JUG
Publication of the Northern California Contest Club

January 2002
Issue 356

The NCCC 75 meter net meets on Thursdays at 9PM, 3830 approximately

NCCC Meeting

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

Program
Contest DXpeditioning
MC'd by Andy, AE6Y

January 14, 2002 at 6pm
Harry's Hofbrau, 1909 El Camino Real
Redwood City

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Contest Calendar

January Contests

SARTG New Year RTTY Contest	Jan 1
ARRL RTTY Roundup	Jan 6
Japan Int. DX Contest, 160-40m	Jan 11 - 13
North American QSO Party, CW	Jan 12 - 13
DARC 10-Meter Contest	Jan 13
North American QSO Party, SSB	Jan 19 – 20
ARRL January VHF Sweepstakes	Jan 19 – 21
CQ 160-Meter Contest, CW	Jan 25 – 27
REF Contest, CW	Jan 26 – 27
BARTG RTTY Sprint	Jan 26 – 27
UBA DX Contest, SSB	Jan 26 – 27

February Contests

YL-OM Contest, CW	Feb 2 – 4
North American Sprint, Phone	Feb 3
CQ/RJ WW RTTY WPX Contest	Feb 9 - 10
Asia-Pacific Sprint, CW	Feb 9
Dutch PACC Contest	Feb 9 – 10
YL-OM Contest, SSB	Feb 9 – 11
FISTS Winter Sprint	Feb 9
RSGB 1.8 MHz Contest, CW	Feb 9 – 10
North American Sprint, CW	Feb 10
ARRL Inter. DX Contest, CW	Feb 16 - 17
CQ 160-Meter Contest, SSB	Feb 22 – 24
REF Contest, SSB	Feb 23 - 24

March Contests

ARRL Inter. DX Contest, Phone	Mar 2 - 3
CQ WW WPX Contest, SSB	Mar 30 – 31

May Contests

CQ WW WPX Contest, CW	May 25 - 26

From the Editor: I had a bit of space to fill, so I thought I would use it to wish everyone a safe, happy and prosperous New Year. At the end of each year I tend to think back on how lucky I am. I've only been an NCCC'er since July, but I've enjoyed it immensely. I need to thank Bill, K6KM and his lovely wife Ginny for hosting us at their location for CQWW RTTY and to Ken, N6RO for the elmering offer we look forward to taking advantage of and last, but not least, special thanks to Bob, N6TV for his help in re-arranging my station layout via numerous emails and digital photos. The SO2R gear is almost all built and I didn't need that fire extinguisher after all!!! 73 and KB…...Mary, NA6E

XI-ting Times

Noise – It Comes And Goes

Regular readers of this column recall that your Prez packed up most of his amateur radio gear and moved it from the line-noise hell of Saratoga to pristine, rural and theoretically noise-free Truckee. Unfortunately, Murphy hitched a ride in the Cessna. Wouldn't you know it, just about the time I had rendered Saratoga brain-dead, the rains came with vigor, soaked the wooden power poles and eliminated the previously incessant S7-9 noise, probably until next Spring. Similarly, the funny noise I heard occasionally on 10 meters during CQP in Truckee became pretty obvious during SS and now, with three to four feet of snow blanketing the neighborhood and nighttime temps dipping into the single digits, it is up to about 70% duty cycle on 10m, declining counter-intuitively on lower frequencies and at night. It's not power line noise, either. Much closer to band noise, it is directional, occasionally intermittent and variable in strength up to about S7. And it peaks with the antenna pointing North toward…nothing! A reservoir, a summer campground, a shooting range, a cemetery and about 30 miles of wilderness stretch out in that direction, not exactly your typical sources of man-made RFI. Another day, another noise puzzle. Keeps ya' thinkin', eh?

Sweepstakes

I hate to do this … to be the bearer of bad news. It's a dirty job, as they say, but someone has to do it. What more need I say? They beat us. Again. Fair and square. Again. This time by a bigger margin. A wide margin. Not really a margin at all – more like a gaping hole in our expectations, our plans and our accomplishments. A hole so big that there is no hope that potential log checking differences could rearrange the claimed standings. According to their president K9PG, that formerly "sleepy" Midwestern contest club, the Society of Midwest Contesters, rounded up 342 SS log submissions for 22,936,952 claimed points! Never mind that our claimed 18,135,322 points broke the previous record (OUR record) of 16M by about two million points. It still lost to SMC by more than four million, ten times last year's spread. SMC went from 211 logs to 342, more than a 50% increase from last year! They increased their score by eight million points. We increased our entries from 123 to 141, a not-so-shabby 20% increase, and our score by four million points but that simply was not enough. "SS is a numbers game," we hear over and over and that, my friends, is the truth. SMC had the numbers and we did not. So they won.

Now there is at least some satisfaction to be had. SMC's average score actually DECLINED from 68,970 reported to 67,067 claimed while NCCC's average score INCREASED from 115,061 reported to 128,619 claimed, a truly awesome figure. We clearly enjoy the strongest roster in US contesting, but they have the deeper bench. And in the free-for-all of unlimited club contesting where any number can play, that's what takes the gavel.

Winning club contesting consists of operating, recruiting, retaining, training and motivating. We are the better operators. They are better at recruiting. The two clubs are about equal in motivating members to get on. We both harvested about a third of the potentially available logs; that is, the fraction of two logs per member. I cannot measure our respective abilities to retain and train. I suspect both clubs do pretty well. So if we want to win, we have to make a major change in our recruiting. We worked hard this year, so hard work isn't the issue. We worked together well, so teamwork isn't the issue. What are left is smart work and perhaps some scut work. We have to do more and we have to do it better. I have some ideas but I'm not going to publish them here in the Jug, K9PG's favorite contest club newsletter. Come to the upcoming club meetings and let's talk. These guys can be beat. We can beat them. Stand by.

SO2R Phase 2

Well, I have completed the next chapter in the saga of N6XI/SO2R. I'm not ready to tell you that SO2R is for everyone but I can say that Phase 2 switching is neither hard nor terribly expensive. You may recall that my Phase 1 switching arrangement left something to be desired - I used a simple audio switch box that gave my ears a choice of Radio 1, Radio 2 or both in Stereo. I used separate keys and microphones for each rig, an obviously unsatisfactory arrangement, especially on phone. Some simple switches and relays could have improved that, but subtleties such as preserving inherent stereo operation from two receivers in one radio would be mind boggling.

I decided to throw money at the problem, $265 to be approximate, by purchasing a Top Ten Devices DX Doubler and prefabricated cable sets for my specific radios. You can accomplish equivalent switching with the Array Solutions SO2R Master. I chose between the two by polling my gurus, finding no consensus and picking Top Ten because it fit neatly under the rig shelf … a weak reason. The resulting lash-up is clean, comfortable and flexible. I do wish radio manufacturers would provide rear panel connectors for mike, key and phones. That would avoid the ugly and awkward loop of medium weight connectors and cables sticking out of the front panels of each rig and getting in the way. Some radios have some such connector placement, but I don't know of any that do it all. And Top Ten chose to use front-panel connectors where possible, even when rear panel equivalents were available. This keeps the rat's nest to a minimum, I suppose. At any rate, I'm satisfied. It does most of the right things with the computer including some really fancy alternating of audio and sending between the two radios. Or you can control sending and listening separately yourself, preserving sanity at the expense of more toggle switching. And when the computer is turned off, you can still use both radios and easily switch between them. I like it!

Now for Phase 3 – actually becoming expert at using the danged thing. This will certainly be the most difficult phase. By the time I am done, I will no longer be your prez, so you may just have to come to a meeting to find out if I succeed. Or monitor the admissions manifest at the Truckee Home for the Contesting Insane…

Happy New Year

By the time you read this, Christmas, Hannukah, Ramadan, Kwanzaa and the International Secular New Year will be over. As will the ARRL 160 and 10 meter contests, the Stew Perry Topband Challenge, the Tennessee QSO Party and Straight Key Night. It won't take much to make 2002 a better year than 2001, so I wish you all much more than that minimum. May 2002 bring us all health, happiness, security and prosperity. May we live in XI-ting but perhaps less "interesting" times, to borrow a concept from a Chinese proverb.

73 & CU on the bands,
Rick N6XI

Andy's Dandies

Onwards and Upwards -- From SS to WPX

Sadly, the unofficial Sweepstakes exit polling shows that we will have to gain a few million points in the log checking to get elected champs in the big dog class this year. While this seems unlikely, I have to give a large pat on the back to our leaders in the SS effort, Ken, N6RO, and Bob, K6XX. Our average per log score was close to 130k, an unheard of number for a large club, but unfortunately, we just did not have enough of those super logs to carry the day. Even so, we can be proud of the effort, which broke the prior club record (both for us and for the SS as a whole) by several million points.

Now it's time to turn our attention to the 2002 contests, and in particular to WPX, which we established earlier this year as being our second club goal. Here is a pome about that (with apologies for the uncharacteristic R-rating, but it's a difficult rhyme to make):

On to the "Nex…"
Sweepstakes continues to vex
As SMC puts on their hex.
What's better than sex?
To be contest DX.
And triumph in W-P-X.

January Meeting

To those of you who haven't been to a recent meeting, all I can say is you don't know what you're missing. Meetings this year have been full of good cheer and ham socializing, and educational to boot.

January is going to be a very interesting panel presentation on contest DX-peditioning. We need many of such efforts to prevail in WPX. There is a wider choice of venues than ever, as rent-a-QTHs have sprung up all over the world.

Possibilities for club members range from established super-stations we hope will come out in WPX, such as HC8N, run by N5KO, W6NL, K6AW and N6KT, to bring the gear and put up the antennas, like the 6Y exploits of Team Vertical, led by K2KW and N6BT.

In between are wonderful places like ZF2NT's Little Cayman paradise, P49V (AI6V), and lots of QTHs for rent, such as the WP2Z hilltop station in the Virgin Islands (a haunt of N6DE) or the Villa Rose (used by AJ6V among others), and the 8P5 venue of W2SC, NH7A's and AD6E's Hawaiian locales. Gosh, just listing a few makes me realize how much variety there is.

Also possible are expeditions within the U.S. and Canada to established sites. Particularly on the East Coast, a WPX expedition can give us Left Coasters the ability to feast on endless European pile-ups – the kind we used to see with JA's.

Don't forget the fun of simply operating your own station from home. Unlike CQWW and ARRL DX, in WPX the multiplier structure allows one to make a most credible score from home in California or Nevada, particularly if you have, or can borrow, an interesting prefix for the occasion. Great scores have been turned in from W6GO (N6IG), W6NL, NR6O (N6RO and company), WC6H, W6YX (W6LD, N7MH – gotta get on for WPX). Even from a average station like my own, 3M points per weekend is readily achievable. And many other stations of club members have greater potential than that, e.g., K6KM, K6ZM, K6TA, N6TV, K6RIM, W6OAT, and others (don't mean to slight anyone; the point is that lots of points can be scored locally just by putting in the effort).

It's also a relatively easy contest to operate. The exchange is just a report and serial number, and because the multipliers count only once, there is no need to worry about moving mults from band to band. Even if you have an antenna for only one or two bands, it is possible to turn in a high score – a determined 10 or 15 meter effort can score about as well as an all band attempt, particularly on phone.

So, this is my monthly reminder that we are going all out in WPX for a club victory in 2002. Start planning those mini-vacations around the contest dates: end of March (Phone) and end of May (CW). If you have limited time, then the Phone contest will produce more bang for the buck. Activity, and thus scores, is higher than in the CW event.

There are a great many possibilities, and we will be exploring them all at the January meeting with people who have been there and done that.

ARRL 10 Meter Contest

I entered the 10m contest for the first time this year, after having heard from K6IF, N6RO, K6III and others for years about what a fun contest it was. Since I only use my own software, I first had to modify CQPWIN to work for the contest (got it working in a beta, or maybe alpha is closer to the truth, version, for the event and have been refining it since then). It really was a blast, even for just a few testing low power hours. I was particularly delighted with the amount of CW activity. With twice as many points for CW contacts as for phone, it was an easy choice for a low power entrant to spend time with the computer and the key. Unfortunately, it occurs only once a year – hope that 10 is still open next December, old Sol permitting.

See you all at the January festivities.
73, Andy, AE6Y

December 2001 "Meeting" Notes

For those of us who like meetings, it was a very pleasant meeting. For those of us who don't like meetings, it was an almost non-existent (business) meeting. As is our custom, the December gathering of the NCCC faithful was a holiday party with business dispensed with using the best rate-running techniques we can muster. Chef Wang's in Mtn. View served up another vast array of tantalizing dishes to a packed dining room. Master of Ceremonies Tom,N6BT proctored several challenging radio exams and then donned his red and white cap to distribute an amazing array of international delicacies to the assemblage. The good cheer was abundant, the price was right, the food was great, the service was perfect and everyone had a good time. If you were there, it was great to see you and I hope to see you again next time. If you couldn't make it, do give a try next time at this most congenial of NCCC gatherings.

73 & KB Rick N6XI

8P5A CQWW SSB (part two)

By Tom Georgens, W2SC

The month leading up to the contest was spent wringing out all of these items, which was particularly difficult given that I do not have any antennas at home. The AL1200 had something wrong with nearly every circuit and was badly corroded. Eventually, the power meter, HV meter, and IP meter circuits were all repaired and the bandswitch replaced. The amp seemed to be in good shape. Likewise, the SO2R box was working very well. In conjunction with the SO2R box, I used an 8 input by 2 output relay box that I used to route any of eight antennas to two feedlines. I had used this box for years when I last had my station and it worked fine. However, when using the high power amplifier, I decided to do a poor-man's measurement of isolation between feedlines to get a gauge as to how much front-end protection I should be using. It turns out that 1500W on 10 meters was returning 5watts down the other feedline. I don't know why I did not notice this at my old station but it would preclude any real SO2R operation. I clearly needed different relays but it was days before it was time to leave and too late to fix. (I can hear Jay typing me an e-mail right now). The loss of true two radio operation was not fatal since there was limited opportunity to do it at such high QSO rates, but it also precluded using all of the other station automation gear I just built. The setup in Barbados is two radios and two amps and, even if I did not do SO2R, automating the switching made band changes, moving guys and recovering from component failures much easier. My solution, however brute force, was to put an added relay in the beverage box that would disconnect the antenna from the radio that was not the current transmitter. This would effectively make the secondary radio deaf until it became the primary. The other thing I wanted to do was to record the contest. I was going to have two networked computers with one doing the radio control, DVK and logging with the other being the back up and recording. The backup would also run Geochron. As the trip approached, I was having an unusual level of anxiety. Part was the normal pre-contest jitters as well as the guilt associated by devoting so much time to such a personal endeavor. We left our house at 4:30 AM the Tuesday before the contest and the trip to Barbados was effortless. Upon our arrival at 8:30PM, the customs adventure began. The AL1200 was in a large, handmade canvas bag. On our way through the "Nothing to Declare" line, the agent asked what was in the bag. I do not mess with customs and said "a radio." He then said he was expecting me and pointed me to a guy I needed to speak with. The guy, it turns out was 8P6SH who was trying to usher thru another ham who, unbeknownst to me, was on the same plane and was carrying a vertical. Dean eventually finessed me through customs with the partial assistance of the fact that the customs agent knew his mother. A good 45 minutes were wasted but everything got through OK. The next ritual is the rent a car, which, although a bit informal, worked very well, and we were on our way for the 40 minute drive to the station. Kathy did the driving since it wasn't raining (that is an inside joke to K5ZD, N5KO, and K6AW). As we pulled in front of the station, my heart started pounding as the anticipation of

the initial antenna checks approached. Whether or not the antennas worked would go a long way toward determining how much pre-contest effort would be expended. The first indication is that we left all antennas pointing east back in August and it was encouraging that they were still pointing in that direction when we arrived. Upon entry to the cottage, I went straight to the radio while my wife started opening the windows. The good news is that all of the antenna SWRs looked normal and all the rotators turned. That was my first deep breath of the day. I wanted to try a different setup this year as I wanted to move out of the corner of the room in hopes of getting better air flow and reducing fatigue. After moving stuff around and getting some of the equipment in place I went to bed around 1:30. The next day (Wednesday) was going to be outside antenna day and we had two main tasks. The first was running the US and European beverages, and the second was to install an 80 meter wire array. The US beverage is about 850 feet and stretches across the front lawn, over the walls of two buildings with collapsed roofs, across a field, over a disgusting chicken coop, and terminates at a woods. This antenna has been installed before. The European beverage is new and extends across an unused field. In prior years, the field had been turned over and was a total mud pit. Now, with all the rain, it is a lush, waste deep tangle of grass. My job is to run the wires and Kathy installs the support poles. The 80 meter antenna was another story. Last year, I got killed on 80 to Europe using the combination of a dipole at 50 feet and a half sloper. This year I intended to install one of my favorite antennas. It

consists of a K3LR/K8UR style folded back sloping dipole. Effectively, it is a full sloper hung from the top of the tower with the portion below the feedpoint folded back to the tower and tied off near the base. At the tower is a full wave loop reflector. This is the same design I used for 40 the year before when the beam was broken. The antenna models well although the reflector resonates much less than the traditional 5% low in frequency. I modeled for optimum performance using EZNEC and then took away the driven element to measure the self-resonant frequency of the loop. The installation process consisted of installing the loop and tuning it with an Autek antenna analyzer. Although the geometry resembled more of an inverted ice cream cone than a diamond, it resonated very close to the length predicted by the model. The sloper was then installed and tuned for acceptable SWR. Initial attempts to get an SWR were unsuccessful when I noticed that the top and bottom halves looked to be different lengths. I turns out there was a misunderstanding between my wife and I as to how much to shorten. Once straightened out, we got 50 ohms but very low in frequency. Shortening the antenna pulled up the resonance but it no longer converged on 50 ohms. This too was what the model predicted. The SWR was not great but it seemed to working as designed. Just as we were going to do the final tie off, a truck pulled up. It was Basil, 8P6EX whom I had never met but worked many times. He was a very nice guy and was glad to see the station still in operation. Just as he was to drive off, 8P6SH showed up with KH6WZ to show him the station. After tying off the antenna I made my "anything that looks this good has to work" declaration and we knocked off. We left to get some lunch, food supplies, and some more poles and rebar for the second beverage. The supermarket was a huge disappointment. As recently as August, it was stocked as well as any US supermarket, but this time is was more than half empty. Of particular concern was the lack of Gatorade. In the ARRL DX I moved to Gatorade rather than Coke and OJ and I seemed to be much more alert and energetic. At the hardware store, they did not have rebar but we got some threaded rod instead that looked to be long enough. We also got some copper tube for the ground rods. The remaining job on the beverage was to put up poles on the European version and do the feedpoints and terminations on both. The first attempt at pole placement on the European beverage was not correct so we had to move them. There is a big coax bone pile there, but much of it does not have connectors installed and other pieces are defective. I eventually concluded that anything without a soldered connector was not even worth trying. Once again, the antenna analyzer came in handy. I had the terminators across the leads of the beverage transformers to produce a 50 ohm load. I plugged one end of the coax into beverage transformer box and measured the impedance at the other end with the analyzer. It was now dark and all of the outside work was done except putting the terminator on the European beverage. We decided to head to dinner at an informal beachfront place called Cocomos (a K6AW favorite). When we got back, it was time to fire up the amp. I reinstalled the tube and the transformer and put the cover on with just enough screws to close the interlock switch. Turning on the amp produced a loud bang. With the cover on, I could not see where the problem was but it sounded like it was on the AC side. I took off the cover and did not see any sort of burn marks anywhere. I jumpered the interlock switch and turned the amp on with the cover off and it came up fine. I loaded it on 20 and it seemed well. I went to 15 and got a strong RF bite from the TS850 and the computer hung so I figured I should put the cover back. It is possible that screws did not keep the interlock closed and that was the source of the noise. In any event, I put the cover back on and it loaded on all bands and worked flawlessly all weekend. Thursday was "inside day" as it was when I would set up the station itself. It lacked a crisp plan unlike the day before and the time was not well utilized. I got up early and did some running on 10 and all seemed fine. I decided that I did not like the new station setup so I went back to the original layout of two TS850s about 18 inches apart with the amplifiers (AL1200 and Centurion) on the shelf directly above them. The laptop was between the two computers. The master SO2R control was at my left elbow. I moved the three rotor control boxes to an adjacent table on the left and the second computer was on an adjacent table on the right. I had to untangle the 8 feedlines and connect them to the 8X2 box. All the while, I would do a bit of running to make sure the amps and antennas were OK. What I noticed was that I would occasionally hear the relays in the relay box click. It seemed that when I turned the radio dial (not necessarily change bands) the frequency readout in Writelog would flash and the relays would chatter. Since the Writelog LPT outputs drive the SO2R box, it is clear that they must be changing. I reasoned that it was not crucial since it was only the receive antenna but I never figured out what was wrong. I added the beverage control box to the mix and I noticed that the radio A side did not work. Something must have shook loose in shipping so I connected up the radio B side. Things were still going well until I tested on 20 and the RF really disrupted the box and the relays were switching wildly. One thing the station lacks is small parts like caps to do RF bypassing. There are no Radio Shacks on the like on the island either. The beverage box was key to using the automated switching since it has the final relay to provide the isolation. I had to sit back in the chair to figure out what to do next. I also noticed that the bands suddenly seemed very quiet. Signals on 10, 15, and 20 were virtually non-existent and my heart sunk as I thought that I might have damaged both

radios with the switching network. At this point, I needed to take a rest. I gave the licensing official a call to get permission to use the 8P5A call. His assistant answered and said he was waiting for my call and had an authorization to Fax to me. I had to explain that I had no Fax capability. I suggested that he leave it with the receptionist and I would somehow pick it up. Kathy decided that she would go and I decided to go take a nap. I lay down with my eyes open for a while and decided to scrap my automation and go back to the manual method I used last year. At this point, a stable situation had to be the top priority. I jumped out of bed and began rerouting cables to the main K4BAI antenna switch, which is now on its last legs. The antenna feedlines all came to a single switch which selected an antenna and routed it to a wattmeter and to another two position switch directly in front of me that would route the antenna to either of the amp/radio pairs. I also went back to an Ameco RF driven beverage switching box. It has a preamp as well but it is not necessary with the long beverages. The downside is that, if this old box dies, there is no real beverage solution and it meant that only one radio could get the beverage. In addition, another switch would be necessary to choose between the two beverage options. When I was done, I noticed that the computer could no longer control one of the radios. It took a reboot to make it work again. One of the radio combinations must have coupled RF into the line. I was a bit concerned about this going in even though I tested it the best I could at home. My laptop does not come with the two serial and two parallel ports necessary for this configuration. I bought a PCMCIA to parallel port card for the second parallel port. For serial, I used a USB to serial converter and it was this port that was failing. I then went back and disconnected all extra cables to the laptop for the station automation and I put a toroid around the USB cable. Now that the station was reconfigured, it was time to pretune the amps and try to wring out the RF problem. I made cardboard cut outs to mark the amplifier settings but it was so humid that the expensive Scotch 33+ tape would not stick to the amps and I went to the other Scotch tape - the transparent kind. I went through every band/amp/antenna combination and recorded the settings. In every combination, I played a recorded test message to check for RF in SSB mode. None was found. If the contest started now, the station would be ready. The last job was to get the second computer networked and the recording working. I have a null modem network cable that I use to direct connect the two computers but, I could not get the Microsoft networking to work. This was particularly frustrating since I had the same two PC's talking when I was down there in August. I found the problem to be trivial and it worked just fine. I started recording and went to 80 meters to check out the antennas. I was testing the audio knobs and worked a few guys when P40W called in. We were chatting about stuff when a station broke in who turned out to be G3WXX. I switched to the array and his signal jumped by what my S-meter would call 20db. I was very excited. John and I signed off and I proceeded to run a number of Europeans. I then went to 40 where European signals were 50 over 9 on the meter. I then ran a few on 20 and went to bed around 11:30. In any event, it was a bad day that ended well and I went to sleep with a smile. Friday was just a rest day as the station was ready. The plan was to just run a few guys here and there in the morning and make any final adjustments In the morning, I decided to listen to the recording I made the night before and it sounded awful. It seemed to have gaps and I could not tell whether it was record problem or play back problem. I decided to switch to an ADPCM mode that sounded better. I then gathered up my rate sheets for the last two years as well as myN6BV propagation charts. Things were definitely ready. At this point, the only thing left was the contest itself. I got out of bed around 6:30 and paced for a while before my pre-contest meal of spaghetti. It was now time to sit in front of the radio and choose a place to start. I like to start with a stateside run on 15 to get into a groove. The goal is to start with an easy, high rate hour as a confidence builder. However, this is contrary to my broader strategy of focusing on 3 point QSO's, even though it will make the QSO total less sexy. It is easy to be lured into running the US boys but my intention was to run EU wherever possible. This must have worked since I got complaints all weekend from the W's about how hard I was to work. The pre-contest pileup was going well as I tried to pass the last interminable minutes before the contest. It was time to go but I stumbled out of the blocks with immediate QRM and unimpressive rate. The band was a bit too good as much of the pileup was JA's and I simply could not go as fast as I wanted. I also think many beams were pointing away from me and 10 might have been a better choice to start. The first hour yielded 258 versus last year's 331. In the second hour, my patience ran out and I made a quick QSY to 20 but I finished with 244 versus 317 last year. After a half hour on twenty, I went back to fifteen to some slightly better hours of 261 and 288. At the end of 3Z, I had 1051 Q's, over 150 less than last year. Even though the rate was OK on 15, I did not want to short 40 and 80 since I thought I had some firepower on those bands. European sunrise would be over in 3½ hours and I had yet to hit the low-bands. 4Z produced only 164 Q's but 53 mults on 40. The beam seemed to be working but it was a struggle. To be heard, it was necessary to go low in the band and I was constantly heckled and jammed for being below 7040. On top of that, my attempts to work DX irritated the W's as each CQ was greeted with a pileup of "listen up." I could feel the raised middle fingers each time I said no. I was now 200 Q's behind last year but 30 mults ahead. I went to 80 at 530 and worked some good rate and closed the hour

with a 6 band move of V47KP. I went to 160 at 630 but it was very noisy and generally unproductive. Nonetheless, I made half of my 160 meter Q's in this hour. I did catch the 20 meter, post sunrise European opening but most of the time was spent hopping from lowband to lowband with a 6 band move of 8P4B in the middle. After 9 hours, I was still about 200 Q's behind last year but an unbelievable 53 multipliers ahead. The 40 and 80 meter antenna work was definitely paying dividends. One strange problem during the night was the crashing of Geochron. After several hours, the Geochron window went black. Attempts to restart it hung the machine and the second copy of Writelog was no longer logging. I rebooted the machine but I could not get Writelog to synch with the run copy even though the network neighborhood window recognized both machines. Likewise, the recording was not running. It was hard to give this many cycles while trying to run at high rate at the same time. I finally broke down and restarted my run copy of Writelog and it finally would synch. Unfortunately, I lost about 5 hours of the recording until I finally got this fixed. It was getting time for the high band runs and I made the QSY to 10 at 938Z. Consistent with my goal of working 3 pointers I set up below the US phone band at 28297 and what ensued could only be called a period of perpetual pileup. The next hours were 253, 255, 227, 235, and 227. At 15Z I caught up to last years QSO number and was at 3278/384 versus 3213/333. It was now time for 15 and I again went below the US phone band for a few hours until going back to 10 for a quick US run which produced the only hour over 300 for the contest. High rate hours are macho but running Europe at 250/hour is generally more productive. It was back to 20 to close out the first day at 5179/521 as opposed to 5127/477 last year. I also crossed 7 million points just two Q's prior to the halfway point. Writelog does not display the points/QSO stat but I suspected I was doing much better in this area than last year. When running on 15, the serial port problem I had pre-contest returned and I lost radio control on the port that used the USB adapter. I knew I needed to reboot the computer to fix this but I never had the chance and did manual band changes for the rest of the weekend. The most bizarre event of the weekend occurred about midday when I noticed two strangers standing behind me as I operated. One of them showed me his hat which had a PJ7 call on it. It turns out that they were on the island and went looking for the station. I was quite clear that I was not interested in a visit, which they completely understood. They asked to look around and take pictures, which they did. They were very polite and understanding but it was still a bit weird. K5ZD has a rule of thumb that the final score is two times the halfway score plus 10%. This would be 15.4 Meg which would be a record-breaking score. 0Z is typically a low morale point for me since the realization sets in that it is only half over. I set my focus to win every hour against last year's score and began thinking about the timing and length of my rest time. I was acutely aware of my fading in prior years and I could feel my anxiety level rise. I was feeling good but I know I was feeling good this time last year as well. It finally occurred to me that the source of my pre-contest tension had more to do with my maintaining my mental state than any technical concern. After finishing my second Slim Fast, I had yet to touch caffeine, and it was time to press on. I was feeling manly about my 40 meter signal and I wanted to get to the band a bit earlier to try and get some interesting mults. UN1LT called in and asked for a move to 80. I was clearly pumped but nothing was heard on 80 as we picked a poor frequency. Later D44TC called in asked for a move to 160 and I told him he was dreaming. I went anyway and we had an easy QSO. IH9P and IG9A were loud up there but they CQ'd in my face. I ended up with only 9 Q's on 160 the second night. One thing of note was a wild stretch of over an hour on when I tried 20 meters. I had not run much stateside on 20 and a huge pileup ensued that I could not work out even after nearly 400 Q's. I wanted to get back to 80 for European sunrise and I just walked away from a raging pileup. The next 80 minutes was one of the most gratifying periods of the contest. I worked two Europeans on one call after they CQ'd in the face of a decent size pileup. Feeling strong, I went down to 3737 and tried to run Europe. It was a bit spotty at first but built up over time and I ran off about 90, mostly European, stations and gained 20 multipliers. On two occasions, Caribbean stations stopped by to

ask if the stations I was working were on this frequency. I really felt good about the effort that went into the antenna at this point. I moved up to 40 to catch the last of the Europeans there and tried to work the Pacific types. I did a very poor job there the night before and I am sure I missed a bunch of very workable mults. Writelog seemed to have a bug with the automatic split frequency information. It took a while to figure out that it was loading the VFO's but not putting the 850 into split mode. In addition, the SWR on the yagi was bad high in the band and the amp did not like going up there without retuning. Messing with all of this cost me a shot at 4U9RG but I did get a JA into the log for a double mult. It was getting time to think about taking a break, as it would be time to start on 10 meters at 930Z. At 817Z I decided it was time. The deal was that I would wake up my wife and she would be my human alarm clock. I went inside at 820 (4:20 local) and woke her up with instructions to let me sleep until 445 local. No sooner than I lay down it seemed that she was waking me up. Coming out of the sleep was no problem, which is relatively uncommon for me, and I felt very refreshed. As it turns out, when I sat down there was an HK on the frequency where I left the radio and I worked him at 847Z for a new multiplier. I chased some mults and waited until 10Z to go back to 10. At this point I was 6394/612 compared to 6141/575 the year before. It was starting to sink in that the record was reachable if I could somehow keep from becoming delusional again. It was clear that 10 was not the same as the day before. Signals were way down and the Russian stations were in far less supply. After a few decent hours, I dropped to 129 and then 122. I tried moving to 15 for a while but it was slow. I worked HB0/HB9AON and moved him to 10 and tried to get things going there for a while but I had to go back to 15. Being a bit frustrated and having a hard time hearing through the QRM, I decided to go even lower in the band to find a place where I could hear. I was already below the US phone band as it was but I chose 21120 and racked up 203 and 166 hours to Europe working guys right at the noise level. In the midst of this, I could feel the delusions coming on again. I cannot explain sleep deprivation delusions to anyone who has not lived through them, but I aggressively fought back. The last time I went through this I made a note to myself that said, "Don't indulge the delusions." It means that when you become delusional, stop and regain reality by explaining to yourself what the contest is about. If you let it go, the mind games take over and you lose control. I know it is hard to explain but it is essential not to let yourself lose touch with reality for long. Having worked through my first bout, I was starting to feel good, but I knew the worst was yet to come. It was now time to go back for a USA run on 10. This stint was my downfall the last two years and this year I decided that I would go slow and not consume much energy. At this point, Kathy came home from the beach as she knew it was the critical time. I don't know what she could do as slapping me, pouring water down my shorts, and jamming ice cream in my mouth did not work in the previous years. In any event, I went about the run very deliberately and sacrificed some rate. I had a 247 hour on 10 which was a bit disappointing and then I had a 213 hour running the US on 15. My next move was to 20 where a huge European pileup quickly developed. I ran it until 2230Z when I finally worked it down. However, fatigue was setting in as I tranced for a while and seemed to be working guys subconsciously. I would see the rate meter at 175 but I could not remember working anyone. I took a while to get my mind working again and I really was not fully alert the rest of the way. I decided to tune for some mults as I knew I was missing some easy ones. Particularly, I wanted to find HC8N as I was missing it on 5 bands. I had a vision of a 5 band move for 10 mults. I finally found them on 10 and asked for a move figuring they needed me as well. In response to my request, I got a terse "no." It was the only time all weekend that I resented having 8P4B on the air as I am sure that they were the source of 8P on the other bands. This was the one time in the contest that I missed not being able to do SO2R as I would have liked to keep running as I tuned for mults. Unfortunately, it did not occur to me to use the beverage as a listening antenna on the second radio. I suspect that lack of thinking probably cost a couple hundred thousand points. I still wanted to take one more pass at 40 and QSY'd at 2315. I did not manage many Europeans but I did have a number of local mults call in that I moved to other bands. After some coaxing I gave in to a request to listen up and ran off about 30 W's. When the stations ran out I decided to just run out the string on 15 at 2340 and put another 60 Q's in the log. The contest was finally over and I broke the record by 2 million points. I told Kathy that this was the most difficult thing I ever did. I tuned to 3830 but did not hear anything so I got no feedback on how people did over the weekend. I got out of the chair and had an extreme pain in my lower back. One point of satisfaction was the impact of the antennas on 80 and 40. On 80, I worked 118 Europe + Africa versus 21 last year. On 40, I worked 411 EU + Africa compared to 274 last year. Overall, the focus on 3 pointers produced only 38% North American contacts and a points per QSO value of 2.62, a record high for me. This trip was a culmination of months of work and planning and I would like to thank the stations for all the Q's and moves. I'd also like to thank K5ZD, K6AW, and N5KO without whose help; I could never have been ready. More than anyone else, this could not be done without the help and complete support of my wife Kathy who was incredible through the entire week.

Crossing item 7 off lifes to do list . . . priceless.

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