

Understanding APRS Packets

WB2OSZ - September 2024

Trying to understand APRS packets can be confusing. Some are fairly obvious but others are really obscure. This introduction will help you decipher these mysterious signals and spot errors. This deals only with the human readable TNC-2 monitoring format. It does not cover AX.25 in HDLC frame format.

My goal is to produce a more approachable introduction rather than telling people to read the protocol specification. This does not cover all of the possible features and is a guide for understanding rather than implementing. For that, you will need to refer to the original APRS protocol specification from 2000 and more than 20 years of addendum documents scattered about. Or you can find the original and the updates merged together [here](#).

There is a section on errors observed. Read this document carefully if you don't want to end up as an example of what not to do.

Contents

- 1 The Standard "TNC-2" Monitoring Format 4
 - 1.1 Source Address 4
 - 1.2 Destination Address (usually device identifier) 5
 - 1.2.1 Destination Address SSID..... 5
 - 1.3 Digipeater Via Path 6
 - 1.3.1 Unused / Used Digipeater Addresses 6
 - 1.3.2 Digipeater Algorithm 8
 - 1.4 Information Part 8
- 2 Packet Types..... 10
 - 2.1 Position Report 10
 - 2.2 MIC-E Position Report 11
 - 2.2.1 MIC-E Device Identifier 12
 - 2.3 Object Report..... 13
 - 2.4 Telemetry 14
 - 2.4.1 Telemetry Data..... 15
 - 2.4.2 Telemetry Metadata..... 15
 - 2.4.3 Telemetry Rambling 16

2.5	Messages	16
2.5.1	Simple Case - RF only	17
2.5.2	More Interesting Case - with APRS-IS.....	17
2.6	Third Party header	19
2.7	Weather.....	20
2.7.1	Complete Weather Report.....	21
2.7.2	Object Reports	21
2.7.3	NWS Bulletins.....	22
2.8	Queries and responses	23
3	Comments	24
3.1	cse/spd - Course and Speed.....	24
3.2	Power, Height, Gain (PHG)	24
3.3	Voice Frequency.....	25
3.4	Altitude.....	26
3.5	DAO - Increased Resolution	27
3.6	Base-91 telemetry	28
3.7	!x! Means Do Not Archive.....	28
3.8	UTF-8 Characters.....	28
4	Examples of Errors Seen.....	30
4.1	Non-APRS format packets on the APRS frequency	30
4.2	Missing System Type Identifier	30
4.3	Obsolete Digipeater Form	32
4.4	Invalid Location	32
4.5	APRS is case-sensitive.....	33
4.6	Kenwood Bug - 0xFF bytes.....	33
4.7	Kenwood Bug - Inappropriate Message Reject.....	34
4.8	Kenwood Bug - Inappropriate Automatic Reply	35
4.9	Incorrect Frequency Specification	36
4.10	Incorrect Power, antenna Height & Gain	37
4.11	Wrong character code for degree symbol.....	37
4.12	DX Report missing mandatory space	38
4.13	Incorrect Query.....	38
4.14	Obsolete Weather Format.....	39
4.15	Used Digipeater Address Not Marked as Used.....	39
4.16	Incorrect Use of RFONLY or NOGATE	40

4.17	OMG!!! Where do I start with this one?	40
4.18	Corruption of the end of packet	42
5	decode_aprs application.....	43

1 The Standard “TNC-2” Monitoring Format

First we need to understand what the standard display format is telling us. There is a variable length address part and an information part.

source > destination : information
source > destination , digipeater1 : information
source > destination , digipeater1, ... , digipeater8 : information

The address part has:

- Source - Origin of the packet.
- Destination - Usually identifies the type of system that generated the packet.
- Digipeater via path - List of digipeaters that a packet may traverse and/or has traversed already.

When sent over the radio, the AX.25 protocol requires that addresses must be:

- A combination of 1 through 6 upper case letters and digits.
- A number in the range of 0 through 15.

We will later see that this naming restriction is relaxed in other contexts.

1.1 Source Address

The Source address contains the name of the station that originally sent the packet. Usually, this will be a ham radio callsign but you will also see descriptive tactical callsigns. An optional number, called the Substation Identifier (SSID), allows up to 16 stations to be operated under the same callsign.

Valid Examples:

- N2GH
- N2GH-1
- N2GH-15

Invalid Examples:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| • N2GH-0 | When SSID is zero, it is not displayed. |
| • N2GH-16 | Maximum is 15. |
| • N2GH -1 | Spaces between the callsign and SSID. |
| • n2gh | Must be upper case. |

Six characters is a limitation of the AX.25 protocol designed in the early 1980s. There are now some countries that have 7 character callsigns. In this case, the full callsign could be put in the comment field for identification purposes.

1.2 Destination Address (usually device identifier)

The name is confusing. In connection-oriented packet radio it is the destination station for point to point communication.

APRS uses a connectionless one-to-many broadcast so this field is used for a different purpose. Most of the time this field will identify the type of system that generated the packet. This is sometimes called the “tocall” field. Calling it something like system type or device id would make more sense.

Common examples:

- APDW18
- APWW11
- APTT4

Often trailing digits will indicate a version. The traditional list of system types is at <http://www.aprs.org/aprs11/tocalls.txt> . This has not been updated since the end of 2021. The authority is now <https://github.com/aprsorg/aprs-deviceid> .

Exercise for the reader: Try looking up the examples above to find out what they mean.

Rules:

- System/device identifiers begin with “AP”.
- Maximum of 6 upper case letters and digits.
- It must not be empty.
- SSID is not used.

Sometimes the literature might have “APRS” in this field. **That is not to be taken literally**; it is a placeholder where you should put the system type.

1.2.1 Destination Address SSID

I wanted this to simply die with dignity until... There is discussion about using this for LoRa APRS to make the initial packet shorter. So, this deserves some discussion.

One of the first APRS trackers https://web.tapr.org/product_docs/Mic-E/mic-edev/mic-e.manual.pdf had 4 DIP switches to set the destination address SSID. The idea was that digipeaters would translate a non-zero destination into a normal digipeater path as shown below:

- [SSID] AX.25 SSID, interpreted as:

0	Use conventional digipeater path, if any
1	WIDE-1 omnidirectional flooding
2	WIDE-2
3	WIDE-3
4	WIDE-4
5	WIDE-5
6	WIDE-6
7	WIDE-7

8	North path
9	South path
10	East path
11	West path
12	North path + WIDE
13	South path + WIDE
14	East path + WIDE
15	West path + WIDE

This was many years before the WIDEn-N form was invented. I always considered this to be obsolete and did not implement it in my digipeater. As an experiment, I handcrafted some APRS packets with 1 or 2 as the destination SSID. NO digipeaters responded to this. So, it looks like most, if not all, application developers have come to the same conclusion and not implemented it.

1.3 Digipeater Via Path

VHF/UHF has a rather limited range if you are not in a good location. We use voice repeaters to extend the range of our voice communications. The repeater listens on one frequency and simultaneously transmits on another.

APRS uses a different type of repeater called a digital repeater (“digipeater”). Rather than using two frequencies the digipeater receives the entire packet, evaluates it, and **might** retransmit it on the same frequency.

You can specify the actual names of digipeaters, but most commonly, you will use aliases, of the form WIDEn-n, so you don’t need to know anything about the network topology. Let’s look at a typical example.

```
WB2OSZ>APDW18,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1:information-part
```

1.3.1 Unused / Used Digipeater Addresses

When a packet is transmitted for the first time, it looks something like this:

```
WB2OSZ>APDW18, WIDE1-1, WIDE2-2 :information-part
```

All of the digipeater addresses are “unused.” There is no asterisk (“*”) character in the digipeater address part so you know that you are hearing the original source station.

Suppose that digipeater N2GH retransmitted this packet. The result would be:

```
WB2OSZ>APDW18, N2GH*, WIDE2-2 :information-part
```

WIDE1-1 had a remaining hop count of 1 so it is discarded and replaced by the digipeater address. The asterisk (“*”) after the digipeater address means that you are hearing that digipeater and the address has been used.

Suppose that digipeater W2UB retransmitted this packet. The result would be:

```
WB2OSZ>APDW18, N2GH, W2UB*, WIDE2-1 :information-part
```

W2UB is followed by * meaning that you are hearing that station and the address is now used. There should be at most one * in the digipeater field. It is implied that all earlier addresses are used. You might see some applications put * after each used address but this is wrong.

Noticed what happened here. WIDE2-2 had a remaining hop count of 2. The hop count is decreased by one so we end up with WIDE2-1 left over.

Suppose that digipeater WA2NRE retransmitted this packet. The result would be:

```
WB2OSZ>APDW18, N2GH, W2UB, WA2NRE* :information-part
```

You are hearing WA2NRE. All of the digipeater addresses have been used up and this can’t be digipeated anymore.

This is what you know if everyone is well behaved:

- The packet originally came from WB2OSZ
- It was retransmitted by N2GH. (Therefore N2GH can hear WB2OSZ.)
- It was retransmitted by W2UB. (Therefore W2UB can hear N2GH.)
- It was retransmitted by WA2NRE. (Therefore WA2NRE can hear W2UB.)

From the AX.25 protocol spec:

The destination station can determine the route the frame took to reach it by examining the address field and use this path to return frames.

The second part might be true in theory but not always in practice. You could have a case where station X can hear station Y but Y can't hear X so the same reverse path might not work.

1.3.2 Digipeater Algorithm

Digipeaters look at the first unused address in the digipeater via path of a packet.

If the first unused address is the same as the digipeater, the address is marked used and the packet is retransmitted.

If the first unused address is an alias for the digipeater, the alias is replaced by the actual name, address is marked used and the packet is retransmitted.

If the first unused address matches the pattern $XXXn-N$, and the prefix $XXXn$ is in the digipeater configuration, the packet might be retransmitted. The processing depends on the value of the SSID, represented as N here.

$N = 0$ Do not digipeat.

$N = 1$ Digipeat and replace generic form with digipeater callsign. Digipeaters should always identify themselves, and mark their address used, so the actual path taken is known.

$N \geq 2$ Decrement N and leave address in path. Leave it marked as unused. Insert digipeater callsign before it and mark digipeater callsign as used.

The list of stations, in the used part of the digi via path (before the "*" character in the human readable monitoring format), reveals the path the packet has taken.

Digipeaters must keep a copy of all packets that it transmitted during the past 30 seconds and not send a duplicate during this time. The duplicate test is based on everything other than the digi via path.

A digipeater should only change the digipeater via path. It should NEVER change the source, destination, or information part. Corrupting the packet would break duplicate suppression.

1.4 Information Part

Everything after the addresses is called the Information Part. The first character is the Data Type Indicator (DTI) which indicates the format of the data following. A few examples:

- `! = / @` Position Report
- `' `` MIC-E Position Report

- ; Object Report
- : "Message"
- T Telemetry Data
- } Third-party traffic

Notice that the only letter defined is "T" for Telemetry Data. All other letters and all digits are invalid.

In general, the following fields are fixed width printable ASCII characters. We will explore the more common types below.

Some of the packet types allow a variable length free form comment at the end. These are not restricted to ASCII. Multi-byte sequences can represent Unicode characters in UTF-8 format.

Carriage return (0x0d) or line feed (0x0a) should not appear at the end. The APRS protocol specification says nothing about their possible appearance and this could cause interoperability issues. IGate stations will remove any CR/LF characters from the end.

2 Packet Types

The packet type is generally (with many special cases) identified by the first character in the Information Part. Some of the most common Data Type Indicators (DTI) are:

- `! = / @` Position Report
- `' `` MIC-E Position Report
- `;` Object Report
- `:` "Message"
- `T` Telemetry Data
- `}` Third-party traffic

2.1 Position Report

This is probably the most common type of packet you will see. A station is sending its own location and other information. There are 4 variations, based on the Data Type Indicator.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| <code>!</code> | no timestamp, no APRS messaging. |
| <code>=</code> | no timestamp, capable of APRS messaging. |
| <code>/</code> | with timestamp, no APRS messaging. |
| <code>@</code> | with timestamp, capable of APRS messaging. |

Timestamps are very rarely used because the current time is implied. Timestamps can be added by the receiving station if the received packets are being logged.

The intention was for the type of Position Report to convey whether the station was capable of APRS messaging.

Example:

```
W1KU-2>APDW16,W1MRA,N3LLO-3*:!4220.00N/07138.00W-PHG2020Northborough MA
```

Let's break this down into the individual components.

W1KU-2 The source station.

APDW16 The packet is generated by Dire Wolf version 1.6.

W1MRA,N3LLO-3* The packet has been retransmitted by W1MRA then again by N3LLO-3. The "*" indicates the station that we are hearing.

! Data Type Indicator (DTI) meaning Position Report, no timestamp, no messaging.

42	Latitude in degrees. Must be exactly 2 digits.
20.00	Latitude in minutes. Must be exactly 2 digits, decimal point, and 2 fractional digits.
N	Hemisphere for latitude. Must be upper case N or S.
/	Symbol Table or Overlay.
071	Longitude in degrees. Note the leading zero. Must be exactly 3 digits.
38.00	Longitude in minutes. Must be exactly 2 digits, decimal point, and 2 fractional digits.
W	Hemisphere for longitude. Must be upper case W or E.
-	Symbol.

The combination of Symbol Table/Overlay and the Symbol represents the type of station and an icon displayed on a map. “/-” represents a house.

You can get a complete list of symbols at <http://www.aprs.org/symbols.html> or by running direwolf with the “-S” command line option.

Anything after that is called the Comment. Certain character combinations can represent optional types of data. The rest is free-form text. We will cover comments, in more detail, in a later section.

2.2 MIC-E Position Report

The MIC-E format was an attempt to make the packet as short as possible. Example:

```
N1JCM-9>TRQP7T,WA1PLE-4*:`c'w| |+>/'"4-}_%<0x0d>
```

The fields are broken down as follows:

N1JCM-9	The Source station name.
TRQP7T	All other packet types have the product identifier here. The MIC-E format Has the latitude and several other bits packed in here.
WA1PLE-4*	Used digipeater address.
`	Both ‘ and ` indicate the MIC-E format.

c'w	Longitude.
I +	Speed and course.
>/	Symbol code & Symbol Table. Car in this case.
`	Message capable device identified by 2 character suffix.
"4-}	Optional Altitude at the beginning of comment field.
	Optional Comment here.
_%	Yaesu FTM-400DR
<0x0d>	Unexpected Carriage Return displayed in hexadecimal. This possibility is not mentioned in the official protocol specification so I would consider it to be a defect that all receiving stations need to work-around.

MIC-E format made the unfortunate design decision to use some ASCII control characters that are not printable. Example:

```
N1YOQ-1>TRUW5X,UNCAN*,WIDE2-1:`c9r<0x1c><0x1f>;#/"5D}Solar Powered Digipeter
```

Some systems will display the unprintable characters in hexadecimal like this: <0x1c> <0x1f> . Others might display some strange non-ASCII characters or nothing at all.

2.2.1 MIC-E Device Identifier

In the previous section we saw that MIC-E format position reports begin with either ' or ` then 8 characters in fixed positions. After this is an optional comment.

According to the documentation, the original MIC-E put a space between the fixed part and the comment:

```
xxxxxxx (space) comment Original MIC-E
```

Sometimes you will see this form, without anything between the fixed part and the comment. In this case, we don't know what generated the packet.

```
xxxxxxx (no space) comment Unknown
```

When Kenwood adopted the MIC-E format, they put a different character before the comment field to identify the equipment type.

xxxxxxx > comment	TH-D7
xxxxxxx] comment	TM-D700

When later models were introduced, an additional character was placed at the end of the comment.

xxxxxxx > comment =	TH-D72
xxxxxxx > comment ^	TH-D74
xxxxxxx > comment &	TH-D75
xxxxxxx] comment =	TM-D710

This is known as the legacy format. For later implementations, a new format is used.

- A prefix of ` indicates a system capable of messaging.
- A prefix of ' indicates not capable of messaging, e.g. a tracker.

At the end we now have a two character suffix for the manufacturer and model. Examples:

xxxxxxx ` comment _ (Yaesu FT2D (messaging capable)
xxxxxxx ` comment _ 0	Yaesu FT3D (messaging capable)
xxxxxxx ` comment _ 3	Yaesu FT5D (messaging capable)
xxxxxxx ' comment 3	Byonics TinyTrack 3 (no messaging)
xxxxxxx ' comment 4	Byonics TinyTrack 4 (no messaging)

Any optional altitude is at the beginning of the comment, after any device identifier prefix and before any suffix. Example:

```
xxxxxxx ` "4-} comment _ (
```

<https://github.com/aprsorg/aprs-deviceid> has machine readable files which list the MIC-E prefix and suffix values.

Rather than hardcoding these rules, application developers are encouraged to read a file at runtime so users can update the device database without waiting for a new software release.

2.3 Object Report

Object Reports are very similar to Position Reports, except you are sending information about something other than yourself. The Data Type Indicator is “;” (semicolon).

Example:

W1OEM-5>APWW11,EKONCT,WA1PLE-4*;;ELYME *190116z4122.06N/07212.98W#145.03
Packet Node ELYME!W98!

Broken into individual parts:

W1OEM-5	Source station.
APWW11	System type that generated the packet.
EKONCT,WA1PLE-4*	We are hearing WA1PLE-4 after packet was repeated by EKONCT.
;	Semicolon is Data Type Indicator.
ELYME	Object name. Any printable ASCII characters including embedded spaces. Object name is case sensitive. Extra spaces must be appended to make field exactly 9 characters.
*	Asterisk ("*") for a live object. Underscore (" _ ") to kill it.
190116z	Timestamp. 19 th day of the month. 01:16 UTC. Here is something really strange. The lack of a specific time is represented as 111111z which is a perfectly valid time. What was the reasoning behind that? Why not make it blank for lack of a timestamp?
4122.06N/07212.98W#	Location and symbol, same as Position Report. Symbol is "DIGI (white center)"
145.03	Looks like a frequency but it is not in standard format so it will not be processed properly. Discussed later.
Packet Node ELYME	Free-form text comment.
!W98!	Adds more resolution to the location. DAO is discussed later. Latitude = 41° 22.06 + 0.0090 N Longitude = 072° 12.98 + 0.0080 W

2.4 Telemetry

Telemetry is broken down into two types:

- The actual data - just numbers.
- Metadata: A description of how to interpret the numbers.

2.4.1 Telemetry Data

Telemetry data is indicated by “T” at the beginning of the information part. After that:

- “#” and a three digit sequence number.
- Up to five numeric analog telemetry values.
- If all five are specified, they can be followed by eight binary values.

The original protocol specification, allowed only values of 000 through 255 which was adequate only for 8-bit analog to digital converters. Later, it was officially relaxed to be 000 thru 999.

Example:

```
N1YOQ-1>APMI0A,UNCAN,WIDE1*,WIDE2-1:T#196,174,000,000,000,000,00000000
```

In practice, longer variable length numbers with decimal points are common. Example:

```
W1HS-11>APMI06,N1LIT-6,WIDE2*:.}N3LLO-2>APRX29,TCPIP,W1HS-  
11*:T#300,38.8,0.0,176.0,55.0,0.0,00000000
```

All of the modern applications that I tested understood this more flexible format. This is a case where the community agreed on an obvious improvement without waiting for the official standard to catch up.

2.4.2 Telemetry Metadata

Just a number, without and context, has little meaning. Is it temperature, solar cell voltage, or river water depth? Information describing data is called metadata.

The names/labels, units, and scaling are sent in a specific format of APRS “message” addressed to the station sending the telemetry data.

```
N1YOQ-1>APMI0A,N3LLO-3,WIDE1*,WIDE2-1::N1YOQ-1  
:UNIT.Volt,None,None,None,None,On,On,On,On,Hi,Hi,Hi,Hi
```

```
N1YOQ-1>APMI0A,N3LLO-3,WIDE1*,WIDE2-1::N1YOQ-1 :EQNS.0,0.075,0,0,0,0,0,0,0,0,0,0,0,0
```

```
N1YOQ-1>APMI0A,N3LLO-3,WIDE1*,WIDE2-1::N1YOQ-1 :BITS.11111111,Telemetry test
```

Receiving stations which want to interpret telemetry values must remember the telemetry metadata and combine it with the actual data before using it.

In this case, telemetry data $174 * \text{scaling factor } 0.075 = 13.050 \text{ Volt}$.

There was not a PARM in this case, so there is no name for the value such as battery voltage.

Some implementations will simply send the number “13.05” rather than scaling it to an 8 bit integer.

2.4.3 Telemetry Rambling

Does anyone know the history behind the metadata format? It would have been more obvious and simpler to use something like:

- T# for data
- TPARM for names/labels of values
- TUNIT for units
- TEQNS for scaling
- TBITS for bit sense (is 1 or 0 true)

If someone knows the history behind the decision to use more complicated special case of “messages” addressed to the telemetry station, please tell me.

There is another form of telemetry that appears in the Comment so more types of information can be conveyed by a single packet. It is described in the Comment section.

For more in depth discussion of APRS Telemetry, see

<https://github.com/wb2osz/direwolf/blob/master/doc/APRS-Telemetry-Toolkit.pdf>

2.5 Messages

The term “message” has a very specific meaning in APRS. It will cause confusion if you use that term to refer to something else.

- Position Reports are not “messages.”
- Object Reports are not “messages.”
- Status Reports are not “messages.”
- Weather Reports are not “messages.”
- Telemetry Data are not “messages.”

While most APRS transmissions are general broadcasts to everyone, it is also possible to direct a “message” to a particular destination.

2.5.1 Simple Case - RF only

If I wanted to send a message to N2GH the packet would look like this:

```
WB2OSZ-7>APK003::N2GH :Hi, Dave!{001
```

Broken into parts:

WB2OSZ-7>	Source Address.
APK003	Device Identifier.
:	End of addresses.
:	Data Type Indicator for Message.
N2GH	Addressee + enough spaces to make total of 9 characters.
:	Separator.
Hi, Dave!	Message Text. May include UTF-8.
{001	Message ID.

The optional Message Identifier has { followed by 1 to 5 alphanumeric characters. When a Message ID is included, the receiving station sends an acknowledgement that the message was received. Generally the sender will send several times until an ack is received or the maximum number of attempts is exceeded. The user should be notified whether the message was delivered successfully.

The other station responds with:

```
N2GH>APK003::WB2OSZ-7 :ack001
```

The acknowledgement is a special case of message where the content is lower case “ack” followed by the message id.

There is also a newer form of message identifiers with “}” in the middle, such as “{ab}cd”. Details might be included in a future revision.

2.5.2 More Interesting Case - with APRS-IS

When the addressee can’t be reached over the local RF network, the packet can travel through an IGate station, across the APRS Internet Service (APRS-IS), and get retransmitted by another IGate station.

It is also possible to send messages to servers on the Internet. In this case, the “addressee” rules are relaxed.

Example: Send message to the "WHO-IS" server:

- (1) WB2OSZ-7>APK003,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1::WHO-IS :W1AW{0<0x0d>
- (2) WB2OSZ-5>APDW17,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1:}WHO-IS>APJIW4,TCPIP,WB2OSZ-5*::WB2OSZ-7 :ack0
- (3) WB2OSZ-5>APDW17,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1:}WHO-IS>APJIW4,TCPIP,WB2OSZ-5*::WB2OSZ-7 :C/ARRL HQ OPERATORS CLUB/CT/United States{1012
- (4) WB2OSZ-7>APK003,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1::WHO-IS :ack1012<0x0d>

There is a lot going on here.

First packet - original message from WB2OSZ-7 to WHO-IS:

WB2OSZ-7	Source of message.
APK003	Device id. You know how to look this up.
WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1	Typical digipeater via path.
:	"." means "APRS message."
WHO-IS :	"Addressee" -- Where the message is being sent to. The field must be exactly 9 characters and followed by ":" so Spaces might need to be inserted. Note that "IS" is letters "I" and "S", not fifteen.
W1AW	Message body -- A callsign.
{0	Message id 0, meaning an acknowledgement is expected. "{" followed by 1 to 5 alphanumeric characters.

Important point: The addressee is often the callsign and SSID of a radio station, but it doesn't need to be. The rules are more relaxed for the addressee because it could be more than 6 characters and/or have an alphanumeric SSID.

Next, we see an acknowledgement that WHO-IS received message id 0. The third party wrapper (crossed out below) needs to be removed by the receiving station before parsing the remainder.

~~WB2OSZ-5>APDW17,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1:}WHO-IS>APJIW4,TCPIP,WB2OSZ-5*::WB2OSZ-7 :ack0~~

WHO-IS	Source of message.
APJIW4	System id.
TCPIP,WB2OSZ-5*	Added by IGate.
:	"." means APRS "message."
WB2OSZ-7 :	Addressee with a space to make 9 characters. Terminated with another ":".
ack0	Lower case "ack" is an acknowledgement for the following message id.

The WHO-IS server looks up the callsign and returns information. Again, the receiving station must remove the third-party wrapper before processing the "message."

WB2OSZ-5>APDW17,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1:}WHO-IS>APJIW4,TCPIP,WB2OSZ-5*::WB2OSZ-7
:C/ARRL HQ OPERATORS CLUB/CT/United States{1012

WHO-IS	Source of message.
APJIW4	System Identifier = jAPRSIgate
TCPIP,WB2OSZ-5*	Added by IGate station.
:	“:” means APRS “message.”
WB2OSZ-7 :	Message “addressee,” blank padded to 9 characters, then “:”.
C/ARRL HQ OPERATORS CLUB/CT/United States	Response to query.
{1012	Message identifier.

Finally, the original station acknowledges the receipt of the information.

WB2OSZ-7>APK003,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1::WHO-IS :ack1012<0x0d>

WB2OSZ-7	Source station.
APK003	Source device id.
WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1	Typical digipeater via path.
:	“:” for “message.”
WHO-IS :	Addressee, blank padded to 9 characters, and “:”.
ack1012	Acknowledge message id 1012.

The astute reader will question why this part, with a data type indicator of “}” was left out of the explanation.

WB2OSZ-5>APDW17,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1:}

That is the subject for our next section.

2.6 Third Party header

Third party headers are used to **transmit a packet on behalf of someone else**. I’ve only seen it used by IGate stations relaying a packet from APRS-IS to RF, but it is more general and could be used in other situations.

Perhaps this is best understood with an example. In the previous section, we saw how the station WHO-IS wants to send a message to WB2OSZ-7. The APRS-IS system knows that station has been heard recently by IGate WB2OSZ-7. APRS-IS forwards the message to this IGate.

It looks like this coming from APRS-IS:

WHO-IS>APJIW4,TCPIP*,qAC,AE5PL-JF::WB2OSZ-7 :C/ARRL HQ OPERATORS CLUB/CT/United States{1012

First, the IGate station replaces the via path so it looks like this:

```
WHO-IS>APJIW4,TCPIP,WB2OSZ-5*::WB2OSZ-7 :C/ARRL HQ OPERATORS CLUB/CT/United States{1012
```

The via path must contain **exactly**:

TCPIP	meaning it came from the Internet and must not go back again. An RF to APRS-IS IGate must not forward a packet with TCPIP in the path.
WB2OSZ-5	the IGate name.
*	both addresses have been “used.”

It must be exactly like that for the whole system to work correctly. **No more. No less.**

That can’t go directly on the air for two reasons:

- “WHO-IS” is not a valid AX.25 address because the SSID is letters.
- The source address field must be the station putting the packet on the air.

The solution is to wrap (or encapsulate) the desired packet with a third party packet. The result, sent over the air, is:

```
WB2OSZ-5>APDW17,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1:}WHO-IS>APJIW4,TCPIP,WB2OSZ-5*::WB2OSZ-7 :C/ARRL HQ OPERATORS CLUB/CT/United States{1012
```

The processing of this type of packet depends on the type of station that receives it.

- (1) A **digipeater** only looks at the first via path (before the “}”) and doesn’t need to have any knowledge of third party packets.
- (2) An **application** that wants to interpret the information part of the packet must first remove the encapsulation and process what is left over.
- (3) An **RF-to-IS IGate** first removes the encapsulation and operates on the rest. If the remaining via path contains TCPIP, the packet must not be forwarded. This prevents loops.

It’s a little more complicated but we will save that for another day. You might find this helpful to understand more about APRS Internet Gateways (“IGates”).

<https://github.com/wb2osz/direwolf-doc/blob/main/Successful-APRS-IGate-Operation.pdf>

2.7 Weather

2.7.1 Complete Weather Report

Many hams have home weather stations and share the data over APRS. Example:

```
W1TG2>APU25N,UNCAN*:@091842z4256.20N/07049.42W_310/004g015t081r000p033P002h54b10001/ - Hampton, NH Wx<0x0d>
```

After the usual Source Address, Product Identifier, and digipeater path, we have:

@	Position Report with timestamp
091842z	Timestamp
4256.20N/07049.42W_	Same as other Position Report, but the “_” weather station symbol is a special case. Rather than a normal Comment, weather data is expected in a certain format.
310/004	Wind Direction (degrees clockwise from north), Wind Speed (knots)
g015t081r000p033P002h54b10001	Weather Data - same as wxnow.txt format produced by many home weather stations so conversions are not needed.
/ - Hampton, NH Wx<0x0d>	Comment

This is a special case of the Position Report when the symbol is “_” for weather station.

When the weather data is decoded, it comes out to be:

wind 4.6 mph, direction 310, gust 15, temperature 81, rain 0.00 in last hour, rain 0.33 in last 24 hours, rain 0.02 since midnight, humidity 54, barometer 29.54

2.7.2 Object Reports

Object Reports are much like Position Reports. The main difference is that you are sending information about some entity other than yourself.

A simple case would be advertising land marks, resources, or a local voice repeater so someone traveling through would know about it. If constructed properly, some APRS capable radios will allow you to set your voice frequency to information in the packet.

Besides having a single point location, objects can also cover regions defined by polygons.

Here is a more interesting, short duration, Object representing a Flash Flood warning during a heavy rain storm. It should be all one line but the page is not wide enough.

```
WZOC-4>APN20H,W1MRA,WA1PLE-4*:.}
```

```
GYXFFW>APRS,TCPIP,WZ0C-4*:  
;GYXFFWNqA*140145z4443.50NF07012.30Ww FLASH_FLOOD  
}j0IAdgJ`0T:5P5IAd{DNqAA<0x0d>
```

```
WZ0C-4>APN20H,W1MRA,WB2OSZ-5*;}BOXTOR>APRS,TCPIP,WZ0C-  
4*;;BOXTORLTA*132230z4158.80N\07125.20Wt033/015 TORNADO  
}a0IV,KOLQPTbObMcLcJdGV,{DLtAA<0x0d>
```

The first part is added by an APRS-IS to RF IGate station.
The rest is an object report.

The corresponding map display is in the next section.

2.7.3 NWS Bulletins

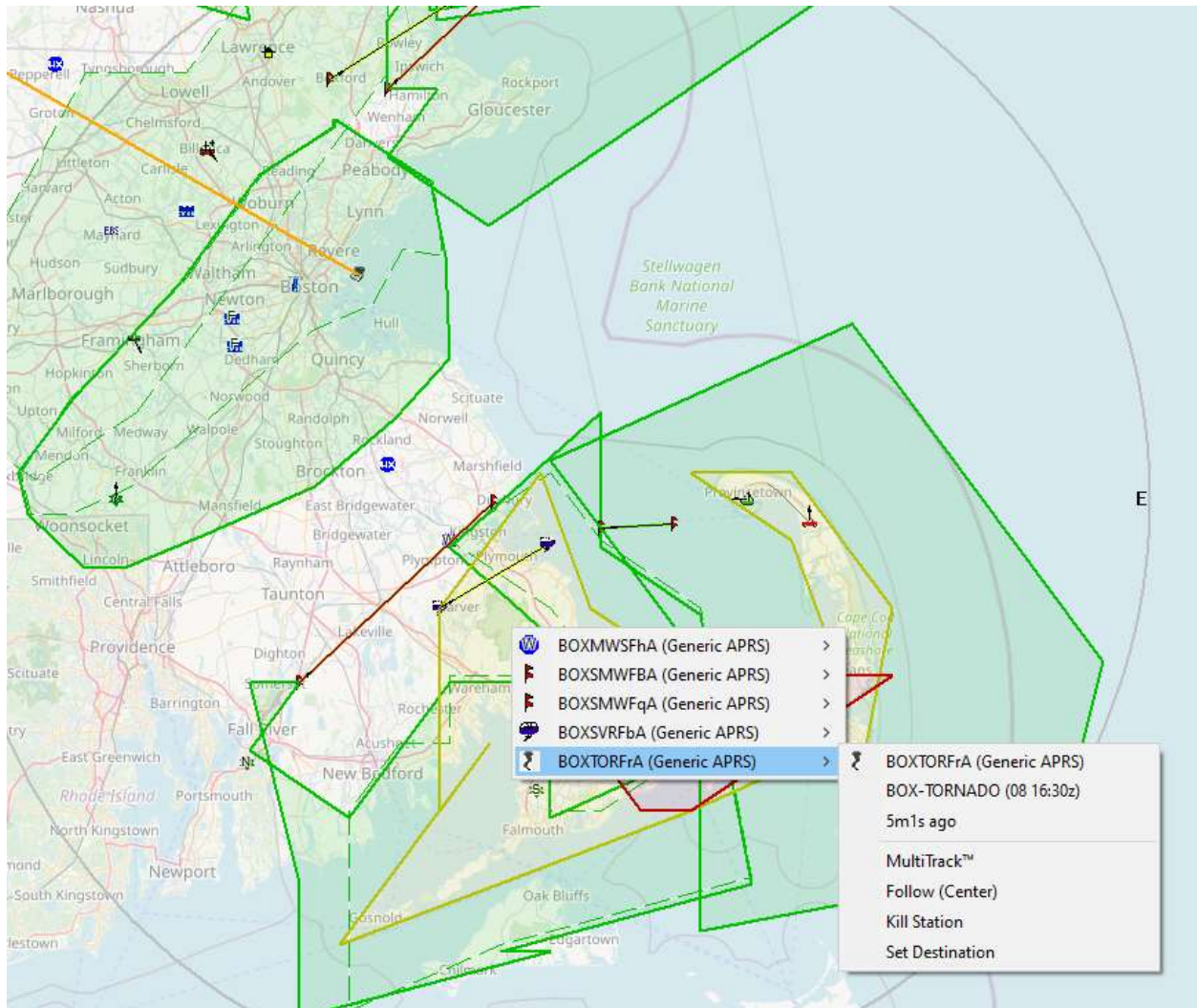
When the Addressee of a “Message” begins with “NWS” it is a National Weather Service Bulletin.

This is another special case of “messages” where the “addressee” is not a specific station. Receiving systems will usually have an option specifying what prefixes it wants to process in addition to the station name.

Example:

```
WZ0C-4>APN20H,W1MRA,WB2OSZ-5*;}BOXTOR>APRS,TCPIP,WZ0C-4*::NWS-WARN  
:132230z,TORNADO,MAC005,MAC021,RIC007{DLtAA<0x0d>
```

Some applications, such as APRSISCE32 seen below, will display the regions impacted.



2.8 Queries and responses

Maybe in the next version.

3 Comments

Position Reports (including MIC-E) and Object Reports can have free form text comments.

APRS was not designed to add new attributes in a consistent way. As a result, we see numerous hacks where character strings, with certain patterns, have special meanings.

3.1 cse/spd - Course and Speed

cse/spd

The course is degrees (001-360) clockwise from north.

Speed is in knots. Three digits, leading zeros as needed.

Zeros, spaces, or periods can be used if values are not known or relevant.

If used, this must appear immediately after the location and symbol, before any frequency or general comments. Technically it is called a data extension.

3.2 Power, Height, Gain (PHG)

Transmitter power, combined with antenna height and gain, can give a very rough approximation of range.

It is composed of the 3 upper case letters “PHG” and 4 digits.

```
!DDMM.mmN/DDMM.mmW#PHG5360 ...comments...
|           |           | | | |
|           |           | | | | _____ Omni (Direction of max gain)
|           |           | | | | _____ Ant gain in dBi
|           |           | | | _____ Height = log2(HAAT/10)
LAT         LONG       | | | _____ Power = SQR(P)
|           |           | | _____ Power-Height-Gain identifier *
|           |           | _____ # is symbol for digipeater
```

There are only 10 possible values for each of these fields as follows:

Digit	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		equation
Power	0	1	4	9	16	25	36	49	64	81	watts	sqrt (P)
Height	10	20	40	80	160	320	640	1280	2560	5120	feet	log2(H/10)
Gain	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	dBi	
Direction	Omni	25	90	135	180	225	270	315	360	-	degrees	D/45

Height is above average terrain (HAAT), not above sea level.

Direction must always be specified, even if it is omnidirectional (0).

If used, this must appear immediately after the location and symbol, before any frequency or general comments. Technically it is called a data extension.

Since course/speed and PHG are both data extensions, using both in the same packet is not allowed. Just because it is invalid, that doesn't stop people from doing it.

Occasionally, you might see an extra digit followed by a "/" character.

```
N8VIM>BEACON,N3LLO-3,W1MHL*,WIDE2:!4240.85N/07133.99W_PHG72604/ Pepperell, MA.  
WX. 442.9+ PL100<0x0d>
```

The extra digit represents the number of beacons transmitted per hour, 4 in this example. This can be used to calculate how reliably that station can be heard.

This hack, which was added later, violates the rule that data extensions must be 7 characters long.

3.3 Voice Frequency

People will often want to advertise the voice frequency where they are listening. APRS-equipped radios usually have a TUNE or QSY button that will switch the voice frequency to the frequency specified in the selected packet. It is imperative that precise formatting rules are followed so the radios can parse the frequency specification.

This is just a simplified explanation which covers the most common cases. The APRS Protocol Specification version 1.2, chapter, 18 has all the details for all the less common cases.

This must appear at the beginning of the free form part of the comment text, after any course/speed or PHG. The form must appear exactly as follows.

Frequency:	999	3 digits representing MHz.
	.	Decimal point.
	999	3 digits representing kHz.
	MHz	Exactly those letters.

This can optionally be followed by a CTCSS tone and/or transmit offset.

Tone:	(space)	Space separator.
	T	Upper case letter T.
	999	Integer part of tone. Leading 0 if needed to make 3 digits.
TX offset:	(space)	Space separator.
	+ or -	Plus or minus.
	999	Offset in tens of KHz so 600 kHz would be "060".

Here are a few people who know how to do it correctly.

```
W1STJ-9>T2TU4Q,N1SFT,WIDE1,UNCAN,WIDE2*:`c8um^9j/`"4l}146.685MHz T100 -060_1
```

```
KB1TOY-9>TRRY9U,W1MHL*,WIDE2-1:`c_"l <0x1c>j/` 449.075MHz T088 -500_%
```

```
W1GBH>TRRQ5Z,WA1PLE-4,WIDE1*:`ca0l7Wj/`"3r}146.655MHz T088 -060_%
```

```
N1EZ-7>P0PPPP,N3LLO-3,WIDE1*,WIDE2-1:`vX<0x1c>l <0x1c>[/>"3r}146.685MHz T100 -060^
```

Actually, these are all MIC-E format, from Yaesu and Kenwood. It is quite likely that the radio automatically generated the proper format.

For a voice repeater, the frequency can be in the first 7 characters of the object name to make it stand out more. The other 2 characters should be chosen to make the name unique. It really doesn't matter if there are global conflicts because this is locally useful information you would get over the radio.

```
EKONCT>BEACON:;146.730CT*111111z4134.84N/07206.31Wr146.730MHz T156 R30m ECTN 9P  
DAILY RASON
```

In this case we have "R30m" meaning the repeater has a range of about 30 miles. **Allegedly one of the major brand APRS capable radios was not able to extract the frequency from the object name so it should also appear in the comment field.**

These are only the most common cases. The complete specification can be found in chapter 18 of the APRS protocol specification version 1.2 found [here](#).

3.4 Altitude

An optional altitude can be added anywhere in the comment field. It must have exactly this format with upper case "A" and six digits:

```
/A=123456
```

The number is in feet (0.3048 meter) above mean sea level. Applications should convert to local units for display.

There is a surprisingly large number of places on the Earth's surface that are below sea level. The MIC-E format allows a negative altitude but the /A= format does not allow that.

Many applications have added this obvious trivial enhancement. The altitude can also be expressed as a minus sign and exactly five digits to maintain a consistent total width.

/A=-12345

If you encounter an application that does not recognize this form, please encourage the author to add this simple enhancement. If an APRS Working Group is ever resurrected, we should try to get this into the official standard.

3.5 DAO - Increased Resolution

APRS latitude and longitude coordinates have the resolution of 1/100 of a minute. This is on the order of 10 meters on the ground. You can add two more digits of precision xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

```
N83MZ>T2TQ5U,WA1PLE-4*:`c.l+@&'/"G:} KJ6TMS|!:&0'p|!w#f!|3
MIC-E, Small Aircraft (original primary symbol), Byonics TinyTrack3, In Service
N 42 41.5502, W 071 18.8076, 283 km/h (176 MPH), course 210, alt 1764 m (5787 ft)
Seq=25, A1=470, A2=625
KJ6TMS
```

Broken down:

N83MZ	Original sender of packet. That is not a ham callsign. It turns out to be an aircraft registration.
T2TQ5U	Latitude 42° 41.55 (note two decimal places)
WA1PLE-4*	We heard this digipeater.
`c.l+@&'/"	Longitude 71° 18.80 (note two decimal places) Course 210, speed 283 km/h.
"G:}	Altitude 1764 meters.
KJ6TMS	Comment with ham call sign of sender.
!:&0'p	Base-91 telemetry (see next section). This should be after the free text part of the comment.
!w#f!	Add 0.0002 to latitude. Add 0.0076 to longitude. This should be after the free text part of the comment.
3	TinyTrack 3

“!” 3 characters “!” provides about two more digits of location precision, giving resolution on the order of 100 cm.

This is described in chapter 5 of the APRS protocol specification version 1.2 found [here](#).

3.6 Base-91 telemetry

Using the same example as the previous section, let's focus in on this:

|!:&0'p| Base-91 telemetry.

Rather than having a separate Telemetry Data packet, it can be embedded after the free text part of a comment. The format is:

| two-thru-seven pairs of characters |

Each pair of characters represents a number in base-91 notation. Decimal values of 0 through 8280 can be represented. The first is the sequence number. If a seventh pair is present, the number represents 8 values of one bit each.

In this example, we get :

- Sequence number = 25
- Analog value 1 = 470
- Analog value 2 = 625

This is described in chapter 13 of the APRS protocol specification version 1.2 found [here](#).

3.7 !x! Means Do Not Archive

Any packet containing this string in the comment or message text field should not be archived by any of the APRS-IS databases. It won't show up on aprs.fi. It applies to positions, objects, status, and messages.

The x is a literal lower case x, not a placeholder for any alphanumeric character.

3.8 UTF-8 Characters

Originally, APRS was created to use only the 7-bit ASCII character set. As it gained more international usage, it became painfully obvious that needed more letters than the Latin alphabet. Other special characters, such as the degree sign are very useful.

Most of the modern APRS applications handle UTF-8 properly. Here is an example of how I'm trying to raise awareness.

WB2OSZ-5>APDW17:!4237.14NS07120.83W#PHG7140 Did you know that APRS comments and messages can contain UTF-8 characters? アマチュア無線

4 Examples of Errors Seen

Unfortunately, it's not uncommon to see improperly constructed packets. Sometimes this is due to defective software or improper configuration. More often, beginners, without proper mentoring, don't know the proper way to do things. The official APRS documentation is scattered so it is not always easy to find an answer.

direwolf will often detect errors and provide an explanation. My intention is not to pick on certain people; I'm just using these real world examples as teaching examples so others can learn and avoid the same mistakes.

If you see others making these mistakes, be a good "Elmer" and help them improve their operating skills.

4.1 Non-APRS format packets on the APRS frequency

Sometimes people throw random stuff out there without even trying to make it look like APRS. The first character of the information part should be the APRS data type indicator.

```
K1EQX-7>APMI03,N1LIT-6,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:NFMRA// K2LM@nycap.rr.com<0x20>
```

```
K1FFK>APMI03,W1MRA,UNCAN,WIDE2*:NOBARC.org // K2LM@nycap.rr.com // N1ATP.com
```

```
N1HRK-2>BEACON,K1RK-1,WA1PLE-4*:KPC3+ TRACKER N1HRK@ARRL.NET<0x0d>
```

```
W1IMD>BEACON,KQ1L-8,AB1OC-10,WIDE2*:W1IMD HIRAM, ME<0x0d>
```

```
W2AIQ-1>BEACON,EKONCT,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:Bi-Directional-I-Gate CODE Enhanced-Re-Tooled  
for Speed
```

```
WA2GUG-15>ID,K1FFK,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*,WIDE1-1:WA2GUG-15/R DISABL/D *-1/B<0x0d>
```

```
WZOC-4>ID,KB1EMU-10,WIDE1,W1MHL*,WIDE2:WZOC-4 BBS [MAYNARD, MA]
```

It seems, to me, that if you are transmitting AX.25 UI frames on the APRS frequency, you should make at least some attempt to construct a valid APRS packet. In general, if you are talking about yourself, use a Position Report. If talking about something else, use an Object Report.

4.2 Missing System Type Identifier

With the exception of MIC-E format, the destination field should contain the system identifier of the form APxxxx to indicate the type of device or application that generated the packet. When you see “APRS” in documentation examples, it is just a placeholder for the actual value. We don’t know the type of software being used for these stations.

```
KR2C-1>APRS,WA1PLE-4*,WIDE2-1:}KK7MGJ-7>APWW11,TCPIP,KR2C-1*::W2ILT :N:HOTG  
Greetings from AZ!
```

```
W1YK-1>APRS,WIDE:!4216.47B/07148.43W#PHG5350 W2, WIDE1-1, WPIWA<0x0d>
```

Using BEACON is wasting air time without conveying useful information. If it is experimental, APZ should be used.

```
NE1CU-10>BEACON,KB1AEV-15,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:@221226z4114.44N/07300.72WrMilford CT.  
PS=12.5V, Shack=85.2F
```

These have empty destination (device id) fields. How could that happen?!?!?

```
KB1EZZ-9>,W1IMD,UNCAN,WIDE2*:!4413.87N\06936.24Wc205/041/A=000093EMA 902  
COMMAND POST
```

```
VE9FPG-2>,W1LH-9,KQ1L-1,UNCAN,WIDE3*:!4612.01NS06710.74W#PHG5460/W3 CRABBE  
MTM,NB MARCAN UIDIGI
```

```
W1BRI-7>,W1MRA*,WIDE2-1:!4217.68N/07130.31W&267/000/A=000204W1BRI vai AT_D878UV  
PLUS
```

I wrote to one of them and he is using an Anytone radio. **The manufacturer should hardcode the destination field with the assigned system type identifier. Instead Anytone allows the user to set this.** Documentation is nearly non-existent.

Here someone put a callsign in the destination field. Why? Was it an attempt to direct the packet to a specific station? Based on the comment it looks like it might be another Anytone radio.

```
KC2DSH-9>N2MH-15,EKONCT,N3LLO-  
3,WIDE2*:!4041.10N/07428.38W[274/001/A=000132KC2DSH-Anytone-APRS
```

WIDE1-1 should be in the digipeater via path, not in the destination field.

```
WA2NAN>WIDE1-1,VE3PGC,VE2PCQ-3,WIDE2,MTWASH,N3LLO-3*,WIDE2-1:;WA2NAN-1  
*062019z4414.41N/07505.66W#FINE, N.Y. DIGI<0x0d>
```

This also has an abusive digipeater path. The packet already went through at least 4 digipeaters and still has an unused address. RF users don’t care about a digipeater 350 miles (560 km) away. This is just unnecessarily clogging up the network.

4.3 Obsolete Digipeater Form

Most often the initial digipeater field uses generic digipeater addresses like WIDEn-n. Notice that just “WIDE” is used here:

```
W1YK-1>APRS,WIDE:!4216.47B/07148.43W#PHG5350 W2, WIDE1-1, WPIWA<0x0d>
```

```
KQ1L-1>APNU19,WIDE:!4414.82NN07025.15W#PHG5730/KQ1L-1 Streaked Mountain, Buckfield, Me.
```

```
K2TGX>APW275,W1MHL*,WIDE:=4156.43N/07111.75WyPHG5260/WinAPRS 2.7.5 - MABRINORTON -275-<630><0x0d>
```

```
N1IQI>WIDE,W1MV-1*,WIDE:=4202.59N/07050.08WNrfn Pembroke,ma NTS {UIV32N}<0x0d>
```

Using simply “WIDE” without any numbers has been obsolete for about 20 years. Unfortunately there are still many websites, which haven’t been updated for decades, offering bad advice. Newcomers are told to do something that won’t work.

4.4 Invalid Location

```
K2VUD-1>APK102,WA1PLE-13*,WIDE2-1:=09H6.00N/134E9.00p_306/001g t025r000p000P h55b10249KDvs<0x0d>
```

Let’s break it down:

=	Position Report.
09H6.00	We were expecting: 2 digits for degrees latitude. 2 digits for minutes. Where did “H6” come from? Decimal point. 2 digits for hundredths of minutes.
N	Hemisphere.
/	
134E9.00	We were expecting: 3 digits for degrees longitude. 2 digits for minutes. Where did “E9” come from? Decimal point. 2 digits for hundredths of minutes.

p	Expecting E or W for hemisphere. Where did “p” come from?
—	Symbol for weather.
306.....	Weather data.

Here is an example which was probably hand coded.

```
W1YK-1>APRS,WIDE:!4216.47B/07148.43W#PHG5350 W2, WIDE1-1, WPIWA<0x0d>
```

Here we find “B” rather than the expected “N” for hemisphere so the location is not valid. This was most likely a typographical error. Letters B and N are adjacent on the keyboard.

```
4216.47B
```

4.5 APRS is case-sensitive

The APRS specification requires upper case letters for the hemisphere.

```
N1EOE>APN391,N1NCI-3*,WIDE2-1:!4216.95n/07243.20w#phg6230/ Easthampton MA<0x0d>
```

We have two different issues here:

- The hemispheres are lower case n and w. These must be upper case.
- PHG must also be upper case so this is treated like part of the free form text.

4.6 Kenwood Bug - 0xFF bytes

Sometimes, apparently at random, the Kenwood TM-D710 will insert a bunch of 0xff characters on the packet.

```
W1SHS-9>4R1X9U,W1MRA,WB2OSZ-
5*:`c0<0x1d>mIL>/]"4T}<0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff>
<0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff>
ff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff>=<0x0d>
```

```
VA2RN-9>T3PS0Q,KA2QYE-10,WIDE1,K1EQX-7,UNCAN,WIDE3*:`eJ1!"&>/]"4h}<0xff><0xff><
0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff>
><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0xff><0
xff><0xff><0xff><0xff>=<0x0d>
```


Here we have a weather bulletin:

```
WZOC-4>APN20H,WA1PLE-4,WIDE1*,WIDE2-1:}BOXMWW>APRS,TCPIP,WZOC-4*::NWS-WARN
:091215z,Storm Warning,ANZ236{100AA<0x0d>
```

Three stations respond with a message reject.

```
K2VUD-1>APK102,WA1PLE-4,WIDE1*,WIDE2-1::BOXMWW :rej3<0x0d>
```

```
AB1OC-10>APK102,WIDE1-1,WIDE3-3::BOXMWW :rej3<0x0d>
```

```
WA1PLE-4>APK102,WIDE2-1::BOXMWW :rej3<0x0d>
```

“rej” means the receiving station is unable to receive the message. For instance, an APRS-equipped radio might have a limited amount of incoming message memory and it is full.

This is wrong because the “ack” or “rej” reply should happen ONLY for a “message” addressed to that station. They should never be sent in response to a bulletin.

Where did they get the message id 3 from? Why not 100AA?

4.8 Kenwood Bug - Inappropriate Automatic Reply

Kenwood has a feature which allows you to send an automatic replay (an addition to any ACK) to messages addressed to your station. It is possible to configure responses to only specific stations or to a wild carded name.

Bob WB4APR had this to say about it, “Auto Reply is only for passing along special information to anticipated message senders when the operator may temporarily not be able to respond. It should not be left on for routine operations in most cases because it adds unnecessary network load. The sending station will always get an ACK, and this is sufficient to know that the message was delivered in most cases.”

Consider this observed example: BOXMWW and N1SFT send bulletins:

```
WZOC-4>APN20H,W1MRA,WA1PLE-4*::}BOXMWW>APRS,TCPIP,WZOC-4*::NWS-WARN
:091215z,Storm Warning,ANZ236{100AA<0x0d>
```

```
WZOC-4>APN20H,W1MRA*,WIDE2-1:}N1SFT>APWW11,TCPIP,WZOC-4*::BLN0 :NEW ENGL.
FUSION GROUP TECHNET SUNDAYS 3PM, WIRES-X RM 28941<0x0d>
```

Kenwood radios incorrectly send an auto reply to bulletins. Imagine if every station did this in response to bulletins!

AB1OC-10>APK102,WIDE1-1,WIDE3-3::BOXMWW :AA:Message Recvd. by AB1OC-10<0x0d>

AB1OC-10>APK102,WIDE1-1,WIDE3-3::N1SFT :AA:Message Recvd. by AB1OC-10<0x0d>

Automatic replies should only be sent when messages are addressed to the specific station.

In his musings, Bob WB4APR concluded, "Auto-Answer messages are SPAM to the network in most cases."

4.9 Incorrect Frequency Specification

Sometimes you might want to advertise that you are listening to some voice frequency. Many will put this into the comment field. Most people do it wrong, probably because they are unaware of the standard. We covered the correct format earlier. All of these are wrong.

K1ASM-9>EB2Q7Z,EKONCT,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:`d_<0x1c>m6^k/]"47}[scanning]Monitoring
146.520=

K1RBC-9>T3TT5U,W1IMD,WIDE1,UNCAN,WIDE2*:`c<0x1e>n|\>/"5q}Monitoring
146.520_%<0x0d>

K1RTA-3>TQUV2X,W1SGL-2,WA1PLE-4*:`bYBl <0x1c>k/"4%}Russ on 146.520 in a 14 Ram and
FTM-400XDR_%<0x0d>

K5HIP-7>TRQP8Z,K2RVW,WIDE1,K1FFK,W1MRA*,WIDE2*:`e1rm_D>/"66}listening
146.52_0<0x0d>

KC1DDH-9>TRQS7U,W1MRA*:`c;(l)Dj/'144.390 PL100_%<0x0d>

KC1HHK-9>T2QS5S,WA1PLE-4,WIDE1*:`cYvm!EE/"5n}KC1HHK - PAUL 146.67_%<0x0d>

KE5BM-9>TQSY7S,W1SGL-2,W1MHL,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:`b(.m,&>/"3r}Black VW Passat 146.520 &
VA_1<0x0d>

N1EZ-1>APWW11,AB1OC-10,WIDE1,W1MRA*,WIDE2:@021909h4255.25N/07134.38W|146.685
in Shack<0x0d>

N1NW>T1ST8T,EKONCT,W1MRA,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:`d^9l <0x1c>#/JN1NW 146.730 TONE
156.7<0x0d>

This is close, but there should be spaces between the frequency, tone, and offset.

```
W1BST>APTT4,W1IMD,WIDE2,UNCAN*,NH3-  
1:!4341.89NL07109.20W#PHG3660147.030MHzT088+060EL#875273 77F 13.7V
```

Refer to earlier section on detailed explanation.

This is very important because some APRS-equipped radios will parse the frequency, offset, tone specification, in the selected position or object report, and allow you to set your voice frequency with the touch of a button. Some applications will parse this information and present it to the user.

Improperly formatted data breaks that feature.

4.10 Incorrect Power, antenna Height & Gain

PHG is pretty easy but I've still seen a few people mess it up. There are 3 things to remember:

The protocol specification clearly states that any optional PHG is specified, it should appear at the very beginning of the comment, before the free text part, for the greatest compatibility. Some applications might recognize it anywhere, but officially it needs to be first.

Some applications might recognize PHG in the middle of the comment, but the APRS Specification clearly states it must be immediately after the location and symbol. An application written with strict adherence to the standard would treat PHG as part of the free form comment text.

```
UNCAN>APOT30:!4258.99N/07135.29W# 10.8V 98F PHG37306/ N1PA-Mt Uncanoonuc Digi
```

It should be rearranged like this for greatest compatibility:

```
UNCAN>APOT30:!4258.99N/07135.29W#PHG37306/ 10.8V 98F N1PA-Mt Uncanoonuc Digi
```

This one has only 3 digits after PHG. This is not valid. It also appears after course/speed so, even if it had the correct format, it might not be recognized by some applications.

```
KE1IU-9>APTT4,WB2OSZ-5*,WIDE2-  
1:/152720h4236.54N/07118.94W>251/059/PHG404/KE1IUMark@gmail.com
```

4.11 Wrong character code for degree symbol

Here are two examples of using the wrong character code for the degree symbol.

W1TG-1>APU25N,WA1PLE-4,W1MRA*,WIDE2:>232322zDX: W1SGL-2 41.41.93N 70.18.20W
89.5 miles 162<0xf8> 19:14<0x0d>

KG5KTN-1>APWW11,W1WQM,WIDE1,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:>FN42kw/-DX: KQ1L-8 28.7mi
48<0x0b0> 01:23 4313.42N 07041.56W<0x20>

ASCII does not include a degree symbol. Different people came up with their own (incorrect) work-arounds. The first example used 0xf8, from Microsoft code page 437, and the second used 0xb0, from ISO Latin 1. Both are wrong.

When using a character which is not in ASCII, the correct approach is to use UTF-8 encoding. The correct encoding for the degree symbol ° is the two byte sequence 0xc2 0xb0.

4.12 DX Report missing mandatory space

Here there should be a space between “/-” and “DX”.

KG5KTN-1>APWW11,W1WQM,WIDE1,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:>FN42kw/-DX: KQ1L-8 28.7mi
48<0x0b0> 01:23 4313.42N 07041.56W<0x20>

A status report, with grid square, requires a mandatory space after the symbol table and symbol code “/-” in this case. The reasoning behind it is not clear, but that is what the protocol spec requires.

Or maybe the intent was to say, “I’m listening on ... give me a voice call.” In that case there is a very specific format for the frequency and PL tone. Some radios can parse that information (if it is in the proper format!) and have an option to switch to that voice frequency.

4.13 Incorrect Query

Queries are used to ask other stations to reply with information. There are two formats:

- “general” to everyone, optionally within a specified circle, or
- “directed” to a specific station.

This is a general query, not directed toward a specific station. With that extreme path, it would go really really far.

N1OLA>APAGW,K1EQX-7,W1UWS-1.N1NCI-3,WIDE1,W1MRA*,WIDE2-1,WIDE3-2:?APRSD

In this case, “?APRSD” means, “What stations have you heard directly?” The protocol specification clearly states that the general query form must have a question mark after the query type. “?APRSD” is

defined for use with a directed query only. A proper implementation would not respond to this for both reasons.

4.14 Obsolete Weather Format

This has a vendor-specific format rather than the standard format.

```
N8VIM>APN391,AB1OC-10*,WIDE2-1:$ULTW00A2007C0317012E27CFFFFA89AB000101B300EB034300000075<0x0d><0x0a>
```

Raw Weather Formats are not recommended. The sending system should convert to the standard complete weather format.

4.15 Used Digipeater Address Not Marked as Used

Notice the progression here.

```
KB1TSO>APDW16,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1:!4242.77NS07113.26W#PHG7150Methuen, MA DIGI
KB1TSO>APDW16,WA1PLE-13*,WIDE2-1:!4242.77NS07113.26W#PHG7150Methuen, MA DIGI
KB1TSO>APDW16,WA1PLE-13,W1MRA*,WIDE2:!4242.77NS07113.26W#PHG7150Methuen, MA DIGI
```

WIDE1-1 is changed to WA1PLE-13*. This is correct.

WIDE2-1 is changed to W1MRA*,WIDE2. Wrong. WIDE2 is not marked as used. Better yet would be to remove it.

Here is another case of the same thing:

```
K1RV-9>TR1P3W,AJ1L,W1MHL*,WIDE2:`bV8n?V>/`"4F}Monitoring 146.535 Simplex_"<0x0d>
```

Both problematic digipeaters are running a Kantronics KPC-3+ with 8.2 firmware. (device id APN382) According to multiple sources, such as <https://www.nwaprs.info/widen-n.html> it has this bug. See part near end highlighted in yellow.

The bug causes the TNC to insert it's callsign has-been-digipeated bit set on the name of the digipeater instead of on the used up WIDE1 path.

This is using the digipeating capability built in to the TNC. So you are probably thinking: use it as a KISS TNC and provide digipeating with an external application. There is another known problem, with packets being delayed for a long time, when using older KPC-3+ TNCs in KISS mode with an application performing the digipeating. <https://blog.aprs.fi/2011/03/kantronics-kpc3-considered-harmful.html> The workaround might be as simple as connecting two of the RS-232 control lines together. Here is an episode we wasted a lot of time finding that it was just another case of this bug: https://groups.io/g/direwolf/topic/buggy_sdr_igates/105889286

We also see where the Microsat (APMI03 & APMI06) also fails to mark a used digipeater address as used. Did they copy this bug from Kantronics?

```
W8BAP-1>S9QS3U,KD8DNS-1,K8GPS-4,WOOSTR,N3DXC-2,KD2CIF-1,KC2OUR-1,K1FFK*,WIDE1:\nVF<0x1c> <0x1c>#/ repeaters 146.85- PL74.4<0x20>
```

```
W8BAP-1>S9QS3U,KD8DNS-1,N8CUB-4,K8GPS-4,K8GPS-10,WOOSTR,K1FFK,N3LLO-3*,WIDE1:\nVF<0x1c> <0x1c>#/ repeaters 146.85- PL74.4<0x20>
```

4.16 Incorrect Use of RFONLY or NOGATE

Sometimes you might want to keep a packet only on RF and prevent it from going to APRS-IS. IGate stations should not forward a packet with RFONLY or NOGATE somewhere in the digipeater via path. It should be obvious that you would want to put it at the end of the digi via path.

The following example is wrong. RFONLY was put in the destination field which should have the application identifier for the IGate station.

```
NE1CU-10>RFONLY,EKONCT,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*;)N3XKU-7>APMI04,TCPIP,NE1CU-10*:@071128z4010.24N/07450.70WIPHG2230 Fairless Hills, PA; I-gate; 12.9v
```

We don't know the software being used by the IGate so we don't easily know what application developer to contact with a defect report.

4.17 OMG!!! Where do I start with this one?

The first thing we notice is that device identifier is being copied from the third-party payload. This is wrong; the IGate software should be identifying itself here.

```
WA2GUG-15>TQ0V4V,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15,K1EQX-7,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*,RFONLY,NOGATE:}KB1CRN-14>TQ0V4V,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1,WB2ZII-13,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15*:`e4Tp,Pu/"4/}Keep on truckin`_1<0x20>
```



```
WA2GUG-15>APFII0,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15,K1EQX-7,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*,RONLY,NOGATE:}N2YTF-3>APFII0,APRSFI,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15*:@011437h4101.46N/07404.18W>359/056/A=000299call me on 146.52!w%C!
```

TCPIP should appear only the third-party payload, not in the RF via path.

```
WA2GUG-15>TQ0V4V,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15,K1EQX-7,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*,RONLY,NOGATE:}KB1CRN-14>TQ0V4V,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1,WB2ZII-13,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15*:`e4Tp,Pu/`"4/}Keep on truckin`_1<0x20>
```

A digipeater should never retransmit a packet that it originally transmitted.

```
WA2GUG-15>TQ0V4V,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15,K1EQX-7,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*,RONLY,NOGATE:}KB1CRN-14>TQ0V4V,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1,WB2ZII-13,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15*:`e4Tp,Pu/`"4/}Keep on truckin`_1<0x20>
```

Next, we see RONLY and NOGATE at the end of the RF digipeater via path. Why? No one else does that. It's not in the IGate specification. It was probably a well-meaning but ignorant attempt at preventing this from being sent to APRS-IS by another IGate. Looping is prevented by TCPIP in the encapsulated third party packet.

```
WA2GUG-15>TQ0V4V,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15,K1EQX-7,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*,RONLY,NOGATE:}KB1CRN-14>TQ0V4V,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1,WB2ZII-13,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15*:`e4Tp,Pu/`"4/}Keep on truckin`_1<0x20>
```

The path in the third-party payload has a lot of extra junk. It should be TCPIP, IGate name, and *. No more, no less.

```
WA2GUG-15>TQ0V4V,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15,K1EQX-7,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*,RONLY,NOGATE:}KB1CRN-14>TQ0V4V,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1,WB2ZII-13,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15*:`e4Tp,Pu/`"4/}Keep on truckin`_1<0x20>
```

Finally, we find a trailing blank at the end. Where did that come from? This will interfere with recognition of the “_1” device identifier because it is not at the end. (I'm not saying that the IGate did this; there are many other links in the chain where it could have happened. Yaesu radios put a carriage return (0x0d) at the end so someone, along the way, must have changed it to a space.)

```
WA2GUG-15>TQ0V4V,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15,K1EQX-7,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*,RONLY,NOGATE:}KB1CRN-14>TQ0V4V,WIDE1-1,WIDE2-1,WB2ZII-13,TCPIP,WA2GUG-15*:`e4Tp,Pu/`"4/}Keep on truckin`_1<0x20>
```

4.18 Corruption of the end of packet

Here we see a packet which is different depending on which digipeaters it has gone through. One has a trailing carriage return character and the other one doesn't. Someone along the way has modified the information part of the packet. This is wrong. A digipeater should only change the digipeater via path. Modifying the information part will thwart digipeater duplicate suppression.

```
KB1CRN-14>TRTT2S,N3LLO-3,WIDE1,W1MRA*,WIDE2:`c6<0x1c>l#Ou/`"4R}147.045MHz C100  
+060 Keep on truckin'_4<0x0d>
```

```
KB1CRN-14>TRTT2S,N1SFT,WIDE1,AB1OC-10,WIDE2*:`c6<0x1c>l#Ou/`"4R}147.045MHz C100  
+060 Keep on truckin'_4
```

5 decode_aprs application

The direwolf software TNC includes a utility that will interpret the contents of an APRS packet and point out many types of errors.

Examples:

(1) Is this packet correct?

```
N1NW>T1ST8T,EKONCT,W1MRA,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:'d^9I <0x1c>#/]N1NW 146.730 TONE
156.7<0x0d>
```

On Linux, you can pipe a packet into stdin like this:

```
$ echo "N1NW>T1ST8T,EKONCT,W1MRA,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:'d^9I <0x1c>#/]N1NW 146.730 TONE
156.7" | decode_aprs
```

```
N1NW>T1ST8T,EKONCT,W1MRA,N3LLO-3,WIDE2*:'d^9I <0x1c>#/]N1NW 146.730 TONE 156.7
"146.730" in comment looks like a frequency in non-standard format.
For most systems to recognize it, use exactly this form "146.730MHz" at beginning of comment.
"156.7" in comment looks like it might be a CTCSS tone in non-standard format.
For most systems to recognize it, use exactly this form "T156" at near beginning of comment,
after any frequency.
MIC-E, Generic digipeater, Kenwood TM-D700, In Service
N 41 34.8400, W 072 06.2900, 0 km/h (0 MPH), 146.730 MHz, PL 156.7
N1NW 146.730 TONE 156.7
```

The original packet is echoed in green.

Error messages appear in red.

An interpretation is in blue.

The final line is the comment after removing any embedded information.

(2) What does this mean?

```
N83MZ>T2TQ5U,WA1PLE-4*:`c.l+@&'/'G:} KJ6TMS|!:&0'p|!w#f!|3
```

Trying to quote this would be challenging because it contains both “ and ‘ characters. You could either:

- Run decode_aprs with no command line options and then type the APRS packet. Or
- Put the packet(s) into a file and specify the file name on the command line.

```
$ decode_aprs test.txt
```

```
N83MZ>T2TQ5U,WA1PLE-4*:`c.l+@&'/'G:} KJ6TMS|!:&0'p|!w#f!|3
```

MIC-E, Small Aircraft (original primary symbol), Byonics TinyTrack3, In Service
N 42 41.5502, W 071 18.8076, 283 km/h (176 MPH), course 210, alt 1764 m (5787 ft)
Seq=25, A1=470, A2=625
KJ6TMS

In this case, parts of the comment field are interpreted as embedded data.

!:&0'p	Is Base-91 telemetry data.
!w#f!	Added more digits of resolution to the location.
3	is the sending device type identifier.

This leaves only “KJ6TMS” for the comment text. The source “N83MZ” looks like a tactical callsign (aircraft tail number in this case) so the comment has the official radio callsign to keep things legal.