



V26B Station Information Last Updated 11/2/2016

Welcome to the V26B station! This document will help explain how things work, what to do and what not to do when using the V26B station. It also contains some local contact information of people & services on Antigua in case you need anything.

As you may know, the station burned to the ground in November 2012. As of October 2013, the reconstruction of the new station is complete. This document is now updated to reflect this, including the changes in improvements in the new V26B! Be sure to check out the station restoration plaque on the wall when you visit to see who helped us rebuild the station.

Your Arrival

When you arrive at the airport, first you will go through immigration who will stamp your passport. They may ask where you are staying. If you are staying at a hotel, tell them which one. If you are staying at the V26B station, tell them you are staying with "a friend on Factory Road in Gunthorpes".

You will be given both a combined immigration/customs form, usually on the plane, to fill out. Unless you are bringing something down to sell to a resident of Antigua, you should fill out the form with no items declared as your luggage is not considered merchandise. The form they use is similar to the US Customs form, so it will look familiar. If you are not declaring anything, get in the green line after you pick up your luggage. Only go in the red line if you have something to declare.

Next you will collect your luggage and go through customs. If the custom's officer asks to look through your bags, don't panic, most of them are familiar with ham radio. Have a copy of your home country and Antiguan ham licenses packed with the equipment so they see those first if they open the radio cases.

When you pack, avoid packing your ham gear in the original manufacturer's box. Try to get a pelican box or similar case for your equipment, or better yet put it in a suitcase. New boxes look to the customs official like you are bringing equipment in to sell to a local resident, and they might ask you to pay duty for it. Ham radio is duty-free on Antigua, but may be subject to ABST (sales tax). If they start asking you to pay duty or tax, explain to them you are bringing the equipment back home with

you, and are not selling anything to a local resident. Most of the customs officials are used to hams bringing in radios and amplifiers, so you should have no problem.

On rare occasion they have asked for a deposit to insure you will take the equipment back out of the country. Avoid this if at all possible, complain and argue that you are taking the gear back out with you. It will only complicate your departure if you leave a deposit. This has only rarely ever happened, and not at all in the last five years, so it should not be a problem.

Again, avoid packing your gear in cardboard boxes that identify what it is! The customs officials focus on that.

Directions to V26B from the Airport

Exit the airport, and turn left on Airport Road. Turn left at the second traffic light (several miles) on to Factory Road (now called Sir Sidney Wallings Highway). Most of the locals still call it Factory Road.

Continue a few miles southeast on Factory Road. You will pass Charlie's service center (Rubis gas station) on the left. Once you get in to the village of Gunthorpes, look for a green road sign for All Saints Road. Don't turn there, but turn left in the third driveway after the intersection with All Saints Road.

If you get lost, find the old sugar factory. The station is right next door. You will see the towers.

Local Transportation

If you are taking a cab, they are just outside the new airport terminal. They can take you to the shack or to your hotel. The directions to the shack are a little difficult as there are no street addresses in Antigua. The station is located in Gunthorpes, just past the old sugar factory (see above section). Take the third left after All Saints Road. You will see the towers on the left, take the driveway just before the towers.

If you are renting a car, the car rental booth is at the old airport terminal. When you get your bags, ask a skycap to take them to the car rental kiosk. It is a little bit of a walk. As you go out of the airport terminal, go left down the sidewalk and walk over to the old airport terminal and you will see the car rental offices.

They drive on the left on Antigua, and drive a little crazy at times. Cars are fairly expensive to rent, so unless you plan on doing a lot of traveling on the island, consider a cab. If you do rent a car, I suggest you do take the insurance. You will also need a visitor driver's license which the car rental agency will provide to you at the time of the rental for \$20 US. I use Avis car rental which can be booked online on their web site. You can also just go to the booth and get one without a booking, or you can rent one at most hotels.

If you rent a car, make sure the car checkout form is filled out in detail with every single scratch and dent on the car noted. Most rental cars have some minor damage when you get them, and you don't want to get stuck paying for something you did not do.

If you have an accident with a rental car, you must call both the rental car company and the police. The phone number for the car rental company is on your rental contract, and you call 911 for the police. Expect the police to take a long time to arrive, but they will come and take a report on the accident.

Cab drivers are available at the airport and at the hotel. If you are not renting a car, get your cab driver's cell phone number so you can call him to arrange for a pick-up if needed at the shack

Currency

Antigua uses the Eastern Caribbean dollar, commonly referred to as EC (XCD). There is no need to change your US money to EC as all places on the island accept either US or EC. If you are coming from outside of the USA, I suggest you change your currency into US dollars and not EC, since the US currency is accepted anywhere on the island. You may be given your change back in EC, but all places on the island gladly take the US dollar. The government uses 2.7 as the conversion factor, while most businesses use 2.6. Just remember \$20 US is \$52 EC.

Licensing

A visiting ham radio license is easy to obtain on Antigua, but should be done well in advance of your visit. It is generally best done by email. DO NOT mail in your payment unless told to do so, it will probably get lost. Visitor licenses are issued for one or three years, they cost \$189 EC or \$70 US for a three-year license, and the call is held for three years then can be re-issued unless you renew it. You can choose from any available V26 or V25 call signs. A one year license is \$75 EC or \$30 US. Renewals are \$10 less. The process is as follows: 1) contact the telecom division and email them scans of your passport, home country license, Antigua license application and technical information form about your station, 2) they will email you back the invoice to pay at Inland Revenue, 3) go to Inland Revenue and pay the invoice and get a receipt stamped, 4) to the telecom office with your receipt and pick up your license. Step 1 and 2 can be done by email in advance of your trip. I strongly suggest you complete step 1 and 2 several weeks in advance of your visit in case difficulties develop.

The telecommunications officer for Antigua is Mr. Daryl Jackson and the Assistant Telecom officer is Mr. William Henry & Mr. Arthur Bird. Their offices are on Airport Road, at the Coolidge Center (NOTE – they have been temporarily moved to the Parliament Building in St Johns). Coming from St John's on Airport Road towards the airport, it is a medium sized office building on the left, just after you pass under the red "welcome to Antigua" awning that goes across Airport Rd. The building is shared with Liat – the Liat headquarters is the right side of the building, and the government telecom offices are just left of the Liat entrance on the right side of the front of the building, under the green awning.. There are signs saying telecom office. There is a security guard, tell them why you are there, and who you want to see.

Contact Mr. Henry or Mr. Bird (assistant Telecom Officer) to get your license. It is usually not necessary to contact the telecom officer directly. His email is william.henry@ab.gov.ag and/or arthur.bird@ab.gov.ag The main number to the telecom office is 268-468-4610. You can also email

telecom@ab.gov.ag for assistance, or as a last resort email Daryl Jackson at daryl.jackson@ab.gov.ag

You should email or call well in advance to set up a time when you are sure he will be in the office to assist you. I suggest you email a couple weeks before your arrival to alert them when you are coming. In some cases they are willing to print up the licenses via email before you arrive to save time. If you do it via email, you will need to scan in a photo ID and a copy of your US license, and email those and the license application to them along with a list of requested callsigns. The license application is available on the V26B web site.

There is a new computerized licensing system in 2016 which is causing some delays. There is also a technical detail form for you equipment and antennas. I have made a generic version of this form for the V26B station which you can use when you submit for your license. This form is on the V26B web site as well as the license application.

To get your license, you must go to the Telecommunications Office and see Mr. Henry or Mr. Bird with a photo ID and a copy of your ham license (unless you have emailed them first and they have emailed you the invoice). They will then give you a document (invoice) to take to the Inland Revenue office to pay for your license. You may be able to scan these documents and email them in advance of your trip also, and you can make those arrangements via email and save yourself an extra trip.

The telecom office will provide you with an invoice to pay for your license, either in person or via email. You will then need to go to the Inland Revenue Office to pay and obtain a receipt for your payment.

Inland Revenue is located in Woods Centre mall, just outside of St Johns, on Friars Hill Rd. They now are computerized and accept cash or credit card. Go there and go to one of the main cashier windows, pay for your license and get the receipt. Then return to the Telecommunications Office with the receipt and Mr. Henry or Mr. Bird will give you your printed license.

Food

If you stay at a hotel, choose the all-inclusive plan, it is worth it.

If you stay at the shack, you will need to go to the grocery store and know where the good restaurants are.

There are many small markets on the island, and they are fine for beer, sodas, and snacks. If you need real groceries, you will need to go to the Epicurean, which is located on the right just past Woods Centre Mall, outside of St. John on Friars Hill Rd. This is a full-service American style grocery store that has everything you could possibly need, including beer and liquor. You will need soap, toilet paper, paper towels and trash bags if you are staying at the shack.

My favorite fine dining restaurant is Celelia's High Point café, over past the airport behind the US Air Force base, across the entrance to the Jumby Bay resort ferry.

There is a good Chinese restaurant near the shack on the road to the airport. It has carry-out or you can eat in. It is on airport road, just before the gas station at Old Parham Rd, on the right side of the road. It is called New Thriving Restaurant and Lounge. You can also top-up pre-paid cell phones there.

There is a very nice roadside stand that has grilled local food that can be carried out back to the shack, and it is very inexpensive. Turn left on Factory Rd leaving the shack, going away from St. John's. It is a couple miles from the shack, on the left, at the intersection of Parham Rd. It is a red stand right at the corner of Factory Rd and Parham Rd. It has delicious local food like jerk pork, jerk chicken, oxtail, grilled ribs and season rice. (This seemed to be closed down in 2011 & 2012 except for weekends.)

The Shack

If you are staying at the shack, you need to know it is not elegant. It has one bed that Roy's sister usually has made up for you with clean sheets and pillows. It has a small kitchen with a refrigerator, microwave a two-burner hotplate, and a coffee maker. There is running water, but only cold water. The water is safe to drink, but you might want to get bottled water at the grocery store just to be sure. The refrigerator works well but you need to plug it in as soon as you arrive.

There is a small shower, with a demand hot water heater mounted on the shower head. Bring your own towels. You may need to clean the shower out a bit before you use it. You will probably need to buy soap, toilet paper, paper towels and trash bags when you visit the grocery store, as these may not be provided for you. There are two main water shutoff valves on the outside of the shack you will need to turn on when you arrive. Please turn them off when you leave. One is on the wall outside the shack and the other in in the ground at the base of the 10 meter tower. The power may be turned off at the AC mains inside the shack, please also turn that off when you leave. We will provide directions on this. There is now a web cam that doubles as a burgular alarm, so we may ask you to leave the mains on, and make sure the power strip at station B is running so the internet stays on and that the camera is plugged in. Unplug the refrigerator, empty it out, and leave the door open unless told otherwise.

Roy's sister Leontine Carty is your contact for any issues related to the house. You will pick up the keys from her, and her phone numbers are 268-461-7655 (home) 268-782-7516. You can also make arrangements to have your cell phone activated, see the section on cell phones below.

The shack now has wifi, via a wimax box. The ssid for the wifi is "v26b-shack" and passphrase is "v26b-wadadli". This information is also taped to the top of the router. Currently, there is no CAT5 wiring or lan switch in the shack so use wifi until this is complete or run your own cat5 jumper to a spare port on the back of the router. There is one CAT5 cable wound up near the router you can run across the floor if you prefer not to use the wifi. There is also a magic jack plugged into the router and the number is 1-954-933-6748. It is a free call to the states with the magic jack, and there is some airtime loaded to call Antigua but that is not unlimited. This is a US based number so US calls are free, everything else is long distance, including Antigua.

The key ring you will receive also has keys to the grey rusty shed outside (the old “cement” shed). There is some hard line and antenna parts stored there, but not too much of interest to you. The generator battery is stored under the kitchen counter so if you need the generator, you will need to take the battery and connect it to the generator. More on the generator later.

There are some hand tools, soldering gun, PL259’s, small rope, rotor parts, stack match spares, spare fuses and other miscellaneous supplies in plastic parts organizer boxes in our locking storage cabinet. There is a good supply of hand tools in the blue tool bag. There is an IC-751A, two Dentron amps, Heil headset, footswitch, 12v power supplies and various other station accessories locked up in the storage cabinet. Please put away anything you take out of that cabinet when you are done and lock it back up when you leave.

When you depart, leave your trash bags outside the shack when you leave and someone will take them away for you.

Generator

The shack has a large diesel generator for backup power located in the generator shed in the back yard. It is locked and the key is on a wire tie hanging on the transfer switch inside the shack. You will need to install the battery when you arrive, and remove it when you leave. The batter is stored in the lower kitchen cabinet.

Currently the generator is manual start only. If the power fails, go out to the generator shed and move the switch to run and the generator will start. Then go back inside the shack and move the manual transfer switch from line to generator.

When commercial power is on, the green light will be illuminated on the transfer switch. When the generator is on, the red light will be illuminated. If you switch to generator, you will know commercial power is back on when t he green light comes back on. That will be your cue to transfer back to commercial power and shut down the generator.

We are working on setting up a remote start switch in the shack so you don’t have to go outside to start the generator but this is not done yet.

There is a black plastic can in the generator shed with diesel in it. The generator has its own built in tank underneath it. If you use a lot of fuel, please refill the diesel can.

Cell Phones

Cell phone service on the island is entirely GSM. TDMA and analog service has been discontinued. Cable and Wireless uses GSM850 (US) and there are also GSM 1800 sites for Eu. GSM phones can usually roam with their existing SIM cards, if your carrier permits it.. If desired, you can obtain a pre-paid local Antigua phone number if you have a GSM850 phone that is unlocked. Go to the Cable and Wireless office at Woods Center, and purchase a pre-paid (green) SIM card for \$18 EC, and then you can add pre-paid minutes to it at any B-mobile “top up” location. That’s \$20 US for your own cell number and \$25EC airtime, what a deal! The Cable & Wireless Caribbean Cellular office that handles this is at the Woods Centre Mall. Cable & Wireless’ phone number is 268-480-2628. APUA

(Antigua Public Utilities Administration) has 1900mhz and 340 PCS service available which should be compatible with European phones. Please note that satellite phones are illegal on Antigua and may be confiscated by customs.

2011 note – for the first time, my CDMA (Verizon) phone worked on the island, and was roaming. This is very new and I am not sure who the carrier is and what the roaming rates are. If you have a Verizon phone, I suggest you turn it off before you reach Antigua to avoid roaming charges, unless you are OK with that.

Fire Ants!

If you see ant hills with red ants in the back yard, stay away from them! These are fire ants and have a very unpleasant and nasty bite! You may also see the occasional tarantula spider, but they are OK as long as you don't put your hand on them or step on them by mistake. There are times of the year where the mosquitoes are bad, so bring or purchase some insect repellent.

Hairy Crazy Ants

New in 2011 was the arrival of the hairy crazy ant in Antigua. They are pretty harmless, and run around very fast in circles seeming to go nowhere. This is a problem as there is a major infestation on the island. They are working on how to control this new invasive pest. You will likely see lots of them. They were gone as quickly as they appeared in 2012, replaced by hordes of roaches, which have been exterminated. Right now, the place seems to be pretty much bug-free in 2016. There are always some ants, which are harmless. There are also Cuban frogs which are also an invasive species that have occasionally infested the generator control box.

Tarantulas

You will occasionally see a tarantula, sometime in the shack. Try to use the broom to get it outside. They do bite, but are not poisonous, and will only bite when provoked. If you have to, just swat it with the broom to kill it. They look scary but are harmless.

Antennas

Maintaining seven towers and all the antennas in the Caribbean environment is a constant challenge. We fix everything once a year, before CQWW SSB in September or October. Sometimes everything lasts all year, sometimes it breaks or gets hit by lightning as fast as we can fix it. After October, the station is on it's own until next year. You need to understand if you rent the station, you may need to make small repairs, and not every antenna may be working perfectly on your arrival. **You should be prepared either to make tower climbs to effect small repairs, and/or accept that not everything may be working perfectly on your arrival. We do expect you to call and consult with Roy or Brian N3OC before making any major changes to the station!!!**

All the antennas are connected to a Array Solutions "eight-pack" antenna switch, with the exception of the 6m antenna and the 40m backup antennas. The eight pack has a radio A and radio B coax cable and control box. One control box, and all the stack match boxes, are powered by a small 12VDC

power supply on the table to the left of the rotor control boxes. The same power supply powers both sides of the antenna switch (station 1 and station 2). Currently, the switch is set up as follows:

- 1 - 160m
- 2 - 80m EU
- 3 - 80m USA
- 4 - MFJ Antenna switch, to 40m EU & 40m NA wire beams and WARC
- 5 - 40m stack
- 6 - 20m stack
- 7 - 15m stack
- 8 - 10m stack

If you are going to use the station for multiop, you will find that most of the stack match boxes and rotor control boxes have extra cable coiled up behind them. You can extend the boxes to the other side of the room if you need to, and route the cable over the door. You will need to disconnect any stack match box you move from the 12 volt power supply and connect them to another 12 volt power supply where you have moved the box to. If you are just a single-op, there is no need to move the boxes. 40m, 15m and 10m have long enough wires to extend to the other side.

The shortwave broadcast station (BBC) near the site is now QRT so filters may not be needed any more. You may wish to bring your own filters just in case, especially if you are multiop.

6 Meters

6 meters is a small MFJ yagi on the 10m tower. Its coax comes down inside the shack and is marked and currently only reaches the B radio position. Usually the band has several good sporadic E openings to the USA and Europe in late May, June and all of July. Other than that, it is usually dead.

10 Meters

We have a 4/4/4 stack on 10 meters. V26B is the best 10 meter station in the Caribbean. The top antenna is rotatable, the middle antenna is fixed on Europe (NNE, it is not quite on EU as it should be), and the lower antenna is fixed on the USA. The 10m stack was moved to the "shack tower" in 2011 and is working very well. We had 3700 QSOs on 10m during the 2011 CQWW SSB, and 3900 in 2012. The stack was moved because the old 10m "white tower" was not in good condition.

NOTE! The old (white) 10m tower is not in good condition and be very careful if you climb it. Do not climb it above the spots where the legs are rusted through.

15 Meters

We have a 5/5 stack on 15 meters. The top antenna is rotatable, and the lower antenna is fixed on Europe. Avoid the temptation to move the lower antenna because its elements will hit the guy wires if you try to move it. The 15m stack was overhauled in September 2014 and is working perfectly.

20 Meters

We have a 3/3 stack on 20 meters. The top antenna is rotatable, and the lower antenna is fixed on Europe. The 20m stack was overhauled in October 2015 with new antennas, and the tower guy wires were replaced in September 2016. The stack match cable has a short in it where if you select the bottom (#1) antenna – which does not exist – it will select the top antenna. This issue is of no consequence as the top and bottom antennas can still be selected individually.

40 Meters

We have a 2/2 shorty-forty stack on 40 meters. The top antenna is rotatable, and the lower antenna is fixed on the USA. Remember you can operate on any frequency on Antigua, you can use 7000-7300 and you can use SSB below 7100. On SSB contests you may wish to transmit low (7040-7100) to work Europe, and listen up (7150-7300) to work USA. Alternatively, you can work Eu all the way up to 7200. You can also transmit 7125-7300 to work USA. If you have to work SSB below 7040, that is OK too, but the Europeans do not like that, but if you have to, do it.

The 40m stack worked well in 2013-2016. The SWR was a hair high (1.8:1) but it performed quite well. On occasion the top antenna develops a problem and if you hit it briefly with high power, it will correct itself.

There are some additional 40m wire yagis vertical available in case the main antennas are not working correctly. There is one pointed to the USA and one pointed towards Europe. These are on a separate coax switch connection to position 4 on the eight-pack switch.

80 Meters

We have two fixed wire beams for 80 meters. The first is a 3-element pointed towards Europe, hung between the 15m and 20m towers. To change the antenna from SSB to CW, you will need to make and install extension links on each end of the elements. These extensions should be about 3 ½ feet each, and connect to the main element end lugs with small nuts and bolts. You can lower one end of the elements and lower the boom a little if you need to in order to reach the end of the elements.

For the USA there is a 3-element wire beam hung between the 15m and 40m tower. This beam also has removable extensions to move it to CW.

The EU 80m antenna was completely replaced in September 2016 and is working fine, and resonates at about 3700. The USA 80m antenna was completely rebuilt in 2014 and resonates at about 3650. For CW you will need to add extension links to the tips of each of the elements.

160 Meters

We have an inverted-v at the top of the old 10 meter (white) tower for 160m. Sometimes, the far end of this antenna behind the 40m tower gets lowered or the rope breaks so if the SWR seems bad on 160m, the first thing to check is the end of the antenna behind the 40m tower, it should be tied to

some small trees at the edge of the property near the old sugar factory and if has been untied that is probably your problem.

Beverages

The field behind the shack was cleared in October 2016. There are three 100' sections of RG-8X cable to roll out across the yard to feed the beverage, as well as a transformer and termination resistor. There is also a 500 foot spool of wire. We usually just lay it along the trees and wire tie it up on the trees. If you have to put the beverage up, you **MUST** wind it back up on the plastic spool when you leave. **DO NOT** just coil the wire up in a tangled mess. Sometimes the beverage will already be up and all you have to do is connect the coax from the shack to the beverage transformer. We will let you know if it is up or not, and if you are expected to take it down when you leave.

DO NOT damage the wire, please! We only have one 500 foot spool of wire right now at the station.

There is also an Array Solutions SAL-30 in a red suitcase, and a spool of RG-6 coax for it. This antenna is much harder to put up and takes four or five people to get it up properly. The fiberglass support poles for the SAL-30 are in the cement shed in a green bag.

WARC bands

We have an A3S WARC-band tribander on another tower for 12, 17 & 30 meters. The coax to the WARC antenna on position 3 of the MFJ antenna switch, which is fed from position 4 of the eight-pack switch. The antenna works fine except it has issues when it is wet. The traps leak and after rain there are issues on some bands, which correct themselves after the traps dry out. The rotor needs replacement so it does not rotate reliably. We left it pointed NE towards EU.

Spare Rotator

At this time there are two spare tail twisters and one spare HAM-IV at the shack. There is one spare control box on the operating table.

Rotator Color Codes

If you mess with the rotators, be advised there are two color codes in use. 10 & 15 Meters uses the color code shown in the hy-gain manual (the standard rotator color code). The rest of the antennas use a different color code, somewhat based on the resistor color code. See the color code document for info on all the rotator and stack match color codes.

Station Information Book

There is a white binder in the equipment cabinet with this document as well as equipment manuals. Please make sure this book is locked back up in the equipment cabinet when you leave.

Leaving the Station

When you leave the station, please make sure the water is turned off at BOTH shutoff valves. One is on the outside wall near the hose faucet, and the other is in the ground near the 10 meter tower.

Leave the power mains on, but unplug the refrigerator and leave the refrigerator door open. We are trying to leave the internet on for the Shack Camera, so please make sure the white power strip on Station #2 (B) is powered on and the wimax box and router are turned on, as well as the Shack Cam.

Make sure all other radio power supplies and rotor boxes are turned off and unplugged. Everything at Station #1 (A) can be unplugged when you leave. The only thing that has to stay on is the white power strip on the B station for the internet to stay on.

Put away any equipment and tools you took out of the locking cabinet and lock it back up. This is very important to help avoid theft.

Lock the door, and make sure the deadbolt seats fully. Make sure all other outside doors are locked and the windows are closed.

Return the keys to Brian on your return home, or to Leontine if you got the keys from her.

Important Phone Numbers

Lentine Carty (Roy's sister)	268-461-7655 (home) 268-782-7516 (cell)
Randy "Blood" Carty (groundskeeper)	268-770-8212
Roy Carty V21N/W4 (station owner, in Florida)	754-210-6339
Shack Magic Jack	954-933-6748
Telecommunications Office	268-562-1868 (office) 268-562-1872 (fax)
Brian McGinness N3OC	301-924-1712 x1 or n3oc@wirelessinc.com
Gomes (HVAC)	268-771-6702
Kurt (HVAC)	268-774-1744 or 268-779-1638
Sted (Generator)	268-774-1615
Scott (plumbing, carpenter, handyman)	268-723-0095

Wifi Info

SSID	v26b-shack
Key	v26b-wadadli
IP address	192.168.1.1
Router user name	admin
Router password	wadadli