APRS Update in my shack, by Russell Hall N8RSH

I wanted to drop in and give everyone an update on my APRS I-Gate setup at my shack over the summer. I am still using APRSCE32 software for an I-Gate interface to the internet. I have, however, changed out the MFJ tnc and Motorola GM300 with my Kenwood TH-72a for a radio/tnc. The MFJ looked like it was working. However, it wasn't very stable at all. It would lock up and crash after a day or hours after started up. After spending a day in a rage trying to figure out what it was doing, I finally gave up and switched to my Kenwood HT.

The Kenwood TH-72a took me about 20 minutes to get the KISS settings setup correctly in APRSCE32. After testing it for about 20 more minutes with another TH-72a that I borrowed from a good friend, it seemed very stable. So then I decided to leave it in this setup for some time and see how stable it would be. In this configuration it ran stable all summer, in fact I forgot about it till I needed my handheld for the annual fall fox hunt.

While on the fox hunt, it occurred to me that I need to find a cheaper solution for a radio/tnc rig. I had bought an Argentdata OpenTacker USB over the summer for a quick weekend project that I had forgotten about and found while looking for my handhead. The OpenTracker USB is designed to be a cheap APRS unit with TNC KISS support. It has the ability to connect any radio with a GPS receiver, to run standalone APRS system. However, I was looking at the TNC support between my radio and I-Gate computer, which it can also do with KISS support.

Another month went by, and I got a phone call from another ham out there in the world. He was telling me about this great APRS unit he found out on the internet and it was cheap. The more he was explaining it to me, the more it sounded familiar to me. Then it hit me, I have one sitting in my garage. He said it was very easy for him to get it setup and running, so I guess it's my turn to get my working.

A few more weekends passed by, then an open Sunday afternoon showed up. I got out my Baofeng, the connection cable, OpenTracker USB and my wife's laptop. I started messing around with the OpenTracker first to get the setting correct. The Windows configure is every easy to use. A few things I had to do to the OpenTracker to get them to work were to removing the HT jumper on the board and re-flash the firmware on the unit. The jumper settings are well documented in the manual online. After messing with the settings a bit, I was able to get it working as a TNC interface to my handheld. In the Windows configurator I had to set my call-sign N8RSH-2, 1200baud, Path WIDE2-2 and a symbol. On the serial ports options USB KISS on, set the port A to 9600 baud rate, KISS mode on. On the position setting to fixed and then set my fix GPS coordinate. With those settings, all I had to do was to tune the unit to my radio with configure tool. That is all it took, and I was sending and receiving packets. Now the biggest question I have is if this system setup will be stable like my Kenwood, only time will tell.

In summary one odd thing I found with this setup, is the OpenTracker will beacon out along with the APRSCE32 software. So if you are looking at the packets on the RF side you will see both the tracker and the software beaconing out. That is it for now; I will keep you guys updated on how this OpenTracker works and if it's stable. 73 from N8RSH https://www.argentdata.com/products/otusb.html