

Antenna Rotator Control Software

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<https://ve2zaz.net>
<https://github.com/VE2ZAZ>
<https://www.qrz.com/db/VE2ZAZ>

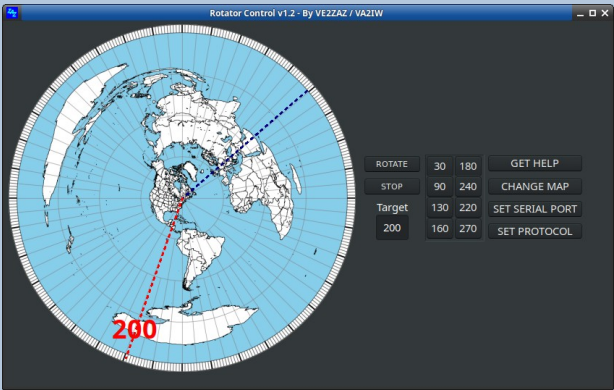


Table of Contents

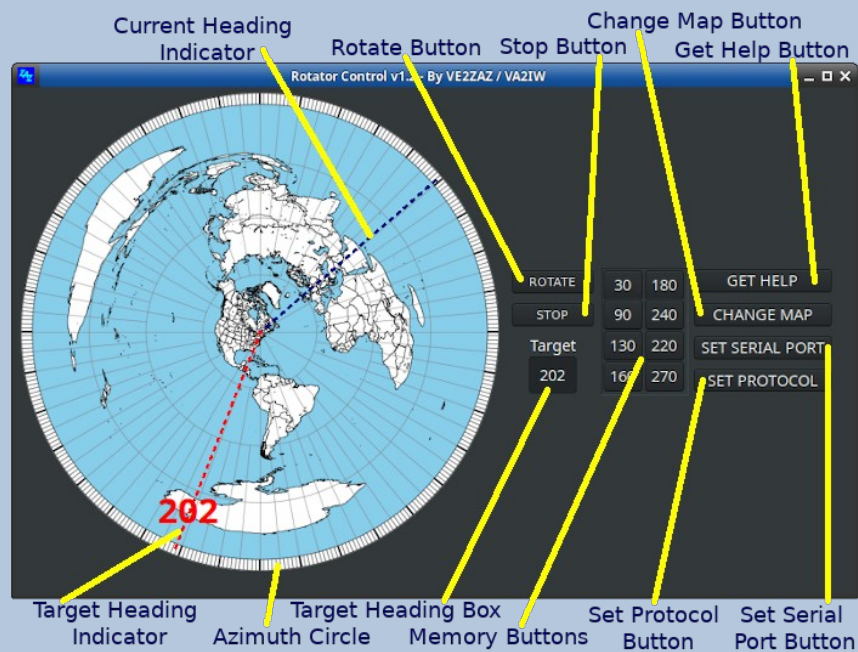
1 Overview.....	2
2 Operation.....	3
2.1 Configure the link to the rotator control box.....	3
2.2 Set the Communication Protocol.....	4
2.3 Initiate a rotation.....	5
2.4 Interrupt a rotation.....	5
2.5 Use the memory buttons.....	5
2.6 Resize window.....	5
2.7 Invoke Help.....	5
3 Program Setup.....	6
3.1 Running software under Windows.....	6
3.2 Setting up for N1MM+ Logger software.....	6
3.3 Programming memory buttons.....	7
3.4 Changing the Azimuth Circle map.....	7
4 Software Recompile.....	9
5 Licensing.....	10
6 References.....	11

1 Overview

This Antenna Rotator Control Software offers a simple, practical way of remote operating antenna rotator (aka “rotor”) control boxes compatible with the Rotor-EZ, Green Heron (RT-21), Yaesu GS-232A and DCU-1 protocols. This software works well with VE2ZAZ Smart Rotator Controller, which was designed as an add-on to HyGain Tailtwister, Ham-III and Ham-IV controller boxes. The software’s main features are:

- It offers a PC interface to the VE2ZAZ Smart Rotator Controller,
- It can also control any antenna rotator control box compatible with the Rotor-EZ, Green Heron (RT-21), Yaesu GS-232A and DCU-1 protocols (the latter two are implemented but have not been tested). The control protocol is selectable with a pull-down menu.
- It offers a re-sizeable window to accommodate various screen needs,
- It displays the current heading on a station-centered azimuthal map (except in DCU-1 mode),
- The azimuthal map is mouse-clickable to quickly pick a target heading,
- The Azimuthal map can be customized for the station location,
- The window offers 8 memory buttons for frequently used headings,
- It has a Stop button to interrupt the ongoing rotation,
- The program can receive N1MM+ logger “Rotate” and “Stop Rotate” commands via UDP socket,
- User settings such as window size and location, serial port, protocol and azimuthal map file name are saved at program exit, and restored at program launch. The settings file resides in the same directory as the program directory.
- A help button invokes the help file, a PDF formatted document.
- Software executables are available for Ubuntu-Linux and Windows 10. The software may be compiled for other OS releases, such as MacOS using the Lazarus IDE (Free Pascal) suite, however it has not been tested by the author.

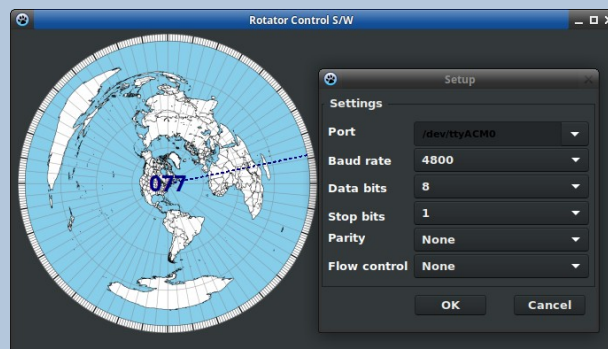
2 Operation



2.1 Configure the link to the rotator control box

The serial link between the computer and the antenna controller box must be properly configured for the remote control to operate. With the VE2ZAZ Smart Antenna Rotator Controller box, a USB link is established. Other brands of controller boxes may require a RS-232 connection. Link configuration in the latter applications is beyond the scope of this help document. Some experimenting will be required.

To reconfigure the serial link, click on the “SET SERIAL PORT” button. This opens the following setup window:



On linux computers, the virtual serial port created by a valid USB connection to the VE2ZAZ controller will show up as “/dev/ttyACMx”, likely “/dev/ttyACM0”. This port must be selected to establish a connection. On Windows computers, it will show up as COMxx. The COM port number xx corresponding to the rotator controller can be found by consulting the Windows

Device Manager. The COM port to look for will be identified in the Ports section of the Device Manager as “USB Serial Device (COMxx)”.

Since the link to the VE2ZAZ Smart Antenna Rotator Controller is a virtual serial port, other settings, including the Baud Rate, can be left untouched.

To confirm the port settings, click on the OK button.

Note that the serial port will show up as a valid port on the computer only when the controller is connected and is powered up.

2.2 Set the Communication Protocol

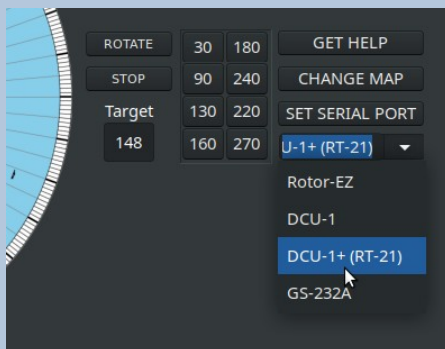
The proper protocol must be set for communication with the rotator control box to work. A wrong protocol selection will manifest itself as a failure to control the rotator and to read back the current heading. A “LINK ERROR” message may also show up at the center of the azimuth circle. If erratic software behavior is detected, this may be an indication of a wrong protocol selected. Consult your rotator controller box documentation to find out which protocol is needed.

The following protocols are supported by this software:

- **Rotor-EZ:** Created by Idiom Press, is a common protocol used by many rotator control boxes (the VE2ZAZ Smart Antenna Rotator Controller uses this one). Is a superset of the DCU-1 protocol. Provides basic control and heading read back operation.
- **DCU-1+ (Green Heron):** Also a superset of the DCU-1 protocol. Used with the Green Heron RT-21 series of control boxes. Recognition goes to Wayne (W0ZW) for having beta-tested this protocol.
- **GS-232A:** Used by the Yaesu GS-232A/B interface boxes, and paired with Yaesu rotators. Untested.
- **DCU-1:** The original protocol used with the HyGain DCU-1 and DCU-2 control boxes. In its standard form, does not provide current heading read back. Untested.

Although there are many similarities between the Rotor-EZ, DCU-1+ and DCU-1 protocols, there are also differences that justify separate selections.

Setting the proper protocol is done by clicking on the “SET PROTOCOL” button. This reveals a pull-down menu containing the protocol choices, as seen on the image below. Simply click on the desired protocol to make the selection.



Note: The GS-232A and DCU-1 are implemented, however they have not been tested on real hardware. Please report any issue with these protocols to the author.

2.3 Initiate a rotation

There are five ways of initiating a rotation of the antenna:

1. Typing the target heading value between 0 and 359 into the Target heading box, and then pressing the <RETURN> key.
2. Typing the target heading value between 0 and 359 into the Target heading box, and then clicking on the Rotate button,
3. Hovering the mouse pointer over the azimuth circle to the desired azimuth, and then left-clicking,
4. Clicking on one of the azimuth memory buttons. The indicated heading will be the target heading.
5. Sending a new heading command via the N1MM+ Logger QSO entry window (<ALT-J> keystroke in N1MM+).

2.4 Interrupt a rotation

There are two ways of interrupting (stopping) an ongoing rotation of the antenna:

1. Clicking on one of the Stop button.
2. Sending a Stop command via the N1MM+ Logger QSO entry window (<CTRL-ALT-J> keystroke in N1MM+).

2.5 Use the memory buttons

The memory buttons allow to quickly “recall” headings you use more frequently. There are 8 memory buttons that can be individually programmed. The programmed headings are saved in the configuration file, and are recalled at program launch.

A mouse click on the chosen memory button will initiate an antenna rotation to the indicated heading.

2.6 Resize window

The main program window can be resized by dragging the window edges or corners. When resizing the window, the azimuthal map also resizes, yet it retains its full control functionality. This allows to create a minimalist window with varying content that suits the user. A horizontal scroll bar shows up when content is hidden due the window size. Examples of resized windows are:

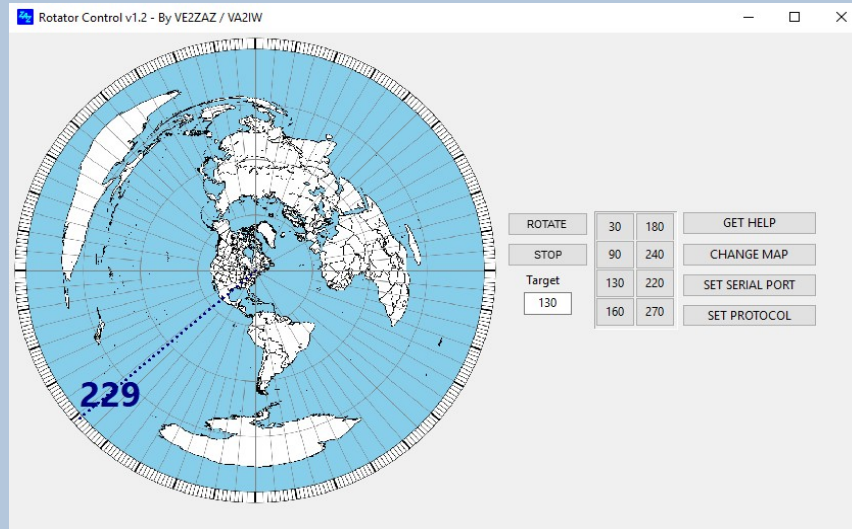
2.7 Invoke Help

This help document being an PDF-formatted file, it can be read in the computer’s default PDF viewer by simply clicking on the “GET HELP” button.

3 Program Setup

3.1 Running software under Windows

The appearance of the program's main window is slightly different when run in Windows. The following image shows the appearance in Windows 10.



Windows has its way of dealing with unavailable resources, such as the COM port and the Azimuthal map file. The software tries to deal with that. For example, when the selected COM port is not available, the software shows an error message popup window. But Windows may decide to terminate program execution altogether despite the program trying to intercept the error, something Linux does not do.

If the program tries to launch but crashes right away or freezes in the COM port selection window, suspect a wrong COM port or a wrong azimuthal map file being selected at launch time. The easiest way to correct this is to manually edit the program's config.xml file, which is located in the same directory as the main program (.exe) file. Any ASCII (plain text) editor is suitable for the task. The entries to modify may be:

SerialPort="COMxx"

or

ImageFilename="xxxxx.png"

(x marks may vary). The values to change are those between the double-quote marks. They should match an existing COM port and azimuthal map file name.

3.2 Setting up for N1MM+ Logger software

The program automatically connects and listens to local broadcast UDP port 12040. As is, it receives and processes the N1MM+ originating antenna rotation command. Consequently, there is no setup required.

3.3 Programming memory buttons

The programming of a memory button is performed by right-clicking on the button. A memory edit box shows up. Enter a new heading between 0 and 359. Press the <RETURN> key to save the new value, or press the <ESCAPE> key to cancel the memory edit action. The programmed headings are saved in the configuration file, and are recalled at program launch.

3.4 Changing the Azimuth Circle map,

As supplied, the program displays an azimuth circle map centered on VE2ZAZ's station location. The user will want to replace that map with a map centered on his/her station location. Such map can be generated online. With some subsequent image editing, the result shown can be obtained.

The author uses N6ST's Azimuthal Map Generator web page, which produces nice colored maps. There are other sites that can be used to obtain azimuthal circle maps, with varying degrees of resolution and color.

The following settings are used on N6ST's Azimuthal Map Generator to produce the required azimuth map file:

Request an Azimuthal Map

Title:

Location: [\(help\)](#)

Distance: [\(help\)](#)

Paper:

Black & white: ☐

Lat/long grid: ☐

Label grids: ☐

No header or footer: ☒

Label countries: ☐

Label NA states: ☐

Label cities: ☐

Blue background: ☒

View in browser: ☐

PSTRotator Map: ☐

The output produced by the web page is a PDF file. Subsequent to obtaining the map file, some image editing of that file is required. The following tasks should be performed:

1. Load the PDF file into an image editing program, such as GIMP. A 200 pixels-per-inch resolution is appropriate for a global view.
2. Remove the white background and the heading indications
 1. "Ellipse Select" the map, excluding the white background and the heading indications,
 2. Invert the selection,
 3. Clear the selection.
3. Crop Image to Content (this removes the unused area around the circle)
4. Export result as a PNG file with transparent background. Save the file into the program directory (saving in that location is a requirement).

Using the same provided PDF file centered on your location, you can produce more than one map. For example, you may want to create a zoomed-in version of the continent, useful for VHF contests. In such case, it is recommended that you first load the PDF file with a 600 pixels-per-inch resolution, which will yield a better continental view. Then just “Ellipse Select” a smaller portion of the map, and perform the same steps as above.

The newly generated PNG image can be loaded to the program by clicking on the “CHANGE MAP” button, selecting the PNG map file and clicking Open. The new map gets displayed. If, instead of clicking Open, the Cancel button is clicked, the map will default to a plain blue circle.

4 Software Recompilation

This software was written in Free Pascal and compiled in the Lazarus IDE environment. The user can modify and recompile the software in Lazarus IDE. In addition to all components installed by default in the IDE, two additional components are required, namely “LazSerial” and “Synapse”. They can be installed using the Online Package Manager tool in Lazarus IDE.

One action must be performed before compiling for Windows. The following line must be deleted from the `main_unit.lfm` file using a plain text editor:

```
“SynSer.NonBlock = False”
```

Failing to remove this line will cause the compilation to fail.

Note that any rework of this software remains covered by the conditions described in the Licensing section below.

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For more detail, please consult the following page:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

6 References

The N6ST's Azimuthal Map Generator web page:

<https://ns6t.net/azimuth/azimuth.html>

The N1MM+ Logging software - Rotator Control:

<https://n1mmwp.hamdocs.com/setup/interfacing/#n1mm-rotator-control>

GIMP – the GNU Image Manipulation Program:

<https://www.gimp.org/>

Lazarus IDE - The professional Free Pascal RAD IDE:

<https://www.lazarus-ide.org/>

The Idiom Press Rotor-EZ protocol:

(<https://www.hamsupply.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Rotor-EZ-Protocol.pdf>).

The Green Heron RT-21 protocol, in “APPENDIX F”:

https://www.greenheronengineering.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/RT-21_Manual_current.pdf

The Yaesu GS-232A protocol, in “Command List” section:

http://www.radiomanual.info/schemi/YAESU_ACC/Yaesu_GS-232A_user.pdf

The DCU-1 protocol, in “Section 5 Operation of DCU-2”:

<https://static.dxengineering.com/global/images/instructions/hgn-dcu-2.pdf>