



Publication of the
Northern California
Contest Club



Issue 477

February 2012

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Guests are always welcome at the NCCC! Please join us.

NCCC-REDXA Joint Meeting

Wednesday, February 8th, 2012

Program

"Software Defined Radios For Contesting"
(Stu Phillips, K6TU)

Date:

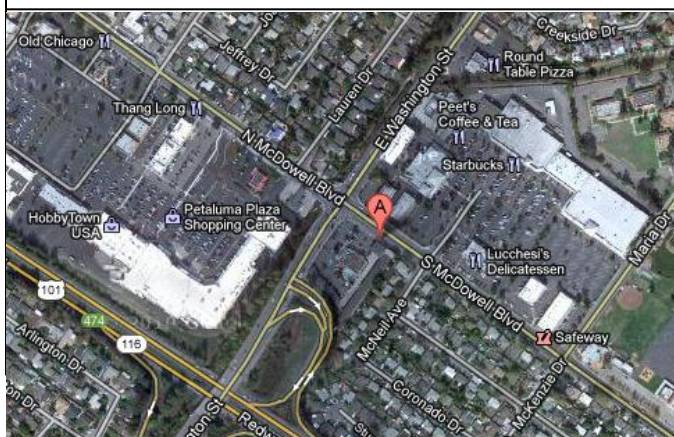
Wednesday, 8th February

Time:

6:00pm schmooze, 6:30pm dinner, 7:45pm program

Gourmet Garden;
200 South McDowell Blvd.; Petaluma, CA
(707) 778-3899

Please RSVP to REDXA President Jim Selmi, K6JS
jselmi@hotmail.com for his "Headcount" list.



From the President

If you contest, why not sprint a bit?

One of the things about contesting, is that it can be very (is that an understatement?) time consuming to be competitive. Now I realize that there are varying levels we compete in contests. Maybe against a neighbor, or a station in Texas or Colorado, West of the Rockies.. etc. But one of the great things about amateur radio contesting is the variety of events that are out there to sample from.

Of course one form of contesting that happens on a fairly regular basis, and takes up very little time, are Sprints. NCJ sponsors 6 sprints a year (2 CW, 2 SSB, and 2 RTTY). Our own NCCC sponsors the weekly SNS and NS/NS Ladder CW Sprints on Thursday nights. These contests range from thirty minutes to four hours.

It's been my experience that sprint contests are misunderstood by some. An impression that you must be an expert to play, have to have a superstation, master SO2R etc. But in my humble opinion is the sprint format is an Ideal format for contesters that have busy schedules, families, a desire to go to the beach or take a day skiing. They are also ideal for folks that simply can't sit in a chair for prolonged periods of time. Four hours of a Saturday afternoon and bam you are done! Superstation or not, no operator is allowed to run a frequency, due to a QSY after CQ rule.

The NCJ sprints as many of you know, support teams of 10, from clubs all over. Traditionally The NCCC has regular volunteers that gather information regarding operator intent, forms the teams, then subsequently flogs for logs to make sure we have a complete and timely submittal. Why not take an opportunity to try it out? Or even better volunteer to spearhead the team effort!

Continued on page 3



Northern California Contest Club

Excellence In Amateur Radio Contesting

Officers:

President	Chris Tate	N6WM	ctate@ewnetinc.com
Vice President	Stu Phillips	K6TU	stu@ridgelif.com
Secretary/Treasurer	Tom Hutton	N3ZZ	nccc.n3zztreasurer@gmail.com
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Director	Bob Vallio	W6RGG	rbvallio@gmail.com

Volunteers:

New Member Mentor	Al Rendon	WT6K	wt6k@arrl.net
Charter Member	Rusty Epps	W6OAT	w6oat@sbcglobal.net
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	Rebar Rebarchik	N6DB	rebar@hamilton.com
CQP Chair	Rick Eversole	N6RNO	rick@eversoles.com
CQP Certificates	Andy Faber	AE6Y	ae6y@arrl.net
K6ZM QSL Manager	George Daughters	K6GT	k6gt@arrl.net
K6CQP,N6CQP,W6CQP QSL Mgr	Ed Muns	W0YK	w0yk@msn.com
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Webmaster Chair	Dean Wood	N6DE	cqden6de@gmail.com
Webmaster	John Miller	K6MM	k6mm@arrl.net
JUG Editors	Ian Parker	W6TCP	w6tcpian@gmail.com
	Stu Phillips	K6TU	stu@ridgelif.com

Thursday Night Contesting:

NCCC—Sprint	Ken Keeler	N6RO	kenkeeler@jazznut.com
NS Ladder	Bill Haddon	N6ZFO	haddon.bill@gmail.com
Slow NS (SNS)	Chris Tate	N6WM	ctate@ewnetinc.com

NCCC Net

Thursday 8 PM

NCCC

Monthly meetings take place on the second Monday of each month !

Details [here](#)

NCCC Membership Information

If you wish to join NCCC, you must fill out an [application for membership](#), which will be read and voted upon at the next monthly meeting. ([PDF application form](#))

To join, you must reside within [club territory](#) which is defined as the maximum of:

- Northern California, anything north of the Tehachapi's up to the Oregon border, and
- A part of north-western Nevada (anything within our ARRL 175-mile radius circle centered at 10 miles North of Auburn on Highway 49).

Sprinting can be fun and exciting, whatever mode you choose. And best of all, you have time left to do other things because after all, it's a hobby right?

So give the sprint format a try, you can contest, enjoy the rest of the weekend, have fun. It WILL make you a better contester, and sharpen your skills and leaves time for dinner with the XYL and harmonics!

73 es KB
Chris
N6WM

VP/CC Corner

Wow! What a start to the year! Sincere thanks to the 75 NCCC members who contributed serious BIC time for the 2012 RTTY Roundup and who racked up a submitted score of 3,881,444!

NCCC you CRUSHED IT! Our own record set in 2009 was 3,328,101 and we handily broke that into pieces and beat the club goal of 3,750,000. I'm really looking forward to the Awards ceremony in March and seeing those RTTY RU awards presented. Thanks to the BIC time and with a little help from the propagation gods, NCCC members broke many existing section records and I suspect, Pacific Division too! A great turn out and I hope you all enjoyed the event as I did in seeing so many turn out.

The contest season is far from over and we have all the CQ WPX event coming up over the next few months.

WPX RTTY kicks off the series on February 11-12. If you didn't get some RTTY practice in RU (or even if you did!), consider the XE International RTTY contest the weekend of February 3-4. NCCC won the team event in last year's RTTY WPX and it would be great to repeat that victory!

If you need any help to be a-diddln' let me know!

March brings the SSB WPX (March 24-25) and the CW event is in May (May 26-27) – time for station and club preparation so we can KB on a massive scale!

I'd like to recognize Jack W6NF, Fred K6DGW and Bob W6RGG for their great help in flogging, team organization and enthusiasm for the NAQP CW, NAQP SSB and the NA CW Sprint respectively! Thank you guys for getting my back during January!

The next few months also see many State QSO parties – if you have some time, please show our support from California for the different parties and return the favor we are given so generously by our fellow hams for CQP.

73 & KB!
Stu K6TU

VP/CC Candidate Statement

Dean Wood, N6DE

Probably the first thing you'll want to know from an NCCC VP/CC candidate is whether we are going to be pursuing Sweepstakes this year. I believe that a contest plan should be a tool utilized by the NCCC to support the leadership's high level goals for the year. After Stu and I finalize a club vision for the 2012-2013 term, I will create a contest focus plan that addresses our goals. Your feedback in last summer's NCCC survey will be used as a valuable resource, as well as your contest soapbox comments and your activity in contests since that time.

At the top of my mind is a renewed focus on you, our immensely valuable NCCC membership. Stu and I need to provide a motivating and rewarding environment that better supports the reasons we all became NCCC members in the first place. I will not hesitate to challenge the status quo if a change can give us a better chance of achieving our goals.

I'm ready to get to work. Let's go!

Dean Wood, N6DE

President Candidate Statement

Stu Phillips, K6TU

When I was first approached to consider being nominated for NCCC President, I asked for some time to collect input from a sample of NCCC members about their experiences with the club, why they had joined, what they liked and what they felt could be improved. To all those who provided both their time (hours in some cases!) and who shared their candid opinion – a sincere THANK YOU!

To the last person, the reasons I heard for joining NCCC were consistent – the enthusiasm for contesting, the high levels of technical expertise, operating excellence and the spirit of freely giving help between members. Not surprising that these reasons echo the primary goals of the club in furthering radio sport!

If I'm elected as President, I would focus on two aspects of NCCC:

- Further increasing our enthusiasm for contesting
- Extending the spirit of "giving back" to the club

Why focus on these and not winning contests? I believe that if we build on these aspects, the winning part will follow as a natural consequence and that we will have great experiences in the process!

The how is more complicated but starts with trying different things and tapping the mind trust of the club – listening, getting feedback and stepwise improvement of what we try.

I was truly gratified by the support and turnout that NCCC showed in the ARRL RTTY Roundup at the beginning of January. We tried something different – different awards, starting to encourage internal club competition and helping folks resolve antenna issues, radio and software configuration problems... a list of folks who wanted to participate and who we were able to help get on the air for the RTTY RU.

I honestly think I had as much fun in the run up to the contest – helping folks – as I did in operating the contest itself. NCCC truly kicked butt in that contest!

I wasn't surprised by what I heard in the opinions of the folks with who I spoke... with one exception. One person asked me "So Stu, what do you want out of a term as President?" It was a great question and I answered without hesitation – I'd like to share my answer with you.

I have been very fortunate over my 45 years as an SWL and then as a licensed ham (I started young!) to have been "infected" by the enthusiasm and selfless mentoring of many wonderful hams. About a year ago I received a couple of unsolicited emails from folks thanking me for my enthusiasm and help – those emails had me walking 6 inches off the ground for weeks to come. It made me reach out to some key elmers of my past – sadly to find out that a couple of them had become silent keys before I could return the thanks but I know they knew seeing my enthusiasm they had helped create!

I want to help create an epidemic of enthusiasm as a way of honoring all those who helped me – and having a blast in the process!

KB NCCC!!!
Stu Phillips K6TU

Radio Sprint – A relay race.



By Don K6GHA

Contesting in Amateur radio has many forms; from power limited (QRP) or unlimited, mode only (CW, Digital, SSB), Regional or International. However, the one that is most likely to tax your abilities as an amateur radio operator is the SPRINT.

Powering down my rig after my first sprint (the North American (NA) Single Side Band (SSB) Sprint), I was looking to see if anyone got the license of the truck that had just hit me! The total time of the contest was only four hours, but it was so much more of a learning experienced crammed into that short time.

GETTING OUT OF THE BLOCKS

In basic terms, a sprint is what it implies, running fast! However in amateur radio terms, you can think of it like a relay race. The basics for the sprint are that a station initiates a QSO by calling CQ, the answering station exchange contact information, and then the answering station assumes the frequency and calls CQ. The baton is passed and the original station must then move off the frequency.

Confused? Even though I had the concept, and the calling information written down, I found myself missing parts of QSO's and then backtracking to fill in the information (if I was fast enough). A sprint requires practice in listening and logging.

PASSING THE BATON

Within the sprint format output power and frequency use is limited; this allows the playing field to be leveled for all participants and prevents a high powered station from holding a frequency and working others, one after another. In theory, the sprint format evens the odds for smaller (less powerful) station to be competitive.

However, for a beginner, the chance of dropping the baton (or QSO) in a sprint is possible because you most likely have *one time* to get the call sign and exchange correct and logged. This transaction happens quickly, and you still have to log the QSO while you are preparing to pass the baton to the next calling station and collect your double, or second QSO.

LOOKING AT THE EXCHANGE

An exchange in sprints generally consists of your call, your serial number (Q's), your name, and State. However, this information format may change depending on the rules of the sprint. So, the best advice is to read the rules of the event.

Passing the exchange, simply and clearly, is of utmost importance. The reasons are to save QSO time, to build consistency in exchange, to efficiently log the response, and to get on to the next QSO. This process has been perfected in the CW sprints.

For an excellent video seminar on Sprints, listen and watch the information at this URL link:

<http://ln-s.net/9CDK>

CROSSING THE FINISH LINE

As well as making the sprint QSO, the contest traverses multiple bands. There is a LOT of dial spinning in a sprint. Depending on propagation, timing, and a lot of luck, you can easily divide your time searching for the person calling CQ, casing the popular toss up, and/or pass the frequency baton (and not being bludgeoned by it!).

Some lessons learned and keys to remember in a sprint:

- You CAN stop on a frequency and call CQ. You don't have to search forever for a contact.
- Take advantage of pre-sprint warm-up sessions. The NCCC holds them prior to events.
- Take it slow and steady the first time. Have in front of you the correct responses for calling CQ, or answering a CQ. (THEY ARE DIFFERENT... *watch the video!*)
- Have some water ready, if things become fast and furious you may even forget to breath!!

OK, I've turned in my first sprint log and have had a few days to reflect; someone once said there is a fine line between pain and pleasure. I think I found that 'fine line' with the sprint format, but I'll be coming back next time to improve my score and my skills on the radio.

There are many different kinds of sprints offered throughout the year, here are some good sources to find more information:

- NCCC organization <http://nccc.cc>
- WA7BNM contest calendar <http://www.hornucopia.com/contestcal/contestcal.html>
- N6TR Sprint Survival Page <http://n6tr.jzap.com/sprint.html>

What's this phone thing anyway?

By Alan Hawrylyshen K2ACK

At the last club meeting, Don (K6GHA) managed to convince me that running a contest would be fun. What I didn't really let on was that I; (a) only had a QRP setup and (b) had not yet made a single HF phone contact outside of the Monday night 10m net. My setup consists of a Yaesu FT-817ND running 'barefoot' through an Elecraft T1 matching device and a G5RVjr dipole up around 25 feet, but very close to the water.

I have managed around a hundred digital mode contacts since acquiring my General class privileges in March of this

year. My contacts span half the globe, largely because as a computer communications software practitioner, the digital modes do not intimidate me in the slightest. For some reason, phone had me a little bit intimidated.

I read the rules carefully and got setup on 20 meters. At the start of the event, I spent some time listening to the pace and rhythm of the other contest participants. I waited to hear someone complete a QSO who was at least S8 at my modest setup and once he called CQ – I pounced. To my surprise, WD0T (Todd) in Pierre, South Dakota heard me and started the contest exchange. I thought I was organized and ready, but I admit that I fumbled my way through it. Once the exchange was complete, the frequency was ‘mine’. I called CQ for over a minute in short bursts, clearly not many people could hear my QRP station. I gave up and went on the hunt again for another contact.

I managed to contact someone with another pounce, (perhaps a good QRP strategy) but my disorganized logging had me lose his information so I was unable to log the QSO. Not wanting to corrupt my serial numbers, I carried on. I also realized that I was not going to be very successful using my logging software – which was not adapted to the sprint format, so I pulled out a ruler and setup a simple pad of paper to track the critical information.

I was still a little overwhelmed as the contest went on and I have to admit calling CQ with QRP power can be frustrating at times, but it sure feels nice when you manage to get a response. I think that I will be looking to improve my antenna before the next contest and I will definitely be brushing up on the exchange format – I would have no shame in following a script just to make sure I don’t miss some of the critical information.

In the end, I managed to log 11 contacts on 2 bands; understanding now that I would have scored better as a single-band entrant, I will look at the scoring strategies a little more closely next time. In summary I had a blast, managed to QSO with Don (K6GHA) and went from zero phone contacts to, well, 11 confirmed and a twelfth out there somewhere.

By Don K6GHA

We hope you read the



With no Arbitron panel or Alexa stats to provide feedback, we don’t know how many of you read the JUG!

The Editors (Ian W6TCP & Stu K6TU) would love to get your feedback be it positive or negative.

- What kinds of things would you like to see covered in the JUG?
- Got a new piece of equipment? Can we get you to write a review?
- Contest or Convention experience? How about some pictures or a short write-up?

Please send your ideas, contributions, pictures, money or beer... to the Editors!

Propagation predictions – a new resource for NCCC members

Stu Phillips K6TU

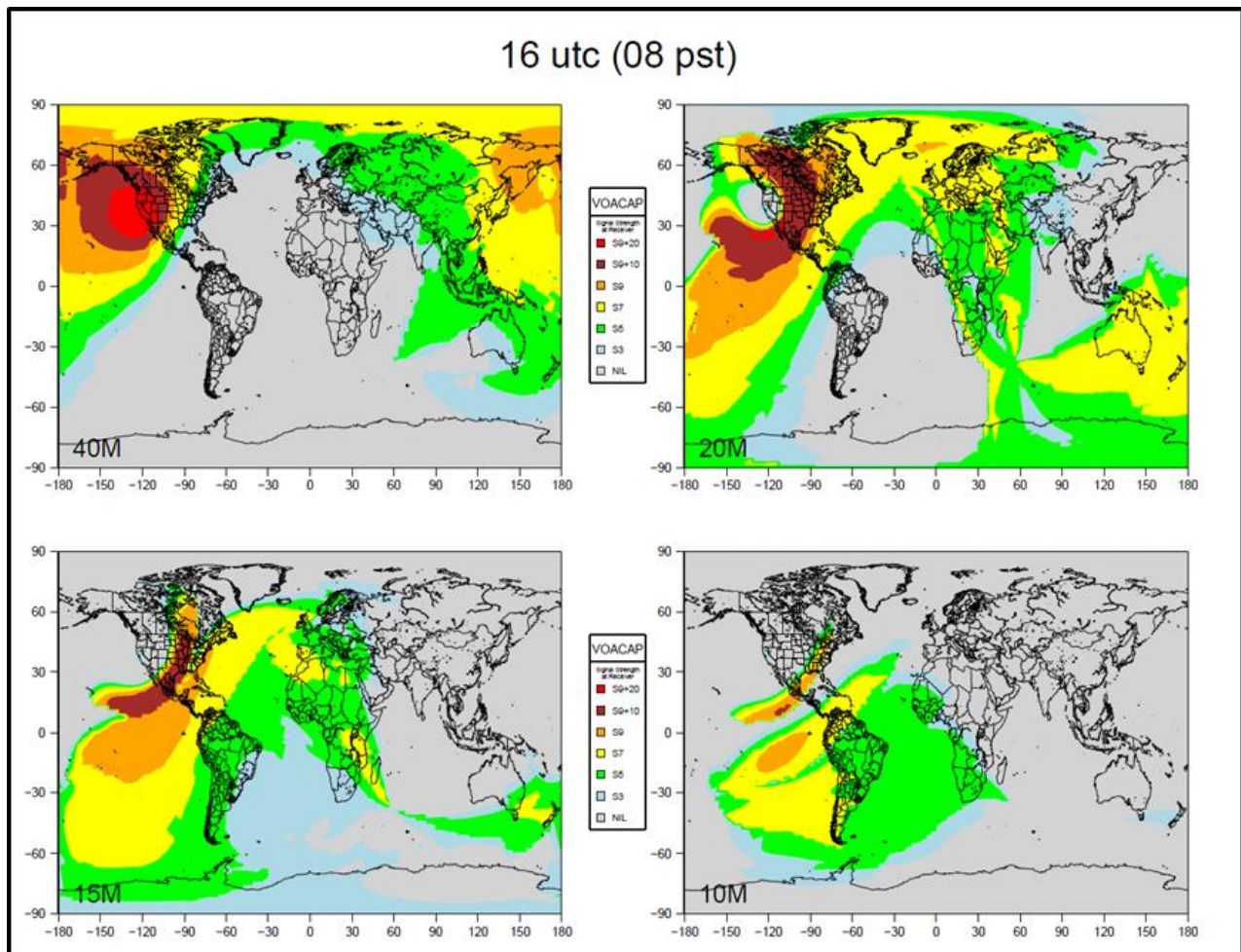
Here's a teaser of a new resource for contesting that will roll out to NCCC members in February with the support and assistance of NCCC webmaster John Miller, K6MM.

After producing the propagation prediction maps for the RTTY RU, I was determined to automate the process of generating the charts so that they could be provided regularly and not as a one off for key contests. I was inspired by the work of Dean Straw N6BV (who has been unstinting in his feedback and advice – thank you Dean!) to be able to produce both the single band/hour format we used for RTTY RU but also a multi-band/hour version similar to that Dean generates each year for ARRL Sweepstakes.

After 3 years of looking and trying different (but no less time consuming) ways of generating these maps, I have finally found a way to automate the entire process. One command, 20 minutes of the computer doing the work that used to take me 5-6 hours... and we are done!

Watch the web site for pointers to this new resource which we aim to publish each month (and perhaps mid monthly during the rise of Cycle 24). In the meantime... here's a the teaser...

If you have any feedback or thoughts for improvement, please drop me a phone call or email.



ARRL RTTY Roundup 2012 Retrospective from P49X

Ed Muns W0YK/P49X

I could say “the devil made me do this”, but it was only Don, AA5AU, who suggested there might be value in documenting my contest experience. He’s right, of course, because I often repeat the same mistakes year-to-year due to an imperfect memory 12 months later. Moreover, if anyone else reads this, I may learn even more when they comment, “You know, if you did this or didn’t do that, it might work better”.

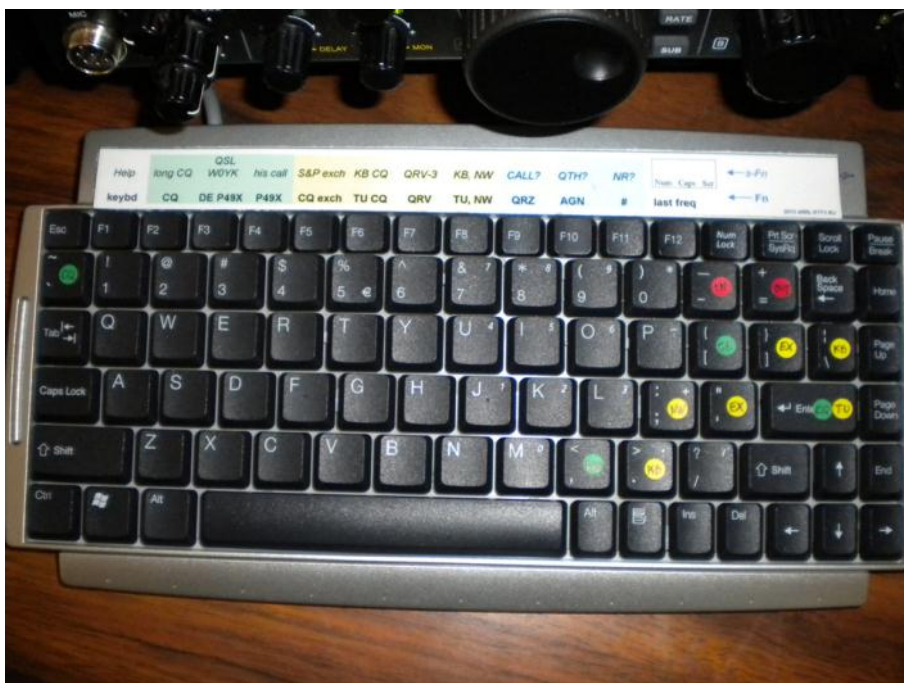
Going into the 2012 RTTY Round-Up, my goal was to achieve a personal best in the contest. After all, RTTY contest participation continues to grow and propagation is bringing back 10 meters, albeit at the expense of the low bands. However, RTTY Round-Up is a rate-fest, so 10 meters is much more important than 80 meters, especially in Aruba. My personal best was back in 2009 when I made 387K with 3166 QSOs and 124 mults. In 2010 I fell way short at 358K, 2931 QSOs and 124 mults and in 2011 I almost equaled my 2009 results with 385K, 3177 QSOs and 123 mults. But, this would be the first year when 10 meters was really “in”. I could always work a few southeastern US stations or a couple SA stations in the past, but 2012 promised good east-west propagation on 10 meters, meaning that many people would actually go there and transmit, providing lots of QSO opportunities for me.



W0YK at the helm of P49X

I felt I had opportunity to improve in both QSOs and mults. Hopefully, my operating skill had improved and with the help of some nice WriteLog enhancements, notably the call stack operation, I was bullish that QSO count could be increased. In 2011, I setup SO3R with the third radio dedicated to 10 meters so I could catch whatever openings or activity there was and instantly capitalize on it. Betting that 10 meters would be in solid for most of the day with lots of activity, I decided to configure for SO4V in 2012, also schlepping two P3s down so I'd have excellent bandscope views of the bands. In theory, this would allow me to S&P on either or both bands I was simultaneously running on, checking out each RTTY signal on the waterfall. And, of course, it is invaluable to see who is around your run frequencies and find holes for new run frequencies. Especially with the K3 which so completely suppresses close neighbors. SO4V (or SO2V on each radio in SO2R) is supported by yet another nifty WriteLog enhancement which makes working stations on the second receiver highly effective with the K3 transceiver. Basically, a decoder window is assigned to the K3 sub-receiver (a comprehensive duplicate of the K3 main receiver) and when a call sign is clicked on, WriteLog puts the K3 in SPLIT mode and moves the Entry window focus to that VFO. This allows an immediate QSO with the station and a single click moves the focus, and transmitter, back to the Run frequency where the main receiver is.

This SO4V really is a slick configuration with WriteLog and the K3, but it requires a very skilled operator to maintain 150+ QSOs per hour running on two bands while searching and then pouncing on new stations or mults on the other two receivers. I actually found needed mults on the second receiver(s), but never had a long enough gap in the runs to go work them. They often QSY'd before I got to call them! I arrived in Aruba several days before the contest and one of my top priorities was to practice this SO4V thing. In retrospect, I need a LOT more practice than I got, so this is something to work on. With CQ WPX RTTY coming up and Packet allowed for all entry classes, I can practice the pouncing with SO4V before having to also build skill in the searching task.



Workflow and Function keys for WriteLog

Don and I debated about what bands we should start on and I was outspoken that it would be 10 and 15 meters. He wasn't so sure, but eventually agreed that made sense. However, as we got closer to the contest, I got cold feet and began to think 15/20 would be best to start on. There was little question that all three bands would be hopping at 18Z, but the big question was which would be the best two at that time at the start of the contest. My last rationale was that 10 meters was still too "new" for most of us and that it was more probable that 15 and 20 would be the optimum bands to start on. In retrospect, I believe that was the right call. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to clear up the pollution I'd done to Don's thinking on this topic and he started on 10 and 15 like we'd agreed! What are friends for?

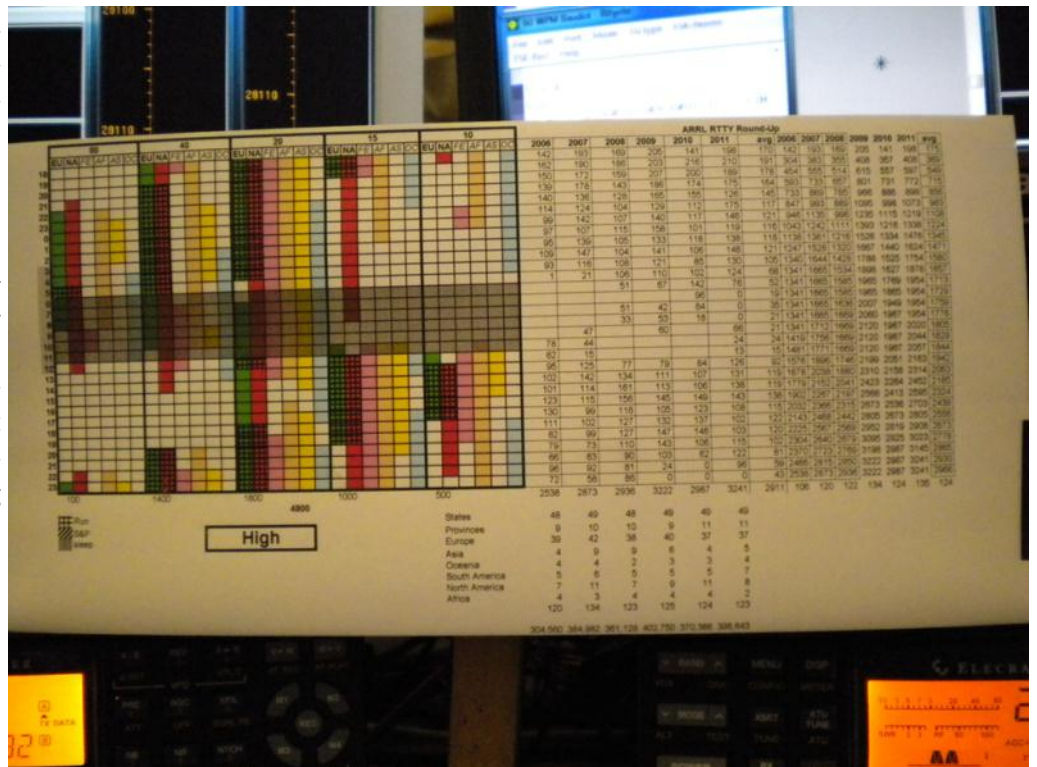
So, 1800z Saturday is approaching and I rotely go through my pre-contest routine of eating, showering, resting, preparing contest food/water, turning off anti-virus and other unneeded programs, clearing the log, making sure the right messages are on board, syncing the PC clocks with WWV, etc. Except that at 1758:30z, I discover that I haven't setup my contest log ... I'm still in my warm-up log ... on all three computers! Mad scramble and I make it in time, except that distraction threw me off balance and took the time when I would normally be finding my starting frequencies. Needless to say, I didn't hit the start time running full speed. On the other hand, I thought I had reasonably good frequencies around 21081 and 14081.

OK, so I'm off and running, literally, with not much lost traction in the beginning. But, QSOs were taking just a second or two longer than I'd like. I just couldn't get the rate above 150/hour. This was devastating because in the prior three years I had one or more hours above 200 out of the first four hours. In fact, my bogey was to exceed 800 QSOs in the first four hours, hopefully closer to 900. However, at 2200Z I was at 633, a real bummer but also a tremendous motivator as I really dug in for the rest of Saturday to do the best I could. A bit of good news was that my rate was increasing and I had a 184 fourth hour. By 2300z, though, the rate on 15m began to sag and I made the move to 40 which was wide open to Europe and eastern North America. The next couple of hours on 20 and 40 the rate held at about 150 and then dropped to 130 when I moved from 20 to 80. But, at European sunrise, the rate kicked up to 150 again on 40 and 80.

Interestingly, the average rate didn't drop off as fast or as much as it did in prior years. That is, my average rate was holding up and by 0630z Sunday when the rate dropped enough for me to take my main break of the contest, I was only 87 QSOs (4.4%) behind my prior high at that point. Not a disaster, but also not on track with my goal of setting a personal best!

My hope was that Sunday would be better than any prior year since there would be three high rate bands rather than only two during the long daytime period. Moreover, since I hadn't been on 10 meters at all, there would be plenty of stations to work all day long there. So, there was still a possibility that I could meet my goal of a personal best. My plan was to sleep and get as much rest as possible before 10 and 15 were runnable on Sunday morning. I got up a bit earlier than I predicted that would be and fixed a full breakfast. But I only got halfway through breakfast before 10 was ready for rock and roll to Europe. At 1146z (7:46am local), I started running Europe on 10 and 15 with the first four hours at 160/hour. (I still had 44 minutes of off-time which was a nice buffer for any unforeseen problems that might arise on Sunday. In 2011, there were some propagation blackout periods of 15-30 minutes on Sunday but that wasn't really expected this year. I was more concerned about station failures that might need some off-time to resolve.) The rate dropped a bit the next few hours and 15 dropped enough that I considered going to 20, but it picked up again so I never left 10 and 15 on Sunday. A few stations who had worked me on all bands except 20 asked about 20, but I didn't feel there was any advantage to me going there before my 24 hours ran out, 45 minutes before the end of the contest period.

Sunday afternoon, my messages began aborting midstream. Sometimes it would take 3-4 restarts before they would complete. Obviously, this torpedoed the rate and my anxiety escalated. Then, it occurred to me that this behavior was like the Last-One-Wins interlock in WriteLog was being invoked even though I wasn't initiating transmit on the second radio. On a whim, I turned of the LOW interlock and presto!



P49X Operating plan and rate tracker

No more message aborts. I just had to mentally manage my transmissions so that only one signal was on the air at a time. Well, problem solved without burning some off-time. Almost immediately, though, the 15m PC froze. None of the normal procedures could awaken it. So, while running all out on 10m, I pulled the battery and power cord on the 15m laptop to get it to reboot, re-load WriteLog, get networked and running again. Second disaster resolved without a break.

Prior to the third near disaster, I decide that I should check 20 meters since the rate on 15 is dropping a bit. In between QSOs, I jump the 15m rig to 20 to check the bandscope. It is filled with signals and much better than 15. At the same time, 10 is still crammed with signals, so what's wrong with 15? Oops, the 15 amp has faulted and the band seems to be dead. Well, it WAS dead locally because something, probably the 15m port on the SixPak, was open or shorted. Having had problems on that same SixPak 15m port a month earlier, I quickly reconfigured to swap 10 and 15 between my two rigs and PCs, but more importantly on the SixPak. I didn't lose either run frequency, nor much time at all, and once again an off-time break wasn't needed to deal with this third problem. Of course, all these Sunday afternoon events left me very nervous for the rest of my 24 hours, but I wrapped up with no more issues.

My rate the last 3 hours dropped to 110/hour and I was glad that I didn't have to operate the last 45 minutes. In other words, I felt I had operated the highest rate 24 hours from Aruba given the weekend's conditions and activity. I had more QSOs by 250 or 8%, but essentially the same mults (124) as the prior four years. But, this should be enough to set a new personal best score even after log check reductions. And, it looks like the score will stay above 400K, a new milestone for RTTY Round-Up. My goal was met, although I felt I could have made more out of the weekend than I did. I guess the good news out of that is that the bar isn't as high as it might have been for next year!

In summary, my expectation that 10 meters would boost the total QSO count held out although I frankly expected even more. My multiplier count didn't improve at all and remains a focus area for improvement. In particular, I only had seven Canadian mults compared to about 10 in the past. After the fact, it looks like some of them were only CQing and I didn't find them. The others may have worked P40YL and avoided my pile-ups. Finally, I am still baffled as to why my starting rate was so low. It was the lowest of the last six years and only slightly higher than seven years ago when I started doing this contest from Aruba. This is a troubling result that I have no insight into. On the other hand, my average rate for the entire contest increased from the previous high of 135/hour to 146 in 2012. Perhaps it could have been even higher.

This write-up is all from my perspective, but that is only half the story. The other half is the gracious efforts of the 2054 different stations who worked me on one or more bands. 29 stations got into the log on all five bands even though the P4 multiplier only counts once. 100 stations worked P49X on four bands, another 245 worked me on three bands and 547 worked me on two bands. I have to repeat what I often say, that much of the credit for these results go to the stations who were kind enough to call in and work P49X.

Shootout at the CQP Coral—By Don K6GHA

Why do westerns have shootouts between the good and bad guy at high noon? And how does this relate to radio contesting? I hope to bring these two things together in my continuing discoveries as described last year's article *Jumping in the deep end of the pool* (see *Jug Jul'2011*). My second time diving in was an improvement; from a belly flop, to something akin to a frog trying to do a swan dive. Although it got me into the pool, and I knew what to expect, it wasn't really that pretty.

This year was the 46th running of the California QSO Party contest, known as the CQP. And for some unknown reason I had it in my head to start from, what some may call, the bottom in radio contesting and work up. I ran QRP low power. Now, some may say QRP requires more patience, skill, and attention to detail, while others shake their head and ask 'why?' In either case, this year my journey was to run in the biggest of all state contests with low power. When living in California, everyone in North America (and in some cases worldwide) tries to make a contact with you. So, I thought, why not give it a try and run QRP?

At this point you might be asking what does *high noon* and *shootout* have to do with radio contesting. Let's first look at some contesting rules and definitions to help with the story (for all information on the CQP, go to the website at <http://www.cqp.org>).

First, the history of the CQP is one in which there is an equal playing field between all contesters. In the CQP, unlike other some other contests, there are 58 multipliers for both California and non-California stations. For California, the multipliers (or mults) are comprised of the 50 US states and 8 grouped Canadian Provinces. For non-Californians, it is simply the 58 counties of California that make up the mults. This leveling is what I call *high noon*, where on the old dusty main street of a western town the sun at noon isn't in either contestant's eyes, and neither has that as an advantage.

Second, there are three groups of transmitter power ratings (or classes) you can operate in for the duration of the contest; greater than 200 watts, less than or equal to 200 watts, and less or equal to 5 watts. In slang terms these equate to 'big guns' (>200W), 'little pistols' (<=200W), and what I call QRP stations 'derringers' (>=5W). Loosely defined in my terms, a derringer is a small pistol that has a small bore and is somewhat dangerous and effective at close range.

In this *high noon shootout* about to take place, there aren't a lot of town folk watching, there are no bad guys (well almost none), it lasts for a maximum of 30 hours, and best of all nobody gets hurt! *But pardner*, you know the landscape; a level playing field of 58 multipliers for your total QSO's or contacts. You know the objective is to make as many QSO's in 24 operating hours as possible. You know that making contact with all the mults and achieving a sweep gives you the highest scores. And you know what you are shooting at, be it *big guns*, *little pistols*, or *derringers*. All that's left after the shooting stops is to collect the logs, and allow the sheriffs to identify the winners.

In my case, again I learned a few more things this year that will help in the next contest.

First, you need good antennas! Yes, plural. Above almost everything, it is to your best advantage to be able to work all frequency bands as they shift throughout the day and night, to increase your score. So, you need antennas to be able to chase the prime band. Especially when running QRP!! A bit more of an overall investment in your station, with better or more antennas, make big difference.

Second, be an efficient operator. If you are 'rag chewing', or not handling the traffic correctly, you are costing yourself, and others, valuable time in adding to total contacts. Good form counts when contesting.

Last, and maybe the reason I am already looking forward to next year's 47th CQP and setting new goals for the event, can be summed up by a western legend:

"The trail is the thing, not the end of the trail. Travel too fast, and you miss all you are traveling for."

— *Louis L'Amour*

Until next time at high noon, and in the deep end of the pool, Adios and good DXing.



Contest Calendar—February page 1

QRP Fox Hunt	0200Z-0330Z, Feb 1
QRP Fox Hunt	0200Z-0330Z, Feb 3
NCCC Sprint Ladder	0230Z-0300Z, Feb 3
Vermont QSO Party	0000Z, Feb 4 to 2400Z, Feb 5
YL-ISSB QSO Party, CW	0000Z, Feb 4 to 2359Z, Feb 5
10-10 Int. Winter Contest, SSB	0001Z, Feb 4 to 2359Z, Feb 5
Black Sea Cup International	1200Z, Feb 4 to 1159Z, Feb 5
EPC WW DX Contest	1200Z, Feb 4 to 1200Z, Feb 5
FYBO Winter QRP Sprint	1400Z-2400Z, Feb 4
Minnesota QSO Party	1400Z-2400Z, Feb 4
AGCW Straight Key Party	1600Z-1900Z, Feb 4
British Columbia QSO Party	1600Z, Feb 4 to 0400Z, Feb 5
Delaware QSO Party	1700Z, Feb 4 to 2359Z, Feb 5
Mexico RTTY International Contest	1800Z, Feb 4 to 1759Z, Feb 5
North American Sprint, CW	0000Z-0400Z, Feb 5
ARS Spartan Sprint	0200Z-0400Z, Feb 7
QRP Fox Hunt	0200Z-0330Z, Feb 8
NAQCC-EU Monthly Sprint	1800Z-2000Z, Feb 8
QRP Fox Hunt	0200Z-0330Z, Feb 10
NCCC Sprint Ladder	0230Z-0300Z, Feb 10
CQ WW RTTY WPX Contest	0000Z, Feb 11 to 2400Z, Feb 12
SARL Field Day Contest	1000Z, Feb 11 to 1000Z, Feb 12
Asia-Pacific Spring Sprint, CW	1100Z-1300Z, Feb 11
Dutch PACC Contest	1200Z, Feb 11 to 1200Z, Feb 12
Louisiana QSO Party	1500Z, Feb 11 to 0300Z, Feb 12
New Hampshire QSO Party	1600Z, Feb 11 to 0400Z, Feb 12 and 1200Z-2200Z, Feb 12



Contest Calendar—February page 2

FISTS Winter Sprint	1700Z-2100Z, Feb 11
North American Sprint, SSB	0000Z-0400Z, Feb 12
SKCC Weekend Sprint	0000Z-2400Z, Feb 12
Classic Exchange, Phone	1400Z, Feb 12 to 0800Z, Feb 13
ARRL School Club Roundup	1300Z, Feb 13 to 2400Z, Feb 17
PODXS 070 Club Valentine Sprint	2000 local, Feb 14 to 0200 local, Feb 15
NAQCC Straight Key/Bug Sprint	0130Z-0330Z, Feb 15
QRP Fox Hunt	0200Z-0330Z, Feb 15
AGCW Semi-Automatic Key Evening	1900Z-2030Z, Feb 15
QRP Fox Hunt	0200Z-0330Z, Feb 17
NCCC Sprint Ladder	0230Z-0300Z, Feb 17
ARRL Inter. DX Contest, CW	0000Z, Feb 18 to 2400Z, Feb 19
Feld Hell Sprint	2000Z-2200Z, Feb 18
AWA Amplitude Modulation QSO Party	2300Z, Feb 18 to 2300Z, Feb 19
Run for the Bacon QRP Contest	0200Z-0400Z, Feb 20
SKCC Sprint	0000Z-0200Z, Feb 22
QRP Fox Hunt	0200Z-0330Z, Feb 22
QRP Fox Hunt	0200Z-0330Z, Feb 24
NCCC Sprint Ladder	0230Z-0300Z, Feb 24
CQ 160-Meter Contest, SSB	2200Z, Feb 24 to 2159Z, Feb 26
REF Contest, SSB	0600Z, Feb 25 to 1800Z, Feb 26
UBA DX Contest, CW	1300Z, Feb 25 to 1300Z, Feb 26
Mississippi QSO Party	1500Z, Feb 25 to 0300Z, Feb 26
North American QSO Party, RTTY	1800Z, Feb 25 to 0600Z, Feb 26
High Speed Club CW Contest	0900Z-1700Z, Feb 26
North Carolina QSO Party	1700Z, Feb 26 to 0300Z, Feb 27
QRP Fox Hunt	0200Z-0330Z, Feb 29

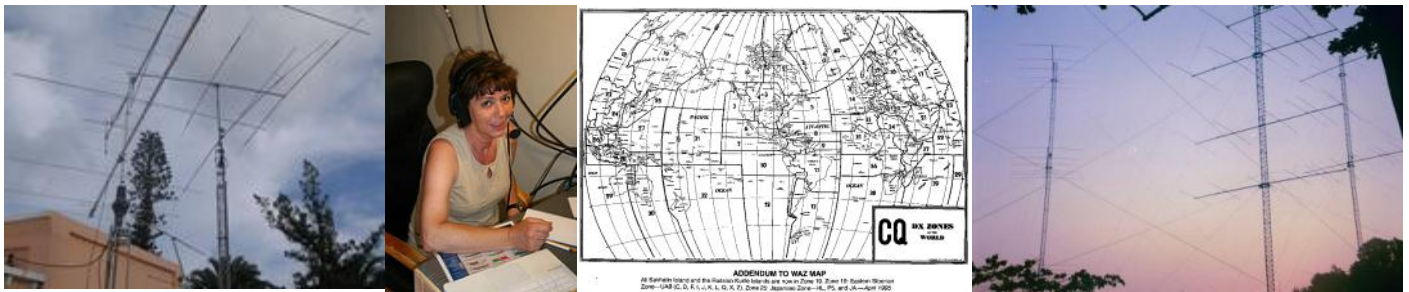


Please consider writing an article for JUG !

March 2012 Newsletter Deadline—February 28th

This is your newsletter so lets make it something we are proud of. I hope you will consider writing an article for the JUG! Whether its about your station, recent contest experience or a technical article we would appreciate hearing from you.

Send your articles to Ian W6TCP w6tcp@comcast.net and Stu K6TU stu@ridgelift.com



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