

# Amateur Radio Contesting

Fun through Competition on the Air



When radio was new, its capabilities were unknown. The first trans-Atlantic 2-way amateur QSOs took place on November 17, 1924. In May, 1927, the ARRL sponsored the first "International Relay Party" to test the ability of USA and Canadian hams to exchange message traffic with hams outside North America. The purpose was to build a list of stations with proven ability to exchange messages over long distances ... in preparation for future disasters and geographic exploration missions. The original amateur radio operating events were quite literally *tests* of stations and their operators' skills.

The early tests grew into contests, as hams found out it was fun to compete against one another while exercising their stations and discovering new information about the developing science of radio. The ARRL's "International Relay Party" evolved into today's ARRL International DX Contest.

Even today, there's a great deal we still don't know about propagation above 30 MHz, so the data generated through VHF/UHF and microwave contesting really do contribute to scientific knowledge. The scientific books aren't closed about HF propagation, either.



QRP enthusiasts enjoy testing the equipment they've built up from kits. Operating a contest puts the gear to a fast-paced workout. Some QRP contests are light-hearted, with humorous names and funny premises. QRP contesting can be hard, especially when the bands aren't very good, but learning to dig a weak signal out of the noise does wonders for your operating skill.

## Links to organizations that sponsor QRP contests.

QRP ARCI	<a href="http://www.qrparci.org">www.qrparci.org</a>
Adventure Radio Society	<a href="http://www.natworld.com">www.natworld.com</a>
"Freeze Your Butt Off"	<a href="http://www.extremezone.com/~nk7m">www.extremezone.com/~nk7m</a>
EPA QRP Club	<a href="http://www.n3epa.org">www.n3epa.org</a>
New Jersey QRP Club	<a href="http://www.njgrp.org">www.njgrp.org</a>
NorCal	<a href="http://www.fix.net/norcal.html">www.fix.net/norcal.html</a>

VHF contesters often compete outdoors from high elevations, "mountain-topping," to hear and be heard over larger territories. Or they operate as "rovers," moving from one grid square to another during the contest. Our neighbor club The Pack Rats do all this, and more. Serious VHF contesting is predominately on SSB and CW rather than FM, though a few local VHF contests use FM.

Casual participants in contests enjoy building up their collections of states, counties, DXCC countries, CQ zones, and grid squares. Even if they don't turn in a log, they enjoy the exercise.

State QSO parties are an excellent way to sample competitive operating to see if you like it. Pennsylvania has the best and largest of state QSO parties (don't listen to those guys from California!). Sponsored by the Nittany ARC of State College, the Pennsylvania QSO Party offers both the serious contester and the newcomer opportunity to have fun and make friends. The contest this year is October 13-14, 2001.

There are magazines devoted entirely to ham radio contesting. ARRL publishes *National Contest Journal*, and CQ publishes *CQ Contest*.



Is Field Day a contest or an emergency preparedness exercise? The only reasonable answer is "yes." Field Day asks hams to set up quickly and operate under unusual, non-optimum conditions, without the comforts of home and junk box. That's good emergency preparedness training. People who say Field Day is irrelevant to today's emergency comm haven't worked a real-life, big disaster.

On the other hand, it's the most popular operating event in North America, which it probably wouldn't be without the competitive aspect. Field Day is what *you* want it to be ... rather like ham radio in general.

Until relatively recently, contest logging and scoring was a lengthy and headache-producing process done with pencil and

paper. As personal computers came into our shacks, hams created sophisticated programs with which you can log your contacts, know your score in real time, prevent duplicate contacts, connect to packet radio spotting networks, control your rig and antenna rotor, and generate Morse code or RTTY from the keyboard. The programs create the specially-formatted log files to be sent on disk or via the Internet to contest sponsors. For their part, sponsors of major contests and some minor ones use computers to process the submitted logs and produce the results.

<b>NA contest logging software</b> NA is DOS software. It includes templates for many minor contests (e.g., QRP, state QSO parties) that some other programs don't serve.	<a href="http://datom.contesting.com/"><u>datom.contesting.com/</u></a>
<b>WriteLog contest logging software</b> WriteLog is Windows software. It can do RTTY contests as well as CW and SSB.	<a href="http://www.writelog.com/"><u>www.writelog.com/</u></a>
<b>Contesting Home Page</b> All sorts of contesting information and links to software sources.	<a href="http://www.contesting.com"><u>www.contesting.com</u></a>

73 and Good Luck in the Contest!

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