

The Pack Rats Members' Chat Room

The Pack Rats have a tradition of having a weekend debriefing session after the January ARRL VHF Contest. They also have a tradition of constant improvement based on their unparalleled inquisitiveness, creativity, and innovation.

The new ARRL 50 MHz and Up contest rules have given plenty of opportunity for innovation and improvement, and so the Pack Rats' debriefing and brainstorming session after this year's January contest, hosted by George, KA3W XV, was particularly lively. A number of innovations arose from that session, and some have previously been discussed in these pages.

One innovation born at that unforgettable session at George's home was the Pack Rats Members' Chat Room. At the February gathering at George's it was noted by several Pack Rats that while the ON4KST VHF and Up chat pages were extremely useful for finding and working non-Pack Rats, those web pages were far too busy to provide an optimal platform for intraclub communications whereby Pack Rats could arrange contacts among themselves, communicate reports of DX stations and Rovers not to be missed, etc.

The Pack Rats make excellent use of 223.5 MHz FM for intraclub communications during contests, but the FM link has the disadvantage of spotty connectivity for those removed geographically from the "Pack Rat Bowl" centered on Philadelphia. It also suffers from the fact that its audio-only messages may be missed during the heat of a contest, as the messages disappear as soon as their sender stops speaking. So if a Pack Rat doesn't hear a message sent on the 223.5 MHz at the moment it is transmitted, he / she never will know it was sent.

So, at the February meeting at KA3W XV's the idea of a Pack Rats Members' Chat Room was born, and it was quickly put into practice. The plan was for a Pack Rats-Only chat room where Pack Rats could communicate among themselves with no outside interference or noise. ON4KST would still be available and used for web-based communications between members of the Pack Rats and the outside world.

The Pack Rats Members' Chat Room came to life on February 22, 2016. All Pack Rats should already know the URL, which will not be reported here. If you are a Pack Rat and don't know the link, ask any one of your fellow Pack Rats; if you remain stumped, asked W3SZ and he will come through with the answer for you.

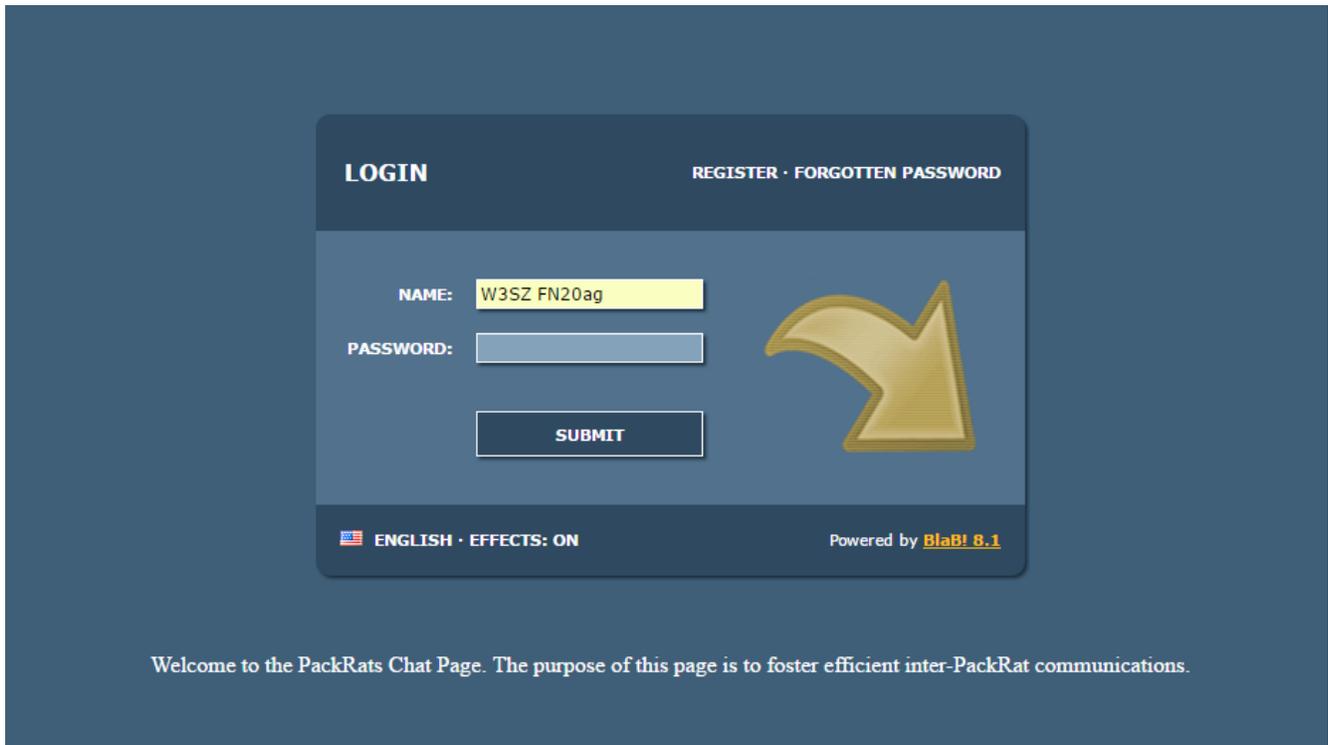
The Members' Chat Room is based on the free Blab! Chat Room software, the same platform that is used by W4DEX for his chat rooms (Thanks Dex!).

The Pack Rats Members' Chat Room provides convenient inter Pack Rat (intraclub) communications during contests, during our weekly nets on Mondays and Tuesdays, during equipment testing, and any other time a Pack Rat needs to find and communicate with another Pack Rat. I've used it to find and communicate with another Pack Rat when I just needed someone to get on the air for a bit to check out a piece of gear.

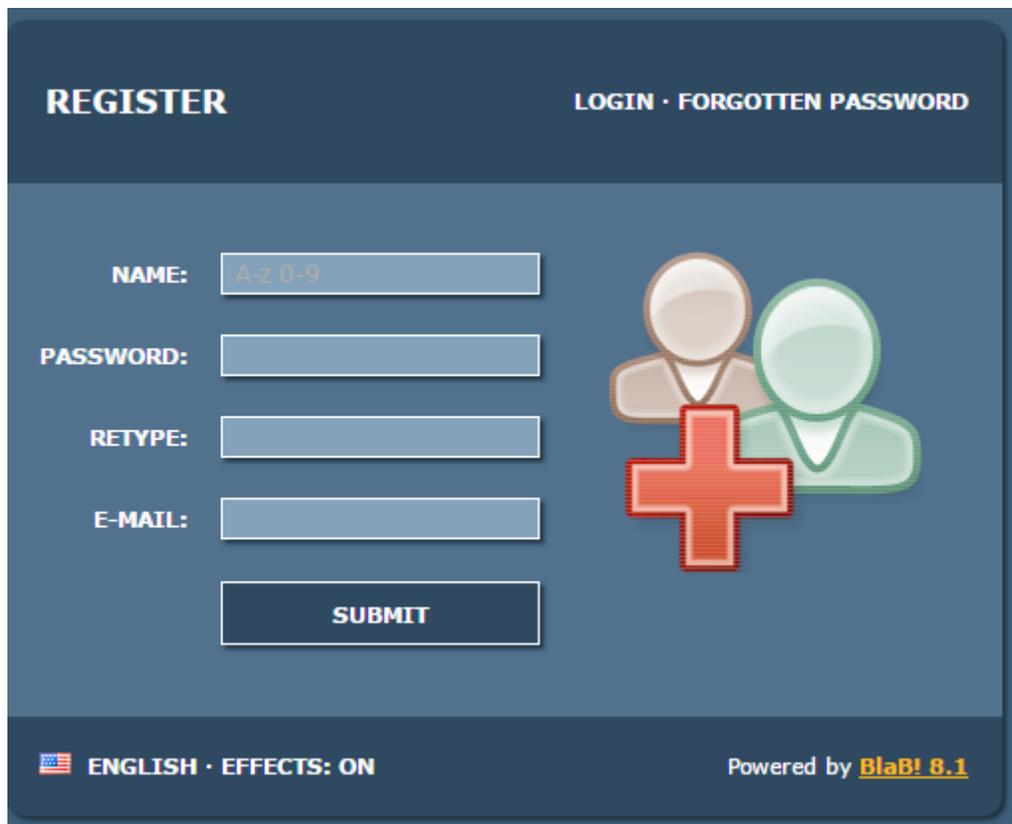
The mechanics of the members' chat room are as follows. First of all, the purpose of the members' chat room as noted above is for intraclub communications only. So it is open only to members of the Mt. Airy VHF Radio Club (the Pack Rats). There are no exceptions. Second, the members' chat room is

password-protected.

To enroll in the members' chat room initially, you need to go to the members' chat room URL. The first window that you see will look like this:



You need left-click on "Register" in the upper right hand corner. This will show you a window that looks like this:

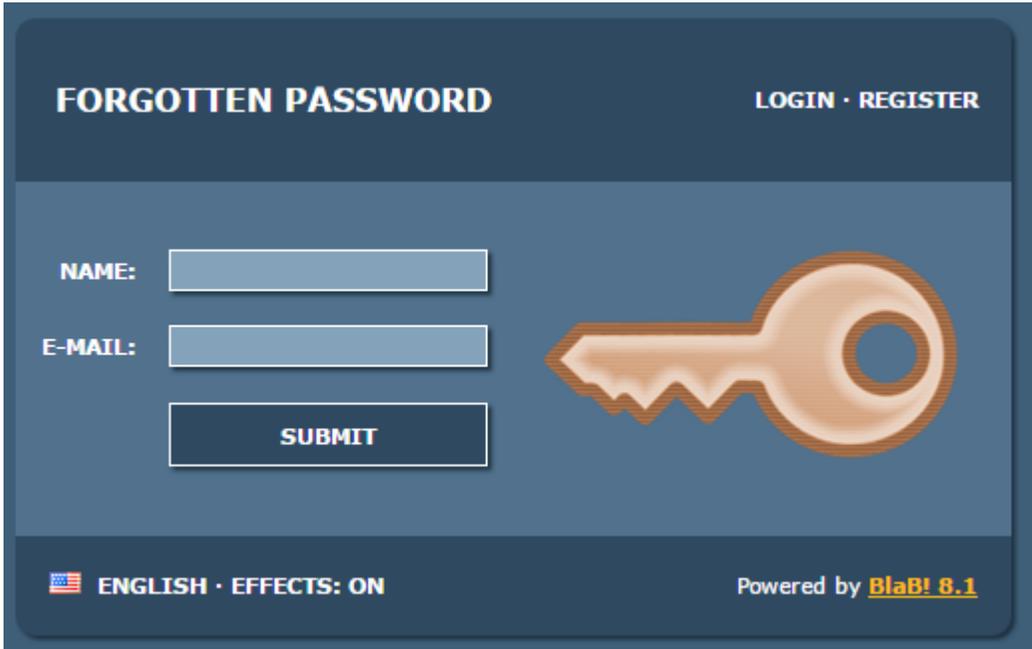


On this screen (above) you must enter, in the boxes so labeled, "NAME" and "PASSWORD", then again enter password in the box labeled "RETYPE", and finally enter your email address in the box labeled "E-MAIL". Note that CASE is important for BOTH the user name and the password.

The desired format of the user name is [1] your call, all in CAPS, then [2] a single space, then [3] your grid in the format of two CAPITAL letters followed by two numeric digits, followed by two lower case letters, e.g. FN20ag. So a complete user name would look like: "W3SZ FN20ag".

Once you have entered all of that information, you need to left-click on "SUBMIT", and then send an email to W3SZ telling me that you have set up an account, as I need to activate your account before you can use it and I won't know that you've signed up unless you tell me. Once your account has been activated, you can log into the chat page by going to the chat page URL and entering your user name and your password into the appropriate boxes and then left-clicking on "SUBMIT".

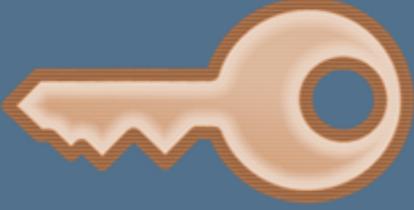
If you enter your user name or password incorrectly [again, CASE is important] then you will get the message, "You have submitted incorrect data!". If that happens, click "CONTINUE" and then on the next screen click "FORGOTTEN PASSWORD". This will show you a screen that looks like this:



FORGOTTEN PASSWORD [LOGIN · REGISTER](#)

NAME:

E-MAIL:



 **ENGLISH · EFFECTS: ON** Powered by [BlaB! 8.1](#)

On this screen (above), fill in the boxes labeled "NAME" and "E-MAIL" and click "SUBMIT". You will be sent an email that contains a temporary password that you can use to sign on to the chat page. Then, in order to change your password, you need to log on using your user name and the temporary password contained in the email just received. Once you have logged in, click on "SETTINGS" and then "PROFILE". This will show you a page like this:

PROFILE: W3SZ FN20AG

E-MAIL:

OLD PASSWORD:

NEW PASSWORD:

SUBMIT

SETTINGS · PROFILE · HELP CLOSE

On this page (above) enter into the box labeled "OLD PASSWORD" the password that you just received in the email, and then enter what you want your new password to be [twice] in the boxes labeled "NEW PASSWORD", and then click "SUBMIT" and finally click "CLOSE". Its a good idea to then log out and attempt to log in again just to make sure that you did everything correctly and your new password is working OK. Also, please record somewhere safe your user name and password, so that you can recall them later.

You can customize your chat window in terms of time format, font, color, etc. by going to the settings window and clicking on "SETTINGS" in the upper left corner of the members' chat room screen. You can also turn sound effects [played when someone sends a message or enters or leaves the members' chat room] using the same SETTINGS window. The SETTINGS window looks like this:

SETTINGS

LANGUAGE:

FORMAT:

EFFECTS:

MESSAGE:

ONLINE:

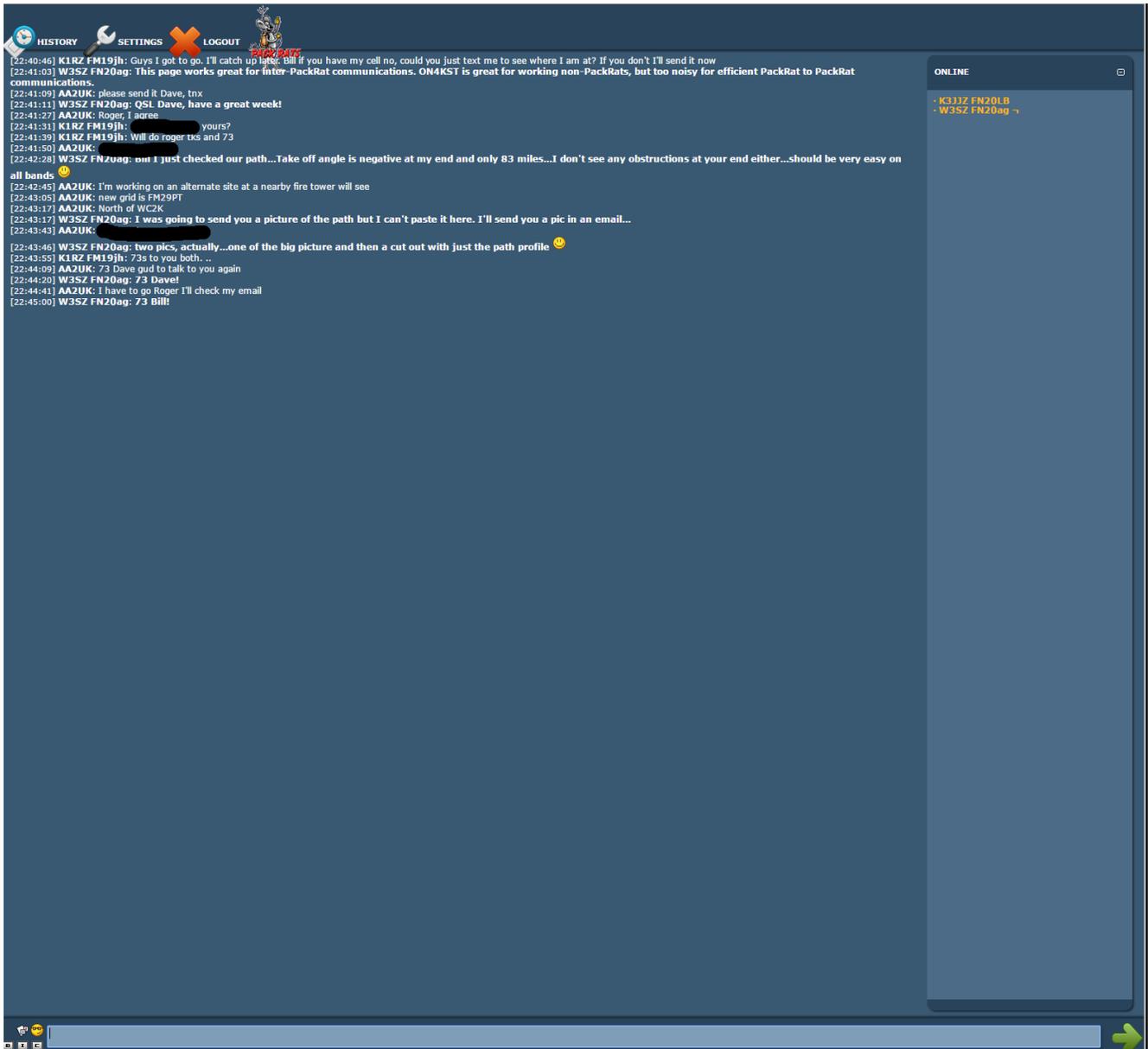
TOPIC:

Bold · *Italic* (ABC)

SUBMIT

SETTINGS · PROFILE · HELP CLOSE

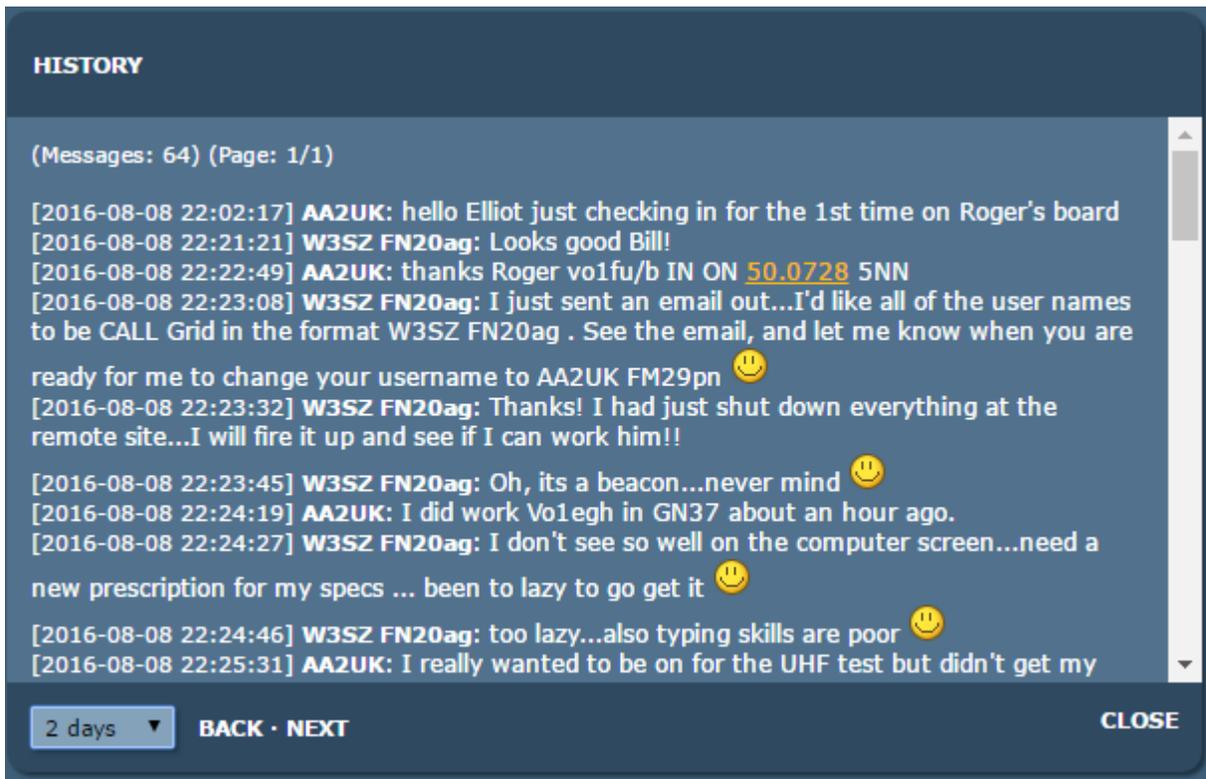
A typical members' chat room window looks like this:



You can see a larger image of this page here: <http://www.nitehawk.com/w3sz/PackRatsChatRoom.png> For reasons of security, I blacked out email addresses and phone numbers in the illustration. On the right edge of the main screen is a list of stations currently online. You can see that K3JJZ and W3SZ were the only stations online when this image was made, early on a Wednesday morning. Needing to block out the phone numbers and emails on this image reminds me of another advantage of the members' chat room over our 223.500 MHz FM channel; the members' chat room provides a secure means of transferring such private information while chatting, which the FM channel does not.

There are a couple of other features to the chat room software. If you click on "HISTORY" in the

upper left corner of the chat window, you can review old conversations no longer visible on the screen. This history window looks like this:



You can select the total duration of the history using the pull-down menu at the bottom left corner of this window. “Back” and “Next” take you from page to page of the history, and within a page you can scroll up or down to see all of the chatter. On the right edge of the main screen is a list of stations currently online. You can see that K3JJZ and W3SZ were the only stations online when this image was made, early on a Wednesday morning. Needing to block out the phone numbers and emails on this image reminds me of another advantage of the members’ chat room over our 223.500 MHz FM channel; the members’ chat room provides a secure means of transferring such private information while chatting, which the FM channel does not.

I hope that the above gives you all of the information you need regarding the Pack Rats Members’ Chat Room. If you need further information, just send me an email. --Roger Rehr, W3SZ