Signals From The Point

Official Newsletter of the Caribbean Contesting Consortium
Editor: W0CG

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CQWW CW 2023 Report

This contest was a real sonofagun because it looked for a while as if it would not happen. What had been a nearly full team of top operators dwindled down dramatically with four cancellations, three at almost the last minute. These were unavoidable and fully justified, but it left us very short staffed for a M/M.

But we did it! Luckily we were able to get last minute help from Roger, M0ORD, who signed on with only a day left and made the long trip from near London. Additionally, CCC member Mike Dinkelman, N7WA, ran 17 hours remotely from Seattle and saved the day (and night) for us. Our on site operators decided to still go with a Multi/Multi, buckle down, operate heavily, and cut back to a four station M/M Lite. Here is the utterly superb outcome. We're very proud of these numbers.

Band	QSOs	Zones	Countries
160:	345	16	45
80:	1072	24	90
40:	2676	36	121
20:	3152	38	135
15:	3528	36	123
10:	3272	34	131
Total:	14045	184	645
	Total Score		34,496,348

You can see the details if you wish in the 3830 posting at https://www.3830scores.com/showrumor.php?arg=3xaKz4yyqqmih .

The team all arrived on time, six people converging on Hato Airport from four separate flights Tuesday afternoon. Miraculously, all flights were on time, arriving within almost minutes of each other from Amsterdam, Miami, and Toronto. We collected people, cars, and bags, and made it to the QTH expeditiously.

Station orientation followed on Wednesday. Here's M0ORD familiarizing himself with the equipment and tropical pileups at Station 2.

Roger Jones, M0ORD, running 10 meters

Thursday was, of course, Thanksgiving. The big stress for Dorothy and me is whether we will be able to find a turkey in the stores, particularly with Cost-U-Less now gone. I grabbed the next to last Butterball at Centrum the day before the team arrived so Thanksgiving happened properly (below).

Thanksgiving Dinner: Jim (WI9WI), Gary (N7IR), Keith (VE7KW), Dorothy (Chef), Annette (KA9DOC), Roger (M0ORD), and Fred (NA2U).

(K8ND had not yet arrived, and I was shooting the photo.)

After dinner this new resident arrived at Signal Point and volunteered to be a relief operator. We tried, but he could not articulate that claw fast enough to run a paddle. He did not make the team.

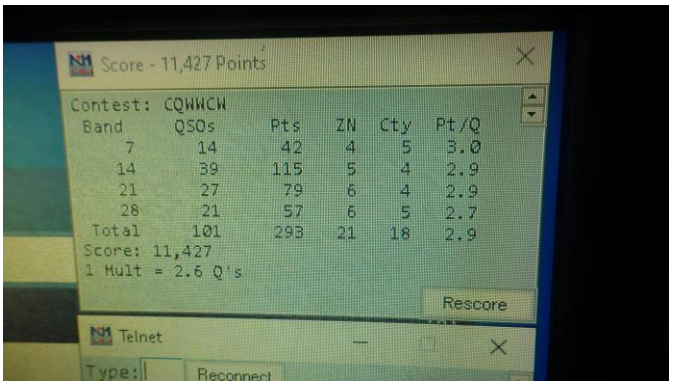
Lefty could not send fast enough with that claw.

Once again this year NA2U very generously took the time to design and order custom shirts for the team and, as always, to pick up the entire tab for them. Thanks Fred. Here he is happily handing them out to the team on Friday.

NA2U handing out the CQWW CW team shirts.

After lunch at Sol Food and the usual sweating and fretting and getting nervous, it was time for the event. I set up the software and equipment in the four hours before 8 PM Friday, and we validated that the log was networking successfully with N7WA in Seattle using the VPN that KB7Q taught us about.

It was pretty quick out of the gate at 0000 UTC Friday evening, with 101 contacts (next column) in the log in the first 10 minutes.



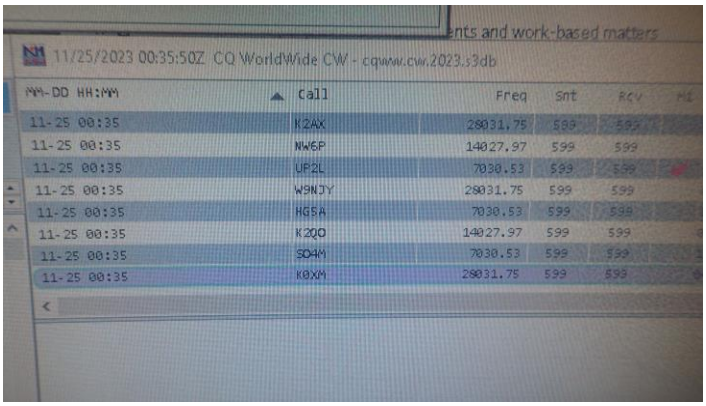
PJ2T 10 minutes into the contest

As you see, we were not on 160 or 80 at the opening because those stations were shared with 15 and 10, respectively. It was up to the ops to decide when to make the switch to the low bands. We decided not to set up Station 5 when so many operators cancelled. Here's the shack at the kickoff.

VE7KW (15), M0ORD (10), NA2U (40), K8ND (20)

VE7KW on 10, looking like he knows a secret

After 30 minutes we had 302 contacts in the log, and soon afterward CCC stalwart W9NJY showed up on 10 (next page).



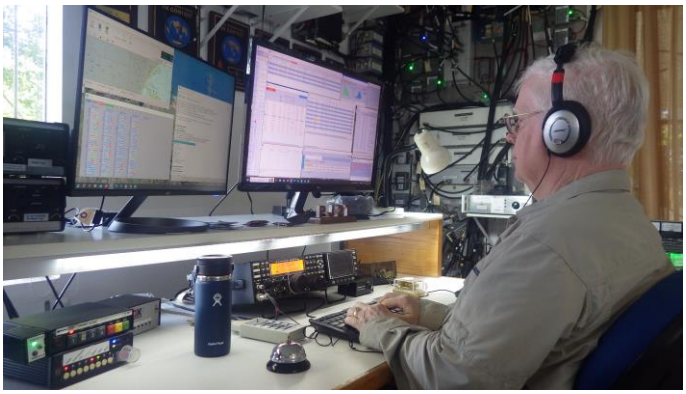
Andy, W9NJY, in the log on 28 MHz

In the wee hours of Saturday morning, K8ND is in his native habitat, thoughtfully picking out callsigns on 160 (below).


K8ND on Top Band

By 1200 UTC Saturday morning we had an astonishing 4506 QSOs logged, a good many of which were made on 40 in N7WA's five hour remote shift.

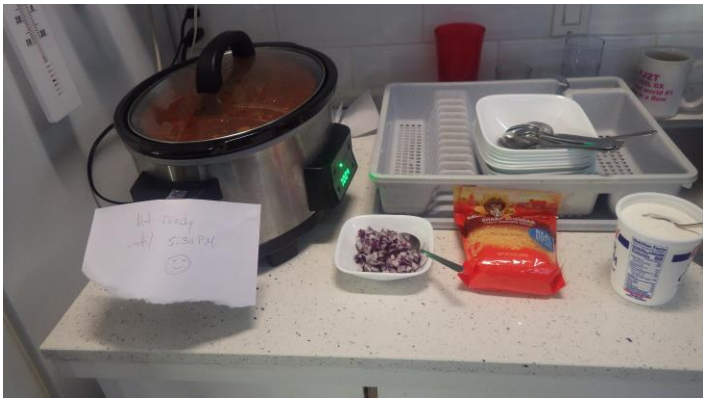
We caught the leading edge of the Europe openings on all three bands. This is always remarkable, because in the space of about 10 minutes the bands will turn from weak thready signals into a wall of frantic S9+ European callers. I opened 15 and was relieved, thankfully, by Fred (NA2U), shown in the next column. These initial hours are tough because there are huge and unruly pileups of Europeans and this slows down the rate.


NA2U handling Europe pileups on 15

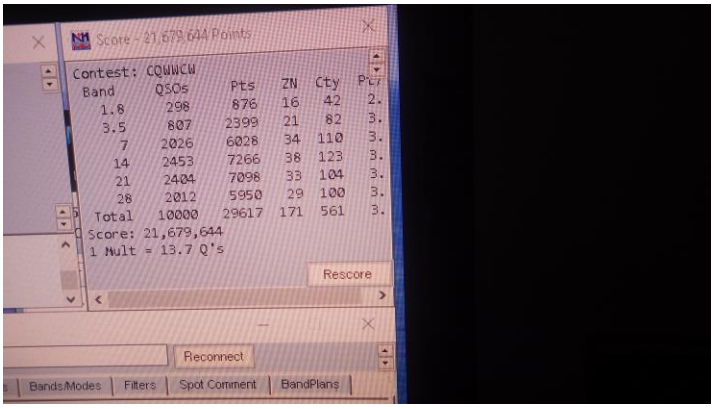
Scenarios such as this one Saturday morning, when we are running big Europe rates on 10, 15, and 20, once again prove the tremendous usefulness of the Ridge Tribander and the triplexers. We couldn't begin to get these results without them. Here's what that looked like Saturday morning.


NA2U (15), N7IR (10), WI9WI (20) Saturday morning, all Europe, all Ridge and triplexers

5:30 local Saturday evening: the contest chili is ready in the Crock Pot (below).


Can you smell Geoff's chili?

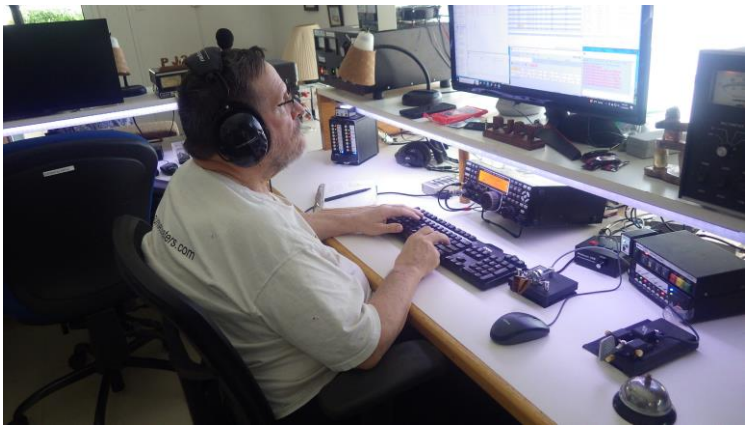
0331 UTC Saturday night, and contact 10,000 hits the log (next page).



QSO 10,000 was JN2AMD, made by K8ND on 20.


Sunday morning, the skyhooks of PJ2T look quiet and serene in the backyard. But it's anything BUT quiet in the headsets.

Keith with a proper contester's Sunday breakfast: a brownie


CCC President K8ND handling the 10 meter Europe pileups on Sunday morning; Jeff is a tireless QSO-machine.

Sunday proceeded as expected, with rates about 60% of Saturday's. Unfortunately, we lost the HF-2500 linear Sunday when N7IR alerted me to a burning smell. The amp smelled horrible, and the entire case was blazing hot, too hot even to touch. The timing of this was incredibly fortunate because at precisely that moment it was time for the remote station to take over 15 meters, allowing us a chance to evaluate what was happening with the HF-2500. After some checking we opted to power it down to cool, and I swapped in a spare AL-1200 so that Station 1 would be ready when the remote shift ended in a few hours. That worked out well, and we will troubleshoot the Commander when time permits.

Rates usually build beginning around 5 PM local on Sunday. As they did we began to think that we might, just possibly, reach 14,000 QSOs. That happened with 12 minutes left, and we ended with 14,045 contacts. Everyone had been very diligent all weekend about chasing mults, and the final score was an impressive 34.5M. We were ecstatic with that outcome given the extreme discouragement of the preceding week's operator cancellations. We left some contacts behind by not having Station 5, but this is still a very good result, well exceeding CQWW SSB.

Tradition matters, so we did the customary beer salute at the finish.

Annette (KA9DOC), Jeff (K8ND), Jim (WI9WI), Fred (NA2U), Roger (M0ORD), Gary (N7IR), Keith (VE7KW), and Dorothy (D0rothy).

Within 20 minutes of the contest's end we had the log at LoTW, the log delivered to QSL Manager KU9C, backups in the cloud in the States, and the 3830 posting up. Thanks to K8ND for expediting this process from Signal Point. He's usually doing so in Ohio.

Monday night celebration at Shelter Rock. L-R: NA2U, Dorothy, M0ORD, VE7KW, N7IR, WI9WI, KA9DOC.

WW CW 2023 is in the books. Regardless of the outcome (Zone 33 will win), this is what we do. All of our CCC activities every day of the year ultimately converge on the moment at 0000 UTC when we burst onto the bands and hand out many thousands of PJ2T contacts worldwide. We succeeded again in doing so. Thanks to all of you for helping to make this happen.

ARRL CW 160 Contest Report

On the nights of December 2 and 3 K8ND operated as a single op assisted, high power, in this tortuous contest. Conditions were horrid, but Jeff trooped through it, 12+ hours in the chair each night.

At present he stands 3rd outside US/VE.

Call: PJ2T
Operator(s): K8ND
Station: PJ2T
Class: SO Unlimited HP
QTH: Curacao
Operating Time (hrs): 21:44
Location: South America

Total: QSOs 590 Sections 73 Total Score 86,140

Here are his 3830 comments.

The arriving CMEs did not bode well for the contest weekend. First night was slow, with much 'letter-mining' to extract full callsigns and reports. This was complicated by the very fast QSB. I would send a report, and by the time I listened for their report, they had faded into the QRN. Second night was better. QSB was there, but slower. Holding a frequency was difficult, as any USA station who stumbled onto the frequency would dwarf my DX signal. NOTE: "QRL?"s are welcome, but you must wait more than 42 milliseconds before cranking out your first CQ, and

respect the answer if told that the frequency is busy by going elsewhere. Also, the old "dit dit dit" to inquire about frequency in use is little understood these days, and also requires more than 42 milliseconds wait. Missed way too many Sections: NE, ND, AK, EWA, ID, WY, and six Canadian multipliers. I saw post-contest that KL7SP spotted me during the 2nd day sunrise enhancement here, but I did not hear him calling. I will be here at PJ2T for the Stew and CQWW 160 CW Contest.

Better Power for the Irrigation Computer

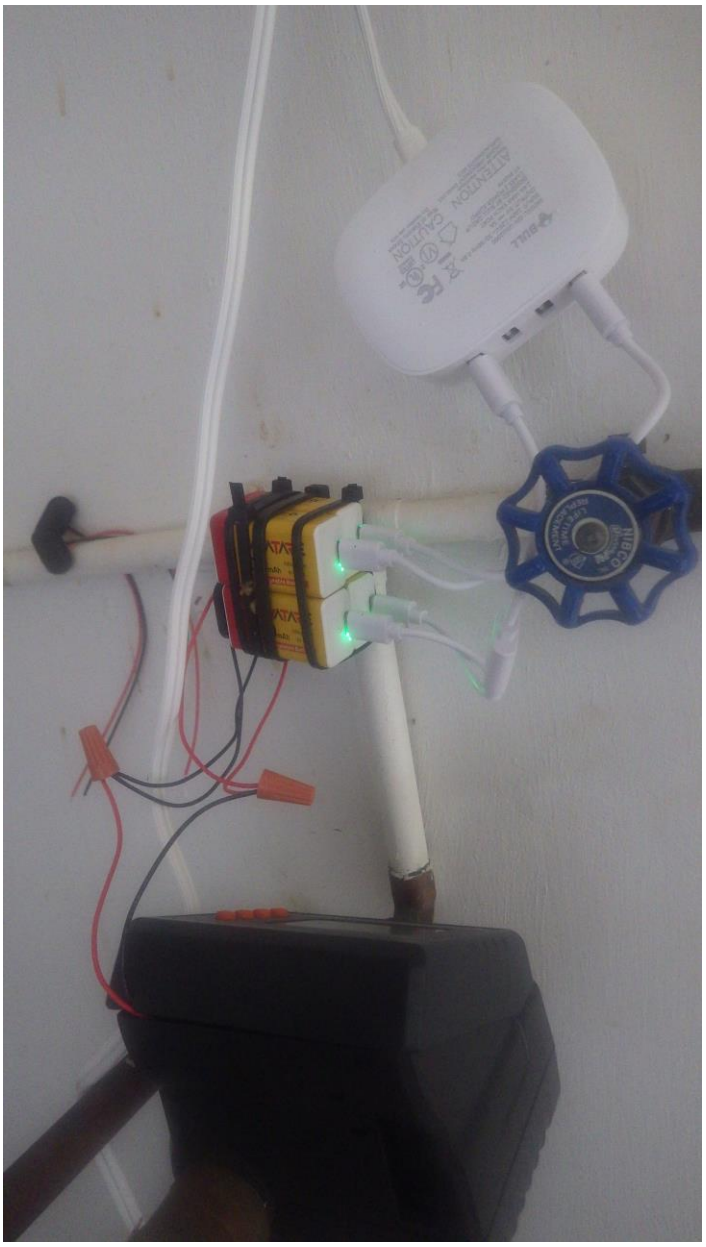
Signal Point has considerable beautiful tropical plantings. These are kept alive by a drip irrigation system that provides 20 minutes of water to all the plants five evenings a week. Curacao has profound drought from mid-April to mid-October every year.

That system is controlled by a small Gardena irrigation computer that is powered by a 9 volt battery. For many years this worked fine. Normal battery life usually exceeded six months. But in the past three or four years we have had ever more troubles with the system dying when the battery ran low and there was nobody at the QTH to put in a new one. A couple of times our across the street neighbor has kindly replaced the battery, but battery life has continued to be a problem. Recently, we had two batteries that failed after only three weeks, even though checks showed a normal 9.6 volts when they were installed. We've tried many different battery brands, with Panasonic being best and Duracell the worst, but nothing has really lasted reliably. They don't make 'em like they used to. In the meantime, some of our plants have died.

I finally got fed up with these lousy batteries and designed a simple workaround. I bought four rechargeable lithium 9 volt batteries, wired them into two parallel pairs, and connected them to an intelligent trickle charger that runs on house power. Then, the trickiest part was to connect to the irrigation computer. This was done by fashioning a wood block in the exact dimensions of a 9 volt battery, gluing a battery clip on top of that block, and installing that into the computer, bringing the wires out of the computer body through a couple of holes I filed in the side. This may seem crude but it works perfectly, and it fools the computer into thinking that it has a proper 9 volt battery installed.

The photo shows this system in breadboard. It worked fine, and the batteries even have lights on the bottom that indicate their charging state.

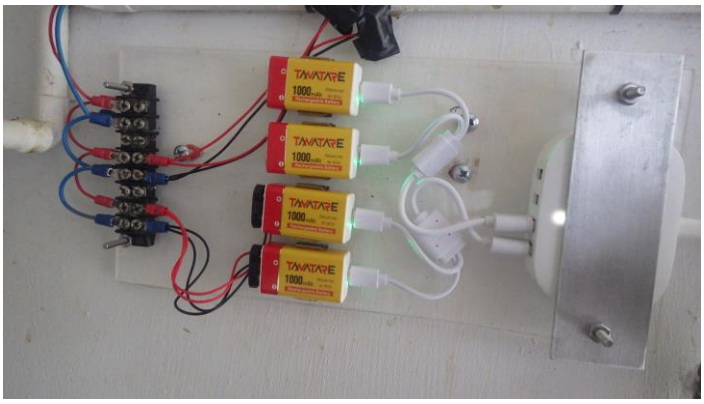
The beauty in this arrangement is that the irrigation computer will have power even during outages of commercial power at the QTH. I'm running two of the batteries on the system and holding the other two in charged reserve.



New power system for the irrigation system, in breadboarded test

The above breadboard worked reliably for six weeks, so on November 30 I built the permanent chassis for this system. Here are the operating notes.

http://www.pj2t.org/ccc/notes.on.irrigation.system.power.supply.htm



The new irrigation controller power system

Dorothy and I had fished a big piece of plexiglass out of a dumpster in March, and I cut out a hunk of it to make up the circuit board shown above. The white unit at the right is an intelligent USB trickle charger that is plugged into the building AC at all times. As explained above, that keeps up a charge in the bank of four 9 volt lithium rechargeable batteries. Again, note the green lights on the bottom of the batteries indicating that they are up to voltage.

Two of the four batteries are connected to the load via the terminal strip at the left and the other two are in reserve. They can be added to the circuit at any time simply by removing the black tape and snapping the connectors onto the top of the batteries.

The batteries can be replaced easily by snapping new ones into the holders. (Thanks K8ND for transporting these holder clips to Curacao.) The trickle charger is also easy to replace by loosening the nuts on the aluminum bracket, which we also fished out of a dumpster and cut to size.

This will support the irrigation system through power outages, and should solve the battery life problem that has killed so many plants at the QTH over the years. Problem solved.

Begali Paddle from M0ORD

The photo shows a beautiful Begali HST single lever paddle that Roger Jones, M0ORD, donated to PJ2T after CQWW CW 2023. See http://www.i2rtf.com/hst-mark-iii.html for the full description of this paddle, which has a very, very heavy base and is optimized for very high speed (HST) sending.


Begali HST Paddle from M0ORD

Roger also included the super high quality small Pelican 1300 case that he used to bring his paddle from England. This paddle is a beautiful precision device that we'll use with great pleasure at PJ2T. Thanks Roger!

ARRL 10 Meter Contest – Results

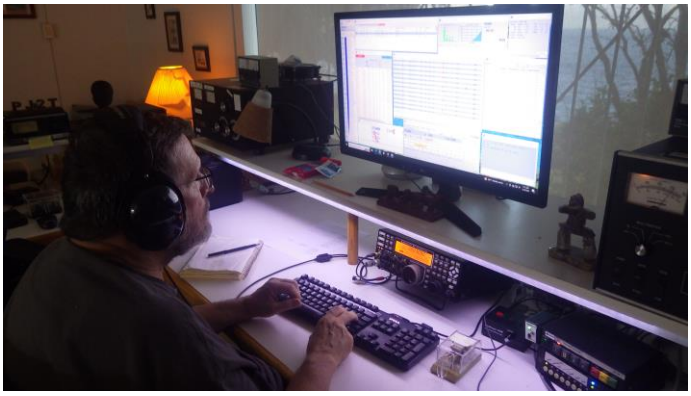
Call: PJ2T
Operator(s): K8ND N7NR WØCG
Station: PJ2T

Class: M/S HP
QTH: Curacao
Operating Time (hrs): 32
Location: South America

Band	QSOs	Mults		
CW:	1871	154		
SSB:	1559	129		
Total:	3430	283	Total Score	3,000,366

Surprisingly, even with the sunspots high we could not raise a team to come to the island. K8ND was already here, and I am a fixture, so we two were the only on-site operators together with N7NR via the remote station.

The opening hours were painfully slow. A CME flare happened at the worst time, so Jeff's first two hours of working only about 30 South Americans each hour were a real slog, next page.



K8ND not having fun mining sparse SA stations at the opening

Saturday was much better with the wall of European callers arriving precisely as expected at 1045Z. Great rates continued through the day as the shift toward the US occurred as expected. We all took turns, with N7NR handling most of the SSB duties via the remote. Our best SSB hour was Dave's, with 199 in the log in the 1900 UTC hour on Saturday. K8ND logged 168 for the best CW hour, the 1600 UTC hour Saturday. Rates were limited at nearly all times by the thick pileups calling us.

The patterns repeated on Sunday, but at the expected 50% rate. We continued to pound out good runs, punctuated by a few brief but extremely productive mult-pouncing intervals. The last three hours were painful. We see from reading 3830 comments that we were not the only ones suffering from depressed conditions at the end of the contest. Jeff and I were focused on the score box at the end, practically begging for one more, just one more QSO to put us over 3M points. PY3LX called Jeff in the last minute, barely putting us over that threshold. Celebration ensued. Then, consistent with our tradition, we had the logs to the QSL Manager, posted on LoTW, and the 3830 information online within 20 minutes after the end, with copies of the log "safed" in our PJ2T cloud account in the U.S.

Thanks again to Jeff and Dave for a really fun weekend.

WWROF Donation: November 30, 2023

It is the Worldwide Radio Operators Foundation that takes care of much of the software and log checking that makes our contesting possible. Creating, maintaining, and operating this software is a mammoth job that has been mostly done by unpaid and underappreciated volunteers. This organization provides tangible support, enhances contesting generally, and also supports youth programs.

PJ2T has not been thoughtful about remembering to support them, but as I submitted the CQWW CW log I was impressed all over again at how smoothly that process went and by its professionalism. Thus, with the approval of CCC officers and directors we donated $100 at the end of November and will try to do better to support this extremely worthy organization going forward.

You can read about them at the link below.

https://wwrof.org/

Funky N1MM Problem Solved by KB7Q

On November 16 I set up the usual test N1MM multi/multi logging network for testing and practice for both the local team and the remote operators. I've done this many times, and it has become a routine, albeit lengthy procedure.

But this time the network refused to work. All logs came up, but there was no communication whatsoever. I spent hours re-checking and re-configuring everything, but still no go. Then I launched into my normal sequence of computer troubleshooting steps: 1) whine to Dorothy and, 2) ask KB7Q for help.

Gene was just two days from departing on a long driving trip, but as usual he found time for PJ2T. He's a wizard at all things remote, and he logged into all five of the shack computers using Anydesk. Dorothy and I sat at the shack table and ate dinner, watching Gene dance all over all five of the machines troubleshooting.

Initially he was baffled also, and after trying all of the many fixes that I had attempted he had the idea of starting the Hamachi VPN on two of the computers. Bingo, the networking came up immediately. This should NOT happen. The N1MM+ network should not care whether the VPN is running or not, but it finally became apparent that N1MM had changed some

internal tables when we ran Hamachi during WW SSB, and that now N1MM expected to find the VPN in order to network.

Gene and I decided to take the conservative approach, run with Hamachi as we had planned in CQWW CW, and then try to clean things up after the contest. Once again, THANKS to KB7Q for saving the day remotely from Bozeman.

Europe Tower – Full Inspection

On November 22 I carefully inspected the Europe tower top to bottom. It is in *excellent* condition. This is the new tower that we put up on December 4, 2018, so it is at its five year point. Two years ago I put a precautionary overcoat of finish epoxy paint on it, top to bottom, and that paint is still in very good condition, with only minimal surface oxidation.

There are some very minor rust blooms that I'll recoat soon with white epoxy, and there's some corrosion around the circumference of the aluminum mast just below the bottom thrust bearing, but all else is extremely good. Our careful prep of the new tower in October and November of 2018 paid off handsomely.

ARRL DX CW February 2024 Update

Most years we post the highest score and make the most QSOs of any station in the world in this contest. We hope to do it again in February 2024, and we have a top team scheduled in pursuit of this goal.

Our ARRL CW team for February is fully staffed, with NF9V+LouAnn, W0CG, K7TQ, N1ZZ, VE3CX, W4SO, AD4ES, and N0VD+Christine scheduled to be here. Because we are renting House #7 rather than the usual Moran pool house, we are down one bedroom. Here's a look at House #7 from the road.

House #7, our home for ARRL DX CW

All CCC members are always welcome at all contests, so if you would like to join the team let me know, and we'll find off-site lodging, no worries. And note (following) that the ARRL SSB team is looking for help.

A/B Switches from N7IR

Our antenna switching system uses 13Top Ten Devices A/B switches. We have only had one spare in stock in case of a failure, and last week I consumed that spare, adding it to the remote station bandpass filter system. This leaves us vulnerable to a failure, which would be a very unwelcome problem during a contest. These relays are no longer made. For a while DX Engineering had planned to take over production, but that has not happened yet.

N7IR (Gary) has several of them as spares. The market value of these unobtainable boxes is ~$75. Gary is going to let CCC have four of them for $150, a substantial donation. He'll ship them to my Idaho QTH, and I'll place them in inventoried stock at Signal Point in late January. Thanks Gary!

Backup Power Monthly Update

Here's a target (next page) that will hopefully inspire us to action. The photo shows the 25 KW diesel generator that our across the street neighbor installed in mid-November.


Dirk van Daam's generator: a 25 KW diesel

25 KW is more than we need, and MUCH more than he needs to run his normal household, but he said these big ones were cheaper at auction than 15 KW units. He bought this in Holland, and even with the ship and import costs it was a number that CCC could have afforded.

Two weeks ago we had a seven hour power outage, only two days after he got his generator. During the outage that big diesel across the street ran quietly almost at idle and powered his home while the rest of us were too hot, not able to sleep, and under attack by mosquitoes.

His is a three phase 50Hz unit, so something like this would be perfect for our needs.

Operators Needed for ARRL DX SSB

Most years we have plenty of ops from PCARS, Melbourne, Florida, including CCC members N1ZZ, K5JC, N0OJ, and K5LD. But this year Dan can't come because of a planned big family birthday party for him, and as a result several other PCARS members will not be making the trip to Curacao. At present, we have K5LD, K4JC, N0OJ, K8PGJ, and K4QD scheduled.

This means that there are four beds available. Can you come for this super fun contest and help PJ2T keep the streak of World # 1 M/M wins alive? Please let me know if you or someone you might nominate can make the trip.

Call for Operators: CQ WPX SSB 2024

At present we have zero operators signed up for this late March contest. In years past we have filled every bed in both houses. The Moran pool house is reserved, and Dorothy will be on hand if we decide we want to recruit her as chef.

Who can come? This is always a lot of fun. Also, it might be a good opportunity for you to bring a bunch of people from your home club and do, say, an all-North-Coast-Contesters operation, etc.

Another question is whether one of you would want to do the contest entirely by remote? I will be on site to support the remote equipment in case of problems. We would have to do this in such a way that it did not result in a huge loss of revenue to the club because we count on these major contests in the budgeting.

Please let me know what you may wish to do, and we'll discuss it further.

W5GAI QRP Patience

CCC member Skip Cameron, W5GAI, must be a vastly patient man. I can't imagine running CQWW in QRP, although other CCC affiliates such as N7IR and W1FJ do it routinely.

Below is his outcome in 10 Meter Classic QRP, a category that he may have won!

SOSB10 Classic QRP

Call
W5GAI
G3L(G3LHJ)
F2CT
NØJK
NN4K

Soapbox:

This was my best ever single band QRP entry. Band conditions were excellent in all directions at the usual times, east early and west toward sundown.

Operated 5 hours 1st day - to let the pileups clear a bit early on, and 5.2 hours 2nd day when making QSOs was easier.

S&P method was to start high around 28160 and work down the band, and repeat.

Had to use +- TX offset half the time to eventually log a pileup QSO. Managed to log UA0, VR2, BG4, 4W8X, YB, 3B8, 7Q6 when propagation peaked their signals here.

Congratulations Skip!! But for me, bring on the QRO.

PJ2T Publicity in PCARA Newsleter

I mentioned last month that we had appeared in the Peekskill Cortlandt (New York) Amateur Radio Association's newsletter. Karl Zuk, K2KZ, wrote a nice piece about us. Here's the link to our part of that excellent club publication.

http://www.pj2t.org/ccc/karl.zuk.article.nov.2023.pcud1223p3-6.pdf

CCC Polo Shirt Re-Order in the Works

Thanks to all who responded to my inquiry about additional polo shirts. I ordered the blank shirts on December 1. They will arrive at my Idaho place in early December, and I'll get them right to the embroiderer. The hope is that I can ship them by mid-January. All new CCC members get a shirt on the house in appreciation.

Need 3CPX800A7s

Can you help us find a couple of 3CPX800A7 tubes? These are increasingly difficult to get.

We have only one new one left on site, and six of them removed from service and in poor condition. The Commander HF-2500 tubes are at or very near their death. The club has resources if we can find some new or young tubes.

We are good on tubes for the AL-1200s but in very slim shape on these tubes that we need for the HF-2500, LK-800 (40 meter amp) and Titan 425.

Know any sources??

Rotor 11 Failure

CCC rotor 11, which N7IR bought for the club in December, 2020, has failed in the Europe tower. It was installed in October of 2021, and two years of life are about the expected norm here. We had the rotor rebuilt by CATS, and at that time Craig warned that this will be the last time a rebuild is possible on this rotor. So no surprise.

We had an extremely severe windstorm one night in early November, and that brought about the demise of the rotor, which is hard-jammed, never to rotate again. We'll junk it. There are several good Tailtwisters on site to make the replacement.

End of Month Treasury Balance

We'll update you on the end of the year treasury balance in the January newsletter.

Bring on the Youth!?

Two members reacted to the proposal that we consider sponsoring some young ops directly, in addition to just through our support of the Youth DX Challenge. The gist was that this is a highly admirable idea, but that the cost of doing this for full teams is simply beyond us as a group. But no decisions have yet been made. Lets keep the discussion ongoing. It surely will be an agenda item in Dayton.

W3ACO suggests the following criteria for any young people we may consider sponsoring:

- *Candidate should have a valid passport.*
- *Candidate should be over 21. This eliminates the issue of unaccompanied minors traveling alone.*
- *Candidate should be able to be away from home more than a week.*
- *Candidate should have some contest experience.*
- *Candidate plusses are familiar with N1MM and K3 radios.*
- *I am willing to contribute to a club effort to support an individual.*

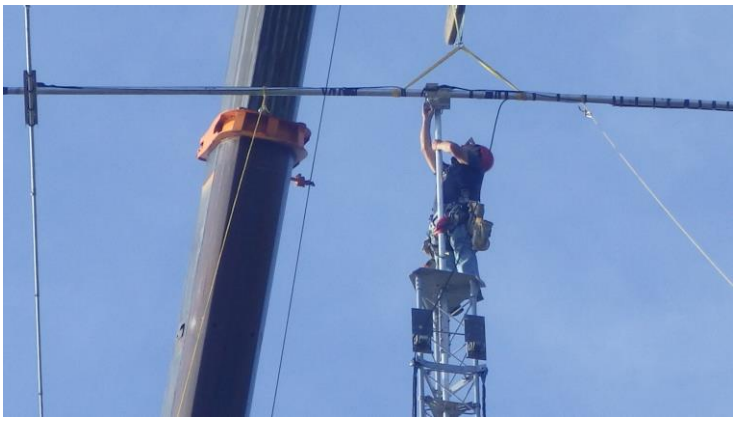
Europe Tower: 5 Year Anniversary Today

As I type this it is early on the morning of December 4, precisely five years since the day we replaced the rusty and dangerous Europe tower.

W0CG as the new tower, hanging on the crane 120 feet above, nears touchdown.

The photo shows the old tower on the ground in the background, part of the orange crane boom in the distance, and the new tower approaching a landing on the concrete base. We planned this very carefully, such that only 96 minutes passed between beginning the lift of the old tower and installation of the new one, supporting itself on the guys without the crane.

We even had enough crane time left that day to install two of the antennas. Here's Tim, W3YQ, fitting the new 40 meter beam to the mast (next column).



W3YQ atop the new tower fitting the new 40 yagi to the mast

This 100 foot Rohn 55 tower had been in the air since July of 2001. It had served well for those 17+ years, but rust had finally taken over despite all efforts at maintenance, and was unsafe. We prepped the new one using knowledge we had gained about seaside corrosion, with the result that today, at five years, this new tower is essentially perfect.

In addition to the careful prep of the new tower we used 100% stainless steel hardware, stainless thrust bearings, a very strong aluminum mast, and zero electrical tape to attach the feedlines. These measures have kept the new tower in pristine shape. Prep required two full months of work, most of which was slowed by seemingly endless October rains. Here's WI9WI putting the second epoxy coast on one of the pieces on the painting table I built in the backyard.

Mid-October, WI9WI putting finish epoxy on one of the new sections.

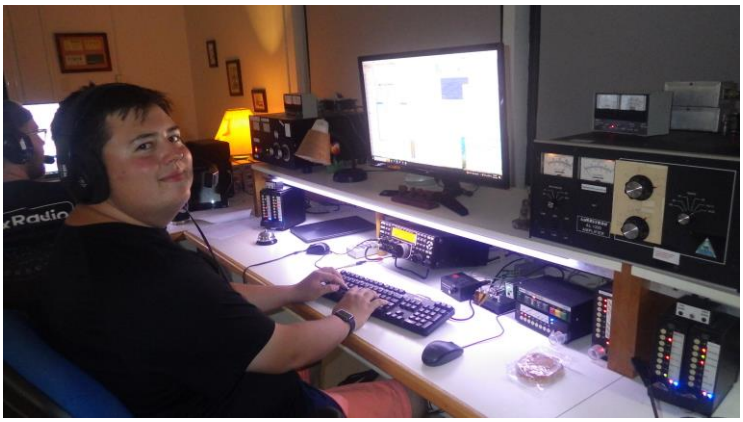
The entire project cost about $27,000, and was made possible by member donations including one very large one by a CCC member. WI9WI, KA9DOC, NR0X, AD7XG and his XYL, VE3CX, and W8WTS made special trips to the island to help. And tower professional W3YQ was the key to the installation, donating all of his time and picking up his own airfare.

And many members of the CQWW SSB and CW teams also pitched in lots of labor on this project. We can all be proud of this outcome, five years later today, December 4, 2023.

The full album of photos and captions is at http://www.pj2t.org/ccc/PJ2TTowerReplacementAlbum/index.html . Click on the first photo to start the album.

Welcome New CCC Member W4IPC

I'm very happy to welcome Connor Black, W4IPC, to CCC membership. He was with the CQWW SSB team in October together with his friend Levi, KG5XR, both of whom are now CCC members.



Connor Black, W4IPC

Connor is wrapping up an engineering degree soon. He's only 23, a welcome outlier in the CCC ranks, and he's a top world class contester. This is the second year he has been to PJ2T, and I can tell you that he's a tremendous addition to our group. In addition to superb operating skills on both modes, he's a ***nice guy***, super smart, with a wide range of versatile skills including Ridge-climbing.

I'm hoping to have the opportunity to school up Connor and Levi so that they will be able to handle the house and stations when I am not here. We're most honored to have Connor in the group and look forward to lots of contesting with him.

Phase 1 of Varnishing Complete

As you know, the maintenance work never ends at Signal Point. In mid-November Dorothy and I tackled the outside part of the ceiling of the Ocean Pavilion. The "inside" ceiling was still in pretty good shape but the outside six foot "skirt" was very badly stained and the varnish had failed in many places.

Dorothy worked over a two day period to scrub down all these boards and remove as much of the stains and salt residue as possible. I followed over the next two days putting on fresh varnish. This is pretty tricky work because in places you have to stand on the railing (photo), hanging out over the cliff edge at the ocean.

Icky and awkward work varnishing over one's head

It also requires placement of drop cloths, and varnishing over one's head is inevitably messy. But it's done now and looks magnificent, hopefully to stay good for another five or so years. I use the absolute best varnish on Planet Earth, spar varnish by Lenmar. I've tried many different products over two decades and this is my # 1.

This stuff is $160/gallon, worth every penny, but you sure gotta be extra careful to not knock over the can!

Phase 2 will be to prep and varnish the inside of this ceiling, but it is not needed immediately, and to do it safely will require that we buy a bigger step ladder. Right now there's none of this varnish in the stores, so we'll wait patiently.

Remote Station Filter Panel Bypass Installed

The new bandpass filter system for the remote is installed, as reported last month. The photo shows part of it, the bank of 10 filters.

Remote station bandpass filter bank

The entire system consists of this filter bank, four 1 x 6 coax switches, a Bandmaster III decoder, and lots of control wiring. This is a lot of failure points, and if anything crumps we could be without the entire remote station for as log as six months, depending on the timing.

Therefore we installed a capability to entirely bypass the filter bank in case of a failure. Uli, DL8OBQ, added a feature to his antenna switching software that enables us to invoke the bypass in a contingency. When that happens, relays are keyed that remove the filter panel from service but enable the remote station to work normally. This capability is only available to three of we "sysops" because if bypass is inadvertently invoked we could lose a K3 if a local operator is on the air at that time.

This bypass required much more engineering thought and vastly more time than I had initially envisioned. I had to fabricate a homebrew coax relay box for the system, but now it is working acceptably.

The Icky Underbelly of PJ2T Maintenance

These December 8 photos show me four terraces below the level of the pavilion floor, cutting out wabi bushes and other weeds. One slip, and you're a goner because the ocean water is very shallow.

Next page: We consumed four tubes of caulk and a few hours last week sealing up leaks in the East Sunroom.

Freshening up the top coat of paint

On December 1 we took much of the stuff out of the Step Closet to clean and to figure out where rain was leaking in. We found the leaks and will put in sealer as soon as we get a reliably dry day.

Thanks K8ND for help on this hot and dirty job.

Sidewalk full of contents of the Step Closet floor

And if you want some really dirty maintenance, try inserting the top half of yourself into a dark, hot, dirty oven to disassemble everything to service the ignitor. I got the oven working again, but not any fun.

Fixing the oven igniter, icky and dark and awkward

Cat Feeder Lady

Dorothy fabricated this cat feeder for when we are gone and is shown here pouring (or "purring") fuel into it.

Gas for the cats

VIP Visitors to Signal Point

Here's (next page) VERONA's president Brett Ruiz, PJ2BR with his XYL Nena, PJ2ZZ. We went to lunch together on December 7 and then returned to Signal Point. Brett and Nena and his kids and mother have visited my home in Ohio, and we have been the best of friends since 1999.

PJ2BR, PJ2DX, Dorothy, and PJ2ZZ at Signal Point December 7, 2023 (Photo by PJ2ND)

VERONA Christmas Dinner: December 13, 2023

K8ND and I attended the Curacao ham radio club's Christmas dinner on the evening of the 13th. 38 people signed up for the event, and the photo shows some of us lining up to load our plates at the buffet.

Lining up for food at the VERONA party; K8ND in immediate foreground.

One important longstanding tradition of these VERONA parties is live music, with several VERONA musicians participating. Here's the band in action.

VERONA's Christmas Band

That's VERONA's president in the pink shirt, Brett, (PJ2BR) on flute. At his right is Brett's son Ian on trunpet, with son Caleb on the other side on alto sax. Obscured directly behind Caleb is keyboardist Torry, PJ2VR, who is very prominent in the 1990 documentary video about Radioteam Finland. At the extreme left in the photo, on guitar, is Castro, PJ2CFM. At the right of the photo in the blue top we have Brett's XYL Nena, PJ2ZZ. Maybe next year I'll bring an instrument and join in. I suggested that they name themselves "The Ham Band," but the dual significance of that suggestion splatted on the floor.

This was a delightful event with Christmas cheer, incredibly good food, lots of international fellowship, good music, and the ever-wonderful Curacao people who I believe are the nicest folks anywhere on this planet.

President Brett did mention PJ2T and CCC in his welcome speech, pointing out that our accomplishments have brought very favorable worldwide attention within the hobby to our little island nation.

A cloudy sunset, PJ2T's skyhooks, and an appropriate end to this newsletter. Photo date December 8, 2023.

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