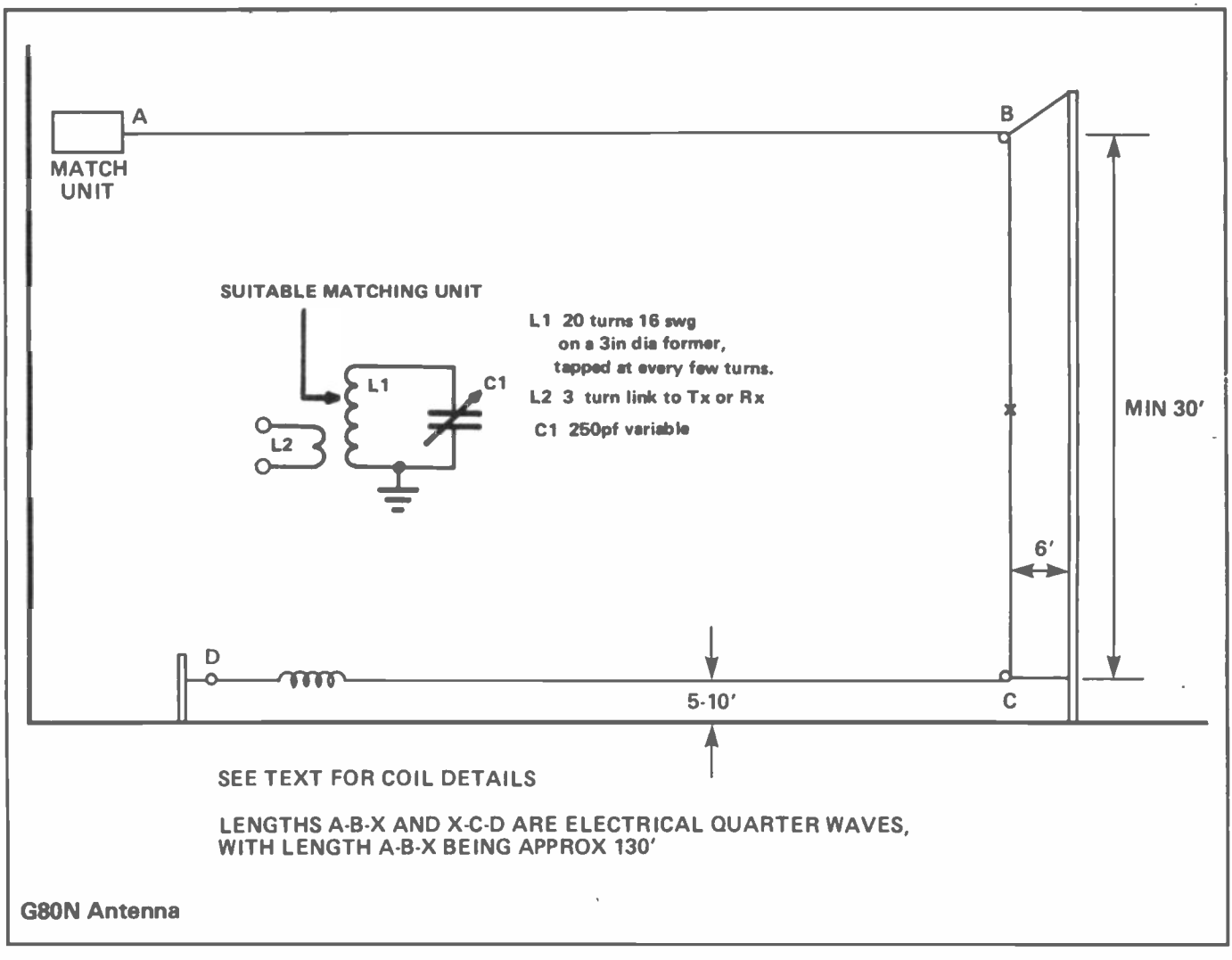

G80N Antenna

DX signals can be weak on the band (or S8+ sometimes), and it isn't much help if you have a 599+++ local calling CQ within a few kHz of that rare bit of DX. One problem here is that many commercial transceivers don't have the facility to operate at this sort of split, so you may have to use separate Rx/Tx combinations, or build something yourself.

Frequency Allocations

Some countries have restricted access to the band, and you need to become familiar with these. France is one, with a spot frequency of 1926kHz, whereas you will find the Russians between 1.85 and 1.95MHz. There are sufficient countries on to achieve the Worked All Continents award — some stations who have been around for a while have even managed DXCC!

Most stations cherish their first contact "across the pond", and there are many shacks with the familiar W1BB card on the wall.

What CW?

You will gather that most of the DX contacts are by means of CW, although SSB is often used when signals are strong enough. Don't be put off by needing to use CW — the speeds used are well within anyone's capabilities who has passed the Test *(and often within the capabilities of many who haven't — speeds used for DX working can be as low as 8-10wpm — Editor).* In fact, often TOO slow for comfort. But, you will usually only be looking for a standard exchange, so it isn't very difficult.

Considering the low power and often simple antenna systems used, working across the Atlantic is no mean achievement, and the feat is a prime example of amateur radio at its best. Why struggle to work the USA on this band when you could do it so easily on 20 metres? Because it is an achievement and a bit more of the 'self-training' aspect of the hobby.

The best times are during the winter, with static at its lowest, and during the hours of darkness. There are normally two main times for QSO's to the States — around midnight, and again around dawn, although you may find that contacts are possible all night long and well into daylight hours sometimes. The important thing is that one end of the contact should be at sunrise or sunset. (See our propagation article also in this issue — Editor).

Even nearer DX has taken on a new look in the past few years as more and more countries have been licenced for the band. The REAL DX, in the shape of Australia (VK) and New Zealand (ZL), is a much more difficult matter. These contacts are usually the result of prearranged "skeds" between the participating stations so that the very brief 'window' available for the contact is not missed. And it is brief — sometimes limited to a few minutes when the correct path conditions exist, although openings of up to half-an-hour are possible. The signal slowly rises out of the noise, peaks for a minute or so, and fades