D-Star and the New Decade

As we start our tenth year of the new millennium, let's look at how far D-Star has come and where it's going. Although I was not involved in the beginning, my research indicates that D-Star was a subject for public discussion as early as 2002 and by 2004 there was a formal specification although it was still a work in progress. Since this really happened in Japan, I'm sure there were discussions in Japanese well before they were happening in English.

Then Icom took some time to develop their products. They were first released in Japan and I speculate that it was probably about 2006 that we started seeing the first D-Star radios and repeaters in the U.S. After having been focused on other things for a few years, I got back into ham radio in late 2006. Within a few months, I started hearing talk about D-Star.

Like so many people, I was uncomfortable with the fact that there was only one manufacturer making radios and did not get involved for a good year. Finally, I decided that, as disappointed as I was by that limitation, I was missing early involvement in something that I thought was really quite a cool technology. I jumped in when I convinced my wife to give me a 91AD for my birthday in March of 2008. At that time there were already several D-Star repeaters in Atlanta and the Atlanta Radio Club was already deep in the thick of things. One of my first remote contacts was a ham in California. His first comment after hearing that I was in Atlanta was to ask if I knew Robin Cutshaw. (Robin is the developer of the dongle and the software that makes D-Star repeater linking work so well.) I was proud to say I did and was immediately convinced that I had made the right choice to get involved while the technology was still being adopted.

Today, there are about 9 D-Star systems in the Atlanta Metro area. The state of Georgia has 13 in total, but we are well on the way to having the whole state covered thanks to John Davis's efforts to get repeaters on the Georgia Public Broadcasting towers. Alabama has 18 D-Star systems spread across the state. Florida has 19. South Carolina has 8. North Carolina has 7. And Tennessee has 5. There are some holes, but 70 D-Star systems in 6 Southeastern States is a great start with more on the way. The areas in which I travel now all have coverage in my typical destinations and along the way even if there are some holes. I'd say D-Star has already reached critical mass in the Southeast.

What's coming up? The new DV-Dongle Access Point has started production and will be in use on a computer near you soon. This is essentially a low powered D-Star repeater that allows an individual ham to connect to other D-Star repeaters and Reflectors using the Internet and his D-Star HT. It's similar to the current DV-Dongle, but lets you walk around the house instead of being tethered to your PC.

Several groups have been working on homebrew D-Star repeaters and radios. Some of these have been successfully tested in North Carolina and in England.

Currently, D-Star systems use gateway software provided by Icom with some add-ons written by Robin Cutshaw. There is a group working on an open source gateway system.

Although D-Star is now mostly deployed, at least in the Southeast, there's still lot's deployment and development activity going on. There are now quite a few nets going on with more coming. The next big push is likely to be more and better applications for the data capabilities.

The water's great. Come on in. D-Star users are a friendly community with lots of good conversation. It's a great way to get to know hams in other locations. Since D-Star is local as well as remote, the same people tend to frequent the same repeaters. This means you can find people often enough to keep friendships. It's a great place to be.

More information about nets and D-Star in general is available at http://www.dstarinfo.com.

As always, direct questions, comments and suggestions to KE4FOV@Bruner.us.