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Northern California
Contest Club



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NCCC Net
Thursday 8 PM
3830+/-

Our Next Meeting

Annual Holiday Dinner Meeting Program Details TBA

Date: Monday, 11 December 2006

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

Location: Michael's At Shoreline

See Web site for meal details, price, etc.

Please RSVP to [K6EU](mailto:k6EU) by Friday, 8 December. Pay via
PayPal beforehand or cash/check at the door.

Directions:

<http://www.michaelsatshoreline.com/location/index.html>

NCCC Officers

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Vice-President and Contest Chairman: Fred Jensen, K6DGW

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Musings from the President

By Dean Straw, N6BV

Thanksgiving is over. We gathered together yesterday with relatives on both sides of the family to be thankful for so many things. I reflect on the wonderful families with which I've been blessed -- that includes blood relatives, our church family, and most definitely the family of friends and colleagues called the Northern California Contest Club.

I am enormously proud of the NCCC. I marvel at how our members have responded so enthusiastically and so competently to the challenge laid down by PVRC this year for the November Sweepstakes contests. You kept your butts in your chairs, despite the disappointing and challenging propagation conditions at solar minimum.

Thanks, folks. Thanks for putting up with that S9+20 QRM on phone, when I know that many of you dislike phone with a vengeance. Even at a giant station like N6RO, which Ken graciously let me operate for SS phone, I wanted to throw in the towel a number of times when I got zip back from my tenth CQ in a row. But, like so many of you, I kept on hammering away, just for the good of dear old NCCC.

At the start of the contesting season this year, a number of people thought NCCC members were too tired and too complacent to put in the tremendous effort necessary to win the coveted gavel a fourth straight time. But the greatest contest team around wasn't

about to let that gavel go to the East Coast without a stupendous fight! And fight we did.

I specifically want to thank Marc Ziegler, W6ZZZ, who helped lead the charge of the duck brigade for SS this year. Marc encouraged, exhorted, cajoled and led by example in mobilizing the NCCC troops. He recruited a small but active cadre of volunteers to help in the effort. Kudos, Marc, to you and to your team. And another special pat on the back goes to our noble Webmeister, Ed Muns, W0YK. Ed's amazing; what can I say?

As best we can tell from the early results, we are still in a neck-and-neck "duck race" with PVRC. It will come down to how many logs are actually submitted to ARRL HQ and how accurate each log is. There's a very real possibility that a single log could make the difference between first and second places this year -- it is *that* close. So look over those Cabrillo files for obvious typos and make sure you send those logs into ARRL.

The upcoming Holiday Dinner Party will be at Michael's at Shoreline again this year. It's a great time for NCCers to gather together and just schmooze, without a formal technical or contesting presentation. Many members bring their significant others to the meeting, if nothing else to show them that not every contester is that semi-lunatic guy sitting in the corner hoarsely shouting "CQ SS" into the microphone -- at least, not all the time! There will be entertainment, of course, by some of the talented members among NCCC's ranks.

73, KB and Kick, Duck!

Dean, N6BV



VPCC News and Views

By: Fred Jensen, K6DGW

First off, thanks to our incredible SS crew of organizers, gentle floggers, tech gurus, station donors, mega-spotters, guest operators, home operators, new folks, and mentors.

This is such a cool club! We are in a real duck fight with our chief competitor and that is the real essence of the "Sport of Amateur Radio." Blow-outs may feel good in the stadium, but it's winning the hard fight that feels good long after. It's very hard to tell from the postings how this will turn out, but the NCCC members' contributions are outstanding.

If you haven't gotten your logs in to the ARRL yet (the CW window is still open as I write this on 22 Nov), please do. No log is too small. If you need help getting it by the robot, or getting a Cabrillo log from your logger, call me at 530.885.8251 or email at k6dgw@foothill.net ... I'll either help you or get you connected to someone who can.

Again, **NO LOG IS TOO SMALL!!**

This competition can be, and has been, won over a very small number of very small logs. Every point counts!

I had a cool conversation with a new member who was concerned that if his error rate was "too high," his log would be disqualified and not count at all. Not true ... we all strive for accurate logs, and sometimes we don't get it right and lose Q's. But **NO** logs are ever totally disqualified, and the final score always counts for our club. And, I've also learned ... sometimes a Golden Log isn't the optimum log ... not that I've personally ever had one 😊

I have had a few breaks in our recently hectic life, and I had a chance to take a look at DX Summit. I speak Perl, so I did a bit of

quick filtering, and I was impressed with two things.

1. NCCC spotters seem to spot everyone. Personally, I really like that. This is an ethical sport, and if we're going to use packet and be in "U" class, when in S&P we should spot everyone. It seems ethical, and also promotes the activity in the contest.
2. We had a huge number of spotters. Jerry, K6III, probably gets the NCCC Gold, I didn't even count how many of his spots were recorded, but there were a huge number of others. Since many of us were running "U", it was a great gift from all the other unseen operators, and too, many of the spots came from non-NCCC members. I like that too.
3. OK, by the time you read this the CQWW CW will be either over or in progress (and if it is in progress, hopefully you won't be reading the JUG!) but coming up, we have the ARRL 160 (2200Z, Dec 1 to 1600Z, Dec 3), ARRL 10m (0000Z, Dec 9 to 2400Z, Dec 10), OK DX RTTY (0000Z-2400Z, Dec 16) [be careful, you have to work at least one OK to post a score > zero], and the venerable and always fun Stew Perry Top Band Distance Challenge (1500Z, Dec 30 to 1500Z, Dec 31). "The Stew" is one of the only Top Band contests that rewards distance as a multiplier. There are a lot more contests, check the WA7BNM calendar for your favorites.

On a personal note, on behalf of my family, we extend our thanks to all of you who have offered your condolences over my father-in-law's recent passing. It always helps to know that friends care. And, my thanks especially to all of those who have picked up my VP/CC duties during this busy and difficult time, as he approached the end of his life. He was 90, it was peaceful, he was a veteran, and the VFW Honor Guard did an outstanding job. I only hope for that for myself. The last of the relatives depart on

27 Nov, and we're hoping for relative peace (pun intended), and a return to real ham radio.

Thanks to all, this is a great group with a major common interest, but also a wide variety of knowledge and skills, and we all can and do benefit from that. Happy holidays to all,
73 and KB/D

Fred K6DGW
Auburn CA CM981w

November Meeting Playback

By: Rob Brownstein K6RB

The November meeting took place at the Tied House in Mountain View, and we had one heck of a turn out. With SS CW come and gone, and SS Phone looming, everyone was eager to share tidbits about how best to wring out those extra points.



Members listening is rapt attention as SS CW war stories unfold.

The program was lead by Dean, N6BV, who once again talked about the anticipated propagation conditions and the decision criteria for whether to start on 15 or 20.



An hour-by-hour illustration of changing propagation helped to see where to be for which areas at different times of day.

Our prognosticators all were in accord that the 2006 unlimited club gavel was in hot contention and it might come down to one modest log's worth of Qs as to who gets the hammer, and who gets hammered.

The SS CW effort was punctuated by super scores by traveling HMOs and by stationery NCCC troupers. A similar effort for SS Phone would certainly help to keep the gavel in contention.

The second part of the program had Ed, W0YK, give us the inside scoop on how to become a contest leader in RTTY. Like many of us, Ed's first take on RTTY was "what's the big deal? The computer does everything for you." But, he learned, quickly that there are many skill areas to learned and mastered with RTTY.



Ed, W0YK, describes the set up and preparation involved in setting a new world record in RTTY contesting.

Ed's preparation for RTTY Round Up may have seemed over the top to some of us, but there's no question that it paid off in spades.

SS Ramblings (from the NCCC reflector) Jim Duffy, W6EU

I don't send many emails to this reflector, so I'll make up for it by this long SS ramble.

First of all, a big thanks to the packet spotters. It really made a difference and I could really tell when I had been spotted.

When you are on the east side of the Sierra (Truckee, Kings Beach and Reno/Carson areas), NCCC spotters from the Bay Area don't hear us very well. Also the calls may not be as recognizable, like K6BSA (K6ST @ N6XI's). The club may need a spotter's call-sign list and the east side may have to recruit a local spotter. The NCCC Sierra Chapter will have to address this for next year.

And once again, a belated thanks to the workers who cleaned up the Super Check Partial lists....as AD6E said, it's a big help.

HMO tip: After I got to N6XI's on Saturday night around midnight and got set up, I decided to pick off a few mults before hitting the sack. I made around 40 Q's and rounded up 26 of those mults that are hard to get if you're on 15 and 20M all day Sunday. I was really happy to not have to worry about snagging those pesky, close-in NW and SoCal sections.

For both SS CW & Phone, we've had K6EU and W6EU stories. This time it was AE6Y who was lucky enough to have Tom and me calling him at the same time, and Andy said, "who is the echo uniform?". Of course we both jumped in again. He finally pulled Tom out and then got me next. He said afterwards, "Well, that was confusing!"

I heard K6NV and K7NV calling CQ about 2 kHz away from one another.

ON OVERCOMING THE SUNDAY DOLDRUMS:

During the Sunday doldrums you can begin to second guess your decisions. Should I QSY? 40M might be open by now.....Is this rate too low? Maybe I should S&P more....I wonder what's going on over on packet? Would it be better to S&P for those last 3 mults? You know the feeling. Since I'm not SO2R, I try to use some of that extra time by using the rig's 2nd VFO, but that dries up sooner or later. Another way to keep your mind busy is to watch TV with no audio! I

have on a football game or one of the 24 hour news channels with a news update crawler at the bottom of the screen. This is dangerous, however. You can dream right on past a new band opening or really wake up and realize that you've not had an answer in 15 minutes!

*THE ROLLER COASTER OF CONTESTING* (Or Keeping One's Butt in the Chair)

Phew. What a grind...

As the Sunday doldrums waned on and the CQ machine droned in my ears, I started to think over the weekend's SSB effort and all the things that came my way. I jotted down my feelings and memories.

It felt like I had been on a roller coaster. I was up, I was down, let's quit, no let's tough it out. Each day is like a lifetime of experiences as the conditions change and the problems come your way.

You start the contest and you're fresh and newborn and excited about the future possibilities. That new antenna, that new software, the bigger amp, all fill you with hope. Then, just as in a life, you hit adversity and you fall to the lowest points and then you hang in there and either solve the adversity or you let time take care of it and you come out the other side.

You blow an amp fuse 18 minutes into the contest and it takes you five minutes to find the fuse and install it (Saturday), but it takes the Alpha 3 or 4 minutes to warm up. Those minutes are eons! Then, you hit some big highs: the QSO rate is going great and you have 3 callers for each CQ and they WAIT for you to finish! Nobody is muscling into your CQ frequency. You can hear all the way to an S-1 Newfoundland station! Life is good.....Then, what's that sizzling noise in the headphones?

The bacon frying sound begins in the background and builds to about an

S-7 noise level (Saturday afternoon). It hasn't rained in days and the dry air has made all the loose power pole hardware into spark gap generators. Man, it's hard to hear anybody lower than S-8. I turn on the FB noise blanker on the 1000D, and it works pretty well, but the adjacent stations are pumping the front end like crazy.

I'm starting to perspire from the physical effort of pulling out the stations during a high rate time and I feel stupid as I ask loud stations for fills.

Damn this is tough. I remember years ago, one contester who was favored to win a weekend event and he pulled out during the opening hours due to local QRN....Should I cave in and do something more fun? I toughed it out for two hours and by then the afternoon sunset must have cooled things off on the poles and the QRN diminished. Life was good again! I was really glad I stayed with it. I learned a lesson.

The weekend is a series of ups and downs, like life. Many times I wanted to get up out of the chair and go watch football and have a decent lunch that I could chew. Something keeps you in the chair. Your club, your commitment, your ego, your buddy across town who is still crunching them out, all this motivates you to not stop.

Like life, the rewards go to those who persevere. Even in phone contests!

More SS Reflections...

This was the 'best' SS fone I've experienced, however relative that may be. I agree with the comments on this reflector and don't want to "pile on": this is by no means an endorsement! Congrats to Dean (BV) for a fantastic total! How did he milk another 200 Qs out of the bands?

But cancel any party: he's the guy who's cheerleading 'forced' me to the chair for my first full 24-hr SS fone effort.

SO2R is difficult on fone. Sunday I didn't even turn on the second rig. The duped bandmap was quite small by darkness Sunday evening--spots everywhere, but none to work.

Suffered from the usual Sunday afternoon bad attitude. Fone SS rate is better than CW and isn't actually all that bad, but my attitude is worse. Maybe the Locust can make up some "Positive Attitude" plaques to mount above the rig for this purpose?

Everything, equipment/antenna-wise, worked perfectly this weekend--no excuses there. 75m is definitely my weakest band, but that's not surprising given that I'm still not at time-parity on the Operating Time vs. Antenna Installation Time for this band (and antenna installation time on 75m is quite small). The low (70') dipole was always significantly better than the high rotary dipole, even to the "far" east coast.

■ -- K6XX --

This was another personally disappointing weekend but for a different reason than the CW weekend ... more about this below. Mostly, the weekend's experience just further widened the chasm between my interest and SS Phone.

Fortunately, this only comes once a year. And, Sunday morning I laid in bed an extra hour instead of getting up and ready to hit the shack as my six-hour break ran out. In the end, I did manage 23-1/2 hours in the chair. But, it was really hard to get motivated Sunday morning after struggling Saturday to only get 600 QSOs logged.

First, I have to say that the Packet spotters are my heroes, both in terms of spotting me and feeding my Band Map with all the other CQers. Up until Sunday afternoon when most of the CQing stations were already in the log, I always had a supply of new stations to pick off with

one radio while running on the other radio. This freed me up from doing much tuning around myself so that I could concentrate on getting as many stations in the log as possible.

The other help from my Packet-populated Band Map was maintaining a feel for the band activity as it evolved during the day and night. I haven't run statistics, but K6III must have been the most prolific spotter even though he had a lot of competition from several other NCCers. Undoubtedly K1TTT will produce a report tomorrow that proves Jerry is some kind of Packet-spotting mutant!

Second, I found N6BV's propagation graphics interesting to watch during the weekend. They proved to be fairly accurate based on the checking I did. When a station was particularly weak or strong, I'd sometimes glance at the current chart and discover that he was in a skip zone or a peak area. For example, W9s would vary a lot in signal strength on 15 meters sometimes, and it turned out that the weak ones were sure enough in the Midwest "hole" that was developing that hour.

Third, I paid no attention to the NCCC Rally Times. Usually, I'd already worked most the active club members and the ones that I hadn't worked showed up on my Band Map, which I was constantly working out all the time anyway. So, for me, it's kind of like ignoring mults because they wind up in the log anyway ... as long as I endeavor to keep my Band Map worked out.

Finally, as is often the case on the Phone weekend, all 80 mults came to me as I was running. I was missing NL when I quit Saturday night, but got three of them as soon as I started up on 15 Sunday morning. As I was warming up on 15 and 20 Saturday morning, VY1YT stopped by for a chat and said he wouldn't be in the contest much but would try to hand out a few QSOs. Sure enough he called me about two hours in and gave me serial number 1.

VE8NSD called me on 80 later Saturday afternoon with serial number 2. VY1JA and MB were very active all weekend but hard for me to break the pileups since my antennas stay fixed at 70 degrees. I was surprised to work only one NNY (K2NNY).

During the CW weekend I had severe receive problems that I ultimately decided were most of my own doing. I'm pretty sure I was just running far too much front-end gain for the conditions of bands crowded with lots of strong signals. This weekend, I turned off the pre-amps on all bands and only turned one on temporarily a couple times for a weak signal when I fortunately had no nearby strong signals to overload the RX front-end. On 40 and 80, I ran with 6dB attenuation most of the time.

■ -- W0YK (K6YT) --

A CW Exercise Regimen

By: Rob Brownstein, K6RB

About five years ago, Michael, WA6O, turned me on to PED. It was a program written by a JA ham that simulated pile-up conditions and measured your accuracy and speed as you ripped through the calls. It was a DOS program, though, and as I went from Windows 98 to XP, it kind of got lost in the shuffle.

Then, a few weeks ago I saw a posting about a program called RufzXP (do a Google to find and download it). It was developed by a DL ham and just sends you call signs, one after the other. There's no simulated QRN, QRM or pile ups. It just sends calls.

It starts at a relatively modest speed, and as you copy and type the calls correctly, it speeds up until you hit your wall. Then, it slows down, again, until your accuracy goes back up. Finally, it stops and tells you how you did.

I found it fairly easy to copy "normal" calls – even exotic DX calls. But, for me, the "/" calls killed my rate. I would stumble over the / and miss the next several characters. Sometimes the call had two /'s – one at the beginning and one at the end. Ugh!

I would use RufzXP as a tune up to get my brain aroused. Then, I would switch to the other new program – Morse Runner. This one has been around, but I never bothered to install it since I don't use sound on my rig computer. (I installed RufzXP and Morse Runner on my laptop!)

With Morse Runner, you get a real-life simulation of a contest situation – like WPX. You can crank in QRM, QRN, QSB, even LIDs. You have to copy both call and serial number correctly for it to be in your log.

Anyway, after about 15 minutes of RufzXP and 15 minutes of Morse Runner, it feels like my CW cognition has been exercised and toned. On SS CW Saturday, I did 20 minutes of RufzXP and 20 minutes of Morse Runner. When I started the contest, I was zipping through the exchanges without a hiccup. It will be interesting to see how my error rate looks this year. I usually have 1.5 to 2 percent error, but I feel like I did better (We'll see).

I plan to keep on using both programs like a body-building regimen. Michael, WA6O, advised me, years ago, to run PED at 40 or 50 wpm so that 32 wpm sounds like a crawl. At 50 wpm, though, I can't hear the difference between an S, an H, or a 5. It just sounds like a blur to my nervous system. With RufzXP, because of the speed progression, I found that I was still distinguishing among S, H and 5s when the rate got up to 49 wpm! That was definitely a first for me.

The goal is to be comfortable at 45 wpm so that 35 wpm is like child's play.
