2007 ARRL June VHF QSO Party Results

Your Log Was Either Half-Empty Or Half-Full

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KB5YZG on his first VHF outing using an ICOM-706, with an 11 element yagi on top of a stack of fiberglass tent poles. Car battery provided talk power, elbow provided rotor power.

The KL7FF QTH - The 2-meter 12-element Yagi can be seen mounted on the mast on the deck to the left side of the cabin. The 6-meter 8-element Yagi can be seen in the right forground, mounted on 3 tower sections. The 2-meter station ran 400 watts output and the 6-meter station ran 600 watts output.

The most interesting question for the June 2007 VHF QSO Party is how you think it compared to the same event in 2006? Split decision! An emphatic yes for some, including the multi-operator team at K8GP and all the long-haul QSOs they had on 144-222 and 432 MHz. But for others it was a struggle to fill the logs, as 6 meters did not have the conditions encountered last year for much of the country or much of the contest period. Sixty scoring records were set last year. Undoubtedly many will say it was a mere shadow of 2006, as there was so little propagation on six meters. And supporting that opinion is the fact that top scores in 5 out of 6 operating categories were about half of what they were last year.

One contestant in the Midwest put it this way, “How bad was it? It was so bad that I didn’t hear K2DRH on 6 meters all weekend.” On the other hand, single-operator K2DRH shows up with a respectable 6 meter total of 82 grids. And WB8JUI/R asked, “Who turned off the propagation?” Yet sixteen stations, including one low-power single op and two high-power single ops worked 100 grids or greater on 6 meters, with K8GP working 180 grids. K3GM added this note to his entry, “Once again, the Magic Band didn't let us down for the June contest. We had a fine opening here in northeast to the midwest, and later on, to the south. I'm hooked on 6.” W0DJM sent this comment, “Got on 6 meters with a 10 element yagi 12 feet

above ground for the band opening during the last hours and had a blast!" As a counterpoint to some of the fixed stations in areas untouched by 6 meter propagation, the rovers were again out in force, having more time to concentrate on what they do best, lighting up rarer grids on the higher bands, and having a ball while giving out all of those QSO points and multipliers.

Another interesting question for the June 2007 VHF QSO Party is how many stations managed to increase scores with less six meter propagation? That answer is found by looking at the number of QSOs made on the rest of the bands, where operators spent more time and effort for higher value QSOs when the frenzy was absent on the magic band. Last year there were 143K 6m QSOs represented in the submitted logs, while in 2007 the entries showed only 52K QSOs. However, this year the submitted QSO numbers increased by 1300 on 144MHz, 1000 on 222MHz, 1700 on 432MHz, 60 on 902MHz and 500 on 1296MHz, despite a reduction of 20% in the number of participants submitting their scores. It also appears many folks have added capabilities on the higher bands.

The weather seemed to be more reasonable this year than it was last year. A high pressure area seemed to dominate the central part of the country. Some groups reported hot muggy weather for their portable set-ups, interspersed with thundershowers and lightning. KI7JA, SOLP in his portable tent set-up in DN03 (SE Oregon) told the harrowing story on the ARRL website soapbox of winds, rain and freezing weather that knocked down his antennas multiple times, tearing holes in his tent, allowing water to drip onto his electronics. With the moisture in his rig it wouldn't work, but then in the daylight, it dried out, and came back to life again. The final straw was the ticks he found on his body, sharing the weekend with him.

Kevin, KL0RG and Paul, K7CW visited Prince of Wales Island, Alaska (IOTA NA-041) in rare grid locator CO35 to take part in the 2007 June contest. Kevin lives nearby, in Ketchikan, but Paul traveled by Alaska Marine Highway ferry from Bellingham Washington to get there. They were able to hand out that rare grid multiplier to 74 other stations over the weekend, with many of the contacts made using m WSJT and meteor-scatter. (Be sure to see the Sidebar on the ARRL Web results)

There are several multi-op groups that bring their VHF gear and teams to the same spots each year to keep a tradition of friendly competition, continuous station improvement to facilitate the on-the-air experience for old-timers, newcomers and rovers. Single-ops have often had the experience of planning out a weekend with schedules for various WSJT modes and propagation and operating time characteristics, to efficiently use the contesting hours. The synergies created between the casual ops, single-ops, multi-ops, rovers, and QRP portable stations makes for some predictable results and some challenges. The issue of use of the calling frequency has been raised again on the vhf contesting reflector. In more VHF-active areas, with higher population densities, activity is spread across 200 KHz or more, with CQ callers and CQ responders often moving up and down the band, and with the "big gun" multi-ops spacing themselves to avoid excessive QRM. Gene, W3ZZ, an active member of the Grid Pirates related his experience this year with the calling frequency dilemma1. When they called CQ on 144.200, they found many more responders from the central part of the country, but missed many of the northeast corridor stations on 2 meters and were unable to "run the bands" with them.

Although log submission numbers were down this year by almost 20% from 2006, it was up from 2005. The anomaly of 2006 in the dramatic increase in logs submitted appears to be related to the six meter conditions that year. In comparing my personal contest logs to all of the contest the logs submitted to the ARRL, it appears that there are still a large percentage of participants who never submit their scores, but certainly enjoyed the event and made it fun for others. Fun, I say, as there is always joy in adding another call into the log and another band-multiplier into the score; and there is nothing more frustrating than tuning or calling CQ and having no response. Even if things appear to be slow, a contact in the log every now and then with a new band multiplier keeps the operators interested and operating.

The Rover entries continue to expand, and this year the number was up to 98 rover logs. Rovers have learned that VHF contesting can be very fulfilling, once their antennas are above the treetops and buildings and looking at relatively clear horizons. Not only do the rovers allow stations to fill in some needed grids from sparsely populated areas, but a review of the entries showed that half of the rovers were loaded with 6 bands or more, and almost half of those had 10 bands or more, making for great band multipliers.

Records
With conditions as they were, could records be set? Yes, eight section and one division records were broken this year. Going alphabetically by section, KL7FF in Alaska topped the previous Limited multi-op scores with a new 2788 score. WA3QPX scored 23,763 to set a new low-power single-op record in Delaware. In the Portable category for Indiana, K9AKS had 1650 points for a new high water mark. Moving down to North Carolina, the W4NH multi-op group had a 368K score for a new record. WA2VNV captured the NLI single-op low power record with 24K. In the San Diego section, KG6IYN scored 64K in the single-op high power category. NN4AA set a portable record in South Florida with 1520. In the more detailed write-up below you will note K8GP breaking the West Virginia Multi-op section record and Roanoke Division record with a 2.38 million score. Even when propagation was lacking, there were several opportunities for record-setting. Check the June VHF QSO Party Section Records on the ARRL web site2 to see the records through 2006 and the many categories in several sections without entries.

Single Operator
Although it's always exciting to see the "battle of the bands" between the top scorers, the hams who make the attempt to be on for a few hours, check the propagation, pull out a few weak signals and submit a log, are always my heroes. Without them, we wouldn't be enticing newcomers and spreading the VHF-UHF and microwave joy. Although many have decried the loss of complete contest listings in QST, the downloadable and sort-able comprehensive results are posted on the ARRL website for "members only." That gives every ARRL member a chance to see where their scores and efforts stacked up against the local, regional and national competition. The top scorers in many divisions remain the same year after year, not surprisingly due to the station quality, antenna arrays, geography and determination of the operators. Four of the SOLP top-ten have appeared in the box 3 of the last 3 years, another 4 have appeared twice, and there are 2 newcomers. K2DRH again had top honors with 242K. Following in second place as he did in 2005 was WB1GQR with W1SJ as operator at 156K. Creeping up the chart is W3SZ in third place with 110K. KB8U is making his third appearance in the top ten box in the past 3 years with 100K, followed by another three-time top-ten boxer, AF1T with 80K. The next five stations in order are N0KP, N4QWZ, WB2SIH, N0VZJ and N0LL, demonstrating that the activity and competition is widely spread, at least to the middle of the country.

In the SOHP category, K1TEO nearly doubled the score of the nearest competitor with another fantastic score of 541K in modest conditions. Here again, the top 5 stations have been seen in the top ten box for several years running, although the next 5 stations have just broken into the box this year. KA1ZE was in second place with 268K and in third place K1RZ had 232K. KM0T in fourth place with almost 189K showed an excellent effort from Iowa, and K8EB with almost 184K from Michigan was in fifth place, proving again that there is substantial VHF activity in the middle of the country. K2LNS is resurrecting the WA2FGK station and managed a sixth place finish. He lost all of his antennas a few years back, but is managing to get things restored with a five band effort. In order of finish for 7th through 10th places were WB9Z, K4TO, K8TQK and N3HBX, all scoring more than 100K.

There were 23 log entries for the Single Operator Portable category this year, down from last year's 39 submissions. Could the weather have been a factor or were the scores so much lower that some operators decided to forgo log submissions? Last year's high scorer KA1LMR repeated honors in first place with bands through 3456MHz, but with 63K, he had about half of his 2006 score. In this category also we found that 6 of the top ten scorers made multi-year appearances in the top-ten box. KG4LEV took second place with a 5 band effort from North Carolina. His score was 19K, an improvement over his last year's 16K effort. In third place, W4RXR had a 12K result as a fresh call appearing in the top ten SOP category this year. W1JHR had an 8 band portable station that scored 11K from the mountains of VT, and was also a newcomer to the top-ten. N8XA managed to compile 10K to make 5th place moving up from 9th last year. With scores from 8K down to 2K, WB6FFC, N7IR, WB2AMU, N6RZR and W3DQT rounded out positions 6-10. Any of us who had calls from these SOP ops are grateful that they made the effort to be out in the field, providing more opportunity, especially on the microwave bands. Considering the rules, the power limitation of 10 watts and the use of portable power, these stations required an excellent elevation in a relatively populated area with lots of gain in the antenna to make their impressive scores. There appear to have been considerable opportunities to break section scoring records in this category.

Multi-Operator

Pooling resources and mobilizing a team creates a common goal for a formal or informal group of VHF'ers, and often provides new opportunities for newcomers to participate. VHF beginners can also take this experience to appreciate the differences between the higher and lower bands; equipment, location, propagation and operating skills. Having lived in a VHF-compromised QTH, I had been a multi-op participant and for the past 20 years, I have participated as a rover. I experienced the frustration of foliage and fixed structure signal blockage, and as a result I always head for the hills. Almost all of the multi-operator groups have established themselves at excellent elevations, with towers and antennas that have a clear view of the horizon in most directions. A well planned and executed group station brings a high level of on-the-air activity to all of these radio-contesting events, with many of them propagating additional single-ops and rovers over time.

A small margin separated the top scorers in the Limited Multi-operator category. The top scoring stations in this group have been in a tight competition for several years. First, second and third places were separated by less than ten percent at the 400K point level. The Wopsonock Mountain group scored 443K for top honors here, having moved into first place after being second last year and third the year before. The W4IY group also climbed a notch in each of the last three years and was in second place this year with 440K. Knocked out of first place in the last two years, K9NS was third with 405K. In fourth place the AA4ZZ group had 362K, also advancing one position from the 5th spot they held the past two years. N3EMF partnered with WG3E to make it to 5th place in this category, just breaking 300K. The 6th though 10th places were earned by W1QK, K5TR, N8ZM, KA2LIM/2 and W3HZU with scores from 169K down to 55K.

The big story this year was the dramatic scores of two excellent multi-operator stations K8GP and W2SZ who battled it out for first place, as they have for several years. And the winner is: K8GP, the "Grid Pirates," taking advantage of some unique propagation, calling CQ incessantly, scouring the bands, seeking the rovers and moving stations up the bands. They amassed 2.38 million points to beat W2SZ, the "Mount Greylock Expeditionary Force" by 300 thousand points. Both of these multi-operator groups beat their 2006 scores by 300,000 and 100,000 respectively.

There is no competition as keen as one between the two multi-operator giants, K8GP and W2SZ. The Grid Pirates celebrated their 10th anniversary of contesting on Spruce Knob in West Virginia at 4863' above sea level. With a set of well equipped vehicles that grind up the marginal mountain roads and a highly dedicated team of operators, they parlayed their win from last year into a repeat performance. It seems that everything went well for them, including a fantastic tropospheric opening into the mid west and southwest and working stations out to over 600-700 miles. They appear to have set an all time high record for 222 grid multipliers, topping an old record of 76 grids with an incredible 84 grids worked this year. They also broke their own record of 77 grid multipliers on 432 with a whopping 94 grids this year. Their final score was 2.382 million points. A complete report of the Grid Pirates contesting efforts including pictures, video and audio clips can be seen on their website3.

The Mt Greylock Expeditionary Force4, W2SZ continues to set a standard for multiops with a score of 2.080 million points. This year the road and the summit of Mt. Greylock was closed to the public for a major road rebuilding project. The group's cordial relationship of more than 35 years with the state officials as well as the fact that ham radio operators are first responders in time of emergency went a long way to obtaining special permission to allow the group to access their usual portable QTH, albeit with a smaller crew and lacking a working lodge on the summit. In a band-by-band analysis, it's clear that the MGEF holds an advantage over the Grid Pirates in the area of microwave contacts, thanks to so many rovers in the northeast that are equipped by the team for QSOs on the upper frequencies. On the other hand, the opening experienced by the Grid Pirates gave them a 130 grid multiplier advantage, despite having 450 less QSOs in their logs. This competition is bound to continue as both groups have several dedicated well maintained vehicles with powerful transmitters and sensitive receivers, substantial towers and antennas, well situated operating locations and a loyal and finely trained group of operators.

In third place, for a third year in a row W3CCX, the Pack Rats5 scored 792K. It was a year of change for this club as the operating configurations were changed, a newer and reduced number of operators

participated, and an unanticipated set of minor problems slowed some of the microwave operations. They also faced some mountaintop changes in power availability, but an additional run of 250' of cable overcame the gap. K5QE held 4th place again with a score of 528K and in 5th place was maintained by K3YTL with 506K points. The order of finish of these top 5 multi-operator groups was exactly the same as last year. Again sharing some of the top scoring activity across the country, sixth through tenth places were captured by W4NH, N2NK, KB0HH, KM5PO and W0EEA.

Rover

N6TEB took first place this year with 322K, and improvement of 30K from last year. In second place, N6DN with 284K improved his score from 2006 by 23K. K2TER in third place with 157K and K2QO in 4th place with 106K seemed to share similar routes in western NY. W1RT in 5th place had his first serious outing in the jitney that he purchased from now silent key W3IY and scored 89K in a Mid-Atlantic set of grids. Sixth through 10th places were won by W0ZQ, W9FZ, KC3WD, VE3NPB and KF8QL with scores from 86K down to 54K. Although the Rover category continues to have some regulars in the top ten box, there are some welcome newcomers to this revered status. Reviewing the similar QSO numbers and the grids worked on the microwave bands by the top two scorers, you can draw your own conclusions; what tactics and strategies did they use to garner scores in the 300K range when there were no other west coast stations appearing in the top ten box scores.

As the numbers of rovers increase, and their band capabilities continue to improve, they have become a new force and source of substantial opportunity for fixed stations. I was stung by a remark that showed up recently on the vhf contesting reflector; a rover was told by a fixed station that they would have to check and see if they needed the rover's grid multiplier before completing a contest exchange. Hopefully this was just a misguided and mistaken comment by a newcomer rather than an attitude of that particular station toward rover activity. Each and every contact should be another building block of score, communications ability and efficiency, and no contact should be refused. What's more, several multi-operator groups and single operators have analyzed their logs and noted that rovers account for 20-35% or more of their contest scores.

Club Competition

Watch out! The Society of Midwest Contesters put together 55 logs to post a 1.1 million point score in the Unlimited Club category. The SMC has grown in number and activity, as they entered 28 logs in '05 and 36 logs in '06. Competition leads to more activity, something we all enjoy. The Potomac Valley Radio Club had their three-peat topping the Medium Club category with a 3.6 million aggregate score from 35 members. The Mt Airy VHF Radio Club swapped places again with the North East Weak Signal Group coming in second with a score of 1.2 million. The NEWS Group in third place had 990K points with 17 logs. Welcome to the Alabama Contest Group who made their first appearance in the Medium VHF Club Category with 3 logs and a total of 111K points.

In the Local Club listings, the North Texas Microwave Society placed first with 7 logs accumulating 773K points, tripling their scores from last year. The Downey ARC was second in this listing with 4 entries and 333K points, another welcome to a new group. The Eastern Connecticut ARA was in third with a 111K score from 5 logs.

Observations and Web scores

There were 3 brief "DX" logs reported this year, two of them with only 1 QSO each, and CU2JT adds, "Rotten conditions but glad I could give one guy the HM77 grid."

With only a few more months to go until the 2008 ARRL June VHF QSO Party (scheduled for June 14-16) it is likely that many of the "regulars" are already setting aside the time, planning their strategy and ensuring that their gear is in top working order. With so many balls in the air to juggle, it takes a defined and disciplined plan and execution to be a top scorer. Single ops carefully track rovers, set schedules and use WSJT to enhance their efforts. Multi-ops use similar strategies, and often equip and support rovers to increase grid-multipliers. Portable QRP ops find that when they are at a good elevation and in the open that even very little power and a lightweight, directional antenna is all that is needed to work many of the well equipped fixed stations. KB5ZYG was a first-timer operating portable from Mt. Mitchell, NC and said,

“Learned a lot, had a lot of fun…next time I'll bring a table, umbrella and a friend with another band to operate.”

We are on the upslope of the next sunspot cycle, 6m conditions are bound to improve, and tropo-ducting and aurora enhancements can make their appearances at any time. If you have already been bitten by the VHF bug, stay with it, as conditions for future contests are always unpredictable. Newcomers with low or modest power and antennas are always welcome. K3NK commented, “First time in this contest. Had fun and will be back.” AK9F reported, “Operated 6, 2 and 432 using only a 6 meter loop at 15 feet…amazingly, it actually radiated.” If you haven’t yet pushed the bandswitch toward 50MHz and higher on your new multi-band rig, you’re missing an exciting opportunity. Subscribe to a VHF reflector or a VHF club newsletter. Visit a VHF club near you, or perhaps their website if you’re not in their neighborhood. Aside from some excellent ARRL publications, there is a wealth of information available on all phases of VHF and microwave theory, construction, operation and contesting available from these resources.

2007 ARRL June VHF QSO Party Results

Top Ten by Class

Single Operator, Low Power	
K2DRH	242,505
WB1GQR (W1SJ, op)	156,738
W3SZ	110,600
KB8U	100,036
AF1T	80,388
N0KP	69,293
N4QWZ	61,500
WB2SIH	60,900
N0VZJ	57,260
N0LL	55,870
Single Operator, High Power	
K1TEO	541,206
KA1ZE	268,745
K1RZ	232,848
KM0T	188,895
K8EB	183,799
WA2FGK (K2LNS, op)	183,169
WB9Z	127,792
K4TO	124,992
K8TQK	123,096
N3HBX	111,384

Single Operator Portable	
KA1LMR	63,731
KG4LEV	19,344
W4RXR	12,144
W1JHR	10,945
N8XA	10,650
WB6FFC	7,950
N7IR	7,614
WB2AMU	3,132
N6RZR	2,666
W3DQT	1,932
Limited Multioperator	
W3SO	443,421
W4IY	440,744
K9NS	405,805
AA4ZZ	362,523
N3EMF	300,384
W1QK	169,600
K5TR	113,160
N8ZM	83,832
KA2LIM/2	66,550
W3HZU	55,860
Multioperator	

K8GP	2,382,600
W2SZ	2,080,878
W3CCX	792,640
K5QE	528,000
K3YTL	506,924
W4NH	368,676
N2NK	178,948
KB0HH	154,070
KM5PO	132,050
W0EEA	122,176
Rover	
N6TEB/R	322,577
N6DN/R	284,700
K2TER/R	157,176
K2QO/R	106,153
W1RT	88,816
W0ZQ/R	85,916
W9FZ/R	76,360
KC3WD/R	71,040
VE3NPB/R	67,456
KF8QL/R	54,352

2007 ARRL June VHF QSO Party Results

Region Leaders

Northeast Region (New England, Hudson and Atlantic Divisions; Maritime and Quebec Sections)		
WB1GQR (W1SJ, op)	156,738	A
W3SZ	110,600	A
AF1T	80,388	A
WB2SIH	60,900	A
K5MA	39,984	A
K1TEO	541,206	B
KA1ZE	268,745	B
K1RZ	232,848	B
WA2FGK (K2LNS, op)	183,169	B
N3HBX	111,384	B
KA1LMR	63,731	Q
W1JHR	10,945	Q
N2TEB	1,536	Q
N3XG	630	Q
N3HU	160	Q
W3SO	443,421	L
N3EMF	300,384	L
W1QK	169,600	L
KA2LIM/2	66,550	L
W3HZU	55,860	L

W2SZ	2,080,878	M
W3CCX	792,640	M
K3YTL	506,924	M
N2NK	178,948	M
K1MUJ	98,420	M
K2TER/R	157,176	R
K2QO/R	106,153	R
KE3HT/R	40,754	R
K3LFO/R	39,450	R
WA3PTV/R	37,080	R
Southeast Region **(Delta, Roanoke and Southeastern Divisions)**		
N4QWZ	61,500	A
K4LY	55,245	A
K2DEL (WA2SEI, op)	35,910	A
W2BZY	26,602	A
K5YPV	22,176	A
K4XR	110,589	B
KE2N	92,616	B
K4QI	91,264	B
W4ZRZ	90,216	B
W4WA	57,524	B
KG4LEV	19,344	Q
W4RXR	12,144	Q

W3DQT	1,932	Q
NN4AA	1,520	Q
N3AWS	468	Q
W4IY	440,744	L
AA4ZZ	362,523	L
KK4US	47,580	L
NR4CQ	28,840	L
KI4SNY	16,632	L
K8GP	2,382,600	M
W4NH	368,676	M
K4EJQ	88,322	M
AG4V	59,823	M
N4JQQ	33,136	M
W1RT	88,816	R
KC3WD/R	71,040	R
N4DXY/R	21,924	R
AH8M/R	17,875	R
N5AC	16,059	R
Central Region **(Central and Great Lakes Divisions; Ontario Section)**		
K2DRH	242,505	A
KB8U	100,036	A
WZ8T	39,550	A
W9GKA	35,695	A

KC9BQA	32,421	A
K8EB	183,799	B
WB9Z	127,792	B
K4TO	124,992	B
K8TQK	123,096	B
K8MD	100,608	B
N8XA	10,650	Q
K9AKS	1,650	Q
K9NS	405,805	L
N8ZM	83,832	L
K8ZIZ	27,448	L
W9VW	26,265	L
WN8R	25,245	L
W8BAE	84,738	M
N9UHF	80,565	M
N2BJ	67,080	M
W9FZ/R	76,360	R
VE3NPB/R	67,456	R
KF8QL/R	54,352	R
NE8I	38,836	R
WB8BZK/R	33,456	R
Midwest Region (Dakota, Midwest, Rocky Mountain and West Gulf Divisions; Manitoba and Saskatchewan Sections)		
N0KP	69,293	A

N0VZJ	57,260	A
N0LL	55,870	A
WB5ZDP	45,045	A
N0POH	34,400	A
KM0T	188,895	B
W0GHZ	94,200	B
K9MK	56,942	B
W3UUM	45,000	B
K5LLL	41,968	B
K5TR	113,160	L
WD0T	46,505	L
W0LSD	14,325	L
N0EO	13,020	L
W0FRC	4,788	L
K5QE	528,000	M
KB0HH	154,070	M
KM5PO	132,050	M
W0EEA	122,176	M
W0KVA	25,276	M
W0ZQ/R	85,916	R
WD0ACD/R	31,326	R
WY0X/R	17,424	R
W0SD/R	12,948	R

KC0IYT/R	12,532	R
West Coast Region (Pacific, Northwestern and Southwestern Divisions; Alberta, British Columbia and NWT Sections)		
NU6S	33,453	A
K6TSK	24,633	A
N7CFO	18,395	A
K6XN	11,684	A
W6OMF	11,656	A
KG6IYN	64,315	B
AF6O	61,870	B
W7CE	27,888	B
KC6ZWT	22,536	B
W7FI	19,584	B
WB6FFC	7,950	Q
N7IR	7,614	Q
N6RZR	2,666	Q
KG6TGI	874	Q
W7KK	270	Q
VA7ISL	36,890	L
AD6IJ	28,670	L
WA7JTM	10,419	L
K7XC	8,896	L
W7MRG	6,669	L
N6CW	80,325	M

W6TV	67,320	M
N6GKJ	20,026	M
W6YX	13,200	M
N6VMO	10,640	M
N6TEB/R	322,577	R
N6DN/R	284,700	R
N6MU	48,635	R
KE6QR/R	14,080	R
N7EPD/R	13,719	R

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Contest Expedition to Prince of Wales Island, Alaska

By Paul Kiesel, K7CW

In 1970, the then moderator of the World Above 50 MHz column for QST Magazine, Bill Smith, then K0CER (now W0WOI), drove his pickup with camper to Ketchikan, Alaska to take part in the ARRL June VHF QSO Party. Bill, using the call KL7ABR, operated the contest in Ketchikan because there were no roads anywhere back then. But Ketchikan lies up close to mountains which block any attempt to transmit to the east. So, Bill was able to make contacts to West Coast states only via meteor scatter and sporadic-E. There was propagation in other directions, probably, but the mountains kept him from making contacts in those directions. I was hoping to better the effort made by KL7ABR.

Ever since that trip by Bill, I have wanted to do the same. Over the last three years, I had been strongly considering the idea of doing the June Contest in Southeastern Alaska. I had discussed this with Kevin O'Connell, KL0RG, and others, but made no decision to prepare for such a trip until 2006, when I retired. I called Kevin early in 2007 and told him that I had decided that this is the year for the contest effort. Kevin, an avid VHF weak signal afficionado, immediately volunteered and we became a two-man crew for the competition. We would use the DX Scavengers Radio Club call sign, KL7FF.

In the meantime, I discussed the upcoming activity with Ed Cole, KL7UW, who is making great efforts to popularize weak signal VHF in Alaska. Ed thought it a great idea to submit a club entry from Alaska. In order to get things going, Ed took steps to make the Alaska VHF Up Group an official organization and obtain club affiliation with the ARRL. Ed also published information on his web page, http://www.kl7uw.com/ , which gave information about our contest plans. He also contacted many Alaskan amateurs and vigorously promoted the VHF contest effort and weak signal VHFing, in general. Unfortunately, the affiliation didn't arrive in time for the contest, but interest in the activity was still raised. Excellent job, Ed.

Kevin and I discussed possible locations in Southeastern Alaska. Of primary importance was the necessity of having a clear shot with low takeoff angle to Canada and the United States. I did a lot of Internet research, seeking possible accommodations. I made many phone calls to owners of vacation and hunting cabins. Some had electricity, but most had unacceptable radio horizons. Finally, I located a cabin near the eastern shore of Prince of Wales Island, near the town of Thorne Bay, in grid locator CO35rq. From the published Internet photos and from discussions with the caretaker, it appeared that all necessary specifications would be met. We needed to know, for sure, though, that we would have a clear shot to VE and W. A good horizon in the direction of South Central Alaska would be a major plus. At the beginning of May, I flew to Ketchikan to check the cabin out. I met Kevin, who unfortunately had work commitments. We were able to take the Inter-Island Ferry to Prince of Wales Island and visit the cabin, however. We immediately saw that the cabin suited all of our needs and we made arrangements with the caretaker, Tim Lindseth to spend 5 nights there around the dates of the contest. I then flew back home.

I had planned initially to drive through British Columbia to Prince Rupert and then take the ferry to Ketchikan, then another ferry to Prince of Wales Island. The idea was to take my radio and pass out rare grid locators along the route to the deserving. But, when I checked ferry schedules, I found that I would have had to spend a total of 5 extra days just waiting in Ketchikan if I had gone that route. Instead, I decided to take the Alaska Marine Highway System ferry from Bellingham, WA to Ketchikan and the mirror image route, in return. That way, I would have only one day to burn in Ketchikan. The trip on the AMHS vessel is really a pleasant cruise that takes about one and a half days. The ferry route follows the Inside Passage and is very scenic with mountains and fjords along side and virgin forests as far as the eye can see. Lots of wildlife, too, with humpback and blue whales and orcas and bald eagles. I chose not to get a stateroom. Brave folks can sleep under the solarium on the bridge deck. It's open to the outside, but has heating elements munted above, so you don't get cold at night. It's a good thing that I chose to take the ferry. As it turned out, there was a large fatality mud slide across the highway between Prince George and Prince Rupert, BC that caused the highway to be closed for several days. If I had taken the land route, I would not have gotten to the cabin in time to operate the contest.

Since I paid to take my pickup on the ferry, I was able to transport anything that I desired from home to Alaska. I took a large portable fan, all my non-perishable food, tower section, rotator and mast. I took extra coax, coax connectors and adapters, extra power strips, extension cords, rope, radios, 2-meter antenna, etc. I didn't have to decide what to leave behind because there was plenty of room for everything that occurred to me to take. I had already shipped some things to Alaska on the barge. Things like the 6-meter amplifier and 6-meter antenna. When I returned to Washington, I brought everything back with me in the truck, with the exception of the amplifier, which stayed with Kevin.

We got to the cabin on the afternoon of the June 7. The weather was beautiful when we arrived, so there was no hurry to get everything inside. We had allowed to have the afternoon and evening of the 7th, all day the 8th and the morning of the 9th to get ready for the contest. But, no matter how much you prepare, some things won't go as smoothly as you desire. In our case, I had forgotten to bring my climbing belt to use in mounting the 6-meter beam. I ended up using a few loops of rope around the tower to hold me to it as I lifted the beam over the top of the mast. This was not pleasant. We also had trouble with the T/R sequencer, which caused us some anxious moments just before the contest began.

We got going in the contest on 2-meters and 6-meters, the only bands we had. It didn't take long to start making contacts, but the only propagation mode that we had at the time was meteor scatter. In fact, this was the way it was to be for the entire contest, with the exception of two stations in Eastern Washington and the stations in South Central Alaska that we worked via sporadic-E. The stations that we worked via sporadic-E all had strong consistent signals over long periods of time. When fading occurred, it was very slow. We did work on FM one station on 2m that was located in Ketchikan in grid locator CO45. He was the only station we worked on a non-weak signal mode.

The band that holds the most interest for me is 6-meters, so most of my planning was centered around that band. But, I remembered how exciting it was when I worked my first KL7 (yes, it was Kevin) on 2-meters during the Leonids Meteor Shower a few years ago. Kevin volunteered to bring his 2-meter stuff, which included a 400 watt brick amplifier. I brought up the 12-element 2-meter yagi that Kevin had recently purchased. We talked about the probability of making CW or SSB meteor scatter QSOs on 2m during the contest. The Arietids Meteor Shower would be going, but probably could not be counted on to give long enough bursts to get information across in a limited amount of time. We decided to try the WSJT mode FSK441 and, in a few announcements that I made to reflectors before I left, I offered to run skeds during the contest on 2m. We got several requests for skeds using FSK441 and a couple for SSB and CW. We completed with everyone who attempted FSK441 contacts with us on 2m. We did complete one contact on SSB on 2m. All totalled, we made a whopping 16 contacts in 9 grid locators on 2m. Stations in South Central Alaska, Southeastern Alaska, British Columbia, Western Washington, Eastern Washington, Oregon and Idaho were worked. All but the FM contact were via meteor scatter. This success far exceeded anyone's dreams and has to represent a record-breaking performance. Kevin found that it was easy to get contacts. We had encouraged folks without skeds to tailend after skeds. They did, and they also answered our CQs. We found that it was not hard at all to make contacts on 2m from Southeastern Alaska! Folks realized that it paid off to go to the trouble to get digital interfaces connected to their rigs and to download WSJT. (Actually, we worked 17 stations total on 2-meters, having had a FSK441 QSO with a station on June 8.)

6-meters was a little disappointing because of the scarcity of sporadic-E. We were kind of hoping that, if there were no sporadic-E, then maybe we would have some aurora. A strong aurora would make things very exciting. But, alas, meteor scatter turned out to be the predominant propagation mode for us in the contest. And, so it was on 6-meters. We had 74 QSOs in 27 grid locators on 6-meters. Not many contacts there. But, it's not because we didn't try. There were quite a few partial QSOs that didn't get logged because we didn't get a "roger" from the other station. We did not work a single station beyond one-hop sporadic-E maximum range. This band ran 600 watts and an 8-element yagi.

The day after the contest, I spent several hours working what stations I could on 6m. There were some single hop sporadic-E contacts made into Montana and South Central Alaska and a few double-hop sporadic-E contacts were made into the Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas area. I worked a few stations on meteor scatter, too.

The contest, for us, was a success because we found that it was possible to get on from Southeastern Alaska and work into areas other than the narrow West Coast corridor that you would be restricted to by operating out of Ketchikan. It is still difficult to find a suitable location because of the undeveloped, mountainous character of the whole region. 2-meter contacts between Southeastern Alaska and the "Lower 48" are now shown to be an easy thing when using fast digital modes.

I would like to thank Kevin, KL0RG; Ed, KL7UW; Bill, W0WOI, Tim & Teresa Lindseth and all the weak signal VHF enthusiasts who have offered help, suggestions and encouragement towards this trip. I think we all got a lot out of it. I hope it happens again soon!

2007 ARRL June VHF QSO Party Results

Affiliated Club Competition

	Entries	Score
Unlimited Club		
Society of Midwest Contesters	55	1,106,960
Medium Club		
Potomac Valley Radio Club	35	3,633,086
Mt Airy VHF Radio Club	17	1,260,783
North East Weak Signal Group	17	990,537
Northern Lights Radio Society	20	605,675
Carolina DX Assn	6	439,435
Rochester VHF Group	6	341,786
Badger Contesters	11	254,311
Yankee Clipper Contest Club	16	241,916
Grand Mesa Contesters of Colorado	10	214,062
Northern California Contest Club	12	162,790
Contest Club Ontario	17	157,632
Florida Weak Signal Society	9	148,956
Pacific Northwest VHF Society	14	130,683
Alabama Contest Group	3	111,219
Roadrunners Microwave Group	4	100,286
Western States Weak Signal Society	4	91,939
Bergen ARA	4	59,317

Mad River Radio Club	4	49,064
Central Arizona DX Assn	4	15,642
Dauberville DX Assn	4	11,304
Tennessee Contest Group	6	4,553
Local Club		
North Texas Microwave Society	7	773,427
Downey ARC	4	333,272
Eastern Connecticut ARA	5	111,104
Chippewa Valley VHF Contesters	5	100,618
10-70 Repeater Assn	3	32,613
Michigan VHF-UHF Society	3	30,945
Raritan Bay Radio Amateurs	8	12,184
Nacogdoches ARC	3	10,406