

# ***SCANNING the North-West***

by GORDON HANCOCK, *Installations*

One of the many aspects of planning a new television system is that of selecting a suitable site for the transmitter and then finding the number of people who can expect a good signal and picture from the new service. Bob Young and I had the job of checking the coverage area for the proposed Independent Television Authority transmitter to serve the north-west area.

A possible site was to be midway between Bolton and Wigan and we had to drive over an area extending from Barrow in the north to Llandudno in the south, being bounded in the east by the Pennines. The vehicle we used was the five-ton Commer caravan well known to Baddow people. In this we had mounted a thirty-foot telescopic mast and a survey receiver. We set off just as soon as the A.A. reported the roads to the north clear of snow.

At first driving a lorry seemed a miserable and massive business but once we appreciated the efficiency of the brakes we never looked back. Naturally we never exceeded the legal limit of twenty m.p.h.

Arriving at Preston we went to see Chief Inspector Gee of the Lancashire

County Police, who had most kindly arranged for us to use the existing 150-foot police masts near the proposed transmitter site. As the road to these masts, at Winter Hill, was still five foot deep in snow we had to carry the test transmitter three miles to the top, and again police assistance was much appreciated. Winter Hill was aptly named, being 1450 feet above sea level, and bitterly cold. Installing the transmitter and aerial on top of the tower was a chilly task. Once this had been done we ploughed our way down the hill and started to trundle round Lancashire.

The service area had been calculated before we set off, so we had a good idea of where we had to check. What we did, when we found suitable country, was to crank up the mast in the caravan and



*All photographs by Gordon Hancock*



*LEFT: The police transmitter mast at Winter Hill, on which our yagi aerial was mounted for the survey. Gordon Hancock is climbing to change the bearing of the aerial. ABOVE RIGHT: This picture of the police receiver mast and Rivington Moor was taken from the top of the transmitter mast by Gordon Hancock. ABOVE LEFT: The remains of deep snowdrifts still isolated the aerial masts at Winter Hill, and the cold high winds made arctic clothing necessary for Bob Young*

drive slowly along, noting the signal levels. In towns these levels were taken at yard intervals on a run of anything up to 200 yards. With the mast erect the vehicle became thirty feet tall, and we had to choose streets that were free from telephone wires. The resulting figures of signal variations gave a very good indication of the intensity and repetition of local reflections of the transmitted waves, and thus the probability of "ghost" pictures on a television receiver.

Plodding systematically over the area, we gradually acknowledged the fact that although the appearance of the northern industrial town may not be prepossessing, the value for money is greater than in the south. We didn't like the solidly smug look of the red-brick Victorian

hotel but the large slice of ham and two fried eggs for breakfast went down very well indeed. On another occasion, unshaven and well-nigh frozen stiff, we spent an hour in a transport café. When we came out we were both enveloping an enormous quantity of chips and sausage, floating in a pint of strong, sweet tea, together with a feeling of well-being that defies description. As Bob remarked, "the best two shillings' worth Marconi's ever spent".

As we expected the daily runs sometimes to end well away from a town, we had taken basic camping equipment with us, and when necessary we slept in the van and cooked our own food. To anyone with limited cooking facilities I can strongly recommend a well-fried egg resting happily between two thick slices



LEFT: *The research vehicle, the Baddow five-ton Commer caravan, in open country in Lancashire. The moorland roads were still banked high with snowdrifts.* RIGHT: *A spot check. Taking a measurement of the received signal at a given map reference in open country near Skipton*

of bread and butter. Inelegant but efficacious. One night I totted up the expenses for the previous fourteen hours:

Breakfast (egg) 4d.

Lunch (egg) 4d.

Dinner (egg) 4d.

Evening refreshment (much needed) 5s. 9d.

This so startled me that I decided (almost) to become a teetotaller and decrease my cost of living by eighty per cent.

After a fortnight we had covered the area. From the coastal roads of North Wales with the mountains in the background we had run down through the plains of Cheshire to the blackened Potteries. Then had gone up west of the Pennines through Buxton and Skipton to sweep round in the southern shadow of the Lake District to Barrow-in-Furness. All the results we needed were filed and finished and the job was done. After saying goodbye to our friends the police in Preston we rolled back to Chelmsford.

Funny how the human memory forgets the discomforts of a trip and retains only the humour. One morning when we

were taking measurements in a narrow street in Manchester, the children had just come out of school and a collection of very small boys gathered round the van. One of them called out: "Eee, mister! What you doin'?" As I'd answered that question twenty times already that day I replied wearily: "I'm looking for naughty little boys to take along to the police station."

"Ba goom!" he said, casting a youthful but cynical eye over his companions, "you've coom to the right district."



*Ba goom!*