



Publication of the
Northern California
Contest Club



July
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Issue 410

NCCC Net
Thursday 8 PM
3830+/-

Our Next Meeting

2005 K7C DXpedition
Alan Eshleman, K6SRZ

Date: Saturday, 22 July 2006

Time: 11:00am schmooze, 12:00pm dinner, 1:00pm program

Location: Senior Center, 229 New York Ranch Road, Jackson (see <http://nccc.cc/meetings.html> for directions)

Pot Luck: Entrée provided by MLDXCC and drinks by NCCC. In addition, everyone is asked to ...

Please bring the following to share based on the first letter of the suffix of your call sign:

- A-G: Chips/dips/salsas
- H-N: Salad (potato, macaroni, fruit, green, etc.)
- O-U: Relishes (assorted pickles, olives, carrot sticks, veggies w/sip, etc.)
- V-Z: Desserts (simple desserts, cookies, fresh fruit, etc.)

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JUG Editor: Rob Brownstein, k6rb@baymoon.com

Musings from the President

By Dean Straw, N6BV

Presidential Musings

July 2006

If you missed the June 12 meeting, you missed a really good one! One of our own NCCC members, Jim Brown, K9YC, presented a terrific program on problems with RF pickup on modern electronic devices (including the microphone connectors on our radios). The audience gained a whole new appreciation of the term "Pin 1 Problem" on modern-day electronic devices.



Jim, K9YC, discusses RF pickup and pin-1 problems.

Jim provided a host of details on how ferrite common-mode suppression techniques work to kill RFI problems; for example, even in the presence of a 50 kW AM transmitter. I can foresee another NCCC purchase of a load of cores, as we had several years ago, but with even better ferrite materials specified.

“Why a Duck?” was discussed at some length at the June meeting. This entirely tongue-in-bill discussion delved into the details of “Kick, Duck” and on the proper use of “KD” on-the-air among NCCers. Old-fashioned “KB” is, of course, still a useful and friendly greeting among the brethren, but “KD” is rapidly becoming the new rallying cry among the cognoscenti!

The July 22 NCCC meeting will be held jointly with the Mother Lode DX and Contest Club (MLDXCC) in Jackson, CA, in the foothills of the Sierras. Full details on how to get there are on the NCCC Web site, under “Meetings.” The meeting starts with schmoozing time at 11 AM, with potluck lunch at 12 PM, followed by the meeting at 1 PM. Our own Allan, K6SRZ, will do his fantastic and highly entertaining presentation on the K7C DXpedition to Kure Island.

By the time you read this issue of the JUG, Field Day will have already come and gone. I hope you took the opportunity to help out at the sites of other clubs in your area. Field Day remains an excellent opportunity for NCCC to spread the good news about contests and to encourage and mentor less-experienced operators in solid contesting techniques.

I am still feverishly preparing for WRTC down in Florianopolis, Brazil. My wife Rayma and I, together with my WRTC partner Mark, AG9A, will be heading down there in early July (providing that VARIG is still flying... Sigh.)

I am truly humbled that you chose me as Team Captain to uphold the honor of NCCC in the 2006 WRTC. I view it as a grave responsibility, believe me, and I am in awe of the high level of competitors who are going to Brazil.

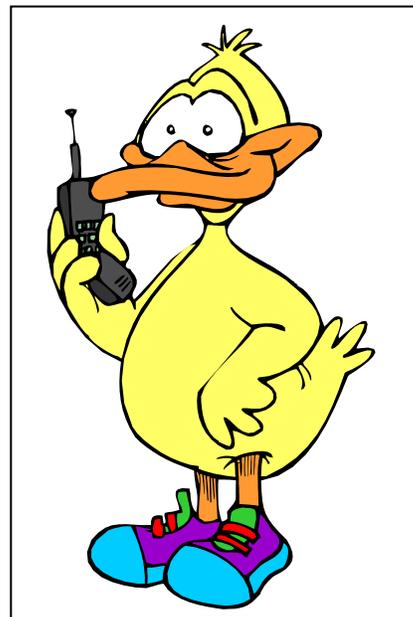
Since WRTC competitors are not allowed to disclose their identities during the contest (to discourage friends from working only their

friends), please work every possible WRTC station you hear, on all bands from 80 to 10 meters. This means working as many PW5A to PW5Z and PT5A to PT5Z (special prefix) WRTC stations as you can during the IARU/WRTC contest, which starts at 12 UTC on Saturday July 8 and ends 24 hours later on Sunday 12 UC July 9.

Check out my propagation predictions on the NCCC Web site for July 2006 to see when the various bands are predicted to be open. Keep in mind also that Sporadic E peaks in June/July, so the bands may be open even better than predicted, particularly to the southern part of South America.

I will be doing some sort of “blogging” on daily events at WRTC. This should appear on the ARRL Web site (www.arrl.org), along with a number of other WRTC blogs.

I salute my friends at NCCC with a hearty “KD”!



VP/CC

By: Fred Jensen, K6DGW

Everyone's busy in the summer, and it seems like Andrea and me especially, but we do have several good contests to go after in July, and of course the WRTC:

RAC Canada Day: (1 Jul 0000Z – 2359Z)

I'll probably make this one, I've had a lot of fun in the past, and wishing our northern neighbors "Happy Birthday" will be an incentive to put in some time on SSB too. Exchange for non-VE's (and VE0) is RS(T) and a serial #. You'll get RS(T) and province or territory back from Canadians.. Multipliers for non-VE's are the 13 provinces and territories. You can work anyone, non-VE's are worth 2 points, VE's are worth 10, and QSO's with official RAC stations (those ending in "RAC") are worth 20 points. Rules at www.rac.ca/downloads/2006CanadaDayContestRulesEnglish.pdf assuming you prefer English.

Spartan Sprint: (4 Jul 0100Z – 0300Z)

The Spartan Sprint is on the evening of 3 Jul from 0600 – 0800 PDT, so given the holiday, activity may be down some. Rules at www.arsqrp.com/ars/pages/spartan_sprints/s_s_rules_new.html I'll miss this one unless I take the KX1 up to youngest son's home in Sparks NV.

IARU World Championships: (8 Jul 1200Z – 9 Jul 1200Z)

We need everyone on for this one! Exchange is signal report and ITU Zone. IARU Member Society HQ stations (ending in "HQ") will send a report and their society abbreviation. NU1AW counts as an HQ station. You will also find "AC" (Administrative Council members), and "R1," "R2," and "R3" stations (Regional Executive Committee members). Like CQP, you can work stations once per band per mode.

This is an even numbered year so it is also the WRTC championships, and our President (Dean, N6BV) is heading up one of the WRTC teams in Brazil. Call signs for the competition stations will be assigned just before the contest start, from the blocks: PT5 and PW5 with one letter suffixes. More information and rules at www.iaru.org/contest.html

NAQP RTTY: (15 Jul 1800Z – 16 Jul 0600Z)

The first of the three summer NAQP's, these are just plain fun. Power is limited to 100W, which really equalizes things for the "not-so-huge" stations (like me). Exchange is a name and state or province. Note: "A name," meaning any name, not necessarily the one your Mom and Dad gave you. Info at www.ncjweb.com/naqprules.php

A double advantage for NAQP is the team competition, and NCCC always fields several teams of 2-5 stations each. If you're new to NCCC, it works like this: I'll plead for a Contest Commander to step forward (consider this to be the first plea). The CC will flog the contest on the reflector and get people to sign up. Most will say, "It'll be a small effort so put me on a high numbered team," which is part of the game.

Flight Of The Bumblebees: (30 Jul 1700Z – 2100Z)

A fun afternoon for QRP folks with portable radios. Hike, bike, paddle, swim, or whatever to the field site of your choice and operate for four hours. How far you hike, bike, paddle, or swim is up to you. Last year, I charged my 12Ah gel cell with an RV solar cell, drove to the Regional Park and schlepped my K2 and other gear in about a quarter mile one way, and had a great time. If you're going to participate hjohnc@core.com for a "Bee Number." www.arsqrp.com/ars/pages/bumblebees/bb_rules.html for rules and info.

www.hornucopia.com/contests will get you the whole bunch.

When Does The Contest End? There's been a thread on the reflector for a goodly part of June, aimed mainly at CQP, on the subject of exactly what is the contest period? The rules say, Sat 1800Z "to" Sun 2200Z. That is reasonably clear, at least to me – set the computer clock to UTC with WWV, wait until it says 18:00:00 on Sat and start calling CQ. A little more complex for the end however, but since some of the prizes are priceless bottles of the finest wine on the planet, being totally unambiguous in the rules may be important. Since I get a soapbox every month, here's what I think (and how I act in contests).

To the end first: All the logging programs I've ever used log the time from the computer clock when the QSO is completed. In truth, any other option for the logging software writers doesn't make much sense. I have assumed and still do that, if I'm trying to finish a Q when the computer clock says 22:00:00 on Sun in CQP, I'm done. It was my job to get the clock set. My highly accurate Casio chronograph can keep time with WWV for several weeks or so and if my computer can't, I probably ought to get another one. That Q will be logged as 22:00:xx, or even later if conditions are really bad, and that log time is after the contest is over. Since I made the Q, I leave it in the log (I don't think this has ever happened for me as an SO in CQP, but it has in other contests), and I figure the checkers will handle it.

Marc has explained how he, as the CQP Time Guru, has handled Q's logged in the first minute of the twenty second Zulu hour of Sunday. That works for me. CQP, the most popular of the state and regional QSO parties, has always worked to be fair and understanding to the participants, and I can't imagine why we'd want to change that. Working around clocks set to local vs UTC, mis-set by an hour or two, or even by a few seconds seems reasonable. After all, if one station's log times are consistently 5 seconds later than all his Q's, it is reasonable to assume he missed the WWV time hack. However, I do think that, given the stature of

the CQP in the contesting world, we want the rules to be unambiguous.

Now for those who, in the Sport of Amateur Radio, will start early knowing they will complete the one Q (and thus log the time for it) after the contest start time, I really hope you don't sleep well.

Switching Supplies

Rob Brownstein, K6RB

For those of us with small transceivers that enjoy taking them with us on trips and vacations, the power supply is usually the bulkiest, heaviest part of the package.

By 2000, there were several companies offering "switching" supplies, where size and weight were much more accommodating. The issue, though, was noise – more specifically, electrical noise produced by the switching technology.

In the July 2006 issue of QST, it is clear to me that manufacturers have made a lot of progress on that score. Four switching supplies were tested in the ARRL labs, and, in my opinion, all passed muster.

What was most interesting, for me, was the fact that of the four – Daiwa SS-330W, Kenwood KPS-15, MFJ-4125, and Ten-Tec 963, the MFJ unit was the most impressive. Not only was it small, light, and relatively inexpensive; it had lower ripple than Daiwa and Ten-Tec, and produced the least amount of broadband noise.

When I got my K2/100 (in 2004), I had considered several switching supplies and opted for an Astron. And, I've been quite pleased with it. But the MFJ is smaller and lighter, and if I were faced with the same decision, now, I probably would choose the MFJ-4125.

In conventional, non-switched, power supplies, we typically deal with 60 or 120 Hz pulsating DC after stepping down and rectifying the voltage. Filtering out such

low-frequency ripple requires large values of inductance and capacitance. This all adds up to larger components, larger enclosures, and heavier weight.

A switching supply, in contrast, rectifies the line voltage and uses a power oscillator to generate voltage at much higher frequencies (e.g. 25 KHz to hundreds of KHz). At those frequencies, filtering uses much lower values of inductance and capacitance. Hence, the components are smaller and lighter. The art comes in maintaining good regulation and suppressing all the switching hash. And, clearly, these four vendors have learned that art.



Marc (W6ZZZ) receives the Jim Maxwell Memorial Award from Dave (W6NL) for his contributions to the club's success in SS '05.



One more time...NCCC earns the coveted Sweepstakes Unlimited Club Competition gavel.



Thirteen-year-old Michael (son of Jack, W6FB) is licensed and rarin' to go. It's part of NCCC's latest SS strategy (take note PVRC!).



Jack (W6ISQ), Jack (N6EM) and Kit (W6ISO) listen in rapt attention as Jim, K9YC, talks about RFI and ferrites.



NCCC president, Dean, N6BV, still trying to explain "KD" to the unwashed.

All photos courtesy of NCCC's official shutterbug, Bob, N6TV

Report from Friedrichshafen

Rick Tavan N6XI

Because of a fortuitously scheduled business meeting, I was able to tack on a side trip to Ham Radio Friedrichshafen, the largest hamfest in Europe, held near the north shore of Lake Konstanz on the German-Swiss border. I flew in to Zurich on Friday morning, rented a car and drove through Austria to Germany.

A better choice would be a flight directly to Friedrichshafen but it is a small airport with limited service. Plan ahead! Thanks to three lovely ladies (well, their voices from the GPS, anyway) I made it to Tettang without incident. You can also get a train right in the Zurich Airport that takes you to a ferry across the lake into Friedrichshafen.

In Tettang, the Hotel Rad is headquarters for several CW-oriented groups that meet Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights for a prix-fixe dinner and drinking late into the night. If you talk them into it, the waitresses will serve you from the main menu which features the unique specialty of asparagus when in season. They have over 60 asparagus recipes on that menu!

I joined them on the Friday night and accepted one of the prix-fixe choices but in the future would definitely go for the asparagus. At the Rad I ran into Alan K6SRZ who was including Friedrichshafen in the middle of a UK/Europe tour with his XYL Carol. We shared some rides and some meals. It was fun to connect with someone from home in the midst of all these new faces.

The main exhibition hall "Messe Friedrichshafen" is enormous, far outstripping Dayton's sagging Hara Arena, with wide hallways, spacious exhibition areas and ample food service venues. The crowd, estimated at 18,000, feels much smaller as it is spread out over so much area.

The flea market is identical to those in the States. It takes at least an hour or two just to walk it. Being suitcase-bound, I chose not to take anything away. The main exhibit hall includes booths for many European national amateur radio organizations plus ARRL, many manufacturers and quite a few retailers. Although there was a lot of computer gear in

both the main hall and the flea market, there was also a good cross-section of real radio gear from the majors and the garage businesses. I was delighted to meet Piero Begali I2RTF and congratulate him on his line of exquisitely machined paddles which were on display in the ARI booth. I was sore tempted to buy another Simplex for EU130 but refrained since I'm well paddled at the moment.

Most of the presentations ("lectures") were in German but I was delighted to discover that the Contest Forum was mainly in English. (They lapsed into German to present their annual awards to Bavarian Contest Club members, a good time to skip out for a sandwich.) This "forum" is not to be confused with the meeting of the same name at Visalia. It is actually a three-hour, multi-part presentation series.

- The first part was a report on the R1MVC/R1MVW expedition to Malyj Vysotskij Island for CQ WW 2005. This entity was created by Russian/Finnish agreement, may not last long and is a difficult place to visit in November. They had a sizeable snow storm while they were there but made a lot of Qs.
- The next talk was about HB0/T94DX in Lichtenstein for the 2006 CQ WW 160 CW. They made 1730 Qs in 74 countries for just over a megapoint. Not surprisingly, most of their Qs were in Europe.
- After the awards interlude, F6HVV(?) described Win-Test, a pretty complete contest logger that has received minimal uptake in the US. I got a demo afterward. It supports 80 contests but not yet NCJ Sprint or CQP. It has window dynamics similar to N1MM (better than Writelog) and log display and keyboard dynamics similar to CT. It appears to have very good support for multi-op stations including real-time log synchronization on a flat LAN (not a serial daisy-chain). It supports two operators on a single station such that a listen-op can type in calls heard on a different or slightly different frequency from the transmit op; very slick. It has an excellent antenna switching matrix that lets you specify which antennas to

use for transmit and receive on each band and mode. Version 3 just came out at the convention and will be available on-line later this week. See

http://www.win-test.com/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=1300.

- I4UFH then described his EZ-Master SO2R box which works stand-alone and shines with custom support from Win-Test. At first I thought he was over-doing it with a philosophical discussion of SO2R operating scenarios that can be customized using his box plus custom control macros in Win-Test. You can configure headphone audio, routing different rigs to different ears, for about 10 different situations. It's a clean, elegant solution for a problem I'm not sure really exists. However, I'd like to play with it. The box itself has some very nice included features: It contains band decoders for two radios, an internal K1EL WinKey keyer, two radio control interfaces, power supply, transformer isolation of most circuits, RFI protection, rotor control (I think) and probably some more stuff that I didn't catch. It all interfaces with the computer through a parallel port and ONE USB port. It's pricey (\$540 with one single-ended custom cable) but definitely reduces the cabling complexity of an SO2R setup. At my Truckee station, for example, it would eliminate two single-port Serial-USB adapters, a dual-port Serial-USB adapter, an external keyer, a band decoder, a manual filter bandswitch, a mic audio transformer and possibly the control head of my Six Pack. That would be nice but I'm not convinced it's worth the effort to change now that I have my kludge working (mostly). See <http://www.hamradiosolutions.com>.

The Bavarian Contest Club held its annual dinner at an inn in the countryside on Saturday night. They had about 200 hams in attendance and conducted all (brief) formalities in English. There were lots of familiar calls to be met face-to-face and the buffet was outstanding. I highly recommend this event. I also strongly urge the use of GPS navigation. It was about 20 rural turns from the hotel to the dinner and I never

would have made it without my "Gertrudes."

In summary, Friedrichshafen struck me as a notch up from Dayton in terms of logistics, crowd control, quality of attendees and level of interest to active HF hams. It wasn't as on-target as our own Visalia, of course, but definitely worth doing if you have another excuse to be in Europe. Alas, it overlaps our US Field Day, a factor that has limited its US attendance for decades. Smoking is permitted and performed in hotels and restaurants but not nearly as much I have seen in other European trips.

There are free shuttles to a variety of locations including satellite parking which seemed to be pretty much necessary if you drove. There is close-in parking but I think it was reserved. The weather was beautiful, warm and quite humid by California standards. Air conditioning is marginal in most public spaces and non-existent in smaller hotels but I slept well and thoroughly enjoyed the weekend. Try it yourself some time.



At Friedrichshafen, the ham crowd mills around the flea-market tables. (Photo courtesy of Danny, M0GMT).

--CL--

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ANAHEIM, CA

(Near Disneyland)
933 N. Euclid St., 92801
(714) 533-7373

(800) 854-6046

Janet, KL7MF, Mgr.
anaheim@hamradio.com

BURBANK, CA

2416 W. Victory Bl., 91506
(818) 842-1786

(800) 854-6046

Eric, KA6IHT, Mgr.
Victory Blvd. at Buena Vista
1 mi. west I-5
burbank@hamradio.com

OAKLAND, CA

2210 Livingston St., 94606
(510) 534-5757

(800) 854-6046

Mark, W17YN, Mgr.
I-880 at 23rd Ave. ramp
oakland@hamradio.com

SAN DIEGO, CA

5375 Kearny Villa Rd., 92123
(858) 560-4900

(800) 854-6046

Tom, KM6K, Mgr.
Hwy. 163 & Claremont Mesa
sandiego@hamradio.com

SUNNYVALE, CA

510 Lawrence Exp. #102
94085
(408) 736-9496

(800) 854-6046

Rick, N6DQ, Co-Mgr.
Howard, W6HOC, Co-Mgr
So. from Hwy. 101
sunnyvale@hamradio.com

NCCC
1560 Klamath Drive
Sunnyvale, CA 94087

Check us at:
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