

National Lighthouse Day and the “Loneliest Lighthouse in the World”



Stannard Rock Lighthouse, USA-808

In April 2021, I was looking for a fun way to get back into ham radio after about ten years away. I stumbled across the ‘**Loneliest Lighthouse in the World**’ with an online video: <https://youtu.be/yPfwqDJ8jx8>. I pondered an activation during the **US National Lighthouse-Lightship Weekend**: <https://arlhs.com/>.

I learned that to see the light, you must be 20 miles from land on Lake Superior! Seaworthy boats with dual engines and experienced captains regularly visit the shoal - when weather permits. As often as not, they cancel because of risks due to weather. One captain said, “The wind can change in 20 minutes”. Inexperienced pilots run out of gas fighting to get home. They can be rescued, but only a fool would underestimate Lake Superior! Sudden storms build enormous waves. The water is always very cold. The lighthouse is haunted by the ghost of Petty Officer 1st Class William Maxwell who was blown up in a fuel explosion in 1961 and never found. The damage from the blast was never repaired. Stannard Rock (USA-808) had never been activated!

I contacted Carl Lindquist, Executive Director of the Superior Watershed Partnership, owner of the lighthouse, with a proposal to use amateur radio to draw attention to his mission and the Lighthouse Restoration Project. His tentative OK prompted my next steps: assembling a team, and finding a way to access (and leave) the lighthouse.



Carl Lindquist –SWP

The first three charter companies I contacted refused my request. Bringing an expensive boat up close to the stone and steel lighthouse among barely submerged rocks, and watching what might happen to a troop of landlubbers in turbulent Lake Superior is not part of any business plan! Then I talked with Dave Kimar, owner of Kimar’s Charters. He proudly said he has delivered equipment and researchers to the lighthouse over the course of many years, most recently, the Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)/ Government of Canada. He would help, but only if he thought we were up to the task.



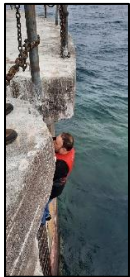
Dave Kimar – Charter Owner

Team members were my longtime friend Matt Crehan (NC), followed by Jared Bergeron (N8CZ) and Greg Stoike (KN4CK), and then Nick Baine (AC8CQ). Jared and Greg were new friends since traveling to Cincinnati to work in a competitive Field Day. Greg is vice president of the W8DC club. Jared is staff advisor to school club W8GVU. Nick is the club's faculty advisor and license trustee. Jared and his student, Justin N8FCC, had recently revived the club after several year's hiatus. They contacted me serendipitously because I started the club years before: <http://n8ppq.net/W8GVU/>. Their timing was perfect!

Jared set up a Discord server and we began coordinating. We met at a riverside park and tested radio operations in close quarters. We hoisted heavy loads with block-and-tackle and a boom that Jason and Nick built at GVSU. After submitting detailed updates, along with proof of insurance through the ARRL <https://www.arrlinsurance.com>, and agreeing to comply with regulations by bringing along a camp toilet, we got approval to stay overnight on Stannard Rock. Carl Lindquist sent me a key to the lighthouse!

At daybreak on National Lighthouse Day, we gathered around Dave Kimar to hear his decision about taking us out. His two largest boats developed mechanical problems days before. We would have to use a smaller boat: a 26' welded aluminum offshore fishing boat. Scientific instruments on and around the lighthouse reported that weather there, 49 miles from the dock, had been rough all night but was calming. Wave heights were 5 feet. Storms were predicted for the evening. Dave eyed each of us directly and asked if we could stay extra nights if weather turned bad. We all confirmed, and Dave agreed to take us out. It was clear the concerning factor was not the boat, but our own capabilities. Providentially, wind and waves calmed over our two-hour voyage.

Dave skillfully brought the bow close enough for me to grab the ladder. I tied the bow, then went up and



KN4CK

down another ladder to tie the stern. I clambered back up to the platform, 23 feet above, and dropped a line. I hoisted gear while Matt, then Jared and Greg climbed up to join me. Jared attached the boom and assembled the pulleys while Nick got the heaviest item, the generator, into his net basket. Their engineering paid off! The generator easily cleared the 2-foot overhang and was set down at our feet! The rest of our equipment soon followed.



Matt – No Call, and Jared - N8CZ



Greg – KN4CK operating



Jared – N8CZ operating



Nick – AC8CQ operating

Greg was on the air first with his 6m station: Elecraft KX3 and 3-el Yagi. He also got the marine band antenna working. (Marine band VHF does not require a license.)

Jared set up his Yaesu 991A and inverted End Fed Half-Wave antenna on the 7th floor. He also made for marine band VHF.

The team used my Icom IC-7300 and G5RV from the 3rd floor. Its microphone got left behind and so we used this rig for FT8.

I operated from a tent on the deck with a BuddiPole and my 30-year old IC-735 for CW during the NA QSO Party. Later, I used the G5RV for phone on 40 and 20m. There was heavy QRN but the wind was louder! You can see the bent G5RV support and the tent lifted off the deck.



N8PPQ station with Buddipole and G5RV

Bellowing winds grew stronger overnight with light rain. By 0700 UTC, it seemed certain we would be staying indefinitely. But again, winds calmed by mid-morning. Great luck, or help from a friendly spirit! Dave Kimar was on his way to get us. We loaded our gear in 3-5' waves and took turns falling from the ladder into the bobbing boat. With wind in our faces, the trip back took almost 4 hours.



Matt and N8PPQ near Greg's J-pole for the marine band and mast for his 6m Yagi.

Results: We made our first QSO at 23:07 UTC on 07 Aug, and the last QSO was at 16:07 UTC on 08 August. We operated a total of 17 hours. We worked 40 states and 8 Countries. That works out to 20.5 contacts per hour. We also got the QRZ Grid Squared Award, USA Counties Award, and World Radio Friendship Award. Details are on LoTW and <http://n8ppq.net/stannardrock>.

We succeeded as the only team to have ever activated USA-808. But best of all: for one weekend, the Loneliest Lighthouse in the world had the company of our team, and well-wishers from all over the world thanks to amateur radio!
