



Publication of the
Northern California
Contest Club



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NCCC Net
Thursday 8 PM
3830+/-

Our Next Meeting

**ARRL Sweepstakes Preparation & CQP Update
moderated by Dean Straw, N6BV**

Date: Monday, 11 September 2006

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

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

Menu: See "meetings" at www.nccc.cc

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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Musings from the President

By Dean Straw, N6BV

If you missed the August NCCC meeting, you certainly missed a good one. Yes, indeed, the old NCCC spirit was in full bloom at Holder's Country Inn restaurant. In fact, it was standing-room-only, with some 50 people signing in.

Everyone really seemed to enjoy the presentations describing WRTC 2006 in Florianopolis, Brazil. There were all sorts of comments and astute observations coming from those NCCCs who managed to make it down there (despite the bankruptcy problems of VARIG airlines). Folks went down either to participate in the competition itself or to enjoy the incredible hospitality and organization of our Brazilian hosts. Those who stayed home to work all the PT5s and PW5s in WRTC 2006 offered their recollections and observations too, some of them quite humorous and insightful.

For those who missed the meeting, Ed, W0YK, our illustrious Webmeister, has uploaded to the NCCC Web site part of the August presentation. (Click on "Meetings" and find the presentations for the August meeting, plus those in April and June too.) Now, I grant you, a PowerPoint presentation is only the bare outline of what was discussed in-person at the actual meeting. There is nothing like actually being there with fellow members of your favorite contest club. I become more and more enthusiastic about contesting when I'm around other contest fanatics!

I trust that all of you have started those summertime antenna projects -- or at least you have *dreamed* about putting up bigger and better antennas. Some of you may have even finished working on your antennas. Of course, others are waiting for the really hot temperatures of summer to drop as we get closer to fall -- and closer to what event in the fall? Our favorite KD contest: ARRL November Sweepstakes.

Continuing a tradition, we'll be holding the September NCCC meeting in Vallejo at China Wok. See the NCCC Web page for directions. There's no excuse for those in the North Bay not to attend this meeting. And there will be the usual carpools from the South Bay, the East Bay and the Peninsula.

We're starting the drum roll for our defense of the gavel in Sweepstakes. PVRC is pulling out all the stops to wrest the precious gavel away from us in 2006. We certainly don't want that to happen, do we? Come and be energized!

73 and Kick, Duck!

VPCC News and Views

By: Fred Jensen, K6DGW

Some September Contests:

All Asian DX (SSB): (2 Sep 0000Z – 3 Sep 2400Z) www.jarl.or.jp/English

Worked All Europe (SSB): (9 Sep 0000Z – 10 Sep 2359Z) www.waedc.de

ARRL September VHF: (9 Sep 1800Z – 11 Sep 0300Z)
www.arrl.org/contests/2006/sepvhf.html

North American Sprint (CW): (10 Sep 0000Z – 04000Z)
www.ncjweb.com/sprintrules.pdf

North American Sprint (SSB): (17 Sep 0000Z – 0400Z)
www.ncjweb.com/sprintrules.pdf

Run For The Bacon QRP: (18 Sep 0100Z – 0300Z) fpqrp.com/fpqrprun.html

CQ WW DX (RTTY): (23 Sep 0000Z – 24 Sep 2400Z) www.cqww.com

Other Trivia:

Our Nearest Star: Someone on the Elecraft reflector was complaining about the current HF conditions, and another someone gently chastised him that “Conditions aren’t bad, they’re just different.” Okay ... I’ll buy that. They’re “different” and rotten. I was going to put in a small effort in the WAE CW, but never heard any EU. Even the East Coasters were way down although we were off the back of all their beams.

There was the short-lived ray of hope in mid-August when the “Littlest Sunspot” bubbled up and turned out to be a southpaw, so to speak. Alas, the little guy lasted only a few hours, followed by more negativity when the experts explained that if he was a Cycle 24 spot, he was way out of his playpen despite having a 24 polarity.

He appeared around 15° latitude and Cycle 24 spots should form much higher, like around 30°, or so they tell us. Poor little guy didn’t even get a number. I did hear a few 10m beacons very weakly in the middle of day a couple of days in mid-August, but nothing with a human operator. I’ve taken to leaving the RX on 14.100 when I’m in the shack doing something else, and I’m sure not hearing very much there either.

A URL

(science.nasa.gov/headlines/y2006/15aug_backwards.htm?list841773)

showed up on one of the reflectors that has a link to the solar conveyor theory which gives us quite a bit of hope that Cycle 24 will likely exceed 23 by some amount. Click on the “full story” link in the backwards sunspot page.

9K2/KB9LLO: Drew is a Captain in the WI Guard, and has a KX1, an HFPacker amplifier, and a stealth 20m dipole strung

between two tents in an unoccupied part of the base. We adopted him and his unit a few months ago to send packages to and we've gotten to know him. He is making QSO's but he has yet to even hear North America through the EU racket. 9K is Zulu+4, making him PDT+11, and somehow it seems to me that would be about the right geometry for gray line propagation, but GL is one of the uncountable infinity of things I don't really understand. Does 20m even exhibit GL propagation? He's been working days, so those with high-mass aluminum farms might listen for him around sunrise and sunset. He says he has been hanging out around 14040 most of the time. He's got about 90 days left.

NS: I haven't quite managed to shed my Thursday evening obligation, so I'm continue to be only an occasional player, but there's still hope I can start getting in on the fun.

CQP: The arrival of September always starts the CQP excitement building for me. Our organizers are doing a great job (as usual). Since I'll be on the N6A crew in Alpine, my very modest station is open if someone wants to light up Placer County. TS-850, SB-220, very vanilla 3-el triband at 70', wires/tuner for 160, 80, and 40, and TR-Log. I'll have the K2/100 with me. "Beverage Central" is in the shack as well.

73,

Fred K6DGW

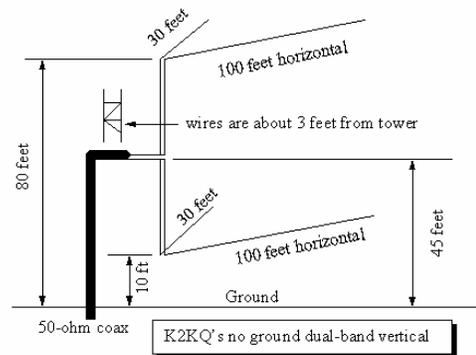
A Double-L Antenna for 160 Meters

By: Rob Brownstein, K6RB

Operating top band is a challenge. A half-wave antenna is about 300 feet long, and if it is horizontal, it needs to be up well over 100 feet to radiate any reasonable amount of energy at other than near-vertical angles. If you shunt feed a high tower, and load it to approximate a quarter-wavelength radiator, you still need a good radial system to prevent ground return current losses from robbing you of radiated power. You also need the room to lay out that radial field.

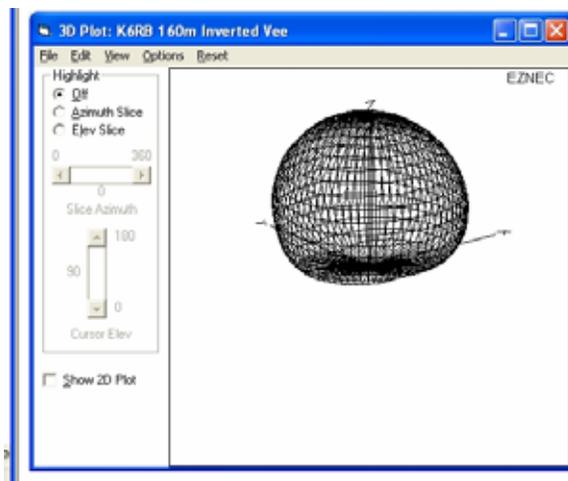
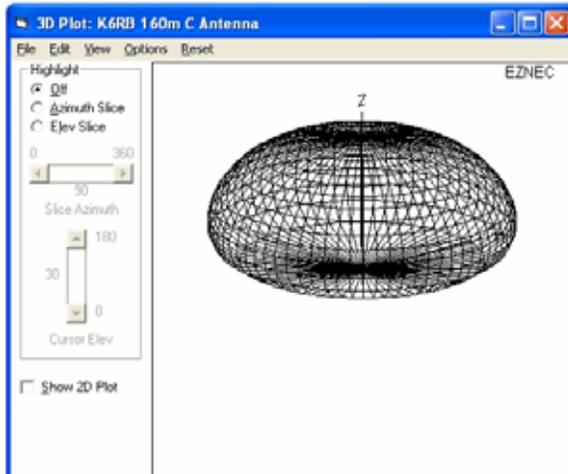
Well, I didn't have the room, so I looked for an alternative. What I found was an antenna called a "double L."

A search on Google brought up a story by Don Toman, K2KQ, from the PVRC newsletter describing an antenna that is essentially an inverted L working against a non-inverted L. Or, as Garry, NI6T, described it, it's a bent vertical dipole. The article described an antenna of 270 feet consisting of an upper and lower horizontal section and a vertical section connecting them. You feed it with a balun and 50 ohm coax at the mid-point of the vertical section.



You'll note that Toman's antenna is a dual-band affair for both 80 and 160. Mine is a derivation for just 160. Also, his antenna made use of an 80-foot tower. My tower is just 72 feet, so my vertical section is almost 10 feet shorter and my horizontal sections are a little bit longer. However, like Toman's antenna, the bottom horizontal section is 10 feet off the ground, and the horizontal sections are parallel to one another in a vertical plane.

I had my friend, John, N3AM, run an EZNEC plot of my antenna and compare it to the inverted vee that it replaced. The latter antenna had its vertex at 72 feet. The plots showed what I had expected. The vee radiated more near vertical energy and the double L gave me a bit more low-angle presence. Both antennas required no radials.



Having installed the double L during the spring, I had no real opportunity to compare its capabilities vis-à-vis the inverted vee. My first opportunity will come this winter with the ARRL 160 and CQ 160 contests. But it is an alternative to an inverted vee that unlike an inverted L or shunt-fed tower requires no radials.

CQP Strategy for Little Pistol Stations

By: Rob Brownstein, K6RB

When it comes to the California QSO Party, there are only two strategies – in-state and out-of-state. Whether your station is a Derringer, a Colt 45, or a Magnum 44 the strategy is the same. If you are in California, you should be trying to run stations (e.g. calling CQ) until you have a sizable number

of multipliers and your rates have fallen to a low level. If you are out-of-state, you should be searching-and-pouncing (e.g. S&P) unless you feel like you have already worked everyone you hear calling CQ on that band/mode.

The only difference between the little pistols and big guns will be rates and scores. Stations with amps and beams can hold a frequency in the midst of lots of adjacent signals; the 100 watt/no-gain antenna stations need to move to quieter sections of the band. But, the out-of-state ops will find you because they are looking for you and they need you. Non-CA stations have no point or multiplier value to them.

CQP 2006 will take place near the bottom of the solar cycle. That means, most likely, 10 meters will be useless for all or most of the contest. It also means that 15 meters will be marginally useful. Most of the action will probably start on 20 meters (both modes) and gravitate to 40, 80 and 160 from late afternoon through early morning. If a little pistol station has antennas that cover 15, 20, 40 and 80, it should do reasonably well.

In most other contests, little pistol stations typically spend most of their time S&P'ing. And, that's logical. In CQP, however, it makes no sense. The great majority of stations calling CQ will be CA stations. After you work one of them, and get the CA multiplier, every other one you work counts just for points. In contrast, every out-of-state op you work, especially during the early hours of the contest, is likely to provide both points and a multiplier.

To better understand why that's a much better choice consider that you hear 10 CW and 10 SSB stations calling CQ. Nine of them on each mode are CA stations; one on each mode is from Texas. You S&P and work all 20 of them. That gives you 2 multipliers – CA and TX. If you were CQing instead, on 20 meters, you might end up in the same amount of time with 10 multipliers.

Now, on CW, those 10 QSOs were worth 30 points in both cases, and on SSB, those QSOs were worth 20 points in both cases. But if you were S&Ping and got only two multipliers, then your score would be 100 points (e.g. 50 x 2). If you were CQing and snagged 10 multipliers, your score would be 500 points (e.g. 50 x 10).

When you hit about 40 multipliers, start seeing a high percentage of already-worked multipliers with each QSO, and your rate drops way down, then and only then does it make sense to start S&Ping. That's because both in-state and most out-of-state QSOs will only get you points, so there is no strategic difference. Before you've garnered those 40 multipliers, though, you are really doing your score a disservice by going to S&P.

For little pistol and big cannon stations that are out of California, it makes no sense to try running stations early on. Most of the savvy CA stations will be running stations, too. So, go with the flow and do S&P. It only makes sense to switch to CQing if you run out of "running" CA stations to work. If you are looking for an illusive county, you stand a much better chance of finding it by S&Ping than by calling "CQ Lake" or whatever. If it's a rare county, those ops are going to be running from bell to bell, and won't be S&Ping.

Like the other contests of 2006, CQP will most likely be concentrated on fewer bands. This will tend to lower overall scores because you won't be able to work the same station on six HF bands. Unless the number of participants increases to compensate for the loss of usable bands, QSO number and point scores will be lower. However, multipliers are not really affected. You get one multiplier for a possible total of 58 regardless of band or mode. So don't be disheartened by a dead 10 or 15 meters. Even a little pistol station could achieve a sweep on just 20 and 40 meters.

Unlike most state QSO parties whose rules encourage in-state QSOs, CQP encourages out-of-state QSOs. This is good news for out-of-state participants because it tends to ensure there will be CA operators working the long-haul bands during the daylight hours looking for just such stations. It's also good news for CA stations because it means there will be more out-of-state operators hunting them down.

AE6Y May 2006 Aruba Trip Notes – CQ WPX CW Contest – PART ONE

By: Andrew L. Faber, AE6Y, P49Y

Wednesday, May 24 - Thursday, May 25, 2006. I couldn't take my normal flight through Miami, as I had to delay my departure for one day due to work commitments. For an extra charge of \$400, I got the privilege of flying on the 10 p.m. red-eye from SFO to JFK, then a five-hour layover at JFK, then a 4 1/2 hour flight to Aruba, arriving at 4:15 p.m. [Note that in the summer Aruba is on the same time as NYC, as it does not go on daylight savings time, so there is only a three-hour difference from the West Coast, instead of the 4-hour difference in the winter.] I had bought a special, extra-large suitcase to transport JP's repaired FT1000D, but had to decide at the last minute not to take it, as my back had been strained a few days earlier, and I didn't think I could manage it. I felt very bad about not bringing it, but the decision was a wise one.

Chris, Andy and Cindy met me at the airport, and JP was at the house (it was a national holiday – Labor Day – in Aruba). The house looked in very good shape. Five minutes after my arrival, John Crovelli called, who had arrived a day or two earlier for the same contest. He wanted to go to dinner, so we arranged a meal at 7:30 with the two of us, plus Emily Thiel, P43E, and Ann Santos, WA1S, who was visiting Emily so they could practice to be teammates in the upcoming WRTC competition in Brazil in July. Emily picked a very nice restaurant

called Promenade in San Nicolas; the meal and the company were both excellent.

I did a quick check on station equipment before dinner. All antennas worked (even our ex 4-element, now 3-element 20 meter monobander). Although I never was able to walk the three beverages for fear of hurting my back by walking in the “cunucu,” amazingly, all three seemed to work. [During the contest I used them on 40, and they were very helpful in cutting down on received noise, and were also quite directional.]

The radios and accessories were fine, except that the Alpha 87A never did work. Instead, both TUNE lights would flash continuously as soon as it was turned on, indicating, per the manual, a probable control-board fault, that could unfortunately not be reset. When trying serial communications with the laptop, the Alpha acted as though it was turned off (i.e., it would accept only the command set for that status, not the set of operating commands).

The temperature was in the high 80s when I arrived, though it seemed to cool off a bit later in the trip and overall was very pleasant. I spent less time outside on this trip than on any other, however, so never really got to enjoy it. The beverages are now properly labeled thanks to John Fore’s efforts in March (EU, West US and East US). They are fed into Carl’s old Ameco preamp and a multiband Dunestar filter set up on top of the Alpha 86. They then go with a simple T-connector into both radios.

The six main coaxes had to be plugged into the SixPak, which is now a harder job due to all the coax stubs that are left attached. Same for the C31 Coax, all of which are, again thanks to John, now clearly labeled.

Friday, May 26, 2006. I felt OK upon turning in, but awaking at about 4 a.m., it took me about 20 minutes to figure out a way to ooze out of bed in some way that didn’t kill my back, and I spent the rest of the night sleeping in a chair, from which it

was a bit easier to arise in the morning. I called Emily (who was at home for the Labor Day weekend), to see if she could help get me some medical care. She said she had a friend who used to work in the office of a Neurology Clinic, and would see what she could do.

Well, in an extremely kind action, Emily not only got me an appointment with one of the doctors (one of only three neurologists on the island), but also drove me there, arranged for me to bypass the waiting line to be seen right away, and then drove me to a pharmacy to fill prescriptions for ibuprofen, tramadol (painkiller) and valium (muscle relaxant). For some reason not explained, the doctor’s visit was free – and the three prescriptions only cost \$15. The doctor, Dr. Jaime Falconi, was great; he examined me and said my back was very stiff, but diagnosed muscle strain and ruled out nerve problems (consistent with my own diagnosis). The clinic was on Vondeallen street, not far from the DTZ. Arriving back home at 11:30, I started the medications, and promptly took a long nap, after which I felt well enough to make my way gingerly to Ling & Sons supermarket to stock up on food.

This was a very gracious act by Emily, and it allowed me to continue my trip and participate in the contest, albeit in something of a drug-induced euphoria that did not help the score one bit. I called John Crovelli to give up my high power slot in the contest, since I didn’t feel I could do it justice, and offered him the Alpha 86 for the weekend. He came over later and got it, but it ended up staying in the trunk of his car as a spare for a few days.

I had the computer set up in front of the Alpha 87A, hooked up with one USB port to the 4-serial port converter running all radio inputs. Of those serial ports, one went to CW keying, one to PTT, one to R1/R2 switching and one to a rig control cable feeding both radios (set to separate addresses). Note that to do this it was

necessary to go into the Control Panel/System/Hardware/Device Manager/Ports/Properties area and rename the Com ports that are assigned automatically when Windows detects the extra serial ports. This is because Windows XP for some reason refuses to release earlier assigned ports, though it will let them be reassigned. It seems to be OK to assign any numbers above Com2 (Com1 is the serial port on the computer, and Com2 is the internal modem).

In addition, since this isn't an officially Windows-recognized device, one must have the CD for the converter in the CD slot, and Windows goes through a process of loading the same driver from the CD four times, once for each port. The second USB port went to a Y-connector attached to the external keyboard and mouse. The external monitor was just plugged into the laptop. I still got some "USB device not recognized" popup windows from time to time, but they seemed to be harmless and did not affect CW keying. It does seem to be necessary to set CQPWIN to delay sending by "5 units" after PTT activated, or the first character is elongated (not sure what would happen if no PTT used, just semi break-in). It all worked fine.

CQ WPX CW Contest Saturday, May 27 (GMT) – Sunday, May 28, 2006 – Contest notes more or less as dictated during the contest. [Note that the contest starts at 0000Z Saturday, which is 2000 local time Friday evening.] 40 is slow at the start. I've been working some stations on the second radio with no trouble at all, so I switch to 20 at 0036Z with only 34 contacts in the log. I'm using the second radio on 40, then return to that band at about 0200Z, and the rate picks up to about 90 an hour, much better. The beverages are working well on 40. All three are good, with marked directionality and definitely better S/N than the yagi. A brief break at roughly 0300Z. I'm at 258 by 181 for 192k points (158 Qs on 20 and 100 on 40). Strangely enough, I haven't heard any

of the other P4s yet. My back, fortunately, has not been bothering me.

There's a station about 250 Hz above me on 40. He pretty much disappears on the US beverage, but his key clicks wipe me out on the EU beverage. I pass 500k points at 0552Z (218 Qs on 20 and the same number on 40, by 262 mults). At about 0700Z I break and take my three pills. Maybe not a good idea as now at 0748Z the valium is making me quite sleepy (at 0348 in the morning local time, to boot). Just before quitting, I work P40W on 40 (who gives me number 864 to my 568) and P40A (who gives me 579 to my 571). The totals are 573 by 328 for 799 Kpts. I decide to go to bed for a few hours [strategically, not a very good idea, but not much choice given the circumstances].

I went to sleep in a living room chair, as I wanted to be sure to be able to get myself out of it when I awoke, which turned out to be about 1130Z. After a quick breakfast of coffee, a cream cheese and jelly sandwich on one of Ling's wonderful rolls, and a piece of chocolate cake, I'm ready to re-enter the fray. My back felt ok on awakening but I took a tramadol and ibuprofen (no valium) anyway. I try 15 and work P40W, but signals are weak, and noise levels high on 15 and 20, while 10 is dead. For a while I search and pounce on 15, both US and EU, but can't scare up answers to my CQs. I start to get answers, but EUs are very hard to copy due to the noise. I actually try the EU beverage on 15, and it seems to help a little. Can't do much with SO2R, since not much is heard on 20, no EUs, but do get a few W/Ks. Rates are very low, and I'm getting depressed, so at about 1413Z with only 26 QSOs in the log from the previous hour's efforts, I take another hour and half off.

END PART ONE

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