



Publication of the
Northern California
Contest Club



February
2006
Issue 405

NCCC Net
Thursday 8 PM
3830+/-

Our Next Meeting Program: To Be Announced

Date: Monday, 13 February 2006
Time: 6:00pm schmooze, 6:30pm dinner, 7:00pm program
Location: Chevy's Fresh Mex, 979-A Edgewater Blvd., Foster City CA 94404 (650) 572-8441

(The banquet room is located on your immediate right as you enter the restaurant.)

Dinner: Fajita Buffet

\$20 per person (tip and tax included). Please RSVP to [W0YK](mailto:w0yk) by Sunday, 12 February. PayPal preferred or at the door for those having dinner.

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This issue

Rob Brownstein, K6RB

I forgot to remind Mike and Kurt to send me their columns for the February issue. Ed, W0YK, who is always looking out for me would argue it's not my job to remind them, but I do understand what it's like being real busy. We members who enjoy the fellowship of NCCC, the meetings, the presentations, the camaraderie must remember that officers, Web master, JUG editor, et al, are volunteer efforts. We try to do our best but sometimes other things (like family, work, illness, etc.) intrude.

So, this issue has no "Mike's Mic" or "VP/CC" report. NCCC has been growing and diversifying. Our membership may be at an all-time high, and the numbers of us doing CW, fone, RTTY and VHF contests has also grown. Our tent is certainly getting more inclusive and larger.

Before you know it, it will be time to elect the next slate of volunteers. Last year, Tom, ND2T, had a hard time finding members willing to step up to the plate. My recollection is it has gotten harder every year during the eight years I've been a member.

If you feel that NCCC has given you many things of value (as I have), then this time around be prepared to return the favor. Think about stepping up to the plate. Let Mike know your interest early on. And, don't wait for me to remind you to send in your columns near the end of each month.

Okay, I got that off my chest.

Now, this issue is particularly enjoyable. First of all, I devoted one whole page to photos from our

December party. Forgive me for not captioning them. You know who you are ☺.

The rest of the issue is devoted to Aruba. Andy Faber, AE6Y/P49Y, and John Fore, W6LD/P40L, have turned Carl's (AI6V) shack on Aruba into an active venue for all kinds of contests. And, they have opened it up to others who wish to experience being the object of a pile up. Ed, W0YK, for one keeps coming back for more.

So, this issue will feature an article by Andy. It will also be accompanied by photos – with captions. Next issue will have an article by Ed.

So, read on and enjoy.

AE6Y October 2005 Aruba Trip Notes – CQWW SSB Contest

Tuesday, October 25, 2005. A heck of a way to spend one's 60th birthday! I had been planning to fly on the usual AA flights via Miami, but MIA is closed due to the aftermath of Hurricane Wilma, so I ended up rerouting via JFK. This necessitated taking the 10 p.m. redeye to JFK last night, then a five-hour layover, but it will deposit me in Aruba at 4 p.m., actually a bit earlier than if flying through MIA. And, due to the hurricane, the rerouting was free. AA didn't make any overcharge for my 100 or so pounds of baggage – unfortunately, I now realize that one omitted item was my dictating machine, so these notes will have to originate on the computer, instead of my usual style of dictating them, then typing later. The new AA terminal at JFK is completely industrial and soulless, but does have plenty of columns with AC outlets for computers available in the waiting areas.

I'm trying to do better than last year (5th in the world SOABHP), but am very tired from work, so am tempting myself with the thought of a 15m single band effort. Pros: only operate in daytime, no need to set up beverages, OK even if can't repair the 40m driven element before the contest. Cons: guilty feeling that it's a bit of a cop-out.

Chris, Cindy and Andy met me at the airport in our car with the a/c thankfully fixed, just today. Arrived at the cottage at about 6 p.m. and unpacked. As I was getting ready to hook up the answering machine (which is kaput), John Fore called. The phone line isn't working well, but fortunately, my cell phone works great here – better than in the Bay Area (just set network to 900). Called John Crovelli, and took him out to dinner at Amazonias, a Brazilian churrascaria restaurant. I told him the only place I wouldn't go was Tony Roma's. Wouldn't you know it, he had been there by himself last night. On the way back, Lisandro

confirmed that Emily's lift would be at the house at 3:30 tomorrow, and John offered to help. Then called Emily and had a very long talk with her. She's off to do a multi-op at CT3YA tomorrow. JP called in the middle and I promised to call him back, but we didn't finish until 11:20, and I decided it was too late to call JP.

Wednesday, October 26, 2005. This has been a very interesting day. I experimented with the radios and amps this morning and came to the conclusion that the old FT1000D had even worse front end problems than before. This time it absolutely won't transmit properly, finding all antennas (even our dummy load, which I finally found after considerable searching) to have very high SWR. John Fore thinks that it may be a sticking TX/RX relay somewhere, and maybe I'll look for that later. Also the Alpha 87A won't even turn on. For that one, I tried a trick that I had brought an email along about, which involves shorting two pins on the RS-232 port, but that didn't seem to help. Talked to Anthony at Alpha, who suggested setting up a serial communications link with the laptop, then calling him to report what information I get back from the amp. Unfortunately, I don't have a serial cable, so that will have to wait till tomorrow. I did swap out the Icom 756 Pro 2 for the FT1000D, and it seems to work fine, as does the FT-990 and the old Alpha 86.

Went shopping at Ling & Sons, my favorite supermarket, buying the usual very fresh salads, breads, etc. Also some hardware at the WEMA hardware store just south of there. I wanted to be sure that I have all the tools and stuff ready to go when Emily's lift machine arrives this afternoon. And what a fine machine it turned out to be! Lisandro showed up just after 3 p.m., and the machine came by a bit later. It's a self-propelled lift (i.e., it can position itself, but is transported on a large flat-bed truck). The truck and the lift are owned by Emily's company, the Thiel Corporation, N.V. It has a huge boom and can extend up to 110 feet. The bucket can accommodate several people – it's much more impressive than Efy de Cuba's lift truck that we used in the past.

Lisandro invited over his friend Leopold Ruiz, P43M, and the two of them are a very good team at maneuvering the machine, which is basically run by the guy in the bucket. It got under our wires and through the gate with less than a foot to spare, then Leopold very carefully positioned it so he could reach the loose 40m driven element on our 40/20 yagi. John Crovelli had come over to help, and he volunteered to take a u-bolt up the northern Rohn 25 tower to re-afix the truss rope on the 10/15 yagi, that had somehow come loose from the mast, though it was still attached to boom at both ends. It took him only 10 minutes or so to complete the task.

I had expected to go up and work on the antenna, but Lisandro and Leopold did it themselves. I had provided the bolts needed, and spade lugs to reconnect

the coax. Crovelli was sure that the coax would need replacing, so I spent some time practicing putting on RG-8 crimp connectors in case we had to do that, but it turned out that they thought the coax was just fine. The existing lugs had simply pulled off the connections when the element came loose. It's a Cushcraft 40-2CD driven element mounted on a Force 12 boom-to-element bracket. They drilled two holes and secured it with stainless steel ¼ inch bolts that I had provided, then cleaned the cable, put on new spade lugs, and after I verified that it all worked, they weatherproofed the connection (using some vapor wrap that John had brought over and black tape) and came back down. Meanwhile I was taking pictures and John was "doin' the heavy looking on." It was a very impressive performance. Lisandro had brought over a battery powered AC inverter device that they used to power his drill, and they even soldered the connections.

They finished the repair as the sun was going down, then backed the machine out of the driveway and parked it out front so that it can be picked up by the flat-bed in the morning. Lisandro and I sat around and chatted for a while afterwards, mostly about the search for Natalee Holloway. Lisandro has been involved as the captain of a search and rescue boat.

I did get on 15 in the late morning to see what conditions were like and worked a few EUs on phone. Also in the evening, I set up the computer to run the radio and worked a bunch of guys on 40 CW. Conditions were good to EU.

Thursday, October 27, 2005. As I had promised, I was up and ready at 7 a.m. to give the key to the lift to the truck driver so he could put it back on the flat-bed. He actually didn't show up until about 8, along with Lisandro, and together they maneuvered the beast back on the truck. I was sorry to see it go. I chatted with Lisandro a bit, and he confirmed we are on for dinner on Monday.

Otherwise, a quiet and somewhat frustrating day. First order of work was to interface the computer with the station, which ultimately, as always, worked fine. I have the CW keying coming from the laptop serial port (as in February, I have the laptop physically on the shelf in place of the 17" monitor to get a sharper screen). The W2IHY box comes out of the headphone jack, going to the mic connector on the DXD. The USB port goes to the Compaq USB 4-1 box, then one port of that to the USB relay box (outputs to PTT, R1/R2 and Mic/DVK on DXD) and one port to the USB-serial box. The two serial outputs go to the rig control inputs on the 756 and 990. At first, CW and voice keying were stuttering unacceptably. I kept looking for extra programs running, finally remembering to remove the Ethernet PC-MIA card from the external slot, which cured the problem. Next issue was that version 10.2 of CQPWIN wouldn't talk to the 756, though it did to the 990. Version 10.1,

which I had used in February worked OK. This turned out to be a minor programming error on my part, caused by adding extra ICOM rigs to the rig control menu, but not implementing them fully. There was a simple workaround, and it's all working FB now.

Then out to look for a serial cable to use to try to communicate with the 87A. No luck at Antraco (and it took a long time to get there due to a cave-in on L.G. Smith downtown that will force a detour for several weeks). Spent 45 minutes or so at the DTZ with Pamela, who is very sweet, but works at her own pace. I did get copies of Ed's license and P49X authorization, but couldn't get my own P40Y authorization letter, since the guy who had to sign it was sick.

Lunch at Iguana Joe's, after looking in at Carlo's and Charlie's (a dive). In the middle Alan and Joe called to talk budget. Stopped at PriceSmart to get Lisandro and Leopold's gift certificates, but found they didn't have any. Then to Codemsa by the airport to buy a few supplies. Back at home, I realized I could try using my DB-9 to DB-25 adaptor (which I use for CW keying). Unfortunately I had to hacksaw off the connector screw lugs, as the 87A has such lugs also next to its female connector on the back. No luck with HyperTerminal. Then no luck after cutting off pin 22 of the adaptor as Brad at Alpha recommended. He even sent me an email config file for HyperTerminal, but it didn't help. Not sure if the failure of communication is the computer, the cable, or the amp. *[Later: The same setup communicates fine with the 87A back home, so it's definitely the amp.]*

I did get on 15 phone and ran some EUs in the late morning. Also chatted with P40A briefly on 20, but otherwise, not much operating. Took my usual 34 minute run from Marina Pirata to La Granja and back, then a quick shower and shave before dinner with JP and Chris at my favorite haunt, the Marina Pirata. As usual sitting right on the water. There is now a small "railing" to safeguard the diners from falling into the water, consisting of a two by eight board with a rope hawser on top, the whole thing being only about four inches high. I guess the lawyers made them do it. Afterwards I read a bit, then was suddenly very tired at about 10:30, so hit the sack.

Friday, October 28, 2005. I've decided that the only "user-serviceable" part on the 87A is the top cover, so after getting up at 7:50 and making a cup of coffee, I removed it and looked inside. Unfortunately, it looked just fine inside. John Crovelli came over at lunch time and couldn't see anything either. So it will presumably have to go back to Alpha in Colorado.

I went to the airport to meet John, who was turning in his rental car, then he treated me to lunch at the Pizza Hut downtown. We then went to the DTZ, where Pamela gave me my bill for 50Fl for my one special callsign (I had requested P40Y just to keep it alive).

As near as I can tell, I don't have to pay anything to renew P49Y – or at least Pamela was suitably vague when I queried her on the subject.

I dropped John off at his place. He has everything set up for a serious all-band effort. He has wire beams strung on a rope between his two towers, 3 el for 80, 4 for 40, plus four beverages. He's going to need all of this wire if the 80/160 noise from the local storms stays as loud as it has been in the evenings.

Next up was a visit to the new Toyota dealership, just north of the airport. JP gave me a tour of their clean new facilities. He is very proud of having helped design the service part of it (he's the service manager), and the whole place is quite impressive. They sell 850-900 vehicles a year, and JP says they are the largest Toyota dealer in the Caribbean.

Didn't do much in the afternoon, but ran at 5:30 or so and brought back a Subway sandwich for dinner.

COWW SSB Contest Saturday, October 29 - Sunday, October 30, 2005 – Contest notes more or less as scribbled during the contest. Contest starts out at 8 p.m. local time on Friday night (0000Zulu). I get on the air a few minutes early and work some weak US stations, but when the contest starts it is extremely frustrating. I can't hear W/Ks at all (after working a handful), but can hear the LUs and PYs working them. Virtually no one answers CQs except for a few SA, so I S&P for an hour and a half, finally giving up at 0129Z at 59/14/11 (QSOs/Countries/Zones). I get back on the air a bit to work a few guys on 20, 80, and 160 (12 Qs in all) just to help out P40W, etc. It's a very inauspicious beginning to a contest. I go to bed around 11 p.m., setting the alarm for just after 6 a.m. to try to get on the air in the 1000Z hour.

After coffee and a quick bowl of cereal, I'm on the air at 1035Z. I can work some EUs, but no one answers CQs. In the 1000Z hour, I only make 18 QSOs, but they are good for 22 mults. At 1117Z, it's as though a switch went on in the ionosphere, and suddenly I have an EU pileup. I run 160 stations or so on 21263, then the QRM gets to me and I QSY below the American phone band, alighting at 21139. At 1200Z I'm at 277/54/18. I continue to work EU (and the occasional W/K who shows up where he shouldn't be) for several hours. At 1600Z I'm at 963/78/24. Big surprise at 1612Z when ST2T calls in with zone 34. The EU pileup slows and I take a food break (18 min) at 1639Z with 1089/82/26.

Returning, I camp out on 21287 and run the US for several hours. The 1600Z hour is my best ever, 370 QSOs! The next three are 325, 242, and 245, so I'm starting to get a better feeling about this. This is a four-hour average of just under 300 per! At 2000Z, the totals are 2012/86/29.

I take a 15-minute break in the 2100Z hour, and then it's all slowing down. Crovelli had predicted the first JA would be worked at 2145Z, but in fact it is at 2124Z! I work several dozen, hoping to get some other Asian mults, but only hear JAs. By 2300Z I am at 2529/91/31, and as the sun goes down, the band reverts to yesterday's form, only worse, since I've already worked the SAs that I hear. So I give up just after 2300Z (6 Qs in the 2300Z hour).

After a decent night's sleep (aah, the benefits of a single band operation on a daytime band), I'm back on the air at about 1100Z. This year, with the foresight of having set the computer to GMT, I don't have to deal with the chaos that ensued in my tired mind last year when the computer reset from daylight savings time to standard time at 2 a.m. Saturday night in the middle of the contest (and, of course, at a time when I was at my absolute low energy level for the whole contest). Once again, there isn't much that I can stir up, but I do S&P for a while, including trying fruitlessly to call a very weak ZA/Z35M for a mult (never did work ZA in the contest). I can't get anything going until 1124Z, when the EU pileup starts, and the first hour is 132, followed by 169 and 160, all on 21138 (i.e., below the American phone band). At 1353Z I take a 20-minute food and mult break (no new mults found), sitting at 3000/98/32.

I go back to running EUs with a pleasant surprise at 1502Z when VU2PAI calls in for zone 22. At 1540Z VE3MR comes by to chat (unfortunately I'll miss him and Truus on the island). At about 1630Z, I decide it's time to look for a US run. I have some trouble finding a clear spot, but end up at 21256. Unfortunately, unlike yesterday, I can never get much of a run going. It's all relative, of course, and the 17, 18, 19 hours of 165, 184, and 169 are nothing to sneeze at, but also nothing like the 370, 325, and 242 equivalent hours of yesterday. ZS6DPD calls in during the run for a very welcome Zone 38.

At 2000Z I'm at 3854/106/34, but things are really slowing down. I decide to S&P a while to look for other Caribbean stations before they move down to 20 for the afternoon. I manage to find KP2YL and J3A, before settling in on 21316 for some grinding it out time – actually a good description of the whole rest of the contest. The first JA calls in today at 2202Z (again consistent with Crovelli's prediction of 2145Z). The band stays open later than yesterday, and I can still hear US at the end, but I've completely run out of stations to work, and my last QSO is actually at 2351Z.

The final tally is 4238 QSOs (4156 non-dupes), 113 countries, and 34 zones for 1,806,189 points. Pretty good, except that last year's category winner, PX5E in Brazil, later reports something like 4310/154/40! How does he find those mults?? He claims to have worked 40 hours in the contest, so maybe he has better propagation at odd times than further north.

After showering and talking to John Fore, who was curious about the outcome, Crovelli and I go off to Tony Roma's for the post-contest dinner. John, P40A, declined an invitation when I talked to him on the radio right before the end of the contest. Crovelli was all-band, and is really zonked out. He ended up with 10.3M points. His total mults were about the same as I had last year, but whereas I had about 130 on 10, this year he had only 40 or so. There was no EU opening on 10, and only a brief US opening (and not to the West Coast). His low band mults were much better, however, and he had 6500 Qs.

Monday, October 31, 2005. A fairly slow day. I packed up the amp in the morning in the Alpha 86 box. The foam pieces were designed for the 86, but could be massaged into fitting the 87A – it's the same size, but has a different panel layout. Then off to experience some Aruban bureaucracy. First to Codemsa near the airport (actually first and second, as I forgot to bring my wallet initially). I wanted to get Lisandro and Leopold gift certificates to PriceSmart, but they don't sell them, so I called Codemsa, which confirmed that they did. It's basically a large hardware/building supplies store. It took the cashier about 15 minutes to fill out the certificates, issue the magnetic cards etc. I apologized to a painter who was waiting for all this to occur, and he said that he always charges customers two hours for any trip to buy supplies, just to deal with the paperwork.

Then to the RBTT Bank down the street from the DTZ to pay my 50-florin fee for the P40Y callsign. There were 15 people in line ahead of me for four tellers. The line lasted about 15 minutes, then the lady had to fill out lots of computer data, then a form to show I paid and another form to change my \$50 bill to florins. It was a lot of work for her. Interestingly, they will take a driver's license for changing \$20 bills, but require a passport for \$50s and \$100s. Lots of stores won't take the larger bills due to counterfeiting problems. Then back to the DTZ, where the ever-amiable Pamela had me wait about 15 minutes while they prepared my official callsign letter.

I walked around for a while, looking for a luggage carrier for the Alpha box, finally finding it at Bon Bini Bazaar (a discount store) on Main Street. A quick Chinese lunch to get into air conditioning, then back home. I was on the 20m barefoot for an hour making 100 Qs or so, mostly with EU. Chris told me that she had let the Setar people in, who fixed the line but said our phone was bad. I believe the phone may be bad, but the line is noisy on both phones. And now I can't seem to use Setar 123 to get on the internet, as I could last night.

Then to JP and Chris's to give presents to them and Andy and Cindy and to discuss finances. A very pleasant dinner at the Buccaneer with Lisandro, his wife Lisette (a lawyer for the government) and

Leopold, all on me. This is an old-line Aruban place, made up to look like the sea, with very large aquaria inset in the walls. Lisandro then drove me to his house, which they are renting just south of the airport. He's the ultimate techno-ham, with four separate computers and four monitors in the shack. One is running his own weather station (which is updated to the internet every 5 minutes), another for APRS, another for packet cluster, etc. He has various rigs lying around to be repaired, and another room is a storeroom for old and to-be-rebuilt computers.

Tuesday, November 1, 2005. This was to be my day of relaxation. However, Lisandro had convinced me that the kosher thing to do with the amp was to go to the airport and get Customs to issue a form showing that it is being taken to the US for repairs, so when John brings it back, we won't have to pay the 7% duty on electronics gear. Lisandro even showed me exactly where to go last night and gave me a copy of the form he had used to get a transceiver repaired. So I dutifully drove to the AA Cargo building at the airport with the unsealed box and experienced another example of island bureaucracy. An AA employee filled out the form, but I then had to take it to three separate Customs officials in three separate little offices in the building for each of them to bless it in his or her own bureaucratic way. One of them collected 12.5 Florins from me. Then I brought it back to AA where another employee collected 35 more Florins and they sent me on my way after a total of about 45 minutes.

After dropping the amp back at the house, I headed off to Arikok National Park to take a short hike. You get there by turning right at Santa Cruz. There was a ranger on duty at a small shack near the entrance, who gave me a very poorly copied map, and I ended up hiking to Cunucu Arikok and Cero Arikok, a little under an hour in all. It's not very strenuous, and the trail is in terrific shape – much better than the roads in the park. It's graded, with little stones lining the sides in places, and actual rock stairs built in some areas, also stone seating areas in shady spots. It's a very pretty place to take a walk. Saw lots of iguanas and birds but no rattlesnakes. Lisandro had warned me about the snakes, which he says they always see when doing work on the cell tower on Jamanota.

Then back to the house for lunch, and to check emails and operate a bit. It started to rain, which slightly delayed my planned start for the beaches. Nonetheless, I got to Eagle Beach and found a lovely, semi-secluded spot where I could drive the car right up to the beach. I stayed there from about 4 to 5:30, and it was idyllic beach weather. The water was clean and warm, and the whole sojourn was highly refreshing. Back home to have sandwiches for dinner (still eating the salads and cold cuts I bought last week at Ling & Sons), and pack up. I did make about 200 Qs yesterday and today using P40Y, just to keep it active. I bought a plastic toolkit to replace the rusty

wrench box from the large kitchen drawer, then organized those two drawers, throwing out some particularly rusty or useless implements.

Wednesday, November 2, 2005. My plan was to go running on our street, then off to the Hyatt for a leisurely breakfast. But when I saw all the early morning traffic careening up the street, I thought better of it and drove, instead, to my traditional route at Savaneta. Then when getting out of the car back home, I stepped right into some dog poop kindly left by our next door neighbor dogs. This was the third time this trip, as they seem to delight in doing their business in front of our gates – presumably to establish some kind of dominance over the visitor from the North. Took the opportunity to throw out my old running shoes, something I've been meaning to do for some time. But breakfast and reading a book at the Hyatt were delightful.

At the airport, Chris waited in the car with the suitcase while I rousted out a Customs agent in the arrivals building to look at the amp in the box. He scribbled on the forms and gave them back to me without ever checking the box. Then at security, where they normally paw through your luggage, they waved me on through. I had a roll of tape and a knife in the suitcase, so I used that to seal up the box. Whew!



Here is P40L/P49Y



Lisandro, P43L, in his shack.



Leopold, P43M, gets ready to fix 40 m yagi.



John, W2GD/P40W stands atop the 10/15 m yagi.



Leopold, P43M and John, W2GD/P40W getting ready to tackle the aluminum once again.



**NCCC
Holiday
Dinner
2005**

