



Publication of the
Northern California
Contest Club



September
2005
Issue 400

NCCC Net
Thursday 9 PM
3853+/-

Our Next Meeting Preparing for Sweepstakes WX5S and Others

Sept. 12, 2005: 6PM schmooze, 6:30 dinner, 7PM program

Location: China Wok Restaurant, 514 Sacramento Street, Vallejo, CA (707) 645-2008

Our menu for the evening will consist of hot & sour soup, honey walnut prawns, lemon chicken, Mongolian beef, ginger scallion fish fillet, dry braised green beans, steamed rice and soft drinks for a price of \$20 per person which includes tax and tip. Beer and wine are available on a no-host basis. The cuisine at China Wok is exceptional, so if you like Chinese food you won't want to miss this one. Please RSVP in advance to W0YK, payment preferred via PayPal, else in cash or check at the door.

Directions: From I-80 westbound, take the Georgia Street exit (which loops back around and you make a left turn onto Georgia Street), continue into downtown Vallejo, turn right on Sacramento Street and you're there. From I-80 eastbound, take the Highway 29 exit just after you cross the Carquinez Bridge. Go north on Highway 29 into Vallejo, turn left onto Georgia Street, go two blocks and turn right onto Sacramento Street. The China Wok is in the middle of the block across the street from the Vallejo police substation, an easy-to-spot building on the corner of Sacramento St. and Georgia St. There is plenty of free parking in the adjacent lot on the north side of the restaurant.

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Mike's Mic

Mike Heideman, N7MH

Summer is almost over, ending with the final summer NAQP and the last running of NS for this year. Thanks to everyone who participated in the NS series, and especially to N6ZF0 and N6RO whose stewardship of this unique practice contest has resulted in increasing participation and expressions of thanks to NCCC from contesters across the country. Thanks, Bill and Ken, from all of NCCC!

The NCJ Sprints are coming up soon. Let's put all that NS practice to good use and sign up for Sprint teams. Just remember to reconfigure your software (and brain) to avoid calling dupes.

We have just over a month remaining before the 40th running of CQP. Kevin N6RCE and Marc W6ZZZ are leading the charge to publicize this biggest of state QSO parties that we run. If you haven't already made your CQP plans there is still time to do so. Whether you go on a county expedition, guest-op at a station in a rare county, go mobile through many of California's counties, operate from your home station, participate in a multi-op, or do something else (like operate from Kure for that HI mult), we need all our members on the air.

Our September and October meetings will be focused on Sweepstakes with our goal to threepat as gavel winners in the Unlimited Club category. We still need volunteers to help in various roles related to SS, so please contact me or Kurt K7NV and let us know how you'd like to help.

VP/CC

Kurt Andress, K7NV

Congratulations to all who participated in the August NAQP contests. We had a great turnout. The 3830 reflector results appear to indicate that the NCCC might have had the most entries in both modes. It is hard to tell as not all entries have been reported. It was close with the TN Contest Group.

Conditions were not favorable for west-coast stations this year, but we did well for what we had. More about how this relates to SS below.

The NCJ Sprints are next on our schedule. The CW Sprint is Sept 11, SSB is Sept 18. After the CQP on Oct 9 we have the RTTY Sprint. Since, we have been sprinting all summer in Thursday night NS's we should be well prepared for the CW version (well some of us anyway).

The following Club members have stepped forward to take on the task of organizing our teams:

Ed, AJ6V – Sprint CW

Dean, N6DE – Sprint SSB

Phil, WA6TQG – Sprint RTTY

Look for the announcements on the NCCC reflector from these guys to sign up for the NCCC teams!

Why Sprint?

For most of us the Sprint contests are quite intimidating and difficult to deal with. Everyone is going at the speed of light and many find the format confusing and/or frustrating. Think of the Sprint as just one wild S&P training exercise where you have to quickly figure out if the guy CQing is a new one, and then place your properly timed call in where it can be heard. That's what I do. Ever since, I just love the contest I used to hate, because it makes me a better S&P contester every time I do it. We're gonna need lots of S&P KB'ers when SS rolls around!

The CQP is next, Oct 1 & 2. This is the 40th anniversary of the CQP and our guys N6RCE and W6ZZZ have been doing a

terrific job getting PR wound up in all the right places for this year's event.

One of the major issues we face this year is activating all CA counties. There are several counties that have not yet been confirmed as being active for the weekend. This presents a great opportunity for those willing to have a little adventure and do a small expedition to these places. It won't take much....100w and a wire and tuner to get some pretty huge pileups.....win the county and maybe set a new record!

Remember, everyone outside of CA will be looking for you!

Check out <http://www.cqp.org/Counties-Plan-2005.html> to see where you can go be a rare mult. If you can't go out and activate one of these counties, but know someone who can, or someone who lives there, let them know about how much fun they are in for!

Contact Bob, N6TV, to claim your County! Another great way to promote CQP is to get on and participate in the other state QSO parties. Work our friends and tell them you'll see them in the CQP.

After CQP and the RTTY Sprint we'll have the CQWW SSB contest, Oct 29-30, which is not one of our focus contests, but is always great fun.

Start thinking about SS!!! SS CW is Nov 5-7, and SS SSB is Nov 19-21. Please put these weekends on your contest calendar. This is the contest the NCCC can win, and can win all the way through the solar minimum!

Dean, N6BV, did an analysis for us of the last solar cycle minimum and found that the NCCC won every SS it really showed up for. When we lost interest and forgot to turn our radios on and put our "Butts in the chairs" we got beat. Every SS during the low solar years where the NCCC submitted more logs than the other clubs, it won! So, the plan for this year is not extravagant. It is really quite simple. If we show up in force and do OUR thing, another Gavel will be added to the impressive total. The outcome is entirely up to us.

We will be encouraging HMO operations and all of the variants that maximize the productivity of our stations and operators. You guys have been getting real good at this the past couple of years, so you probably don't need someone to tell you how to do it. I expect most of you are going to tell us how you are going to do it.

The decline in productivity on 10 & 15 meters will significantly affect us. After all, 15 meters is normally a very important band for us during the daylight hours. If it goes in the tank, we will need to change our operating strategies. We may need to take some breaks during slow daylight hours, and not sleep all night, but get on for the east coast sunrise on 40 & 80. Everyone that can run high power should do it; this will really help on the low bands.

Lots of contesting on the horizon....everyone get wound up and go out there, have a great time and KB!

Nevada Redux

Rusty Epps, W6OAT

Webster defines masochism as "a taste for suffering". I guess that's something akin to trying to set a new CQP state record from Nevada! I recently talked to both Kurt, K7NV and Tom, K5RC about the possibility, and each gave me the all-knowing but kindly "Are you out of your bloody mind?" look. Nonetheless, Tom graciously offered me the use of his fabulous "W7 Radio Nevada" station if I really did want to tackle this bit of operating insanity.

Curses upon you, Marc W6ZZZ! Had it not been for your exposing the fact that my very own Nevada state record set 22 years ago from WA7NIN's QTH in Carson City Was the oldest existing out-of-state CQP record and "probably could be picked off by someone this year", then I could have stayed right here in California. I could have had a ball running high rates from a big station, like K6IDX.

Or maybe Ira, K2RD, and I might have gone mobiling again and enjoyed all the beautiful fall colors in the mountain foothills. But noooooo ... "Oldest record; easy picking" is what you just had to keep telling folks.

Okay, Marc, you win. Somebody might indeed take the Nevada record away from me this year, but thanks to your needling, I'm going to be there at W7RN trying mightily to defend the title. I now have only vague recollections of setting that old record way back in 1983, but what still is vivid in my mind is just how painful it was to gather the 606 QSOs I made that year. I do recall spending most of my time on 40m SSB pleading with anybody in California for a contact, and then meekly asking if perhaps they had a spouse or a kid with a callsign who would be kind enough to get on and make a second QSO with me. I even learned what "QNI" means. It was sheer agony!

"What's so tough about working California from Nevada?" one might ask. Well, mainly, it's the skip. Nevada, and especially western Nevada, is just too close. Sure, a handful of W6 stations around Lake Tahoe probably are going to be loud and easy to work. But the big Bay Area and Los Angeles population centers are 150 to 350 miles away.

We're going to skip right over them on 10, 15 and 20 meters, and that's where most of the daytime CQP activity will be found. On those high bands, every W9 and W4 is going to be 20 to 30 dB louder than my backscatter signal from Virginia City. I'm going to lose out in those pile-ups every time! Get the handbasket ready, because my rate on those bands likely will have a one-way ticket to Hades.

Won't nighttime on 40, 80 and 160 meters save me? Probably not. It's true that during the 30 hour CQP event on October 1st and 2nd, the sun will be below the Nevada horizon for exactly 12 hours and sixteen minutes. But by the time most California stations decide to drop down to 40m, it will be after dark and propagation on that band will have gone long. Again, my pathetic signal eking out of Nevada likely will be heard only by those California

stations who don't get anybody else answering their CQs -- and there won't be many of them because all the East Coast CQPers will be on 40m right then trying to bag their W6 QSOs.

On 75 and 80 meters, it'll be a different story. That's where I can be king of the hill. I'll be loud -- probably REAL loud -- because W7RN plays so well on that band. I'll be able to run and run, right? Ummm ... unfortunately, no! Trouble is, most of the W6 gang doesn't go to 75/80 meters until about 10:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. local time. They duck down there, cherry pick a few easy QSOs, and then most of them yawn and say "I'm a single op and that means I've got to take six hours time off; guess I'd better get to bed so I'll be daisy fresh in the morning when it's time to start running all those W9s and W4s again on the high bands." Whump goes the big switch, and upstairs they go to pour themselves a good, strong scotch before crawling into the sack. So there I sit, listening to CQs from the multi-op guys who can go all night, but I've already worked those stations hours ago.

And as for 160m, historically it's mostly just the CQP big guns who even think about going there. Yeah, there might be an easy 25 to 50 QSOs to be scooped up on top band, but that hardly sets a Nevada record.

So, what's one to do? How can a new record possibly be pulled out of this mess?

Well, to start with, what's bad for California stations just might be a lifesaver for someone in Nevada. Take ten meters for instance. 2005 is getting down towards the bottom of the current sunspot cycle. If 10m simply isn't open -- or isn't open but an hour or two -- then all those loud midwesterners and southerners won't be there to blow me away. That's when my backscatter signal just might get through. Don't be surprised to hear a fluttery W7RN in there calling you; or if you're listening around the CQP's suggested frequencies of 28040 and 28450

kHz, don't be too surprised to hear that I'm even trying a few "CQ CQP" calls myself.

Fifteen meters probably is going to be a lot more lively than ten meters this year, but it, too, is likely to take a big hit from the declining sunspot numbers. Once again, I'm hopeful my backscatter signal will be heard.

A strategy I expect to employ will be to request that California stations QSY with me from the lower bands up to 10m and 15m. And those QSY requests might even come at night when we know those bands won't be open for skip-based contacts. It's amazing how frequently backscatter QSOs are possible on very quiet "closed" bands. And try rotating your beam from north, through east, and down south. Backscatter signals sometimes peak from seemingly strange directions.

I expect the bulk of CQP stations will be hanging out on 20m during the daylight hours. That's the band which will be open for most California stations, and no matter how I slice it, it's going to be bad news for me. I'm not going to be loud enough to break most pileups; and even when some W0 doesn't answer your CQ, the din of nearby QRM usually will be stronger than I'll be. Most W6s just aren't going to hear me on 20 most of the time. If there's any hope for success on 20, it'll probably come in the form of backscatter QSOs made late at night with stations kind enough to accept my pleas to QSY there from the lower bands.

Because of the constant bedlam on 20, and the poor conditions likely on 15 and 10, some CQP stations, and particularly the little pistols who can't clear and hold CQing frequencies on the high bands, might drop down to try 40m during the daylight hours. I sure hope so, because I plan to be there waiting to pounce. W7RN has a second transceiver at the main operating position, and I plan to keep it cycling between the calling frequencies of 7040 and 7230 during daylight hours. Come on down on your own, or suggest a QSY to 40 if we're lucky enough to hook up on one of the high bands; I'd love to meet you there while we're relatively loud for each other.

Finally, what about six and two meters? Traditionally, these two bands don't see much CQP activity. Nonetheless, W7RN does have stations QRV on both. The CQP rules suggest rally times of 20:00Z and 04:00Z on 50.135, 144.210 and FM on 147.54 MHz.

I'll be there at both rally times; and at other times if anybody wants to QSY there from another band and give it a shot. Tom tells me that in a recent VHF contest, W7RN was pretty successful working as far west as Fresno and Sacramento on both bands.

So there you have it. I know well that pulling out enough QSOs to set a new Nevada mark is going to be a tough row to hoe. But if bad band conditions keep 10 and 15m quiet enough for backscatter QSOs, and the ruckus on 20 tempts folks to test 40 during daylight hours, then maybe it can be done. I'll try not to be shy about asking California folks to QSY to other bands and modes with me; and I invite you to make similar requests of me if things are slow and you feel like trying for Nevada QSOs some place where we haven't yet worked.

First Contest

Jack Troster, W6ISQ

It was a Saturday afternoon in very early 1936 when I was W2ISQ in Yonkers, NY. I was tuning around 80 meters with my trusty ACR-136 (You had to "tune" Then because most ops were crystal controlled, so you called CQ then tuned up And down for an answer.

There were some ops who could go like VFO, who had rigs like Tuned Plate Tuned Grid oscillators, which had a beautiful, ripe, juicy T4-5 note. (A few months later I built one and went chasing DX on 20 with a delicious T-5).

I heard stations calling CQ...then replying with a report and city location, and I think a name.

After hearing a few of these I decided to enter the fray and do likewise.. I fired up my 47 crystal oscillator, which fed into the 66 ft. ZOTR (Zepp On The Roof) antenna and grabbed my homemade wooden bug with both hands (had to use one hand to hold it and one to key it).....and called.

If I went over about 15 wpm my call came out W2IVK, so I stayed within my understandable W2ISQ zone. I exchanged a few rounds with other stations. Then I called a fella going at about 20 wpm. My flank speed at the time was about 16-17. So he came back to me and whipped through his message at what I guessed was about 20 wpm. I sent my reply then asked him to please repeat. He repeated ...at about 25. Ahhh, "agn pse". So he came back at about 30. "Agn pse"...so he came back and repeated at about 35 wpm..... and then went to CQing again. I guessed our QSO was terminated. I was smarter in those days.

>

...Through all this, I was picking up odd letters he'd sent. I received NJ, so figured he was in New Jersey! wow. And his town began with "M" or "G". So I got down the atlas and began looking..not Morristown or Madison..not the correct scramble of letters I had written down. I finally matched some of the letters I had written down with Metuchen, NJ, which is about 25 miles across the Hudson River from "Yahnkiz" (to use the native NY vernacular). But, I never heard of Metuchen! I put him in the log anyway. I didn't send the log of my few contacts to anybody. I didn't know you were supposed to. And, I didn't know who to send 'em to anyway.

About 25 years ago, I drove through Metuchen...Guess what I thought about. Maybe that experience has kept me a low scorer in CW tests all this time. I keep the speed down and figure maybe some of my callers might be in the same excited shape as the kid I remember from Yonkers a few years back.

At least I don't have to repeat my message too often.

First License...First Rig

Jack Troster, W6ISQ

May, 1935..Yonkers, NY. Just finishing freshman high school year. My room was full of tube sockets, resistors, condensers, Fahnstock clips, bits of wire, breadboards, and all that neat stuff a radio fella must absolutely have.

My father surveyed my room one evening and said..."School is about over. If you don't take the FCC amateur exam in the next 2 weeks, I'm going to throw all this stuff out."

Naw..he wouldn't do that...he's kidding, as usual...But...ahh...better not take any chances. So I began to memorize the License Manual in earnest. The code I knew up to about 14 wpm thanks to a buzzer system wired up to the kid next door...also an aspiring ham.

The exam then was 10 essay questions... plus... "draw a circuit diagram of a transmitter showing an oscillator, buffer/doubler and final push-pull amp, a class B modulator and power supplies for all". I had this diagram down cold, having practiced surreptitiously drawing it many, many times (like I was taking copious notes) during boring classes like English, German, math, etc., etc. Only wood shop, print shop and gym escaped my drawing time.

I memorized the whole Manual for the essay questions. Two weeks later I walked a mile to the trolley, then 3 miles trolleying to the five-cent VanCourtland Park subway, then about an hour's ride to a station not too far north from what was Courtland Street's Radio Row in lower Manhattan. (Also, not too far north of what was later the World Trade Center).

About 25 of us sit at desks. I decide I am the youngest in the room by at least 10 years. The Inspector passes out paper. I'm shaking already. Put on the fones. Here it comes. I start off a little wobbly. But then it comes pretty well...all this at 13 wpm. End of tape.

The Inspector comes to my desk first, looks at my paper and says, "that second word is wrong . If you can figure out what it should be by the time I collect the papers, I MAY pass you."

I had written "unoppicial". As I looked at it ...it could have been in maya glyphs or Chinese. I had absolutely no idea. He came back and took the paper. I was a shambles. I felt in my pocket to be sure I had a nickel for the subway ride back home.

After half an infinity, the Inspector begins to call out names. He called all but three of us. Then he walked over to me..a worse shambles.."that word was your only mistake, kid. You passed. Here write the exam."

Two hours later I was still looking at the essay questions. As I recall, most of them could be answered in a single sentence. I had answered them all in about a half hour, but was scared to pass the paper in. ...yet. I might have forgotten something. So I hung on and sweated. Now, the Inspector was standing in front of my desk. We are the only two people in the room.

He finally said, "time to give up, kid". OK. I slunk out of the office and headed home. Oh, well. I should clean up my room anyway.

Fast forward...July..Bellflower, (Central Illinois (population 400, if everybody is in town at the same time)

The usual summer with farm family, cousins, uncles, aunts...My cousin (my age), who lived on the edge of town and his buddy on a farm three miles out, had taken their ham exams. (They went to Chicago with their fathers. The boys passed; their fathers flunked the code!).

In anticipation of their licenses, they had each built a 2 tube transmitter -- with a Class A modulator yet! Wow. They were pirating on 160 like others on 160 in the area and always scared that their few watts would be intercepted all the way up to Chicago, and bring the Inspectors down with hand cuffs.

So, I had to build something too. I scrounged what was available from the two hams-to-be and started winding a coil, and there was some other stuff too.

I had my grandfather's huge AM receiver which went down to 160, so that was easy. In late-July, my grandfather came home to lunch one day and said, "you have mail forwarded from Yonkers." Yes. There was a small envelope with return address of FCC, DC. Yipes. I finally got up courage to open it. Yep. There was a ticket..for W2ISQ.

Ohmagosh...I am a ham. I ran the half mile to my cousin's house pretty fast. I needed to complete my rig and get on the air like a real ham. Got the stuff, ran back and finished with a few twisted wires (what solder?). I had a "B" battery-operated, loop-modulated oscillator. With loop modulation, just wind a couple of lamp-wire turns around the plate coil and attach a liberated carbon mike from a "party line" telephone. And holler real loud.

The antenna was a collection of wires twisted together and strung across a sidewalk about 40 feet to a tree. Anyone walking the sidewalk would be guillotined.

But not many walkers on a hot July day in a little town in Illinois. A half mile away, my cousin was already patiently listening for me. I yelled into the mike..."W2ISQ is on the air and listening". I yelled that a few more times. He could have heard me yelling if he had stuck his head out the window. Anyway, he heard me on his Skyrider. He said, "I hear ya' but you are zipping by pretty fast." Then, he called his buddy three miles out in the country to listen.

My report came back..."I think I heard him a few times, but he was flashing by so fast I couldn't understand what he was saying."

Yep,the loop-modulation system does have a bit of FMing involved!! But I had made my first contact as W2ISQ. Of course, readability was about R-1, ahhh...Yipee. I am a ham.

As I cooled down, I realized that my first ham contact had been in VIOLATION of all FCC rules and codes.

First...I had contacted an unlicensed person. Two...I was using loop-modulation which was forbidden. Three...I had not notified the "Route Inspector" in Chicago that I would be using a "W2" call inside his "W9" District (at that time it was a requirement that the RI of the district where a portable station would operate should be notified).

So, my FIRST QSO had been DISLEGAL!! I wondered if the "RI" in Chicago had monitored my transmission. One QSO and I am off to jail.

Nah. If I could not be copied three miles out of town, how could the RI monitor...ahhh. But, I did not receive a summons from the RI in the next two days,,,,oh well...take a chance...so I went back and talked to my cousin half-mile away. He did his best to follow me up and down the dial on his Skyrider.

NCCC has a true treasure among its membership. Jack Troster, W6ISQ, has been writing his unique essays for as long as I can remember. I had many a laugh over his columns in QST in 1950s. It's a great honor to have his contributions in the JUG.

ED

---CL---

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