TALES FROM THE SWAMP

November 2024

Editor: Kevan Nason, N4XL

Thank you to our group leadership:
President – Ed, K3DNE
Vice President - Dave, WN4AFP
Treasurer – Scott, KG9V
Secretary – Kevan, N4XL
Web Master – Frank, KG4IGC
SFCG Webpage: swampfoxcontestgroup.com

Contest Tips:

SFCG Member Tips	
Tip	**From**
Post Contest. Submit score to 3830 at 3830scores.com maybe with a tutorial on how to do that (we think it's intuitive but does everyone?). Make sure the dropdown box for Club: Swamp Fox Contest Group and Team (if applicable) are properly selected. K3DNE	K3DNE WN4AFP
Post Contest. Submit a post of your score to our SFCG reflector to generate further discussions (I copy and paste the 3830 email received after posting to 3830). K3DNE	K3DNE
Start in a single band category and totally focus on learning the changing conditions for that range of frequencies. Study the grey line maps for that band	W7WZ

and see when the openings and closings will be. If you have directional antennas learn when long path opportunities arise.	
There will always be other operators and stations that have a competitive advantage that is out of your control. My old friend Jim Sullivan, W7EJ built a station at CN2R and his single operator efforts still hold the world wide records in the CQWW DX contests. Most of us can only dream of accomplishing what he did. Enjoy what you have and make it fun.	W7WZ
Plan/schedule your operating time in advance.	WN4AFP
Know your stations strong point and use them to your advantage. My station /location works very well on 10m and 20m. Especially to the west thru out the afternoon/ evening. Schedule your op time and bands around your station best bands and directions.	KZ3P
Many of the functions of N1MM logger are great. But you don't have to use them to be competitive. Use the ones you are comfortable with. Myself, I don't currently use the f key. I voice all my calls.	KZ3P
The enemy of contesting flow is apathy, boredom, tiredness. Eventually those are things you'll have to deal with (say to win the Sweepstakes), but when you are building your skills and getting the feel for how you like to contest, best to not get bored. If its not fun, try something different, or turn off the radio and try again next weekend. This is not advice for how to win a contest, just advice for finding your own way into this part of the hobby.	AA5JF
You'll need to learn how to run, so after you get comfortable making S&P contacts in a contest, that's something to work on. But: once you are able to run, don't forget to practice S&Ping. There is a real skill to it (maximizing the number of contacts you can make while not on a single frequency).	AA5JF
I don't worry about being #1 but I do my best. My main goal in contesting is to have fun, develop better operating skills, to better my previous scores and to contribute to the club, usually as a point contributor.	N4IQ
I keep data on all my contests and review the data prior to a contest. I have six LARGE three ring binders that contain all my contest results, data, rules and notes. (I don't include CWTs, etc.) They go back 15 years. I print and file my N1MM summary scores and make comments about anything unusual, propagation conditions and notes that might improve my next entry.	N4IQ
Waiting until the day before, or worse the day of, the contest to set up for the contest is inviting disappointment. Setup is critical to both ensuring you have a good time and to allow achieving the best possible score. It involves more than configuring the software for that contest. Check out everything. SWR on every antenna and band, coax connections are tight, simulate making several contacts by logging into a dummy log and actually transmitting (preferably into a dummy load), drinks and snacks are available, honey-do's are done, carefully read the rules, develop a contest plan based on expected propagation to target areas, profile set correctly	N4XL

for the Contest Online Scoreboard, etc. I like to start preparing at least a week in advance of a major effort.	
A key factor in keeping BIC (Butt In Chair) for many hours is personal comfort. You must have a great chair and set of headphones.	N4XL

Highlights From The Reflector:

- Herschel KA2G learned the old timer trick of pointing a yagi straight up when trying to test SWR with the antenna close to the ground. He also learned it ain't much fun to rebuild traps from older style yagi's.
- Ed K3DNE managed to recover his antenna farm after hurricane Helene's visit.
- Apparently propagation forecasts aren't always correct. Imagine that. W3LPL's forecast (forwarded to us by Ed K3DNE) for the CQWW SSB didn't look too promising. Then John NJ4Z said a large sunspot group that was firing off solar flares was rotating toward us. My comment was those horrible doom sayers needed to go away. But things turned out great and people had a good time and made fantastic scores! Let's hope that conditions forecasted to be good for the CW portion of that contest don't buck the trend like happened in the SSB.
- Some CQWW SSB highlights
    - George N4QI did pretty good in the CQWW SSB. For those of you who don't know, George uses low power into attic antennas. George pulled in 156 DX stations in 4-1/2 hours. Good job George.
    - Herschel KA2G demonstrated great contest determination by working through four power outages. He said he never had such high S&P rates.
    - We were sorry to hear John K4QQG had to come home early from his planned Vanuatu CQWW effort because his daughter was diagnosed with breast cancer.
    - Frank KG4IGC shared some Lessons Learned from his CQWW effort in post #28857. In post #28876 Matt NU4E shared some from his effort and in post #28879 Bob KZ3P shared some of his. It is always good to look at the comments people write while reporting their scores. Sometimes you find diamonds in what many consider routine messages. (Sorry if I missed listing anyone else here who commented.)
    - Matt NU4E had a mind boggling 7,410,825 claimed score for his SOAB(A) HP effort.
    - VAN N4VGE did well on their DXpedition to Vanuatu. Their M/2 effort logged 1,127,265.
- A discussion about pulling tilt over tower up garnered a few comments. Many people just engineer something they think will work and go for it. That often works and works well. We

have all heard something like "You don't need to do all that. All I did was [XYZ] and it has worked great for 40 years." But I urge caution about doing that where there is a possibility of personal injury or severely damaging your property. If you are going to cut corners while erecting or raising a tower, try to think of where it might fall and to determine what the failure points are and ensure they won't damage your house or car.

- Ford KK4MRG practed his contest skills by doing a POTA activation from Givhans Ferry State Park. *(Editor's Note: I used to ramble around that area while assigned to my first submarine. A couple of my crew mates lived out there.)*
- Consensus is Davis Bury Flex is a great coax to use. It is stiff though and not great to use where flexibility is needed (like feeding rotatable antennas).
- Dave WN4AFP shared an old training video about how the military teaches people to send CW. Ugh. Informational? Yes. Useful? Yes. Stodgy and stiff? Absolutely. I remember seeing some of those old things when I first entered the military. After a couple it was hard to stay awake.
- Dick KD4S managed a clean sweep in the ARRL Sweepstakes. Bill N4IQ and Ed K3DNE did too.
- Ed shared an "Aw, Crap" experience about what happens to amplifiers when you hot switch them. It ended well since nothing more serious than a blown fuse happened – this time.
- Burton KY4ID did fantastic in the CQ Open. He placed in the top 10 in two sessions. Great job Burton.

Getting Spotted on the RBN

By Kevan N4XL

Although people debate if it is for better or worse, everyone agrees the Reverse Beacon Network (RBN) has changed contesting. Whether you use it or not everyone who runs is affected. The legions of S&P operators who do will see every runner calling CQ. CW, RTTY, psk31, and psk63 are tracked by the network. Busted spots are the biggest complaint raised by those who use the service. Rate for Runners drops because you find yourself working a large number of duplicate stations and correcting your call when they tell you who they think they are calling. Busted spots also cause S&P ops to work dupes. Unfortunately for S&P ops a busted spot will also cause the penalty points removed after log checking to skyrocket because you logged an incorrect call. Since it is in everyone's interest to have accurate spots Runners should ask how they can help the RBN ensure it copies their call sign accurately. Here is what the RBN website has to say about that.
https://reversebeacon.net/pages/How+to+get+spotted+by+the+RBN+44

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Making the Most of the Reverse Beacon Network

By Pete Smith, N4ZR

The RBN team has been in business since 2009, but we still get lots of questions about how to make it work best for you - particularly from contesters. Herewith, an attempt to clarify things, at least a little.

The basic question is "how do I get spotted as much as possible?" Fundamentally, you must send one of the key-words: TEST or CQ (FD, SS, NA and UP also work in appropriate settings), as well as enough repetitions of your own call (more on that below). These don't necessarily have to be in one transmission, because the way VE3NEA's CW Skimmer works is to "watch" literally hundreds of decoders, each 50 Hz wide, across a band. Each decoder is 256 characters "deep", and with each new transmission newly decoded characters are added and the oldest characters are dropped. What that means, as a practical matter, is that you don't have to meet Skimmer's requirements in any one transmission, so long as you don't change frequency enough to confuse the software.

Skimmer's callsign requirements are simple enough and are derived from the need to avoid grabbing call-sign-like text out of innocent conversations. Depending on how common your callsign is, Skimmer may want to "hear" two, three, or four repetitions of the call before it will be spotted. It uses a "three-character pattern file" harvested from years and years of spots, as well as semi-annual revisions to keep up with new callsigns. Here's a sample:

+ 4U1@
+ 4U1@@
+ 4U1@@@
4U1@@@@
4U2#@
+ 4U2#@@@
4U2@
4U2@@@

A basic pattern consists of the first three characters of a call. Everything thereafter is denoted by either numeric (#) or alphabetic (@) wildcards. If a pattern appears on the list, but without a "+", it means that Skimmer must "hear" it three times (again, in 256 characters in a row) before it accepts it as a callsign. If it has a "+", meaning that it is judged to be very common, it must be heard twice. On the other hand, if the pattern doesn't appear at all, Skimmer requires 4 repetitions.

The last ten years have seen a rash of single letter suffixes, many explicitly granted for contesting purposes, as well as exotic prefix/suffix combinations for various commemorative purposes. The RBN has tried hard to keep up with this trend by amending the pattern file semi-annually.

How important is this? That depends. Experiments with a common (+) call in the weekly K1USN CWTs while running assisted show that, as you'd expect, it takes two brief 1X1 CQs to begin getting spots. A less common callsign (no +) will take 3 quick CQs, and one that is not listed will require 4.

CW Skimmer is pretty forgiving, but to be optimally copied by the RBN, particularly in QRM and QRN, make sure your CW is good. Any errors here may manifest themselves as mis-spots. Use a memory keyer or your logging software, if feasible, to be sure of this. As remote operation becomes more and more common, be on the lookout for Internet latency and other conditions that can affect your CW. Above all, avoid using half-spaces right before or right after your callsign. Again, taking CWTs as an example, TK and TW prefixes are all too common, because Skimmer may copy the T in CWT and run it together with the real callsign.

One topic contesters frequently ask about is using the RBN for antenna comparisons. This is easy and can be very useful. The only necessary trick, in order to complete the comparison as quickly as possible, is to QSY 300 Hz or more between transmissions. Otherwise, if a node has spotted you during your first transmission, it will ignore you until 10 minutes have passed.

Observations by the Editor:

- I've always wondered why some commercial VHF antennas I've seen have more than one reflector. I think it was Cushcraft used to market a 2 meter antenna with three. Peter G3PLX gave this explanation on the RSGBTechnical reflector:

  "The idea of having multiple reflector elements side-by-side is to reduce the sidelobes across the back, to reduce problems like co-channel interference on TV signals."

- What cluster to choose initially or to use when your main GoTo is down is often asked. The middle of a contest is not the best time to try and answer that question. Take some time between contests to check these out. Log into them to make sure you have the correct settings for them. Document which ones you can use and be sure to keep the list handy while contesting. Here's a link of clusters used around the world. https://www.dxcluster.info/telnet/index.php#291

- Been extremely busy this last month and had computer issues so not much to say here this time.

N1MM+ Tips:

NOTE: Unless otherwise specified references to problems people are having, solutions, and tips come from the N1MMLoggerPlus Group.io reflector. A search there for items described should turn up the original posts and replies.

- Selected changes made since last newsletter. (NOTE: These often come from a user requesting a change or fix to a problem.)
    - Many errors were addressed. Things like CTRL+F to find a call was broken and there was a runtime error when using Call Stacking while SO2R was selected but the second Entry Window was closed, etc. If you were aware of something not working right so had been avoiding it, you might try it and see if your particular issue was fixed.
    - The minimum time for the program to send a self-spot was changed from 15 minutes to 10 minutes.
    - The RIT issue for diversity receive using a FTdx-101D was corrected.
- Many visual options (window colors, text size, font, etc.) can be set using Config>Manage Skins, Colors, and Fonts…
- It might prove helpful to review the section of the manual on Keyboard Shortcuts. Here are some I use almost every contest…
    - CTRL+Q: Quick edit previous call
    - ALT+R: Turn repeating CQ on and off
    - CTRL+R: Set time between repeating CQ's
    - CTRL+M: Turn Enter Send Message (ESM) on and off
    - ALT+A: Grab next Q from the Available Mult & Q window
    - ALT+D (or click the mouse wheel): Delete spot from the Bandmap
    - And one I only use now and then but keep handy because when you need it, you need it right away: CTRL+ALT+ENTER: Log an invalid Q
- Even if you never plan to use packet spots, the Bandmap is a very useful window. As you S&P your way up and down the band, each station you've worked will be marked with a grey self-spot, so you can skip by them the next time even if you have no packet spots
- As mentioned in the contest tips above, it is a good idea to set up for and test your station before the contest. I created a separate N1MM database called "Test Log" for generally trying out odd things I want to do. But a secondary purpose is to setup N1MM for upcoming contests in a safe place rather than risking inadvertently saving bogus QSO's I use during contest setup inside of my main contesting database (which is aptly called "Contests"). Those bogus QSO's would likely end up being submitted to LOTW and Club Log if I didn't take care to keep them out of my real

log. Once I have everything working correctly for my upcoming contest, I use N1MM to copy that working configuration from the Test Log database to the Contests database. While in the Test database I use File>Copy This Contest to Another Database. Then I switch to the Contests database and everything is ready to go for the upcoming contest. I once forgot to change out of the Test Log database and did the entire contest there. Since I didn't feel like retyping hundreds of contacts I used the same copy the contest procedure and copied the Q's to the Contests database. I have also used the procedure in the other direction. I sometimes copy a contest with hundreds of Q's from my real log into the test log database so I have a real life scenario to play with while trying out new N1MM tricks.

- **Troubleshooting Com Port In Use Errors**

  Com Port In Use Error Messages – Occasionally Windows can get confused and orphan both physical and virtual comports. These ports are not visible to the user in Device Manager, but Windows will enumerate them causing failures when trying to create a virtual com port where one invisibly already exists. This procedure will in most cases allow the user to un-hide hidden com ports in order to delete them eliminating possible com port conflicts. Before starting, shut down your radio and close any programs what may be using the virtual com ports, like SmartSDR CAT or other third-part applications.

  • Click Start, point to All Programs, point to Accessories, and then click Command Prompt.

  • At a command prompt, type the following command, and then press ENTER:
  set devmgr_show_nonpresent_devices=1

  • Type the following command a command prompt, and then press ENTER:
  start devmgmt.msc

  • Troubleshoot the devices and drivers in Device Manager.

  • Click Show hidden devices on the View menu in Device Manager before you can see all devices associated with the computer.

  • Scroll down to the Ports section and you will be able to see all the hidden and unused COM ports. The

  hidden COM ports have a grayed out icon next to them.

  • To delete a particular port, click to highlight it and hit the Delete key on your keyboard. In the Confirm Device Removal dialog box, click OK.

• After you have deleted the unused and hidden COM ports, the list will show only those COM ports you use or may use in the future. Be careful not to delete the COM ports that are working properly.

• When you finish troubleshooting, close Device Manager.

• Type exit at the command prompt.

Note that when you close the command prompt window, Window clears the devmgr_show_nonpresent_devices=1 variable that you set in step 2 and prevents ghosted devices from being displayed when you click Show hidden devices.

Finally – if all else fails – this suggestion from Peter DF1LX: "I had this problem for some month. Nothing helped me what was mentioned in this thread. Only using the registry editor and searching for the COMX value show, that another program, which never use any com port have a registry entry which show this com port. Deleting this registry entry and the problem was done. I would do this as last option if the given hints are not working."

Upcoming Contests:

See the WA7BNM webpages https://www.contestcalendar.com/contestcal.html

SFOTA Current Leaderboard:

Nov-21-2024

Current Leaderboard

2024 OVERALL STANDINGS

	CALL	Contests	CW QSO'S	SSB QSO'S	DIGITAL QSO'S	RTTY QSO'S	TOTAL QSO'S
1)	N4IQ	95	13603	2689	1224	4224	21740
2)	WB4HRL	351	17274	1450	548	1588	20860
3)	KE4EA	234	12764	884	8	3	13659
4)	WN4AFP	100	9235	3972	0	0	13207
5)	K3DNE	48	1491	7391	1086	0	9968
6)	KZ3P	91	2739	4669	0	2038	9446
7)	NU4E	8	2400	6001	59	0	8460
8)	K4QQG	55	0	6323	771	668	7762
9)	K2SX	26	6819	0	0	0	6819
10)	K4FT	89	5344	166	0	0	5510
11)	N4XL	10	4178	1057	0	0	5235
12)	KG4IGC	20	614	1219	0	3314	5147
13)	KA2G	38	0	2963	616	0	3579
14)	KD4S	69	2034	227	104	942	3307
15)	N1UZ	16	333	0	830	1948	3111
16)	N4QI	58	1836	531	0	427	2794
17)	AA5JF	7	1745	806	14	0	2565
18)	K7OM	20	553	0	0	1920	2473
19)	NI7R	7	1876	88	0	0	1964
20)	AA4SD	22	1834	0	0	0	1834
21)	KY4ID	13	1185	62	0	377	1624
22)	N1SUZ	28	0	1615	0	0	1615
23)	WA4LDU	28	247	536	492	184	1459
24)	N4VZ	13	0	433	595	326	1354
25)	W1RPG	21	0	918	102	38	1058
26)	WA2BCK	4	0	300	604	0	904
27)	K4CU	9	321	171	1	293	786
28)	KS4YX	5	176	0	13	565	754
29)	N2OG	7	253	294	0	0	547
30)	WB5NHL	9	0	194	0	102	296
31)	N4VGE	1	0	167	0	0	167
32)	KK4MRG	1	0	108	0	0	108
33)	NE4EA	1	50	0	0	0	50

3830 Activity:

Contest	Call	Class	Pwr	Score
CaQP				
11/05/24	KA2G	SO(A) New-Contester	HP	5,320
CQWW SSB				
10/28/24	K4QQG	SOAB	HP	483,264
10/27/24	KA2G	SO(A)AB Rookie	HP	301,500
10/28/24	KB4DX @W7WZ	M/2	HP	8,973,536
	(AA4VT,K3DNE,NJ4F, N4XL,WN4AFP,			
10/28/24	KB4FHA	SO(A)AB	HP	28,971
10/28/24	KE4EA	SO(A)AB	LP	86,486
10/29/24	KG4IGC	SO(A)AB	LP	208,086
10/28/24	KZ3P	SO(A)AB	HP	315,085
10/27/24	N4QI	SOAB	LP	45,903
10/28/24	NU4E	SO(A)AB	HP	7,410,825
10/28/24	W1RPG	SO(A)AB	LP	101,996
10/28/24	W4EEY	SO(A)AB	HP	1,035,650
10/28/24	WB4HRL	SO(A)AB	HP	55,350
JARTS				
10/23/24	KG4IGC	Single Op	LP	82,680
NA Sprint SSB November				
11/10/24	K3DNE	Single Op	HP	10,348
11/10/24	N4IQ	Single Op	HP	7,452
11/10/24	WN4AFP	Single Op	LP	1,260
RusWWDig				
10/23/24	KG4IGC	SOAB	LP	784
SS CW				
11/03/24	AA4SD	Single Op Limited-An	QRP	18,212
11/04/24	K3DNE	SO Unlimited	HP	3,698
11/04/24	K4FT	Single Op Limited-An	LP	36,022
11/03/24	KD4S	Single Op Limited-An	HP	14,620

Contest	Call	Class	Pwr	Score
11/09/24	KE4EA	SO Unlimited Limited	LP	748
11/04/24	KZ3P	SO Unlimited	LP	7,912
11/04/24	N4IQ	SO Unlimited Limited	HP	124,780
11/04/24	NI7R	SO Unlimited Limited	HP	50,512
11/04/24	WB4HRL	SO Unlimited	HP	29,440
11/04/24	WN4AFP	Single Op Limited-An	LP	70,028
SS SSB				
11/18/24	K3DNE	SO Unlimited	HP	196,520
11/19/24	K4QQG	Single Op Limited-An	HP	119,686
11/18/24	N4XL	Single Op	LP	392
11/18/24	W4ANT	Single Op	HP	24,734
11/18/24	WB4HRL	SO Unlimited	HP	11,872
11/19/24	WN4AFP	Single Op	LP	19,220
WAE RTTY				
11/11/24	K7OM	Single Op	HP	76,180
11/11/24	KD4S	Single Op	HP	39,444
11/15/24	KG4IGC	Single Op	LP	106,358
11/11/24	N1UZ	Single Op	LP	11,000

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73 es QRT de N4XL