Signals From The Point

Official Newsletter of the Caribbean Contesting Consortium
Editor: W0CG

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Missing W9VA this Year

Station 4 trestle during ARRL DX CW, with a photo of W9VA

For the first time in countless years W9VA was not with us for the ARRL DX CW contest. But he was very much in our thoughts, and we posted this photo of him at Station 4, smiling at the camera last year in this same contest. W9NJY has visited with him a couple of times in recent weeks, and Bill and I have been swapping E-mails. He hated missing this, his favorite contest.


W9VA, February 2018

Bill and I have been doing these contests together since the VP5 days in the late 1990s. We wish him well.

Report on ARRL DX CW Contest: World #1

We were unable to raise a full team for the ARRL code contest this year. Three beds went unused, and the on-site team had to dig in to cover all of the needed open band hours over the weekend. CCC members WI9WI (and Annette, KA9DOC), KB7Q (and Joyce), W9NJY, and N7IR anchored the team. In addition we were fortunate to have perennial ironman operator Rudy (NF9V) back again this year. As a fairly last-minute team sign-up, Randy (K7TQ) came to the island and was a huge help covering the shifts. Randy is president of my home club, the Spokane DX Association, and this was his first go at industrial strength contesting.

Murphy arrived. We had terrible RX noise on 80 that we were unable to find and fix before the contest, and that cost us a lot of QSOs and the ire of some who complained, validly, that we were deaf on 80. We also fought severe interstation noise from 20 into 10, requiring that we run 20 meters using the Europe Ridge antenna, not the optimal way to do things. I finally found and fixed the 80 noise after two days of full time troubleshooting, but the 10 meter problem is still with us, although much less severe.

Conditions were too good. When the bands are super open, and the U.S. is working Europe, we suffer in the deep Caribbean. Because of this it was a struggle in the Europe daylight hours.

In spite of these frustrations, it appears that we still managed to win the World #1 spot, DX-side, Multi/Multi. And we made the 3rd most QSOs in the world, following K1LZ and K3LR.

(Note: The 80 total on the next page should read 1093.)

Class: **M/M HP**
QTH: Curacao
Operating Time (hrs): 48
Location: South America
Remote operation

Summary: Compare Scores

Band	QSOs	Mults
160:	438	48
80:	10933	57
40:	1742	59
20:	1781	60
15:	2151	59
10:	2146	61
Total:	**9291**	**344** Total Score **9,588,312**

We had fun prepping for the contest. One of my favorite scenes of the CCC year is Andy (W9NJY) with his QRP rig and cigar operating outside in the Ocean Pavilion. In 2003 when we built those patios I installed a coax cable in a conduit under the concrete. It's still there, so this makes it convenient to hook up a radio out at the table, patch in that cable indoors to a big antenna, and the outdoor operator is in business. In the photo Andy is running QSOs on the Ridge with 5 watts, no problem! What a thrill to be able to do that – access all the big PJ2T antennas from outdoors at the table.


QRPer Andy, W9NJY working the world with 5 watts


Practice prior to the contest: K7TQ is plugged in listening to NF9V, a master high speed contest operator.

One might have thought that this rainbow ending at the Ridge tower would be a good open for the contest, but not so.


Wednesday, February 15, 2023

An excellent long view of the shack by K7TQ

We spent considerable time on maintenance projects before the contest. One such chore was to straighten out the US/JA Beverage on the Ridge. Thanks to the loan of a GPS receiver from K8ND, I was able to confirm that I did not do a very good job of installing this antenna. The GPS waypoints showed this, thanks to the data display (below) by K8ND.

Doglegged track of US/JA Ridge Beverage

Randy and Gene and I decided to straighten out the antenna. Here we are before taking it apart to straighten it out.

Randy (K7TQ) and Gene (KB7Q) at US/JA Beverage origin

Both of these guys are in exceptional physical condition, with strength, balance, and endurance in the extreme heat. It's a good thing because we had to do the job twice. On the first attempt we disconnected the wire at the origin, rolled up about 250 feet of it to remove the dogleg, then struck back in what we thought was a straight direction toward the feedpoint. This required a tremendous amount of hacking out brush. Our best guess as to the correct direction turned out to be terribly wrong, as we missed the target almost 60 feet too far north. So we had to roll up the wire and try again.

I went back to the feedpoint origin and unrolled a long wire as a guide, homing in on Gene's voice through the thick brush. We then followed that breadcrumb trail, hacking through very thick virgin brush, trees, and cactus all over again, and got it right the second time. Mission accomplished, and the signals on this Beverage now sound a lot straighter.

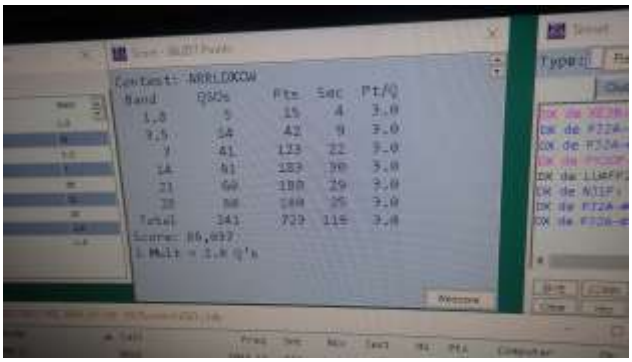
The next morning we had a team "strategy" session over breakfast.

WI9WI, KB7Q, N7IR, K7TQ, W9NJY (NF9V missing)

That noon we had the traditional contest day lunch at Sol Food.

At Sol Food: KA9DOC, NF9V, N7IR, W9NJY, KB7Q, Joyce Shea, K7TQ, WI9WI, Dorothy

Rudy kicked off the contest with K2AX (NJ) on 20 meters, and we were off to the races. After 20 minutes there were 241 QSOs in the log.



241 CW QSOs in 20 minutes

A very special aspect of this contest is that the entirety of the 160 meter operation was done via the remote station. N7NR, K8ND, and W8WTS took turns on 160 via the remote and did very well in poor conditions, working 438 Qs and 48 multipliers. This freed our much too small team to concentrate on 10 – 80 meters and enabled more reasonable shift lengths and sleep periods. The remote station performed perfectly throughout the contest and yet again proved the concept of wide area logging. All of us on site and the three remote operators all saw the same N1MM log in real time thanks to the Hamachi VPN solution delivered for us by KB7Q.

The remote station (above the plaques) on 160 while five local stations are simultaneously on 10 through 80

W9NJY on 80 with W9VA cheering him on from the photograph

2:20 AM local Saturday morning; NF9V (20), W9NJY (80), KB7Q (40), N7IR (15)

At the halfway point we had 6476 contacts and most all possible multipliers.

Here's KB7Q Sunday on 15 (next page)

CCC's super patient tech guru KB7Q on 15

Seemingly quickly everything was over, and we had a late dinner and beverages.

NF9V, K7TQ, KB7Q, WI9WI, W9NJY, and N7IR and our remote ops N7NR, W8WTS, K8ND, probably delivered PJ2T another World #1 plaque!

Post contest beverage, not to be confused with, well, you know what….

WI9WI relaxing at Monday breakfast with the Europe tower visible above the roof

Andy chowing down at breakfast and celebrating a superb contest effort


Monday evening L-R at Shelterrock: Joyce Shea, KB7Q, WI9WI, KA9DOC, W9NJY, NF9V, K7TQ, N7IR

Thanks KB7Q for the VPN

As you read elsewhere, we are now regularly using the Hamachi VPN tool for wide area logging in contests where the remote has a role alongside the Signal Point radios. This tool has been rock reliable, enabling us to very easily and quickly incorporate off site stations into our local Ethernet.

Hamachi VPN is free for five users, but we needed more. As a donation to PJ2T Gene (KB7Q) has paid for an annual license and made the login credentials available to CCC for up to to 32 users. Thanks KB7Q!

K3(8) Arrived Signal Point

As you saw in earlier newsletters we bought our eighth K3 recently. With five stations in our M/M layout, one at the remote, and one K3 usually offsite for repairs, we had no "bench." This transceiver gives us some backup, and we're very grateful to N7IR who executed the purchase, set up the radio for PJ2T, then shipped it to me in Ohio. I brought it down to the island from Cleveland on January 24. There was one bored baggage inspector at Hato who smiled and waved me and all others right through the checkpoint, no X-ray. That radio is now in the safe, ready to go into service when needed. Thanks to all CCC members whose Station Support dues picked up the tab.

Results: ARRL DX SSB Contest: World #1

Once again this contest was manned by the PCARS Melbourne, Florida club group, led by our very long time CCC member Dan, N1ZZ. They include Walter K5LD (CCC member), Vince K4JC (CCC member), Don AF4Z, Chuck AD4ES, Dave KE3VV (CCC member), Ryan N0OJ, and Steve AK4R. CCC member K8PGJ cancelled as a caution when he tested positive for COVID after being in KH6. The team booked an extra-long trip, arriving three days early and spending 10 total nights on site at Signal Point and the Moran pool house.

Early in their time here K5LD and K4JC activated two parks on the island that were first-time activations in the POTA program. Check Walter's article and photos near the bottom of this issue.

This was the first time a team had come three days early. Our experience was that this is a huge help because we did not have the usual time pressure to get everyone up to speed, or to accomplish important team work projects. We got a tremendous amount of work done and felt completely ready by the time contest Friday arrived.

Friday was not just contest day, but N1ZZ's 84th birthday. He continues to be ageless, unstoppable, energetic, innovative, and an inspiration to all of us. Thanks to Dorothy we had a cake for him, accompanied by poor but energetic singing.

It wouldn't be a PJ2T contest without Friday pizza at David and Sunshine's. Here's the full crew, all of whom we managed to sandwich into two cars.


Sol Food L-R: Walt (K5LD), Vince (K4JC), Don (AF4Z), Steve (AK4R), David (KE3VV), Ryan (N0OJ), Dan (N1ZZ), Chuck (AD4ES), and ever-smiling Dorothy

The contest started with a bang, with K5TER in the log first, on 15 meters. I had challenged the crew just prior to the contest kickoff to making 750 QSOs the first hour. That brought a loud laugh, but by golly we did 755, and there was cheering in the shack at 0100Z. Here (next page) is that starting gang. The Rate King that first hour was K4JC. Vince spooled off 255 QSOs on 15.

Kickoff at 0000Z: AK4R (10), K4JC (15), AD4ES (40), N0OJ (80), K5LD (20)

Not to be outdone by my photography, here's N1ZZ at the contest start.

N1ZZ shooting the team at startup

While Vince was having fun on 15, Ryan was not having fun on 80, as expected, with only four QSOs that first hour. The next column shows Walter running fast on 20, Ryan running not at all on dead 80 meters, and Vince in the distant background glowing orange from his 15 meter rate.

K5LD (20) foreground, N5OJ (80) after 30 minutes

That first half hour was tremendous fun, with 393 QSOs logged (below)

393 contacts in 30 minutes

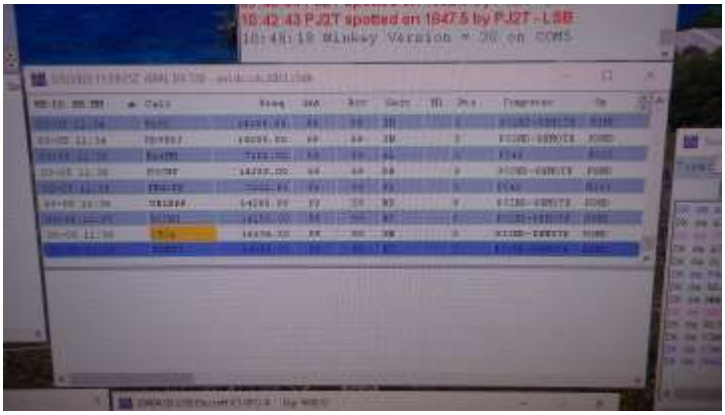

AK4R ready to start his 10 meter shift Saturday


Halfway: AF4Z (160), KE3VV (15), N0OJ (40), AD4ES (20) with N1ZZ, AK4R, K5LD, and K4JC waving; 7,200 QSOs in the log

As in the CW weekend, conditions were almost too good. The U.S. was working lots of Europe in their daylight hours, so our rates here suffered. Also, 20 was in the graveyard most of Saturday with everyone on 10 and 15, and 160 was the worst we have experienced here. But everyone is using the same playing field, so on we went into the second 24 hours.

This contest was our first time involving remote operators as part of the rotating multi-band shift schedule. The remote operators N7NR and K8ND covered 29 band-hours on all bands except 160. We worked out a smooth transition procedure wherein the local op would stop at the 58th minute in an hour and turn off the K3. The remote op turned on his K3 at 59, selected the antenna, and continued running on that same frequency. This worked nicely, and except for the change in voice the pileups had no idea that their op just shifted from Curacao to a desk in California. The fiber connection and RRC boxes worked magnificently. In fact remote op N7NR turned in a couple of hours at just a hair under 200 QSOs/hour.

The photo shows the log on site. The 20 meter contacts are being made by K8ND in Powell, Ohio and the 40 contacts by our local Curacao operator N0OJ. The integration of the remote ops into our log is slick and seamless.


K8ND's QSOs from the remote, interleaved in the M/M log

In total K8ND made 314 QSOs via the remote, and N7NR 1171, including some super rate hours. This technique enabled us to do more with fewer on-site operators, and everyone got more sleep. Remote operation is here to stay at Signal Point, thanks to our fiber installation, Gene's technical leadership, my design and fabrication of almost all the custom hardware, and one big donor's financial support.

Upcoming: WPX SSB Contest

With no interest shown from within the CCC group, I made an overture to my home club, the Spokane DX Association, to see if we could raise a team and do an entire contest with just SDXA members. We were fortunate to be able to recruit AD7XG + Svetlana, AC7DC, and WA7CPA. But that was not enough for a full crew, so we recruited outside of CCC and SDXA and managed to assemble an excellent team which now consists of WA7CPA, AD7XG + Svetlana, AC7DC, KC7EFP + Jenny, N5BR, W5WZ, and WM5H. We'll see you on the air the weekend after next.

WPX RTTY Contest Operation at PJ2T

Jim and Annette came a few days early for the ARRL CW contest in order to put PJ2T on RTTY in WPX. Here's WI9WI (Jim) in the process of apparently winning WPX RTTY SOAB Classic HP.

WI9WI winning WPX RTTY Classic

SOAB Classic HP

Call	OpMode	Remote	QSOs	Prefixes	Op Time	Score
PJ2T(WI9WI)			1492	587	20	3,153,364
YT3D			1307	624		2,752,000
KI6DY			1522	595	24:00	2,453,780
N1RM			1340	572	24:00	2,451,592
LZ6K(LZ2PL)			1056	624	22	2,001,792
NF6A(K6XX)			899	469	15	1,049,724
NG1M			874	448	16	1,005,312
JH7QXJ			727	402	24	920,178
AJ6V			1018	432	23:34	919,728
NØTA			1003	414	20.7	745,200

After the contest Jim patiently worked with me to institutionalize RTTY at Station 1, including permanent installation of clearly labeled audio cables and preparation of a set of instructions. Thanks Jim!

80 Meter US/JA Antenna Failure and Repair

With one hour left in ARRL CW I sat down at 80 for my last shift. Shockingly, the SWR on the 80 US/JA 2 el array had gone wild, and I quickly checked that it was not a switching error.

Naturally one assumes that there is a bad connector or a broken wire somewhere, but it turned out not to be that obvious. I took the AA-54 analyzer to the point on the tower where the Heliax feedline transitions to the RG-8X hanging loop up to the feedpoint. After removing all the weatherproofing from that joint I ran the SWR curve and there was no dip, and no antenna there. Now the only thing to do was to bring down the antenna, a huge task. We needed to determine whether it was the feedpoint/balun (photo next column) or the feedline itself that had gone bad.

Fortunately there were a lot of hands available, including these guys who theatrically guided the north leg of the driven element to the ground.

NF9V, W9NJY, and K7TQ hamming up the removal of the US/JA 80 wire array**.**

Once on the ground I opened the connection at the feedpoint, strung out the antenna at a height of five feet, and hooked up the AA-54. Perfect resonance at 3.30 MHz as expected for a deformed ground antenna. Clearly, the RG-8X hanging loop had failed, although there was nothing obviously wrong by carefully inspecting the 100 foot length of the cable.

Feedpoint of the 80 2 el, with balun

Upon checking the inventory spreadsheet I found that we had 250 feet of new RG-8X in stock. Imagine my disappointment when I rolled it out and discovered that it was crappy flooded 75 ohm RG-6, clearly unsuitable for our 80 array. Now we had a crisis. It is Wednesday, the ARRL SSB team arrives Saturday, and we are without a key antenna needed for the contest.

DX Engineering to the rescue. I ordered 154 feet of RG-8X coax on-line at about 3:30 in the afternoon, paid for overnight air, and it was delivered 19 hours later to N1ZZ's home in Florida! That's incredible service. Because orders over $100 get free ground shipping, the overnight air fee was washed out by

ordering slightly more cable than needed. A great bargain. Dan brought the coax in his luggage Saturday (see photo), and I slept with it in sight from my bed to be sure it was safe.

N1ZZ, W0CG, and the 154 feet of RG-8X coax delivered like lightning from DX Engineering

I sent an effusive note of praise to the DXE website and another to K3LR personally. Their order fulfillment is beyond professional.

We put connectors on the RG-8X, tested, reassembled and re-waterproofed the feedpoint, cut off a short length of weathered support rope, and put the antenna back up Monday afternoon. This required many hands and much patience, but the repaired antenna worked perfectly, and we used it for all of the 80 meter operating in ARRL DX SSB.

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Tower climbers can't be effective without patient ground crew: K4JC, K5LD, N0OJ, AF4Z, N1ZZ, AK4R.

Problem with Beverage Antennas Resolved, Finally

Both Beverage antennas have been intermittent, very noisy, and sometimes totally dead since last November's CQWW contest. The remote station had been having particular problems with unreliability, and the 80 station almost unusable on a very noisy US/JA Beverage. That noise on 80 cost us points in the ARRL CW contest and angered many of our customers who were not being answered.

I had been unsuccessful in fixing these issues before the CW contest. In the days before the ARRL SSB contest I dug in with extra determination and an aggressive troubleshooting attitude, determined to stamp out these problems. It took days of troubleshooting, believe it or not, because of the complexity of the in-house RX antenna cabling and the large number of parts and components involved. Also, troubleshooting an intermittent requires particular patience and a cooperative partner on the other end.

The problem with the 80 US/JA at Station 4, frustratingly, turned out to be a short commercially made BNC male to BNC male cable with an intermittent shield connection at one end. The center pin was making contact, but the shield was intermittently open. I tossed it in the trash, spit on it, cursed its parents, poured coffee grounds on top of it in the can, and found a new, more reliable cable combination. BNCs have been a problem here, so I minimize them when possible.

Then on February 28 I attacked the problem with the RX cabling to the remote station Beverage, isolating two intermittent BNC adapters in that line. This required considerable patient testing, and AK4R was a great help. In frustration I ended up fabricating entirely new cables, and installing them in a way that makes it easy to insert an RX bandpass filter for the remote if needed during contests. This arrangement is now solid, passing the cable-wiggle tests. Done, finally, and death to anyone who disassembles the RX antenna cabling behind Station 3 and 4, or changes or loses any of the labels back there. It works perfectly now, no fiddling needed in the future.

Failed Astron Supplies Back in Service

Years ago we started using switching power supplies at all stations because they are smaller, lighter, and Astron has managed to make them pretty well noise-free. These supplies have been reliable except for their cooling fans, which seem to have short lifespans and whose protective grates rust such that the fans become jammed and can't rotate.

We bought replacement fans, finding out the hard way that not all of the Astrons use the same size fans. N1ZZ brought some 80 mm fans in his luggage after I placed an emergency order with DX Engineering. These fans are very inexpensive (~$8 each), but they have to be the correct sizes.

I replaced the fan in the 50 amp supply with minimal problems after VE3CX last fall found our 10 pt Torx driver to get the supply apart. The DC connector on that one fan was even compatible with the one in the supply. No soldering was needed.

But the other supplies were not nearly as cooperative, as you can see in the photos.

Don (AF4Z) and Dan (N1ZZ) struggling with uncooperative Astron supplies

For starters, the fan in one of the supplies was riveted into the case. The only way to remove it was to drill out the rivets and, in most cases, hacksaw off the remaining heads before the fans could come out.

KE3VV (David) manipulating out rivet heads

AK4R supplied the hacksaw technique and elbow grease, and KE3VV did the final steps with pliers to clear the fan holes. Then Dan and Don installed the new fans, and soldered the wires together because the connectors were incompatible. They found suitable stainless hardware on site to replace the rivets, thanks N0YY for the on-site hardware assortment.

We put those supplies back in service for the ARRL SSB contest and all are working well, and there are several additional new fans now in inventory here.

Meeting of the Presidents

Randy (K7TQ) and Brett (PJ2BR)

Brett was on site to confer with Gene about EME, and I realized that we had two important club presidents here concurrently. That of course called for the above photo of the presidents of the Spokane DX Association and VERONA.

Redundant Power Control for Remote Installed

The remote station AC power is remote-controlled by a web switch from uSwitch, a Boston-based company. This is a very powerful and versatile commercial grade unit that's in service worldwide at utility companies, fire protection systems, and other mission critical applications. The device is IP addressable, so we have full control from off site via port forwarding through our router. Also, there are very sophisticated watchdog and timer capabilities built into the switches.

The PJ2T remote was initially built with one of these switches. It has served well, but in February we added a second switch to enhance reliability (below).

Port 72 and Port 73 remote AC control switches

With this new arrangement, there are two independently addressable switches, so that if one fails we can still power the remote station using the other one. There's a spare port on the second switch for

future use. Only KB7Q and W0CG have the credentials to reach the second switch, which we consider to be a last ditch fail safe recovery option.

1296 EME Class Held at Signal Point

KB7Q coaching PJ2BR (Brett) on how to get his semi-homebrew/kit 1296 500 watt amp working. Gene left his amp on loan with Brett as an example.

KPA-500 and KAT-500 Boxed Up

The photo shows the KPA-500 amplifier and its antenna tuner that have been on loan to the club from K8ND for about five years. This rear view, showing all the connections, is much more interesting than the front panels.

KPA-500 and KAT-500, owned by K8ND

With the introduction of the KPA-1500 into the station, there is no longer a need for this smaller amplifier in our remote station. Jeff kindly told us we could keep his gear on site for backup, so in mid-February KB7Q and I carefully boxed it up in the original Pelican case, together with all needed cables and connectors and a photo of the proper hookup. It will be safe in storage here and available in a pinch if we need it. Thanks K8ND!

Thanks ARRL SSB Team for Screen Replacement

Dorothy polled the ARRL SSB team to see if anyone would be willing to replace some bad window screens. We had bought the needed material a few weeks before, but Geoff was busy with station things and did not feel confident dealing with these particular screens anyway. AF4A volunteered to take this on. While Dorothy and I went to the car lease agency and lunch on February 27, Don and his helpers replaced all six window screens, expertly, and they were done when we returned home. Wow! Thanks Don and everyone else for executing on this not-fun task with skill and energy.

The Death of Cost-U-Less

Cost-U-Less, last day, February 28, 2023

I lived in the Virgin Islands for five months in 2000, and the Cost-U-Less store on St. Thomas was the go-to source for all groceries and housewares and supplies. The store was a godsend. When I first scouted out Curacao in July of 1999, I was delighted to find a CUL store on Curacao, not very far away, and that helped assure us we could survive here just fine.

Because of poor management and stupid merchandising, the Curacao store failed, closing its doors at the end of February, 2023. This is a real loss for us, as we will now have to do that sort of shopping at Goisco, which is an additional 50 minutes driving on a round trip from Signal Point. The Cost-U-Less chain itself is still in business, with stores on multiple islands in the Caribbean and Pacific.

Thanks for Paradan Radio Gift

The PCARS group brought gear to activate two new parks in the POTA program. They did so successfully, with first time activations of Mt Christoffel National Park and Shete Boca Park. After the operations they very kindly made a gift of the battery, a Paradan PS-4P intelligent controller, and the battery charger (photo below). These will be extremely valuable to us, enabling excursions in the field to test our antennas and seek out sources of RFI. Many thanks to Dan, Walter, Vince, and the entire gang for these assets.

Field DC power source donated from Paradan Radio and the ARRL SSB crew.

Long Term PJ2T Wish List

- Automatic switchable bandpass filters for the remote station, nine bands, with controller
- Diesel generator
- Manual AC power transfer switch
- More 3CX1200A7 tubes.

Ridge Crew March 2023

AK4R shoots the photo with N1ZZ looking on. K5LD, N0OJ, and K4JC, the Ridge crew.

There's always work to do on the Ridge, and this week's tasks were to tune the 80 dipole for SSB and to update the epoxy paint on the Ridge tower. K5LD, N0OJ, and K4JC gamely volunteered and up we went. The photo shows the sendoff. We always take photos like this on the chance that this is the last time any of us will be seen alive.

K5LD and N0OJ prior to reaching the work site, in extreme heat and humidity

We had some challenges with wind and light rain, but still managed to recoat most of the top section of the tower and tune the antenna. Several of us came back with grey epoxy paint in places where it did not belong, as usual.

Stew Perry Result 11 March 2023

Congrats to CCC President Jeff (K8ND) who signed PJ2T via the remote in the Spring Stew Perry contest. 144 Qs, 1,200 points, with the #2 claimed score, DX side.

Shack Air Conditioner Back in Service

During the CW contest our 36,000 BTU air conditioner was not cooling effectively, and the air circulation vanes were dead.

There was not time to look at it prior to the contest, but I got to it right after the SSB team arrived. I found copious amounts of dead rat body parts in there, and the heat exchanger was caked with dust. I aggressively vacuumed away all dust, removed all the body parts, and discovered one wire to the vanes motor that a rat had eaten through.

After some top of ladder soldering and rat-proofing for the future, everything is working and the cooling is much more effective. This airco has lasted much longer than expected since its installation in 2009, but we expect to need to replace it soon and are holding back sufficient funds to do so. Sure did miss W8WTS, who is an expert HVAC guy.

W0CG, the airco repairman

1st Time Ever Parks on the Air (POTA) Activation from Curacao, by Walter Aucoin, K5LD

I have coming down to PJ2T for the past 5 years for the ARRL DX SSB Contest. This is a big highlight of my year, and I thoroughly enjoy the trip every year.

In the past 3 years, I have been active in Parks on the Air (POTA) back home. POTA is a far more relaxed operating venture from contesting. It is a very popular program for operating in the field and more new hams, as well as seasoned hams, are taking to it each day. Eventually some of these operators may move toward more serious actual contesting, like ARRL DX SSB. However, to stress the ARRL's famous words about Field Day, that it is not a contest (And we all know better than that), POTA is definitely not a contest, but a program that you work on at your own pace, set goals, earn awards if desired, etc.

I have activated a good many parks around Florida and am also looking for new ones I haven't been to. In November, when I went back home to Louisiana, I brought portable gear with me and was able to do two activations there. It took a little planning, etc., as you need to make sure you have everything, as you can't run back to your station and get the missing things!

When our PCARS team decided last year in the fall, to come back to PJ2T for the ARRL DX SSB Contest, I began to put together the idea of activating parks on Curacao. Upon checking, I found that there were two parks on the island, Chrisoffel National Park and Shete Boka National Park. Both were within a few miles of Signal Point, on the northwest side of the island. Also, I had found that no one had ever attempted or activated either one of the parks. I thought how neat it would be if some of the PCARS/CCC team could be the first ones to activate these parks.

In setting this up, we would need to bring a radio, batteries, and a portable antenna. I have an ICOM 7000, which I have used a number of times for POTA. A good friend of mine, K4AOQ, agreed to lend his BudiStick for the trip. Finally, I approached long time CCC member & wonderful friend, Dan N1ZZ, on bringing down some of his batteries from Paradan Radio, that we could use. I also had a brand new piece of 75 foot coax for the antenna, so we were pretty much set on what we needed.

I also approached Vince K4KC and first-timer Ryan N0OJ, on accompanying me on the activations. That said, we split up the equipment, with Vince carrying the BudiStick and coax, Dan bringing the batteries, and I brought the radio and a laptop for logging.

We headed down to Curacao on Saturday, Feb 25, with all of our equipment. There were no issues at all with either getting thru Miami TSA/security or coming into Curacao. Saturday evening, after a most wonderful and delicious dinner prepared by Dorothy. Vince, Ryan and

I set up the BudiStick between the gazebo and the house, to make sure we could set it up quickly the next morning. That was a wise thing to do, as we ran into issues with the tuning. We followed the instructions, etc, but we were not able to get a decent SWR. Finally, we borrowed some short lengths of RG-8 with a barrel connector from Geoff and were finally able to get the antenna tuned. We later discovered that the connection into the BudiStick hub may have been the issue.

The PJ2T Team ready to leave Signal Point, heading for the 1st time ever POTA activation from Curacao. L-R K5LD, N0OJ & K4JC

We set out Sunday morning about 10AM for Christoffel National Park. It was not too far from Signal Point, and we got there in pretty good time. We paid our admissions and began exploring the park for a spot to set up. After some driving around in the park, we found a suitable spot that we could park in and set up the antenna. With the continuing issues of the connector on the BudiStick, we used the short lengths of RG-8 and tuned for a good SWR. We got the radio set up with the battery, and I got the laptop set up and ready to go. POTA uses self-spotting frequently, and that requires a data/Internet/cell phone connection. Ryan saved the day with his international data plan on his phone, so we could spot and get moving. We all sat in the rental vehicle, since there was very little shade and really no other place to set up.

Entrance to Christoffel Park

Our 1st POTA contact on Curacao was Steve, K4AOQ, and that was most fitting, since his antenna made the activation possible. Once the spot went up and took effect, everyone came looking for us. We passed the mic around to all 3 of us, Vince, Ryan and myself. Operators calling us were amazed and happy and they desperately wanted a POTA contact with Curacao. I took care of all the logging. We got in 87 contacts on Sunday, and that was mostly limited to having to be out of the park by a certain time. We worked a couple of our fellow PCARS members back home & some DX as well. We set a time to cease operating, to allow for tear down of the equipment and also to allow time to get back to the park's exit. On the way home, we enjoyed a late lunch, before heading back to Signal Point.


Vince tuning up the BudiStick


Vince and Ryan on the air


Successful activation on Day 1!

The next day, Monday, we repeated the same thing at Shete Boka National Park. We pretty much followed the same pattern, paid our admission and drove around the park, looking for a place to activate. This 2nd park was certainly much more pleasant and scenic, and offered some great views. We were even visited by a pack of wild goats that roamed through the park. We got 57 contacts in the log. Again, due to short park hours, we allowed ourselves some tear down time and also some time to enjoy the beautiful cliffs on the Caribbean. We grabbed some lunch on the way back to Signal Point afterwards at another restaurant we had not been to.


BudiStick among the wild goats

K5LD with K4JC at the mic

L-R , N0OJ, K4JC & K5LD

Our 1st time ever Curacao activations were a successful! All of the contacts in the log were most appreciative of us being there. Dan has left one of the batteries behind with a charger, and I left the 75 ft coax behind as well, for future activations. We look forward to more successful activations when we return in 2024

Strays

W1USN, Mike Rioux, staying in the neighborhood for the second year and guest operating at PJ2T February 9

Loggers: Mike Maley and Dorothy and I cut down this 25 ft high giant century plant that had grown into the overhead fiber cabling

Kadushi Cliffs Hotel Unit 221/222, site of PJ2C CCC contest in October, 1999, our first Curacao operation. Now abandoned, overgrown, vandalized, and in ruins.

1970: Signal Point on the left with the tribander tower. The now defunct dormitory building for the hotel is partly visible at the far left.

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