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A LADDER MAST

The following material was extracted from earlier editions. Figure and Equation sequence references are those from the 21st edition of *The ARRL Antenna Book*

A temporary antenna support is sometimes needed for an antenna system for antenna testing, site selection, emergency exercises or Field Day. Ordinary aluminum extension ladders are ideal candidates for this service. They are strong, light, extendable, weatherproof and easily transported. Additionally, they are readily available and can be returned to normal use once the project is concluded. A ladder tower will support a lightweight triband beam and rotator.

With patience and ingenuity one person can erect this assembly. One of the biggest problems is holding the base down while “walking” the ladder to a vertical position. The ladder can be guyed with $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch polypropylene rope. Rope guys are arranged in the standard fashion with three at each level. If help is available, the ladder can be walked up in its retracted position and extended after the antenna and rotator are attached. The lightweight pulley system on most extension ladders is not strong enough to lift the ladder extension. This mechanism must be replaced (or augmented) with a heavy-duty pulley and rope. Make sure when attaching the guy ropes that they do not foul the operation of the sliding upper section of the ladder.

There is one hazard in this system that must be avoided: Do not climb or stand on the ladder when it is being extended—even as much as one rung. Never stand on the ladder and attempt to raise or lower the upper section. Do all the extending and retracting with the heavy-duty rope and pulley!

If the ladder is to be raised by one person, use the following guidelines. First, make sure the rung-latching mechanism operates properly before beginning. The base must be hinged so that it does not slip along the ground during erection. The guy ropes should be tied and positioned in such a way that they serve as safety constraints in the event that control of the assembly is lost. Have available a device (such as another ladder) for supporting the ladder during rest periods. (See **Fig 6**.)

After the ladder is erect and the lower section guys tied and tightened, raise the upper portion one rung at a time. Do not raise the upper section higher than it is designed to go; safety is far more important than a few extra feet of height.

For a temporary installation, finding suitable guy anchors can be an exercise in creativity. Fence posts, trees,



Fig 6—Walking the ladder up to its vertical position. Keith, VE2AQU, supports the mast with a second ladder while Chris, VE2FRJ, checks the ropes. (Photo by Keith Baker, VE2XL.)

and heavy pipes are all possibilities. If nothing of sufficient strength is available, anchor posts or pipes can be driven into the soil. Sandy soil is the most difficult to work with because it does a very poor job of holding anchors. A discarded car axle can be driven into the ground as an anchor, as its mass and strength are substantial. A chain and car-bumper jack can be used to remove the axle when the operation is done.

Above all else, keep the tower and antenna away from power lines. Make sure that nothing can touch the lines if the assembly falls. Disassemble by reversing the process. Ladder towers are handy for “quickie” antenna supports, but as with any improvisation of support materials, care must be taken to ensure safe construction.

THE A-FRAME MAST

A light and relatively inexpensive mast is shown in **Fig 7**. In lengths up to 40 feet it is very easy to erect and will stand the pull of ordinary wire antenna systems. The lumber used is 2×2 -inch straight-grained pine (which many lumber yards know as hemlock) or even fir stock. The uprights can be as long as 22 feet each (for a mast slightly over 40 feet high) and the cross pieces are cut to fit. Four pieces of 2×2 lumber, each 22 feet long, provides more than enough. The only other materials required are five $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch carriage bolts $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, a few spikes, about 300 feet of stranded or solid galvanized wire for guying, enough glazed porcelain compression (“egg”) insulators to break up the guys into sections, and the usual pulley and halyard rope. If the strain insulators are put in every 20 feet, approximately 15 of them will be enough.

After selecting and purchasing the lumber—which should be straight-grained and knot-free—sawhorses or boxes should be set up and the mast assembled as shown

After the coat of paint is dry, attach the guys and rig the pulley for the antenna halyard. The pulley anchor should be at the point where the top stays are attached so

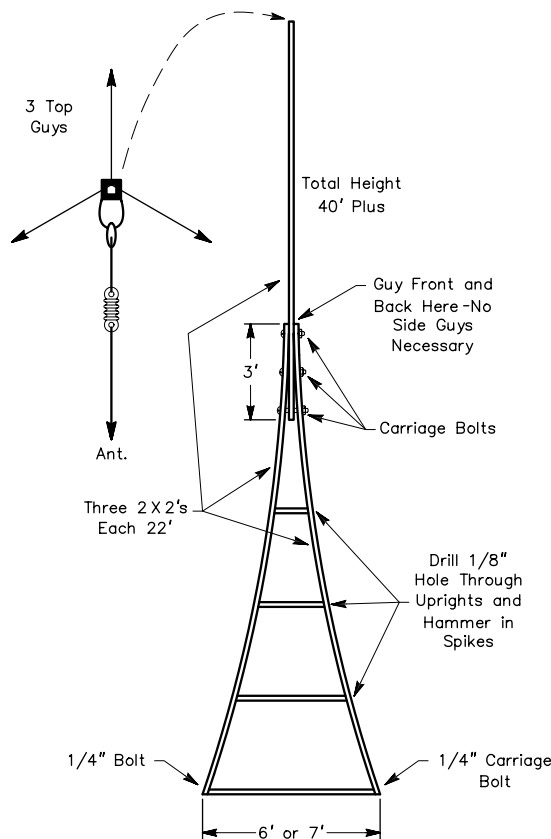


Fig 7—The A-frame mast is lightweight and easily constructed and erected.

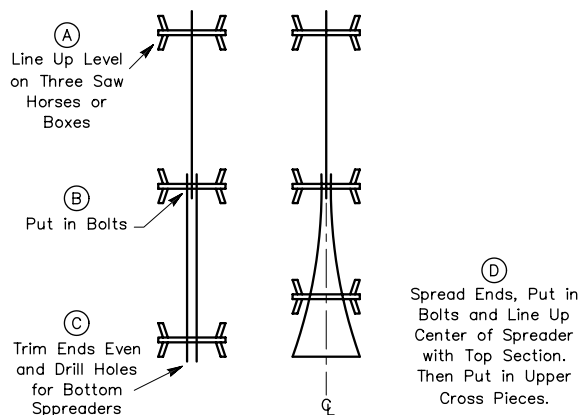


Fig 8—Method of assembling the A-frame mast on sawhorses.

If the mast is to stand on the ground, a couple of stakes should be driven to keep the bottom from slipping. At this point the mast may be “walked up” by a helper. If it is to go on a roof, first stand it up against the side of the building and then hoist it, from the roof, keeping it vertical. The whole assembly is light enough for two men to perform the complete operation—lifting the mast, carrying it to its permanent berth, and fastening the guys with the mast vertical. It is entirely practical to put up such a mast on a flat area of roof that would be too small to erect a regular tower installation, one that had to be raised vertically on the same spot.

THE PVRC MOUNT

The following material was extracted from earlier editions. Figure and Equation sequence references are those from the 21st edition of *The ARRL Antenna Book*

The methods described above for hoisting antennas are sometimes not satisfactory for really large, heavy arrays. The best way to handle large Yagis is to assemble them on top of the tower. One way to do this easily is by using the *PVRC Mount*. Many members of the Potomac Valley Radio Club have successfully used this method to install large antennas. Simple and ingenious, the idea involves offsetting the boom from the mast to permit the boom to tilt 360° and rotate axially 360°. This permits the entire length of the boom to be brought alongside the tower, allowing the elements to be attached one by one. (It also allows any part of the antenna to be brought alongside the tower for antenna maintenance.)

See **Figs 38 through 42**. The mount itself consists of a short length of pipe of the same diameter as the rotating mast (or greater), a steel plate, eight U bolts and four pinning bolts. The steel plate is the larger, horizontal one shown in Fig 38. Four U bolts attach the plate to the rotating mast, and four attach the horizontal pipe to the plate. The horizontal pipe provides the offset between the antenna boom and the tower. The antenna boom-to-mast plate is mounted at the outer end of the short pipe. Four bolts are used to ensure that the antenna ends up parallel to the ground, two pinning each plate to the short pipe. When the mast plate pinning bolts are removed and the

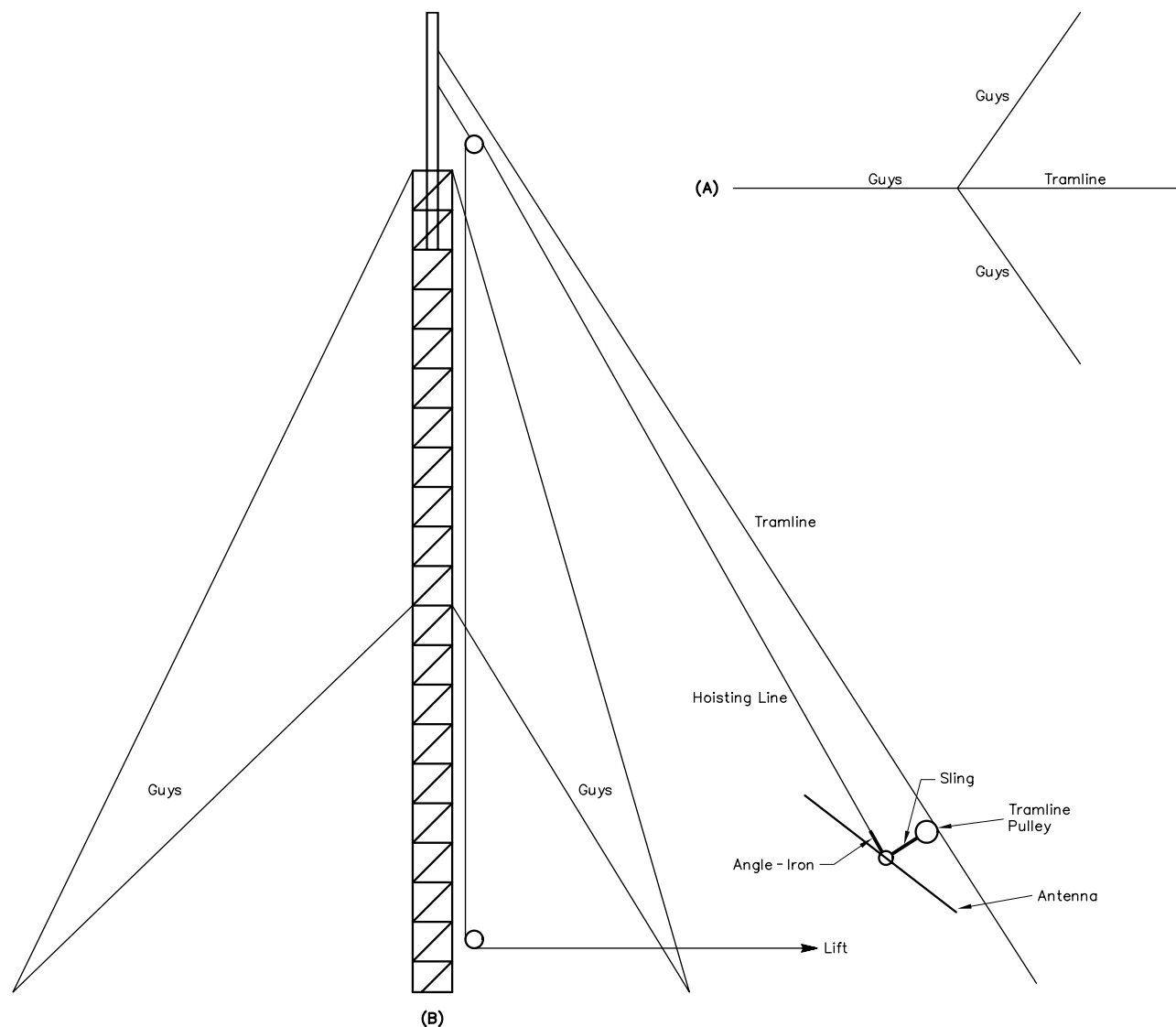


Fig 37—At A, bird's-eye view of tram system used to bring large Yagi antennas from the ground to the top of the tower. At B, side view of rigging used for tramline and hoisting line, along with the sling and tram fixture used to hold the Yagi on the tramline.

four U bolts loosened, the short pipe and boom plate can be rotated through 360°, allowing either half of the boom to come alongside the tower.

First assemble the antenna on the ground. Carefully mark all critical dimensions, and then remove the antenna elements from the boom. Once the rotator and mast have been installed on the tower, a gin pole is used to bring the mast plate and short pipe to the top of the tower. There, the top crew unpins the horizontal pipe and tilts the antenna boom plate to place it in the vertical plane. The boom is attached to the boom plate at the final balance point of the assembled antenna. It is important that the boom be rotated axially so the bottom side of the boom is closest to the tower.

This will allow the boom to be tilted without the elements striking the tower.

During installation it may be necessary to loosen one guy wire temporarily to allow for tilting of the boom. As a safety precaution, a temporary guy should be attached to the same leg of the tower just low enough so the assembled antenna will clear it.

The elements are assembled on the boom, starting with those closest to the center of the boom, working out alternately to the farthest director and reflector. This procedure must be followed. If all the elements are put first on one half of the boom, it will be dangerous (if not impossible) to put on the remaining elements. By start-

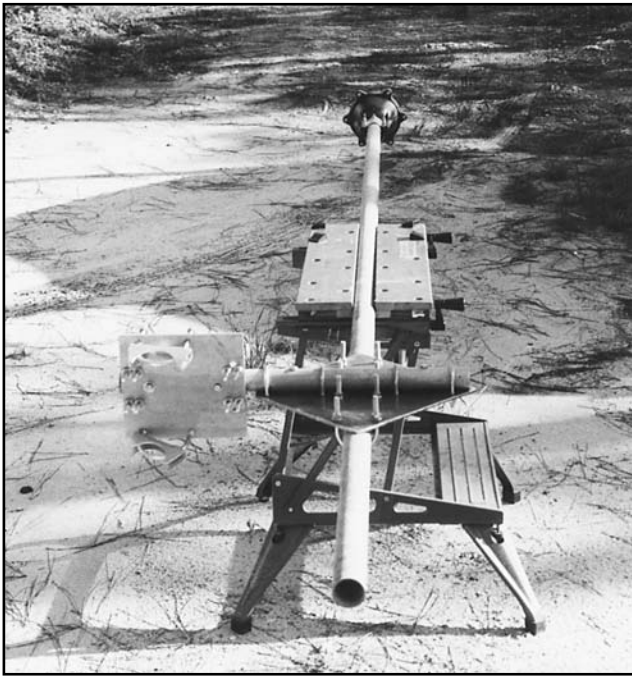


Fig 38—The PVRC mount, boom plate, mast and rotator ready to go. The mast and rotator are installed on the tower first.

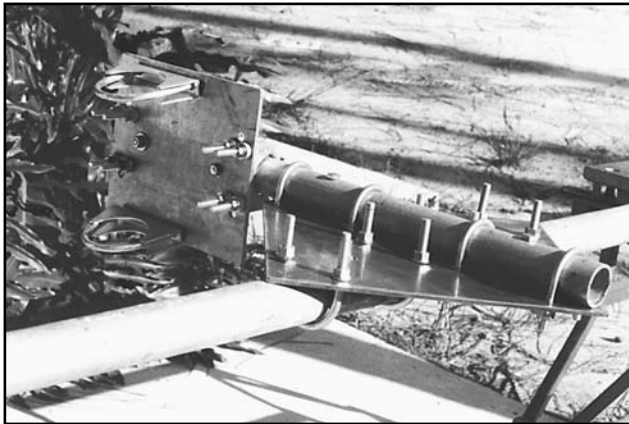


Fig 39—Close-up of the PVRC mount. The long pipe (horizontal in this photo) is the rotating mast. The U bolts in the vertical plate at the left are ready to accept the antenna boom. The heads of two locking pins (bolts) are visible at the midline of the boom plate. The other two pins help secure the horizontal pipe to the large steel mast plate. (The head of the bolt nearest the camera blends in with the right hand leg of the U bolt behind it.)

ing at the middle and working outward, the balance point of the partly assembled antenna will never be so far removed from the tower that tilting of the boom becomes impossible.

When the last element is attached, the boom is brought parallel to the ground, the horizontal pipe is

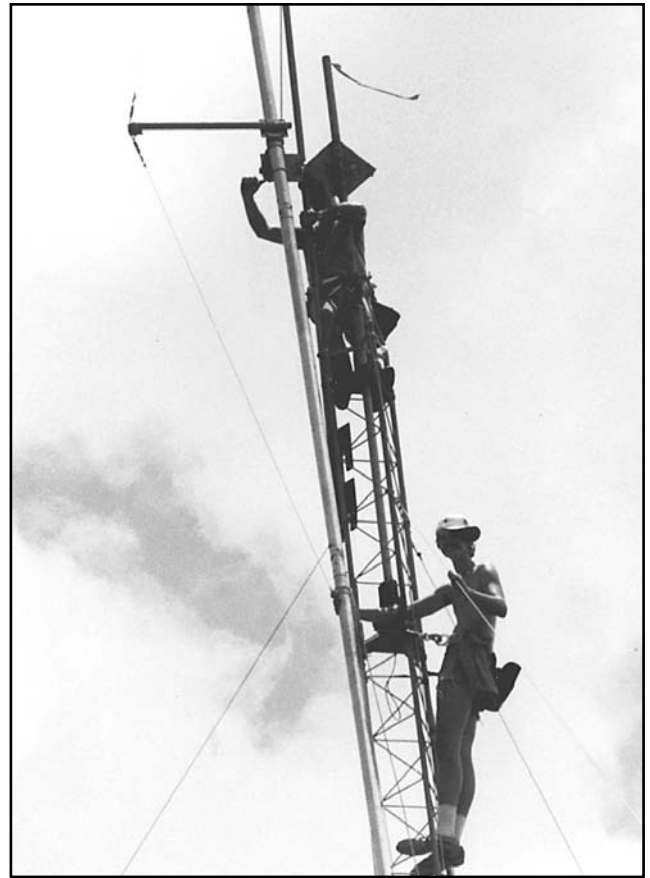


Fig 40—Working at the 70-foot level. A gin pole makes pulling up and mounting the boom to the boom plate a safe and easy procedure.

pinned to the mast plate, and the mast plate U bolts tightened. At this point, all the antenna elements will be positioned vertically. Next, loosen the U bolts that hold the boom and rotate the boom axially 90° , bringing the elements parallel to the ground. Tighten the boom bolts and double check all the hardware.

Many long-boom Yagis employ a truss to prevent boom sag. With the PVRC mount, the truss must be attached to a pipe that is independent of the rotating mast. A short length of pipe is attached to the boom as close as possible to the balance point. The truss then moves with the boom whenever the boom is tilted or twisted.

A precaution: Unless you have a really strong rotator, you should consider using this mount mainly for assembling the antenna on the tower. The offset between the boom and the mast with this assembly can generate high torque loads on the rotator. Mounting the boom as close as possible to the mast will minimize the torque when the antenna is pointed into the wind.

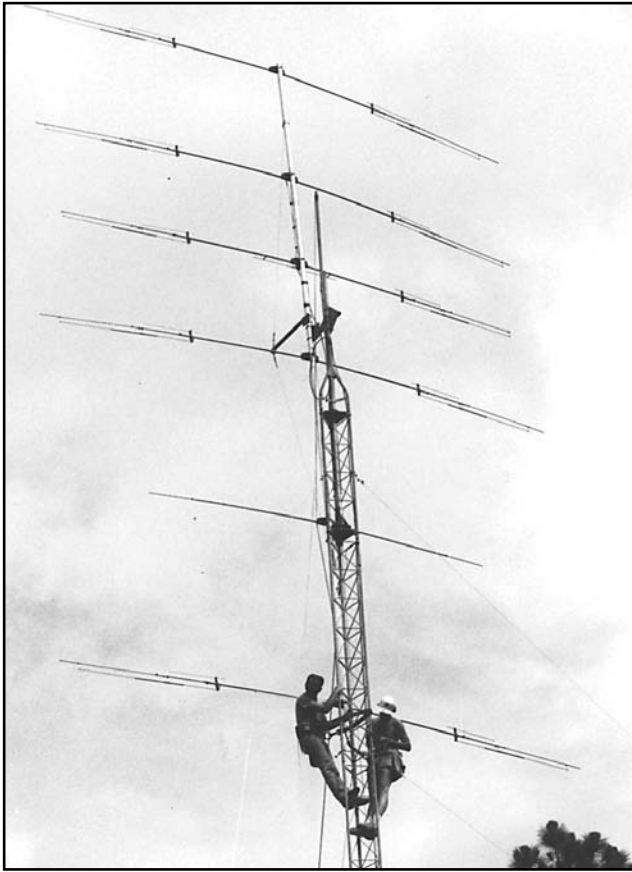


Fig 41—Mounting the last element prior to positioning the boom in a horizontal plane.

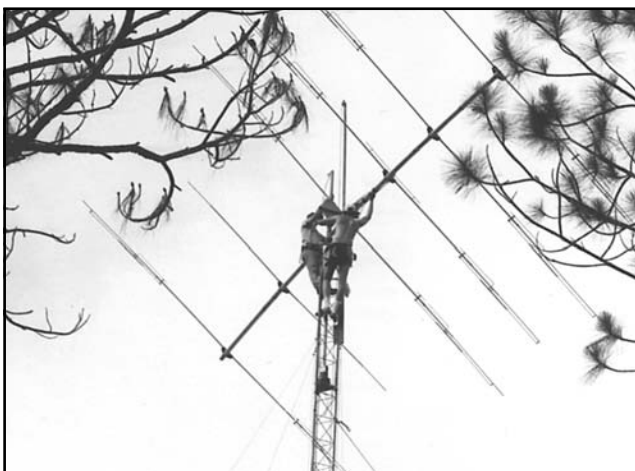


Fig 42—The U bolts securing the short pipe to the mast plate are loosened and the boom is turned to a horizontal position. This puts the elements in a vertical plane. Then the pipe U bolts are tightened and pinning bolts secured. The boom U bolts are then loosened and the boom turned axially 90°.