South African Radio League

Amateur Radio Hall of Fame

Greg Roberts, ZS1BI

Inducted in 2020

Greg was born in Glencoe, Natal in 1939. He became interested in astronomy at the age of eight, grinding his first telescope mirror at twelve. After a start in mechanical engineering, he graduated in pure science from the University of Natal. After working in Durban for some years, he spent a year in Cape Town around 1966 before returning for a spell at the Republic Observatory in Johannesburg.

He finally transferred to Cape Town around 1974, where he became a volunteer at the then Royal Observatory, later incorporated into the SA Astronomical Observatory. He was initially licensed as ZR1BB in 1974, later upgrading to ZS1BI, a call sign he still holds.

Greg was active in satellite tracking as early as 1962. He optically tracked Apollo 11 and 12 to over 300 000 km on their way to the moon.

In the early 1970s, Greg became very interested in communicating through the amateur radio satellites and started building equipment for that purpose, as well as trying to promote interest in the amateur community in this field. He became a licensed radio amateur specifically for this purpose.

He became a committee member of the Cape Town Branch of the SARL and was soon approached by the SARL to become a Council member. He became the Chairman of the Technical Committee of the SARL, mainly to promote the use of amateur satellites. He played a major role in the frequency band plan for amateur satellites.

He became a life member of AMSAT in the USA and was appointed Chairman of the Editorial Board for their publication *Orbit*. On AMSAT's request, he established SA AMSAT (now AMSAT SA) as an affiliate of the international organisation. Greg remained President until retirement, when he was awarded the first Life Membership in the South African organisation.

Largely because of Greg's many articles in Radio ZS and numerous talks, as well as his prediction software and bulletins on the Sunday HF net, satellite activity increased dramatically.

Greg continues to track satellites and report on his activities in the astronomy press. He leads a network of volunteers tracking over 400 objects in space, both by radio and optical means, to make their orbital elements available to non-military users. He has even been named a threat to US national security due to these disclosures!

Although he retains his licences, he is unfortunately no longer active on amateur radio.

Greg has presented several papers at the South African Space Association and symposia of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa and has won several awards.

Greg received the SARL's Jack Twine Merit award in 1978 and has been named Radio Amateur of the Year. He won the Barney Joel trophy for mobile operations in 1977. He won the annual JJ Pienaar trophy for the best article in Radio ZS three times from 1975 to 1980.

"Living amongst the satellites", by Richard Dismore, *Wattnow* February 2015, pp. 36-39. https://issuu.com/saiee/docs/wattnow_feb_2015

http://forums.qrz.com/index.php?threads/amateur-radio-newsline%E2%84%A2-report-1713-june-11-2010.252118/

"High-eccentricity orbits simplified", by Greg Roberts ZS1BI, Orbit Volume 3 Number 2, March/April 1982, pp. 14-17 http://www.ka9q.net/AMSAT-ORBIT-10.pdf

"Radioamateurisme en gevaarlijke hobby", 2010-06-18, https://het-bar.net/page/147/