



599 VA

Earthquake/Hurricane Edition

September 2011

Newsletter of the Central Virginia Contest Club

<http://www.c-v-c-c.us>

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Meeting Notice

The September meeting of the CVCC will be held on Tuesday, 6 September 2011 at 7:00 P.M. at St Martin's Episcopal Church, 9000 St. Martins Lane, Richmond, Va. 23294. The pre-meeting social and dinner will be at 5:30 P.M. at the Golden Corral, Gaskins Road and West Broad Street.

<http://classic.mapquest.com/mq/6-TJmDGeaCoDGu>

September Program

Joe Palsa, K3WRY will be doing a presentation on AC power conditioning and its benefits in the shack.

Random Skip by W4DR

As I write this the STOR DXpedition has been over for almost 3 weeks. I would rate it as one of the top 5 DXpeditions ever. This despite the fact that they are not in the top 5 for numbers of QSO's. They were operating during the wrong months (summer), during a poor sunspot cycle and from the center of a very third world city. Despite all of this they worked over 121K QSOs with 28K unique call signs in 175 DXCC entities and all 40 zones. Europeans had solid openings on all 10 bands including 6 meters where over 900 QSOs were made. We North Americans had great openings on 9 bands (not including 6). W4DXX and I had the most Band/Mode/Countries with a total of 23. There were numerous NA stations over 20 BMC's. What really amazed me was that I was able to catch 3 band openings on each 10 and 12 meters during which I make only one QSO during each opening, a cw, a ssb and a rtty. I did not think we would get a shot on either of those bands. I also did not hold much hope for 160 meters during the middle of the summer, but there was one good night and I managed to them on only several calls. My 9 year old grandson, Gabe was with me for 8 or the 17 days of operation and he got very much into the spirit of chasing rare DX. He is a dedicated fisherman and I told him this was just like fishing and hooking STOR on 160 was like catching the "big one". I told him I used a 3/4 inch line (hardline) and very long hooks to fish for this one. I believe he was as excited as I was when STOR answered me on top band.

There is very little of a critical nature one can say about such a fine operation where the whole world is anxious to work them on any band or mode they are on. The operators without exception were very efficient. To their credit they did not spread their pileups over large segments of any band as some DXpeditions are prone to do when there are so many callers. This was true on all three modes. I found only fault with the 160 meter operator. He was sending too fast (30+ wpm) for a weak signal band with lots of QRN and he was not coming back a second time to confirm the QSO as completed. This caused stations to continue calling because they were not sure they had been logged. Sending the call once more with a "TU" would have been better and would not have reduced the rate by very much if at all. I resisted the temptation to call again after I caught on to his style and within a few hours the logs were online and I could confirm my QSO.

I hope you had as much fun with this fine DXpedition as I did. Next up is 4W6A and lets hope our antennas all survive the hurricane headed towards us.
Bob W4DR

Special Column by N2KW

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CONTESTING:

"a well-rounded operator can do it ALL"
by Allen Singer - N2KW

Where did the Summer go? It's Autumn, and Contest Season is upon us! I do hope you got some antenna work done, during the dog days of Summer, it's much less fun when there is ice on the tower.

This column, and the one to come, will be devoted to boosting your contest score. The time for antenna discussions has passed. Merits of Vertical versus Horizontal polarization will have to wait until Spring. We will now concentrate on fine-tuning technique.

Please remember that you are only competing with yourself, and it is not necessary to have the highest score, you can still be a "winner" if you exceed your pre-determined goals. You might want to try competing with a mate (or someone that you hate!) You might pick an arbitrary number of contacts, or another goal. One of the most memorable contests I ever entered, was a CQ-WW that I operated from the mobile. What kept me going (9 hours on Saturday, 7 hours on Sunday) was the attempt to work DXCC in a single weekend. I almost made it too!

It is not necessary to be on for the full contest period ... the last hour can be the most exciting part of the contest, if you're the only "fresh blood" on the band! I often suggest that non-contesters try that particular one-hour slot, and see how many stations they can put in the log. Just operating that last hour, and keeping a record of your one-hour-rate, will absolutely improve your skills, in contesting, and in pileup management, without a major investment of time.

Pileups are certainly not the only management issue during a contest. I don't know about YOU, but I cannot (and never could) stay awake for 48 hours. I MUST take some "off" time, and THAT can be a major management decision. Planning for WHEN that "off-time" is, can be crucial. I cannot identify that time with a number, because we have such a widespread audience. What is true for New England is all wrong for Africa. So, let's tell time a different way. There are only four times that are important. Sunrise, Sunset, Noon, and Midnightall LOCAL.

Propagation at local Sunrise sees some spectacular DX on the Low Frequency bands. But there is no rate to be found there. An hour before your Sunrise, you should be following the MUF, as it climbs.

Your best rate is usually found on the highest frequency with propagation, but not always. You should know in advance when to expect 21 or 28 to open. You want to be on the band that supports the highest RATE, and leave the long-distance contacts to the MultiOperator Stations. Display a Grey Line on your computer screen, at the operating point, and you will quickly see that the areas that you can hear, are also in their daylight. If you want to work stations that are West of you, just look for them an hour

before THEIR Sunrise. The opposite is true on LFboth stations will be in darkness. Late at night, on Top Band, stations to YOUR East will have difficulty to hear you, until the areas to THEIR East are in Daylight. In other words, stations to THEIR East, are louder than you. The time to be on 160, is when the sun is just rising in the target area. Reading between the linesthe best time to sleep, is after THEIR sunrise, but before yours. This will change with Sunspots, and HF bands will remain open all through the night. Decisions may be more difficult then, but will still be decided by RATE.

Your body's natural rhythm wants 90 minute sleep multiples, and I find two of them each night (consecutive) to be sufficient. That is to say, my sleep periods are each three hours. When you awake, it may be possible to work the antipode on LF, but the rate is elsewhere.

Sleep planning isn't the only preparation before the contest. Serious competitors make it a point to evaluate the bands 27 days prior to the contest period, when solar conditions foreshadow what to expect. Or not. Part of what makes propagation interesting is the randomness of the whole thing. You know what to expect... maybe. At least you know what to look for! It doesn't hurt to review the rules, either....they often change, but they have the decency to announce it in advance!

There is a great deal to be said for callsign recognition. It certainly helps when the DX knows your call in advance. "CU in test" echoes on the band for a week prior to kickoff. This is a good time to be visible, to CQ rather than tune, to make yourself known. If you want a clear frequency during the fracas, may I suggest that you establish yourself on a frequency at least 30 minutes before the start? If you don't think that you can hold a frequency at the beginning of the contest, use that half-hour to load your memories with loud DX stations, so you can hop from one to another instead of tuning. You would be surprised at the rate that can be achieved that way.

What is the one piece of information the other station lacks? It is your CALLSIGN. Why call "CQ TEST" when anyone on the band knows it's contest time? In fact, why call "CQ" at all? "YOURCALL YOURCALL TEST" is sufficient. But PLEASE, don't get carried away with brevity and fail to identify. That's plain selfish, it wastes the time of stations on frequency, who have probably worked you already. In fact, it will absolutely increase the number of "dupes" in your log, which completely negates any time you think you saved. Send your callsign, instead of "TU." Think about the economy of streamlining your exchange to omit extraneous characters, like "k" or "ar." (Unless you're AC5K or K1AR!) If you are in zone 5, don't send "05" or "T5." If you think this small economy is silly, think about 2000 QSO's, and how long it takes to send "T AR" 2000 times, or, more to the point, how many QSO's you COULD have made in that period.

Some people have a hard decision, whether to S&P, or to run. There is always a clear frequency to run on, the trick is to find it before someone else does. You will rarely find this clear frequency at the bottom of the band. Don't be afraid to go high, your rate will be higher without the QRM. If you are making one contact per minute, stay on the frequency. Although 60 QSO's/hour doesn't sound very good, it equals over 2500 QSO's during the contest period, even with 6 hours sleep. If you decide to tune, don't become a DXer, vainly calling a weak station in a big pileup. He is S9 SOMEWHERE, and that's where he will work. Even if he stays weak all weekend, the pileup will be greatly diminished by Sunday anyway. Keep moving, and you can work 90-100 stations in an hour....more if you have big antennas (emphasis on the "s".) Winning overall requires a good signal, skill, stamina, and some luck (not necessarily in that order!). Remember that even if your signal is 25 db below the competition, it is

still over S9 to most locations. Don't forget the fable of "The Hare and the Tortise" because the number of hours that you can spend in the chair, is just as significant as being a crackerjack operator with an enormous rate. To come out on top of the heap, you need both. Whilst there is only one "first place" there can be MANY winners. "Winning" is simply exceeding your goal.

Usually, the middle of the day sees a lull, which is a good time for a shower, and a proper lunch. It's amazing how a strategic 40 minutes can completely renew you. When you return, remember that the loud stations that you hear on 40 metres, cannot hear YOU. Again, propagation will favor stations to their East, who are in complete darkness, while it is still bright outside your window. You will have better luck on 40 after THEIR Sunset (but before yours....because AFTER your sunset, it will be time for 80.) Afternoons will be far better on 14 or 21. At this point in the Solar Cycle, 28 MHz simply isn't reliable. If it's open, milk it for all that it's worth, but be understanding if it's not. It's a nice luxury to monitor the bands a few days prior to the contest, but there is no guarantee that the same conditions will exist on the weekend. In fact, if 10 is open on Saturday, make hay while the sun shines, because there is no guarantee it will re-open on Sunday.

Band planning decisions will become more difficult, as the Solar Cycle is on an upswing. It's easy to pick a band, when only one or two are open. You can treat the available bands as one big one, and keep tuning, but if you can hold a frequency, your rate will be higher. Oddly enough, if you choose to "run" the multipliers will come to you. When it comes time to compute score, QSO's are far more important than multipliers, which always seem to take care of themselves.

A common pitfall, is when Search/Pounce, some ops try to work only new multipliers. This can really damage your score. Remember to work everything that moves. If you are calling CQ, and a "dupe" calls you, JUST WORK HIM. That's much faster than arguing "No you didn't, yes I did"which will only be resolved by duplicating the contact anyway. Stand up and stretch once in a while, the chair can get fatiguing. Be sure that you have sufficient lighting.

If you cannot commit to the entire contest period, yet want to maximize QSO's, your strategy will be largely determined by the amount of time that you wish to operate. If it's only a taste, that "last hour" formula is hard to beat. Saturday morning can be intense, yet still allow other activities during the day. Get on Top Band around Midnight for a while ...you know that the activity will be there! The object is to have fun, and to hone skills.

There is a seasonal propagation peak, right around the Equinox. The CQ-WW and the ARRL-DX Contests are well-positioned for these slots. Combined with the upswing in Solar activity, the upcoming contest season appears quite promising. I hope to see as many of you as possible in our upcoming QSO party! Our next column will be specifically devoted to the Marathon, my favorite "non-contest." Do you have a specific Marathon technique that you would like to share? Please send it to <mailto:N2KW@Ymail.com> (thanks!)

The only effect Irene had on me, was 3 hours to take the antennas down, and 4 hours to put them back up. Hope she was kind to you.

73, Allen - N2KW