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Contest Club



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NCCC Net
Thursday 8 PM
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Our Next Meeting

SS War Stories and P49X RTTY Round Up

Date: Monday, 13 November 2006

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

Location: Chevy's Fresh Mex, 979 Edgewater Blvd, Foster City, CA 94404

See Web site for meal details, price, etc.

Please RSVP to [K6EU](mailto:k6eu) by Sunday, 12 November. Pay via PayPal beforehand or cash/check at the door.

From 101: Take 101 to Hillsdale Exit, head east to Edgewater Blvd., turn right (south). Shopping center and restaurant is on your right. See Web site "meetings" for more detailed map and directions.

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Musings from the President

By Dean Straw, N6BV

The October 16, 2006, meeting at TIBCO was very well attended. There were many spirited discussions before dinner, during dinner, and certainly after dinner too! Ed, W0YK, has uploaded to the NCCC Web site the October presentation. (Click on "Meetings" and find the presentations for the October meeting, plus those for earlier months too.)

The 2006 California QSO Party was an unqualified success. Propagation was better than expected on Saturday, although we had some elevated geomagnetic activity on Sunday that put a small damper on 15 and 20 meters. I operated out at N6O and had almost 700 more QSOs on 15 meters in 2006 than I did last year in CQP. This is a harbinger of better propagation conditions to come in the next few years, once we get out of the lowest part of the solar cycle we're in right now. Let's hope that propagation is good for SS, too.

I wish to commend our CQP committee, headed up by Kevin, WB6S, and Marc, W6ZZZ, and ably assisted by many dedicated volunteers. They managed to get all 58 California counties on the air for the 2006 CQP. I saw many very positive comments on various contesting reflectors about how much people enjoyed CQP. Kudos to Kevin and his gang!

As I write this column there are only two weeks before the *BIG ONE* for NCCC: the

ARRL November Sweepstakes. At the October 16 meeting at TIBCO, I showed some PowerPoint slides that PVRC used at their last meeting. Not to put too fine a point on it, but PVRC really, really wants to seize the Unlimited Club gavel this year. They have seen the declining scores from NCCC over the last two years (corresponding to the fall in the sunspot cycle, of course) and figured that we were ready to roll over and just give them the Unlimited Club gavel.

As I pointed out in my last Musings from the Pres column, the biggest danger we face is *complacency*. Believe me, ladies and gents, SS 2006 is not a done deal. We need to get every possible NCCCer on the air -- both weekends, CW and phone -- for as many hours as is possible on both weekends.

I've appointed Marc Ziegler, W6ZZZ, as the 2006 SS Coordinator. Marc has hit the ground running with his characteristic enthusiasm and drive. He has gathered a number of volunteers to aid NCCC members in whatever they need to get them in the chair to rock and roll for Sweepstakes.

Do you need help finding a station at which to operate SS? Do you have a station but need a top-notch op to run SS? Do you need help configuring your logging software? How about getting your Internet Packet going? What about your antennas? Need some help getting that aluminum tweaked for SS? Contact Marc or one of the volunteers he has listed on the NCCC reflector.

One of the SS topics that got a lot of discussion at the October 16 meeting, and that has continued on the NCCC reflector, is that of Packet spotting. Ed Muns, W0YK, has written a short paper on how to do Packet spotting so that our NCCC club score is maximized. The essence of this concept is that as many NCCCs as possible operate with "U" (Unlimited) precedence, meaning that they're connected to a Packet network, preferably using the Internet for speed and reliability.

The idea is to constantly spot *all calls* while stations are S&Ping. We're also organizing dedicated spotters (perhaps mainly at Multi stations) who will comb the bands, spotting every station possible. With a multitude of spotters, we end up with a huge number of stations in individual band maps or packet Announce windows. An individual operator connected to packet via his logging software will only see spots that represent new stations for him -- in other words his logging software filters out stations that would be dupes.

Even with all this wonderful technology and spotting networks, it still all comes down to a group of individuals putting in the time in front of their radios, calling CQ when they can, and S&Ping when they can run rate that way.

Here's my personal goal for 2006 Sweepstakes. I want to make 200,000 points at K6TA for CW, and 300,000 points as N6BV at N6RO's place for SSB. What is your goal, noble NCCCer? Will you help vanquish PVRC once again?

73 and Kick, Duck!

Dean, N6BV



VPCC News and Views

By: Fred Jensen, K6DGW

Well, CQP has come and gone ... and what a blast we had at N6A in Alpine County! We managed six ops this year (Left to right in the picture: W4UAT, WB6ETY, KQ6DI,

me, WD6FLG, and Don, W6OA who came down from his new home in Washington) which really works out well. And, propagation was surprisingly good considering the spotlessness of the sun.

The weather leading up to the weekend was frigid at best, with a little snow each day, however Saturday and Sunday warmed up dramatically, enough for shorts and T-shirts. Fortunately, there was very little wind at all.

I want to thank all those who have stepped up to fill in for VP/CC in my obvious absences. Had I known the problems Andrea's Dad would be facing when Ed and Dean called me last spring, I'd have put off accepting a VP/CC position until ham radio could regain its appropriate place on my To-Do list. I'm hoping on a SOHP effort in CW, but will miss SSB due to a number of relatives descending to see Andrea's Dad. This is short this month, I promised Rob I'd get it into him yesterday, but that little time window slammed shut on me. Somewhere in all of this, I need to see if I can digest the FCC's new R&O, too.

73 and KB/D in SS,

Fred K6DGW
Auburn CA CM981w

Preparing for SS

By: Rob Brownstein K6RB

Yes, it's that time, again. SS is looming large. For many of us, it is another in a long string of SS contests; for some it's a painful experience done out of fealty to the club.

As contests go, SS is one of the most challenging. The exchange is long, and absent a pre-fill file, it's unpredictable. There's no perfunctory '599 SPC' stuff here. For many contests, it comes down to being able to copy a call sign correctly; for SS, that's just one of five data points.

You've heard it before, and it bears repeating, read the SS Handbook. It is very well written and comprehensive. Read the sections on spotting, and setting up for spotting, in the members' section of the Web site.

Every NCCC member's strategy for SS is the same – win the unlimited club gavel...again. For some of us, that means sustaining a good average rate and operating for the full 24 hours per contest. For others, you may add much more to the overall effort by S&P'ing and spotting every CQ'er you run across.

Here's the rationale in a nutshell. Even the biggest, meanest, big-gun station will begin running out of people to work well before the 24 hours goes by. With many NCCCs spotting – especially on Sunday – each of us benefits from those additional ears.

A ton of CQ'ers are spotted, but for each of us, only the un-worked calls end up on our individual band maps. We each contribute to the mass of spotted stations, and we each benefit from that team effort. No single one of us could possibly sift through the active bands and find the same number of prospects as all of us working collectively. That's the point.

Now, just a few things to keep in mind:

- Most of us will probably be most productive operating 20, 40 and 80, but check 15 on both days;
- QRO stations with beams should spend most of Saturday trying to "run" stations;
- LP stations, and stations with wire antennas should plan on a lot of S&P, but spend some time CQ'ing near the uppermost frequency portion of each band, too;
- LP stations may, in fact, generate pile ups on Sunday by CQ'ing;

- QRO stations should be working the non-dupe spots, particularly on Sunday, when rates drop substantially;
- There's less risk of losing a run frequency by pouncing on a spot on Sunday;
- Don't spend too much time on any spotted call – come back later when the pile up diminishes;
- There is no strategy or tactic more important than spending the maximum amount of operating time.

Remember, when CQing, send at a rate with which you are comfortable. Good operators will call you at that rate.

If you are CQing and are uncertain about a number, precedent, check or section, ask for a fill until you're sure you have it right.

If you are S&Ping, you don't have to ask for a fill. Just hang around and listen to his next QSO. It will take you a little more time, but you won't be slowing him/her down.

CQP at Lake/Colusa ... The full story Al Maenchen, AD6E

County Expeditioning has been a lot of fun over the years, but each year I drive home afterwards dead tired with the thoughts "why do I do this?" and "this is the last time!"

Here's what has become my standard routine:

Drive to site on Friday and set up:

- one 50ft TV mast with an A3 tribander, 40/80 dipole on one coax, and a 75 dipole on a third coax

- If time permits before dark install a second 50ft mast for the 40 and 80 reflectors.
- Setup tent (usually in the dark) and assemble the station

Saturday, operate all day going QRT around midnight

Sunday, operate from 6am to 3pm .. then

- quickly remove the A3 from the mast, and drop both masts
- coil up all coax and rope
- disassemble and re-pack the station
- pack everything back into the car and try to leave before dark.

This time, I decided to leave on Thursday instead of Friday since I had a cold and wasn't feeling too well (excuse #1). After stopping off at the store for ice and at Togo's for four large sandwiches (my main food supply besides cookies, orange juice, and diet Coke) I set off for the northern hinterlands. Thanks to excellent driving directions by N6DE, I arrived at the site in the afternoon and had the luxury of putting up the tent in daylight, knowing that I had all of Friday to devote to the antennas. What would I do with all the extra time?

This site was first discovered by Ron, K6KYJ several years ago and was used by the crews of K6L and K6C several years in a row. It's on a ridge top just a few hundred meters from the summit of Goat Mountain. The exact location is 39.273927 x – 122.728800 (antenna). Google Earth gives a very good view. The antenna mast and tent were in Colusa county, but the 80 & 40 wires stretched out into Lake county.

The weather on Thursday was good, but with some lingering showers from the storm front that had passed by the day before. At one point, near dark, I saw a few snowflakes. The forecast called for sun through the weekend so I didn't think much of it except that it was cold!

Friday morning, I slept in until 9am. The sun was shining brightly and there wasn't a

cloud in the sky. Beautiful day! I spent a couple of hours exploring the area and taking some photos before tackling the antennas. The first job was to erect the 50ft TV mast. This is tricky if you don't have any help. My technique is to use a 10ft orchard ladder. I used a short piece of rope to tie the collapsed mast to the ladder, then run around and guy the mast at it's 10ft level. Experience has taught me to use heavy duty guy points. I used 2 ft long x 3/4 inch bolts with a washer hammered into the ground angled slightly away from the mast.

Once the mast is stable with one set of rope guys, then I climb the ladder and install two more sets of guy ropes at the 30 and 50 ft sections. I also attached two pulley lines for raising the dipoles, then push up the mast section by section. Don't try this on a windy day! With all sections up, the mast is pretty floppy until all the guy ropes are secure. I spent a lot of time tensioning each guy in turn to get the mast straight.

Next, I assembled the A3 tribander with only the reflector and director elements attached. Leaving off the driven element may seem foolish, but it keeps the weight down and makes it much easier to walk it up the ladder and mount to the mast. Once loosely mounted at the bottom of the second mast section (10'), I attached the driven element and pushed the whole thing as high as I could reach standing on the ladder. That put the A3 at about 17ft. Granted, it isn't very high, but remember, I'm doing this by myself!

About this time .. mid afternoon .. I noticed spectacular clouds forming just north of me. The first of three thunder heads arrived and I made a mad dash to the car to sit it out. Fortunately, no ground strikes and little rain, but these were very close and very loud. This is when I discovered the tent doesn't do well in the rain. It took a while to mop up after each squall.

In between cloud attacks, I measured and cut the wires for the 80/40 dipoles, and the 75

dipole. I used NEC to find the optimum length of each wire, but past experience says the calculated value is always too long. This time, I tried raising the first dipole (40) to about 10ft and trimmed for proper frequency before raising to 50ft where I can't reach the ends. I wondered why I never tried this before since this is MUCH easier than raising/lowering these wires on the mast and not getting everything tangled. Hmmmm ... With the 40 dipole tuned thusly to 7.10 MHz, I raised it to 50ft and spread out the wires using nylon string. The wires were pretty horizontal, and the resonant frequency became 7.7 MHz !! The 80 dipole was resonant at 3.4 MHz since I hadn't trimmed it. At this point the second thunderhead arrived and I never did get the 40 dipole corrected (excuse #2). Both 40 and 80 dipoles are connected to the same coax with a choke balun.

The 75 dipole uses it's own coax and I hoisted this to the top of the mast, but with the wires spread out 90 degrees from the 80/40 wires. This makes it a N-S dipole instead of the E-W antennas for 80/40, which is very useful.

By this time, the afternoon was shot and I never did get to put up the second mast for the 80 and 40 reflectors (excuse #3). My head cold wasn't helping and I felt lethargic. Otherwise, I probably would have pushed myself to get this fully installed. As night fell, I only wanted to get some sleep in the hope that would give me needed energy for operating. The station was operational, but I wasn't. So, I blew off the practice session and the 75 meter net.

Some CQP Photos



Rusty during the W6OAT/M and K5RC mobile jaunt.



K6DGW and CQP "crew"

New WriteLog Feature

Ed Muns, W0YK

Beginning with WriteLog 10.61, a nifty new feature is included for SO2R and Multi-Multi stations. I've lobbied Wayne Wright, W5XD and author of WriteLog, for a year now about adding this capability.

I've always wished logging software would have message parameters for grabbing the frequency of the other radio(s). Then, a QSY message could be constructed that automatically tracked the frequency of the other radio(s) without the operator having to stop and edit the message with the new frequency whenever it changed. This way, all the radios can be moved to new run frequencies (or a quickly found clear "meet-me" frequency) and the QSY message on

CW or RTTY would automatically point to that correct frequency.

Well, this is now available in WriteLog version 10.61 with the addition of the '%Zn' parameter for messages. This parameter inserts the current frequency of radio 'n' into the message. For example, a typical SO2R WriteLog setup will have two QSO Entry lines, one for each radio. The first, or top, one is labeled 'Radio 1' and the second or lower one is labeled 'Radio 2' in WriteLog. If Radio 1 is on 7016.3 kHz and Radio 2 is on 14043.6 kHz, you might set up two QSY messages thusly:

```
F7 (QSY to Radio 1): PSE QSY %Z1 TU
F8 (QSY to Radio 2): PSE QSY %Z2 TU
```

When your transmit focus is on Radio 1 (7016.3 kHz), you press F8 and the following message is sent:

```
PSE QSY 14043 KHZ TU
```

When focused on Radio 2, you press F7 for:

```
PSE QSY 7016.3 KHZ TU
```

I'm still working with Wayne to omit the 'KHZ' text so that the message can be kept short. The operator can add these letters back in, if desired.

This is great for the SO2R operator controlling both radios from one computer. But what about those of us who use networked computers, one on each radio? Or, how does the multi-multi station make use of this feature? Neither Wayne nor I had thought this detail through in the early stages of implementing the feature. Once I got the 10.61 Beta release in my hands, it was unusable in my RTTY setup. I then suggested to Wayne that the %Z parameter be expanded to include a letter followed by a number, or '%Zln'. The letter 'l' designates the network computer and the number 'n' designates the radio on that computer. Thus, for my SO2R arrangement with network computer 'A' on one radio and network

computer 'B' on the other radio, my messages look like this:

F7 (QSY to Radio 1): PSE QSY %ZB1 TU
F7 (QSY to Radio 2): PSE QSY %ZA1 TU

Note that with two radios, I only need one QSY message buffer on each computer, so it can be the same function key. But for multi-multi stations, there will need to be n-1 message buffers to cover all the other radios from any given radio. This enhanced %Z parameter definition is implemented in WriteLog version 10.62 which is in Beta now and should be released publicly soon.

For high rate contesting it is important to keep your messages short, but still intelligible. So, I typically use only 'PSE %ZB1'. Most people get it, although some take a few minutes to catch on. In time as this becomes more common, either this or other shorthand messages will become well known.

KVM Switch for SO2R

Ed Muns, W0YK

For those (few) of you who use two networked computers for SO2R, you might try out a KVM switch instead of dealing with two sets of keyboard, display and mouse. I know N2NL uses the two networked computer approach with CT for CW and phone. I use it only on RTTY with WriteLog, preferring TR-Log on one computer for CW and the rare occasions I do phone.

The problem, of course, with the two networked computer approach for the single operator is finding a good layout at the operating position for two sets of user interface. It is also problematic to be moving your hands between two keyboards and mice. I've been thinking about some kind of switch box that could be run by a foot switch to swap the keyboard and mouse between the two computers. I would always use two LCDs, one on each computer on RTTY so there is more display real estate for watch the decoders on each radio. Well, I wasn't aware that the computer industry has had nearly what I needed for some time now. It is called a "KVM Switch", for Keyboard Video Mouse switching.

They come in various configurations for how the operator performs the switch. Most of them use a special key sequence on the keyboard, such as a fast double tapping of the Scroll key. But, I found a Belkin model that has a remote pushbutton that controls the swapping between two computers.

For starters, I've simply used double-sided tape to mount this little push button up on a corner of my keyboard. I plan to experiment with ways to use it as a footswitch. The good news is that it plugs into the KVM module using a 1/8" phone plug. The bad news is that it is a special 4-conductor plug and I don't know if I can find one ... may just have to sacrifice the original pushbutton and use the plug/cable that came with the KVM. The reason it is 4-conductor is that signals are fed back to the pushbutton as to which of the two computers the KVM is currently connected to. Those signals light up a green LED for the left computer and a yellow LED for the right computer. In my application, I want to replace this set-up with a footswitch and an LED mounted on each LCD to indicate which one has the keyboard/mouse active on it.

Still a work in progress, but if you use two or more computers (there are 4-computer KVMs as well!), you may want to try out this approach.



Two models of KVM switches: left one uses double Scroll key presses, right one uses small push button.



Small KVM control button mounted in upper right corner of keyboard.

