



Publication of the
Northern California
Contest Club

January
2003
Issue 368



NCCC Net
Thursday 9PM
3830+/-

**NCCC Meeting:
WPX – The Easiest Contest for
Mega-Points – and the Most Fun**

Featuring a panel of first-class WPX operators, including worldwide winners, moderated by Andy AE6Y

Date: Monday, 13 January 2003
Time: 6:00pm schmooz, 6:30 dinner (no host), 7:00 meeting

Location: Harry's Hofbrau
1909 El Camino Real
Redwood City, CA 94063
(650) 366-3733

Musings from the VP/CC

Bill Haddon N6ZFO.

You've all had a great holiday season. many of you with family and friends, partaking of great feasts and perhaps much merriment. Or on the other hand, perhaps you just enjoy letting others do the running around for the holidays. In both these situations, January and February radio contesting can be a great remedy for those winter doldrums that are certain to set in at some point. So, please have a look at the accompanying contest calendar for January and February, re-oil your contest arsenal and join in the fun. If you're into New Year's resolutions, of course you will want to consider contest-related items. For example, if you're like N6RO, you've been intending for years to try your hand at RTTY. Well, maybe now's the time. Or how about a resolution to enter one of the upcoming NCJ Sprints to sharpen those contest skills. Or maybe it's time to get over that CW bump that's holding you to 12 or 15 wpm (or less??). In any case, NCCC represents a great opportunity for all of us to experience the enjoyment of ham radio to the fullest.

NCCC Officers

- President: Dave Curtis, N6NZ n6nz@arrl.net
- VP/CC: Bill Haddon, N6ZFO n6zfo@arrl.net
- Sec/Treas: Rob Brownstein, K6RB k6rb@arrl.net
- Webmaster: Ed Muns, W0YK w0yk@arrl.net
- Directors: Rick Tavan, N6XI n6xi@arrl.net
John Fore, W6LD jfore@wsgr.com
Mike Shapiro, WA6O wa6o@qsl.net
Ken Anderson, K6TA k6ta@arrl.net
- JUG Editor: HELP WANTED

In this issue:

- Weak Signal CW Operating Techniques – ZF2NT (a.k.a. N6NT)
- Contest Musings – N6ZFO
- Dave's Waves – N6NZ
- Contest Calendar – N6ZFO

Also:
FREE
BEER

Volunteering and Mentoring

One of the goals of NCCC is educational activity. This can be within the club, externally, or both. The officers can't run the club alone -- we urgently need your help, and your ideas. The enthusiasm of new members has been invigorating this year.

This month, I'd particularly like to highlight one of our long-term members, Jerry, K6III, who has made invaluable contributions this year in four contests -- not just from operating, but from taking on the onerous task of tracking log submissions. Jerry has helped with WPX, ARRL SS both Phone and CW, and now with the ARRL 10M contest. This is a vital activity: scores need to be submitted for both the club and individuals to get full credit. Jerry's efforts for Sweepstakes were particularly notable, as there were some difficult situations to deal with. It appears that we've approached 99% submissions of logs by the due date. And the missing 1+ percent was an unavoidable error from a computer crash, not undue procrastination. Actually you can try to procrastinate, but under Jerry's scrutiny, this will be difficult.

But K6III made another outstanding contribution this year in the area of mentoring. We're always moaning about the lack of young contesters. Well, Jerry did something about it by inviting a young gentleman, KG6JED into his shack for portions of the recent 10m contest. The pictures below attest to the success of this effort! Thanks, Jerry, and congratulations, Joseph, for a job well done, and particularly for mastering Jerry's maze of wires, gadgets and buttons. Actually Jerry, that looks like a

pretty well-organized station, maybe making some of us look pretty bad.

Nature Wins 10m Contest

Well, we had fun in the 10m contest. That's the almost universal comment from the NCCC participants in this December event. Little did we know that it would coincide with a devastating winter storm that played havoc with commercial power, producing outages lasting nearly the whole contest in some NCCC areas.

However, we're a hardy bunch. The latest web score totals indicate we did spectacularly well thanks to better-than-expected propagation and level of industriousness that is typical for club members. For those who did not have emergency power, perhaps it's time to add to those New Year's Resolutions. You can consult the web for score totals to date. A spectacular total of 14 stations broke 850,000 points, with 10 over 1 million, and one at 2,000,000 plus. The high scorers were W6YX (with N6DE, KG6FLT, K6IF, W6LD and KG6OAV at the helm), N6RO, N6NT @ZF2NT, K6XX, K6KM (with W6SR and W6QD), K2KW (@N6BT), K6IDX (with K0BEE, W1SRD and W6OAT), W6YK, KA6BIM, WX5S (@N6IJ), NU6S, and K6SRZ (@W6CUS) and NT6K.

We'll have more analysis later. Dave, KA6BIM's advice and predictions were well-founded. The surprise opening to the East Coast mid-evening on Saturday was a notable surprise. While this opening may not have supplied a lot of additional points, it did illustrate the amazing character of the band. These are good lessons for future years, when

sunspots are less. The Friday night Geminids meteor peak seemed to occur a little earlier than predicted, and the burns were a little shorter than ideal. Still, contacts were possible in this mode.

Spring Contests -- WPX

WPX is on the not-too-distant horizon. In a major show of generosity, not to mention talent, our esteemed former VP/Cc, Andy, AE6Y, is moving in the direction of leading another spectacular NCCC effort. Please give him your fullest support in this contest, and in particular attend the January meeting to hear the exciting details. New members - - this is the contest that NCCC actually wins . . and best of all, it provides that travel opportunity you've always dreamed of. Unlike certain other more stingy contests, WPX actually lets club members roam the world and at the same time accumulate millions of points for NCCC. What a deal. For further inspiration, please consult the May 2002 JUG Article by AE6Y. And, if you're not intending to be a world-traveler, be thinking about borrowing a call with an unusual prefix to get yourself additional attention in WPX. In this regard, however, you may wish to review the Roving Reporter article in the same May JUG.

Happy New Year to All,

73 Bill, N6ZF0 VP/CC.



K6III & KG6JED



KG6JED

Weak Signal CW Operating Techniques

One doesn't have to be a QRP operator or a 160 meter fan to find himself chasing signals which could only be described as marginal at best. In every contest I operate, which this time of year means practically every weekend, I start out answering calls from the 20 dB over S9 monster stations but by the end of the contest find I'm digging out ESP-level calls in an effort to get every last point I can. So do we all! So herein are a few operating techniques I've picked up over the years which are, admittedly, a matter of opinion and so subject to challenge by some. But I think I can defend my ideas on this, so please bear with me.

To get straight to the bottom line, the thesis here is that you should NEVER send anything you don't have to send, and if

asked by the other station whether he copied you correctly there are only two permissible answers: “R” (or “C” or “CFM” or even “YES”) or “NO”, perhaps repeated once or twice, and then followed by the correct information.

The best example of the importance of this that I can cite occurred a few years ago when the 9M0C operation was on Spratley and I heard my friend Will Angenent calling them on 160m. At that time, he was KN6DV, and after trying for the better part of half an hour to get through the pile-up the operator at the other end came back to Will with the right call. But then Will made the fatal mistake, one which sadly I hear happen repeatedly. He answered “DE KN6DV TU 5NN”. To that operator at 9M0C, as to just about any run operator, the fact that Will repeated his call in his report meant that he must have copied it incorrectly. So then he came back with something like “KN6DU?” No. “KM6DU?” No. “KM6DV?” No. And so on it went, over and over, with the 9M0C operator trying to guess at Will’s call and Will repeatedly trying to correct him. Finally the 9M0C decided he was spending too much time on this one and just sent “LTR”, followed by “QRZ?” Will did get in the log the next day, by the way, but it was painful listening to the exchanges that first time around. It would all have been avoided if Will had just sent the report without repeating his call in the very beginning.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, I remember one contest last spring (BERU) where the exchange included a sequence number. Along about dark o’clock I got a water-weak call on 80m that after a moment’s thought I realized had to be G3SXW. After sending my exchange to Roger, I braced for what I expected would be a protracted round of guessing as I tried to copy his sequence number. I knew Roger was running 100w into a low wire, whereas I was running a KW, so there was no doubt in my mind that he could hear me better than I could hear him. I got Roger’s report, some insidious number like 676, but it was barely

ESP and so I decided to play it back to him just to be certain. Roger’s answer was exactly what I would have expected from the master: “C C C”. Nothing else. Whew! Anybody else would have simply pressed the F2 button again, and then the guessing games would have started.

This sort of situation happens to me as the run operator so frequently that I almost feel like it’s tilting at windmills to try to change peoples’ behavior. But having just come off the ARRL 160 and then the ARRL 10 contests, I simply cannot resist trying. I think the major culprit is none other than the pre-programmed keyboard and the reluctance people feel to grab the paddle and send something which hasn’t been pre-programmed. Thus when I send “PSE CFM UR CALL EI5SH?” they simply hit the F4 button a couple of times to repeat their call rather than send the very simple “R” manually. Unless their signal has come way up when they do this, I probably have to repeat the request for confirmation rather than run the risk of a penalty for a busted call. And, sometimes, I finally end up doing just what that 9M0C operator did to KN6DV: I send “NC” and move on. It’s not worth the risk. The same thing happens in getting the exchange through. It’s always easier to hit the F2 button, or whatever you’re using to send the exchange, than it is to repeat only the information requested or to confirm that the operator at the other end got it right. Yet handling this part of the contact is at least as important as getting your call over, if not more so. This is where the DXers drop the ball so often. To a DXer, all that matters is that the other station got his call correct, and all the rest is just so much fluff. But to the contest operator, the contact doesn’t go into the log unless he is also sure he got the exchange correct. I know that this is the basis of a lot of the “NIL” responses my QSL manager sends out on my behalf.

After the ARRL 10 contest, I received several pieces of email from people saying something like “Wow! I can’t believe you

got my call. I was only running 2 watts into a buried coat hanger, and you're the only DX station I got during the contest". Sadly, their call was not in the log when I went to verify the contact. And I think I know why. There was one point during that contest where the QSB was very deep and very slow. I remember several times where I answered a ESP-level signal and then heard the following: "BK DE KB6XYZ R R R GE UR 5NN <buzzzzz>". And then I never heard from that station again. Let me repeat what I said at the very beginning: under weak signal conditions, NEVER send anything you don't absolutely have to send. If you really feel it's important to fill up some time on the air, then send the needed information twice, but please, nothing else.

One final thought, though I'm sure this is so obvious to all in NCCC as to scarcely warrant the ink it takes to print it. Once I'm sure I have copied the exchange correctly, that QSO is over as far as I'm concerned. No matter how I fight the urge, the brain goes into a temporary shutdown mode at that moment while I prepare to copy a new call. So the absolute worst thing people can do is send a call correction AFTER sending the exchange. It's likely not to be heard by me or any other run operator. If you've got to correct your call, do it BEFORE sending the exchange, not after.

But back to my original point of only sending the needed information...I am well aware that there some around who are insistent that when they come back with the exchange they should send both my call, their call, and then the exchange information. I would reply that I think there are some situations where this is indeed appropriate. In crowded band conditions, where there could be multiple different run stations hearing the exchange, I will concede that this *might* be a good idea. But that situation is not likely to be the case where we're trying to dig out water-weak signals. In that case, different tactics are needed. See paragraph #2 above.

CU in CQWW 160!

de ZF2NT

Dave's Waves



Mother Nature sure had us in her bore sights for the 10m contest, eh? There were plenty of WX-related challenges throughout NCCC-land, no doubt you had your fair share. The wind, rain, and many power outages clearly let some of the air out of our club score.

But I must say that hearing and reading the after-contest reports was inspiring -- folding the tent and going home is just not the NCCC way, no sir! Generators came out, some antennas got twisted making pointing an arithmetic exercise, some operating schedules became "make the best out of Plan B". The NCCC/mm sailors wisely stayed in port and found other ways to contribute to the club score. It is a story of many individual acts of heroism and just plain bloody-minded determination. And overall, the NCCC stayed on the air in a big way, and pushed through to a fine club score. I am proud to be associated with a group with such spirit and perseverance.

Holiday Party

We had another fine fete at Chef Wang's for the Holidays. Unfortunately, at the last minute Santa developed sleigh trouble and was unable to make an appearance. So, we went to "Plan B" (hmmm... the theme for December?) and did some 10m contest warm up discussion. We also had the pleasure of voting in two new members at the meeting, Barry AE6IL, and Al KE6JAC.

Volunteers Needed

An under-appreciated fact about the NCCC is that much of the work of making the club a great organization is the effort of volunteers. Right now we have two needs. The Jug needs a permanent editor or editor/publisher team. Think of the Jug as “glue” holding the club together. We truly need an editor who can give the task the attention it deserves, and make that glue do its job well. The jobs of editor and publisher can also be split out, with the editor producing the electronic file and the publisher taking care of printing/ mailing. Please contact me if you would like to take on either role.

I would also like to create another volunteer position – Visalia Hospitality Suite Host. The NCCC Hospitality Suite has become a tradition at the Visalia DX Convention. Also, by tradition, it falls to the brand new president to figure out how to pull it off at the last minute – I’d like to make the next president’s job a little easier in that regard. It’s really a pretty easy job – if you have the forewarning – just make sure we have a space, and arrange for beer and munchies. If you are a Visalia regular and would be hanging around the suite anyway, why not take this opportunity to make sure it is stocked with your favorite munchies? Did I mention the FREE BEER?

Electronic Jug

Speaking of the Jug... do you really need to get it on paper via snail mail? Currently about half the membership still gets the paper Jug. The electronic Jug is the same – except that on your

computer screen you get to see the photos in glorious color! It saves the club significant money in printing and mailing if you download the electronic Jug.

Now, I can understand that if your internet connection is iffy to start with, or if computers are just not a big part of your life, then downloading a big ol’ pdf file can be a pain. But if you have access to a good connection and a decent printer, then please consider going electronic. It is a painless way to, in effect, make a significant donation to the club coffers – money that can go to awards and other worthy causes.

It is easy to switch. Just e-mail Rob K6RB that you would like to go paperless and he will flip the flag in the membership database.

Nomination Time

Speaking of new presidents... the time of year when the current NCCC officers’ freshness dates expire is fast approaching. The nominating committee is beginning its work. Perhaps you are thinking you could make a contribution to the club. Perhaps you are thinking another member would make a great officer and you would like to bring that person to our attention. Bring those suggestions to me or any other member of the BOD.

WPX Focus of January Meeting

It’s time to start looking forward to the Spring contests. WPX is a perennial favorite with the NCCC. Andy AE6Y will be moderating a panel discussion about WPX. Just in case you didn’t notice, last year as a single op Andy

turned in over 24M points for the club between both modes. You won't want to miss this program.

topic of Weak Signal CW Operating Techniques – and take the admonitions to heart.

That's all for this month. Be sure to read ZF2NT's excellent contribution on the

73, Dave N6NZ

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Contest Calendar for Jan/ Feb 2003					
2	<i>Compiled by N6ZFO</i>					
3						
4	Special NCCC Club contests in red.					
5	Events that may be of particular NCCC interest in bold .					
6	Note: For the special interest contests in January,					
7	consult http://www.hornucopia.com/contestcal/contestcal.html					
8	Rules Links: Good example: www.yccc.org/Links/Rules.htm					
9						
10	HF Contests -- January 2003					
11	SKN (ARRL St. Key Night)	0000Z	Jan 1	2400Z	Jan 1	www.arrl.org
12	ARRL RTTY Roundup	1500Z	Jan 4	1500Z	Jan 5	www.arrl.org
13	NAQP CW	1800Z	Jan 11	0600Z	Jan 12	www.ncjweb.com
14	NAQP SSB	1800Z	Jan 18	0600Z	Jan 12	www.ncjweb.com
15	CQWW 160M CW	2200Z	Jan 24	1600Z	Jan 26	
16						
17	50 MHz and Above					
18	ARRL Jan. VHF Sweepstakes	1900Z	Jan 18	0400Z	Jan 19	www.arrl.org
19						
20	HF Contests -- February 2003					
21	NCJ Phone Sprint	0000Z	Feb 2	0400Z	Feb 2	www.ncjweb.com
22	Fists Winter Sprint	1700Z	Feb 8	2100Z	Feb 8	
23	NCJ CW Sprint	0000Z	Feb 9	0400Z	Feb 9	www.ncjweb.com
24	ARRL DX	0000Z	Feb 16	2400Z	Feb 16	www.arrl.org
25	NAQP RTTY	1800Z	Feb 22	0600Z	Feb 23	www.ncjweb.com
26						

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anaheim@hamradio.com

BURBANK, CA

2452 W. Victory Bl., 91506
(818) 842-1786
(800) 854-6046
Eric, KA6HT, Mgr.
Victory Blvd. at Beena Vista
1 mi. west I-5
burbank@hamradio.com

OAKLAND, CA

2210 Livingston St., 94606
(510) 534-5757
(800) 854-6046
Mark, W17YN, Mgr.
I-880 at 23rd Ave. ramp
oakland@hamradio.com

SAN DIEGO, CA

5375 Kerry Villa Rd., 92123
(619) 560-4900
(800) 854-6046
Tom, KM6K, Mgr.
Hwy. 163 & Clearmont Mesa
sandiago@hamradio.com

SUNNYVALE, CA

510 Lawrence Exp. #102
94085
(408) 736-9496
(800) 854-6046
Ken, K1ZKM, Mgr.
So. from Hwy. 101
sunnyvale@hamradio.com

NCCC
44 Toyon Terrace
Danville, CA 94526

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