



# RTC-TH Apr 2011 Update

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Community-based environmental education for the self-sufficiency and sustainability of small rural family farms

ชุมชนตามสิ่งแวดล้อมศึกษาเพื่อการพึ่งตัวเองและยั่งยืนบนบพขนาดเล็กครอบครัวฟาร์ม

*You may post questions / comments to the Discussion area of our website*

## Happy Songkran!



Photos from the Internet: educational fair use clause.

*News media featured pachyderms at play during Songkran (the traditional Thai New Year) water splashing event.*

Happy Thai New Year! This marks the completion of another year and the coming end of the hot/dry season. This is a dangerous time to be in the streets with an expensive camera, cell phone or other high tech electronic gear. Songkran is also called the water splashing festival. Before the advent of air conditioning Thai people respectfully and gently sprinkled water on each other. In the beginning, it was full of religious symbolism. But fun loving Thai, especially the younger and more mischievous among them, see this as potentially the world's biggest water fight!



*At this time of year, watch out for wet pavement!*



*It all seems fun and innocent at the start.*

### In This Issue

<i>Happy Songkran!</i>	1-2	<i>Leaves Are "Tree-eats"</i>	8-9
<i>Sparky Visits a Reservoir on the Nam Yang</i>	3-4	<i>Blossoms and Future Fruit</i>	10
<i>GROWing, GROWing, Gone!</i>	5-6	<i>MEWS: First Full Release</i>	11
RTC-TH: Internet to the GERC Net	7	<i>RTC-TH EchoLink® Featured at a Fair</i>	12-13



*Drive-by showers and at wet time for all.*



*Free car wash on the road*



*The day was not too hot, not too cold: just wet.*



*But it can blossom into a full "arms race".*



*Ambush Alley near Ban Na Fa*



*A wet day for everyone but the water buffaloes*

It is the annual time for family gatherings, temple visits, and celebrating Thai culture. This is a busy time of year with people traveling all over the country to get home for the traditional holiday. As you can see from the photos above, driving at this time of the year can be hazardous. People dart about splashing water or avoiding being splashed. Of course parties and celebrating involving alcohol adds to the concerns of the police. 🌐



## Sparky Visits a Reservoir on the Nam Yang

There's not much evidence that many people come to visit this spot. Most only glimpse the spillway from the highway bridge south of Thawangpha as they drive on their way to the north, west, or south. The reservoir has two sections. The lower section is from the spillway near the highway bridge to the flood control gates. In between, there are stretches of extensive rip-rap to protect the bank from erosion.

A dirt road takes you back to the upper reservoir which is behind the flood control gates. Along the way there are a couple of pavilions where you can sit and enjoy the view of the water. It seems they intend to put in more outdoor picnic tables / benches.



*An aerial view of the lower and upper reservoirs of the Nam Yang River. (Numbers keyed to photos in the story.)*



*The spillway near the highway bridge*



*Sign at the entrance to the reservoir road.*



*A pavilion overlooking the lower reservoir.*



*Rip rap protecting the lower reservoir bank and road.*





5

The flood gates of the upper reservoir.

Facilities are being built for the upper reservoir. At the time of this visit, there were no pavilions, restrooms, trash containers, etc. There is very little evidence of other visitors. The only tire tracks I saw in the dirt ended in a U-turn  $\frac{1}{2}$  the way to the flood control gates. This made for a very quiet and peaceful visit. 🌐



6

View from the flood gate control walk. A sala with a statue of Buddha overlooks the flood gates.



7

Debris screen at the emergency by-pass flood gate.



8

Me and Sparky under a tree at the upper reservoir.



## ***GROWing, GROWing, Gone***

After serving as a storage container in the drive way for almost 2 ½ years, it is ready to start a new life on the farm as the RTC-TH GROW (Getting Real On-farm Weather) station and field office.

Due to the challenges and costs of moving the container, placement on the farm required careful consideration. Like a game of chess, any move we make could potentially block future construction projects or affect traffic flow on the farm. We finally picked a spot in the parking area near the farm house. Traffic could still get by the container office. Even if we chose to build a structure adjacent to the existing farmhouse, there's still enough room in the parking area for it. As with many things in life, the site isn't perfect. For now, it seems to be the best overall compromise.



*Pressed into service for storage in the drive way.*



*Getting ready for an "uplifting: experience and re-birth.*



*The container gets a real "pick me up" to move it.*



*Gone from the drive way; onward to the farm!*



*En route to the farm; slowly but surely.*



*Picking a spot for future flexibility.*



*Once in place, it will stay there for a long while.*



*The container is aligned to previously surveyed markers.*



*This placement allows for road access and future building.*



*The container is stabilized on stumps and salvaged concrete posts over the uneven ground.*



Details are being finalized for the installation of a digital weather station, lightning ground ring, tip up mast to mount weather sensors and radio antennas. There will also be some interior work done for the container for a desk and equipment storage. In an emergency, amateur radio equipment could be installed and operated from this site (for which we have a legal amateur station license in hand). There is still much to do, but progress is being made. 🌐



## ***RTC-TH EmComm's First GERC Net Check-in***

On 30 Mar 2011, the RTC-TH hit a major milestone: Our first check-in to the GERC Net. Mark (N7YLA-L) is the home of GERC (the Glendora Emergency Response Communication) EchoLink® station (node #358124). Their weekly net is a good way to maintain contact with group members to assure radio equipment is working and ready to go in time of need.

It's been a roller coaster ride trying to get our EchoLink® set up. There were internet connection issues, router issues, computer glitches, and power outages added to the mix of learning the ins and outs of setting up the EchoLink® software. For now, via our computer and the internet, we are able to make international contacts. We plan to connect a VHF radio to the computer as Mark has done.

The GERC set up allows GERC members and the public to access the GERC EchoLink® via either computer or the local VHF repeater. Essentially, a licensed Ham operator can use a radio to contact GERC through the local repeater and reach the world via the GERC EchoLink® connection.



*First time Check-in to the GERC net!*



*Greg, HS0ZHM checking in from Thailand.*



*Jim, KG6TQT: "You sound like you are sitting next to me."*

For the RTC-TH EmComm there are 2 key benefits for doing this: 1) personally, our station with a radio/computer EchoLink® node in town would allow us to use a radio at the farm or on Sparky to call the world. Presently there is no internet access at the farm; 2) as a public service, other Thai Hams in range of our town station (especially those in northern Nan Province) could use it to reach the only repeater in the province located some 40+km south of us. Both points are wholly compatible with the RTC-TH EmComm and Community Service goals.

Of course, the weak link is a stable internet connection. This isn't always the case. But when the internet is working, it gives area Hams another communication option. And of course, "when all else fails, there's Ham radio." 🌐

## Some Leaves Are Meal-time “Tree eats”

Many of the northern Thai dishes use raw or cooked leaves. Some of them come from trees that you see in yards and along roads and paths. To the outsider, these are “just trees.” Some of the leaves come from common weeds and are readily found just about anywhere! To the locals, these leaves are real “tree eats”. To a visitor, some of these taste rather bitter. Locals eat them for the high content of vitamins, anti-oxidants, and nutrients. This tends to reinforce the saying “if it tastes “bad”, it must be good for you.” Sometimes when you sit down and look at the fresh leaves piled on plates among the various main dishes, it looks like the food is scattered on a table of garden clippings.

Some leaves are boiled or steamed. Sitting in a dish, diners will pick at the pile, separating the stems from the soft leafy material which is pasty to the touch. This is very suitable for the finger food northern Thai eating style. This all reinforces the opinion that the villagers live much closer to nature than many urban dwellers.



*Hong Kong Orchid (Bauhinia) leaves = edible wrappers*



*Tamarind (Tamarindus Indica: new growth tips are eaten as a vegetable side dish.*



*The Ficus lancor Buch looks like just another tree, but Thais pick the new younger leaves to eat.*



Locals use a raw leaf as a tiny wrapper as they pinch off a bite of various pasty dishes, dip them into various spicy sauces and pop them down with a satisfying grin. They laugh at my wincing and mega-puckering at the sour/bitter taste (I pass on the chili paste), and a good time is had by all, (and I really appreciate a good glass of water)! 🌐



*Sweet yam leaves in the garden (left) and a close up of the leaf (right) either steamed or boiled.*



*Thai edible fern (left) as it grows along a wall side garden (left) and the sought after young growing tip (right) which can be steamed or boiled before serving.*



*Pak Tam leung grows on an overhead trellis at the farm. The young tender new leaves are used in a soup.*



## ***Blossoms & Future Fruit***

The hottest days of the year are yet to come, but we noticed these blossoms emerging in the garden and on the farm. We are lucky to have this diverse array of food on hand. This is also a commitment to bio-diversity that is easy to do on a sustainable farm. By planting and growing what we like to eat, there is always a diversity of crops.



*Rose Apple blossom & young fruit forming*



*Guava blossoms and baby guavas*



*Thai Egg Plant blossom*



*Another variety of Thai Egg Plant blossom*



*The all important Thai chili.*

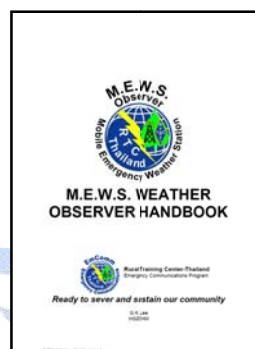


*Longan blossoms in our orchard.*



## MEWS: First Full Release

It's been a nearly 2-year effort to compile the MEWS (Mobile Emergency Weather Station) lessons. It wasn't a full-time steady effort. There were numerous breaks. Literal breaks included a few computer crashes, power and internet outages. Others were the types of interruptions of everyday life--- fatigue, visitors, distractions, etc.



*The MEWS Observer Handbook*

*The MEWS lessons consist of 3 orientation, 8 Basic level, and 6 Advanced Level lessons as PDFs. There are various articles describing MEWS in general, Introductory papers for each MEWS level, and a paper about Sparky's MEWS capabilities.*



*The PDF lessons are downloaded free from the internet, an emergency response team.*

The MEWS Observation log form is designed to be a self-learning tool. Each item has brief reminders of how to make the observation. The back of the form follows the same item sequence on the front and gives more details on what to do. Observers in the field don't need to try to memorize MEWS instructions. The Handbook follows the same order as the data items on the form. This makes it easy for Observers to find references and instructions if they need them. Everything was designed for speed and ease in the field.

In the greatest traditions of amateur radio, the MEWS lessons are available free of charge for non-commercial educational use. To get the lessons go to the "Pages & Links" page of [www.neighborhoodlink.com/org/rtcth](http://www.neighborhoodlink.com/org/rtcth), then click on "RTC-TH MEWS Lessons." FFI: e-mail [rtc2k5@gmail.com](mailto:rtc2k5@gmail.com)

But MEWS also involved integrating different parts of things: Sparky, the Batt-mobile, gathering various kinds of weather equipment, making some equipment for examples, and field testing the various methods to document procedures and taking photos to illustrate the lessons. They say "a picture is worth a thousand words." The MEWS lessons definitely put that phrase into practice.

A thermometer is the only required instrument for Basic level MEWS Observers. This makes the system very robust, low cost, and suitable for the austere conditions found in the wake of a natural disaster. A licensed Ham radio operator can easily enhance their value to

*The back of the form has more instructional notes matching the layout of the data blocks on the front.*



## RTC-TH EchoLink® Featured at a Fair



*We were prominent in the GERC EchoLink® display.*



*Preparedness Fair visitors at the GERC booth.*

communications functions of their radios “talking” to a GERC base station where another radio was interfaced to a computer that was connected to the internet and running the EchoLink® software.

On our end, we operated only from our computer connected to the internet using the EchoLink® software. (See the schematic on the next page.) EchoLink® uses VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol). Visitors to the event had a chance to talk on the GERC radio and get a live response from the RTC-TH EchoLink® computer connection. Everyone was amazed by the sound quality of the conversations.

EchoLink® was created by Jonathan Taylor (K1RFD) and is free to licensed amateur radio operators. FFI: [www.echolink.org](http://www.echolink.org) 

GERC (the Glendora Emergency Communications Response) participated in a recent Preparedness Fair. The public was encouraged to take action to prepare to survive major natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, wild fires, etc.

GERC is mainly involved in emergency radio communications. But as the recent quake and tsunami in Japan revealed, the internet in areas not affected by the disaster, served an important conduit for relaying information. So GERC asked us to help demonstrate the international



*Les Wigger was impressed with the sound quality.*



*Neil McAlister (KG6TOE) LA County Fire Dept. on EchoLink® with the RTC-TH station in Thailand*

*Photos by Mark (N7YLA)*



Rural Training  
Center-  
Thailand



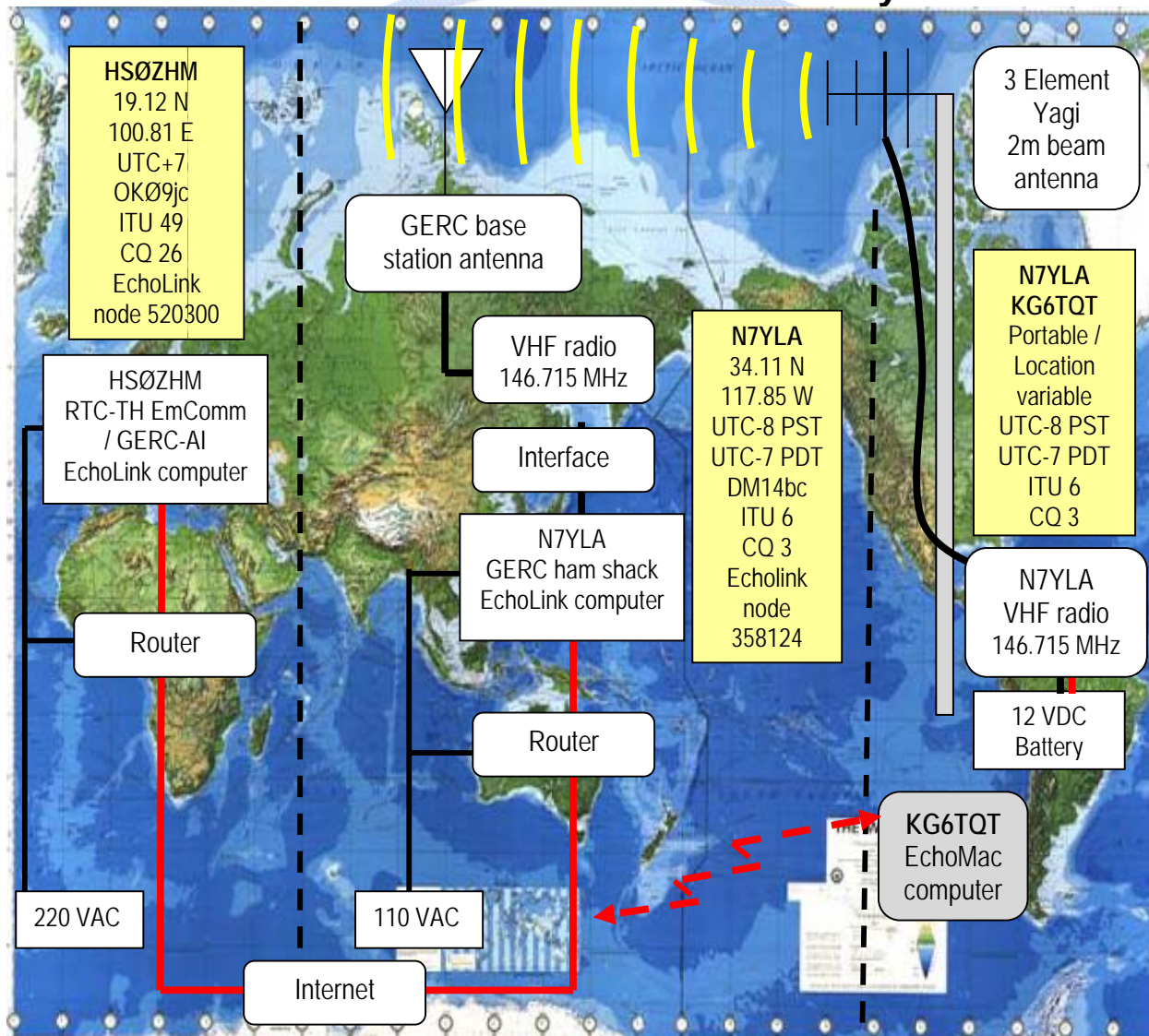
GERC-AI

*Ready to Serve  
and Sustain Our  
Community*



Greg  
HSØZHM  
(KI6GIG)

## RTC-TH GERC-AI / GERC EchoLink® System



Glendora  
Emergency  
Response  
Communications



*Ham radio may not  
change the world, but  
it will change the way  
that you hear it.*



Mark  
N7YLA



Jim  
KG6TQT