

WAWA'S TELEVISION QUALITY EXPLAINED

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Have you watched your favourite program, frustrated by the colour fading to black and white? Older residents have questioned why Wawa's TV quality was so good only a few years ago when three stations were brought in by cablevision from Sault Ste. Marie. Recently an explanation for our recent poor quality TV reception was provided by Mr. Peter Simpson, the region's cheerful, bearded, C.B.C. technician. Many residents know Peter is one capacity or another. Sometimes he's riding his Honda around town. More often his familiar blue and white C.B.C. truck with its twin Hawk C.B. antennas appears, as Peter heads for his own airplane or completes his weekly transmitter check. Peter's name is also well known through his large teletype equipped ham station to Amateur Radio Operators throughout Ontario.

His job's not an easy one. "You don't make mistakes on high voltage TV transmitters twice", Peter noted, as he told how he numbed his arm for a day from a 3,000 volt shock. On the road constantly to cover 2,000 miles a month, Peter weekly checks transmitter sites in Marathon, White River and Manitouwadge, as well as numerous C.B.C. radio repeaters throughout the Algoma region. Many of his sites require four wheel drive to reach, while at Marathon a difficult six mile ski-doo trip is necessary in winter.

As an instructor of the Sault College Amateur Radio class, Peter offered to show the students the equipment. We drove the steep, twisting, Helen Mine Road, to the red 515 foot radio tower, one of the highest structures in the Superior area, where Michipicoten's rugged terrain stretched from Pukaskwa to Gargantua in the distance. Inside the clean, spacious cement block building, a half million dollars of complex equipment stretched in panels from floor to ceiling. The motor of the cooling system for the two kilowatt transmitter, hummed steadily in the background. "Should this motor ever stop", Peter stated, "the transmitter would automatically shut down to avoid burning itself up".

Familiarly twisting numerous control knobs of the large oscilloscope, and plugging in test leads, Peter demonstrated the ideal studio test pattern, and the present broadcast pattern. A slight deviation, which seemed to be apparent in the broadcast signal, was explained.

"This C.B.C. television signal you see", Peter stated, "is being piped by microwave from Toronto to Geraldton. It's then rebroadcast to be picked up by Beardmore and Manitouwadge from the air. At Manitouwadge, we rebroadcast the signal and pick it off the air at Marathon, Hornepayne and White River. Once again it's rebroadcast from White River to service Wawa". The meaning of this is that the Wawa signal, on entering your television set, has already been passed through four separate receivers and transmitters. Any small errors in equipment simply accumulate in the signal and are passed along. Wawa, being the end of the road, has the greatest loss of television quality. Similarly any breakdown between Geraldton and Wawa, would disrupt our TV reception.

When it's considered that Wawa's TV signal has been broadcast almost 300 miles, the fading colour is understandable. Peter is optimistic that as older equipment is replaced by newer and higher output transmitters, the signal will improve in quality. An alternative solution is to bring cablevision by microwave directly from the Sault to Wawa. Most Michipicoten citizens are looking forward to that day.