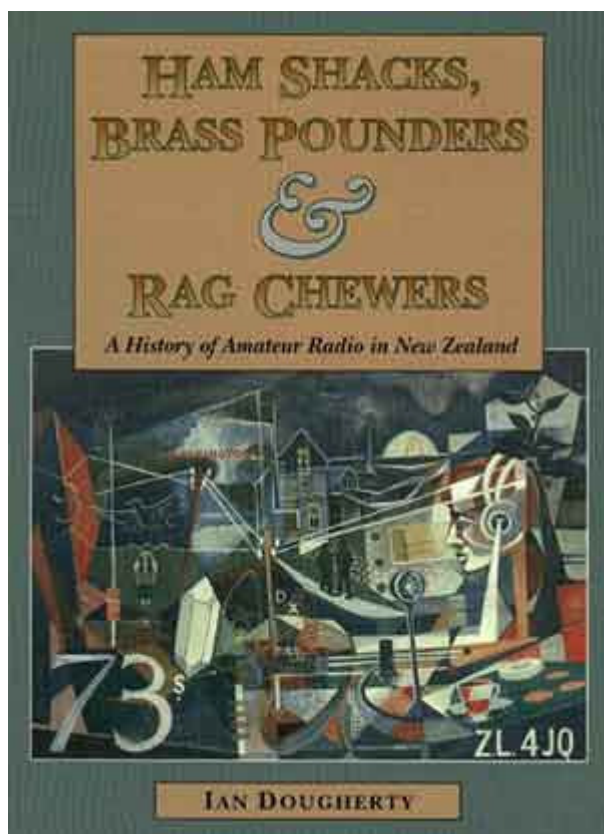
Ham Shacks, Brass Pounders & Rag Chewers

100 Years of Amateur Radio in New Zealand

Ham Shacks, Brass Pounders and Rag Chewers traces the history of amateur (ham) radio in New Zealand, from the early days of simple spark transmitters and crystal receivers, to sophisticated space communications. It's a history New Zealand amateurs can be proud of, both in their contribution to the community by providing vital communications links in times of need such as the 1931 Hawke's Bay earthquake, and in their contribution to science by helping to pioneer the use of short waves for long distance radio communications. While the book covers the technical developments that have occurred, the author has produced an account that is as much about the people involved as the gear they used. It will appeal not only to amateurs themselves, in New Zealand and overseas, but to anyone with an interest in New Zealand history and communications.



“Amateur radio is one of New Zealand’s most popular pastimes. There are more than six thousand licensed amateur radio operators in New Zealand, more than two million world-wide. For many participants, amateur radio is more than mere hobby. It is a passion. For many outsiders, it is a baffling subculture. For the nation it is a ready source of self-taught technicians, and of emergency equipment and expertise.”



“This volume is a fascinating account of the radio amateur in New Zealand. I was fortunate to be one of the early ones at Wellington College. We built everything from the ground up, winding transformers, building liquid rectifiers, receivers and transmitters. We communicated with other amateurs around the world. Those were exciting days indeed”

– from the Forward by Dr William Pickering

“A ‘ham shack’ was any place where a ham operated an amateur radio station. It could be a shack out the back, a corner of the garage or basement, a spare room or a bit of bench space in the kitchen. Morse keys were commonly made from brass. Those who used them became known as ‘brass pounders’, from an exaggerated description of how they operated the keys. Amateurs who preferred to talk into a microphone became known as ‘rag chewers’. The term was derived from the colloquial phrase ‘chewing the rag’, which had a similar meaning to the more common expressions ‘chewing the fat’ or ‘having a chin wag’.”

Historic Two-way Radio Contact



The anniversary of the historic two-way radio contact in 1924 was regularly celebrated, including a special 50th anniversary event organised by the NZART's Otago Branch and hosted by Frank and Brenda Bell at Shag Valley Station in 1974 (A.D. Bell)

"The Bell-Goyder contact was not just a first for amateur radio. The 19,000-kilometer, hour-and-a-quarter morse code chat between the back-blocks Otago sheep station and the London school was the first direct two-way radio communication of any kind from one side of the

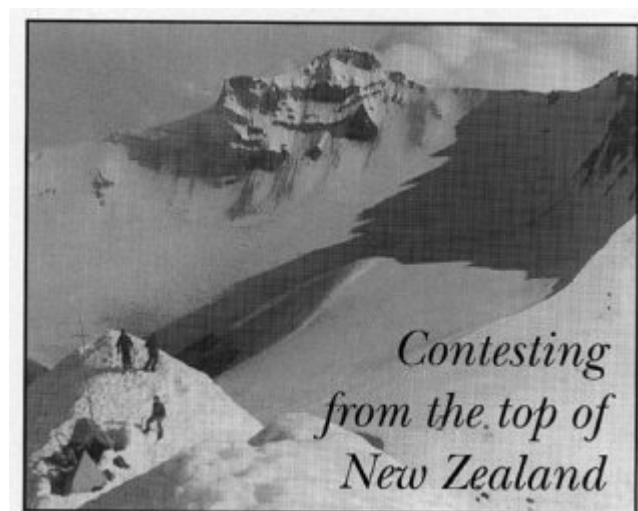
world to the other, smashing all previous distance records. It had been achieved with simple radio transmitters and receivers, using the power it takes to run an electric light bulb, on wavelengths considered useless for the task."

Amateurs maintain vital communication link



(Alexander Turnbull Library)

"In Napier, amateur radio operator George Tyler was at work when the earthquake struck at 10.47 am. He managed to escape unhurt from his business premises as they collapsed around him. He rushed home to find his wife and family safe and his house only slightly damaged, but the power supply was cut and his radio equipment lay broken on the floor. Tyler returned to the burning city center to rescue what batteries he could from the ruins of radio shops. Back home, he rebuilt his broken transmitter and connected it to the batteries. At about 1 pm, not much more than about two hours after the initial shock, Tyler tried to establish morse code contact with the outside world. He managed to raise an amateur in Christchurch, then several more in Canterbury and Otago who took messages from him. His house in Vigor Brown Street was itself in danger of being razed, by one of the resulting fires."



Amateurs went to extraordinary lengths and heights to take part in VHF field-day contests. During the 1970s a group of amateurs from the Auckland University Radio Club operated their VHF equipment from the top of Mount Ruapehu, including this site on Pare, above Crater Lake, in 1978. (Q.S. Foreman)

In 1994, ten-year-old Pamela Blackett become one of the youngest-ever licensed amateurs in New Zealand. She later

