

THE BLACK HOLE



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Adventures in SO2R Land - Part 4

By Bill Axelrod ND9E

So there I was, one Saturday morning trying to figure out how to operate my nascent SO2R station when, YIKES! I started wondering what would happen if I ever (or when) I screwed up and left both radios on the same band and tried to transmit.....

Yup, the one part of all my research that just didn't register in my dim bulb of a brain was that I needed bandpass filters for each radio for self-protection. This time I almost did it right. I looked at the system aspects, wrote down my requirements, did an as-is drawing, a to-be drawing, made lists of what I needed, and for the very first time, though about how I would operate the upgraded station. I saw myself winding up with more buttons, switches, boxes, and indicator lights than I would ever be able to manage. Automation was needed! Lots of automation.

So out I went to purchase two band decoders, two complete sets of W3NQN filters, serials cables for the radios, fancy cables to connect it all up, more fancy cables to automate the antenna switching, all translating to a big bill. Lesson learned: SO2R just isn't cheap or easy.

And one day it was done! A full up SO2R ham station. It even all worked. Of course I spent 4 or 5 weekends configuring software

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Rock the QSO Parties

In an effort to increase SMC activity, we're encouraging everyone to actively participate in state QSO parties in 2009. A calendar listing the state QSO parties for 2009 has been posted on the SMC website. Let's make a concerted effort to rock the state QSO parties.

Missouri QSO Party	18Z, Apr 4 to 05, Apr 5 and 18Z-24Z, Apr 5
Georgia QSO Party	18Z, Apr 11 to 0359Z, Apr 12 and 14Z-2359Z, Apr 12
Michigan QSO Party	16Z, Apr 18 to 04Z, Apr 19
Florida QSO Party	16Z, Apr 25 to 0159Z, Apr 26 and 12Z-2159Z, Apr 26

DX and Contest Lunch

By Craig Thompson, K9CT

An informal lunch was hosted by Craig, K9CT for the pleasure of area DX and Contest enthusiasts. The conversations started at 11 AM and continued until 3 PM in the restaurant meeting room of the Embassy Suites when we were chased out for the next group. More discussion continued in the nearby hotel lounge area. I am sure that everyone had a great time.

28 hams were present and converged from Kankakee, Champaign, Bloomington and the Peoria areas. Groups represented were Society of Midwest Contesters, Metro DX Assn., Peoria Area Amateur Radio Club, Central IL ARC, and Kankakee Area Radio Society. We encouraged those interested in contesting to join SMC. SMC members would help them with contesting and station questions.

The Black Hole



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Membership in **The Society of Midwest Contesters** is open to all persons with a bona-fied interest in amateur radio contesting. For more information contact one of the following officers:

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SMC Dues

Dues are \$10 a year, but may be waived based on the fulfillment of participation requirements:

In the SMC SS circle: Make 100 total Sweepstakes QSOs over the two weekends and submit your score(s) for "Society of Midwest Contesters." In addition, submit one other score for an SMC club competition in one of the following contests: ARRL VHF, 160m, or 10m, NAQP, CQWW, ARRL DX, etc.

Outside of the SMC SS circle: Submit two scores per year for SMC club or team competition in any of the six NAQPS and four Sprints.

Qualifying scores are those submitted during the calendar year prior to January 1.

Donations are still accepted

You can make your payment two ways:

1. Send a check, money order, or cash to:

Zig Markowski - KM9M
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Shirts

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and devices to get it all working. Configuring my Micro-Ham MK2R+ for SO2R was a challenge. Configuring N1MM for SO2R contest logging was frustrating. Seems pretty easy now but it took me a long time to finally get right. Pete N4ZR has published a lot of great set up guides for N1MM including interface setup with MMTTY (yes, the RTTY bug bit in the middle of all this). He saved what little sanity I had left. Configured my general logging program (DXLabs suite). And one day it was done! It even all worked.

I could select a band with radio 1 and a second band with radio 2. The correct filers engaged, the appropriate antenna connected, the earphone and key or keyboard connected to the correct radio, wow! Pretty darn cool stuff. And the powers of the universe rewarded me with a deal too good to refuse on a used Alpha 87A amplifier to replace the only manual adjusted and tuned device I had left, my AL-80B amplifier.

Looking back, I could have saved months of effort and a lot of rework if I had started with the notion that I wanted a SO2R station and done the basic systems engineering. But one can not turn back the clock – just enjoy the fruits of his labor. So enjoy I did. Pure automated SO2R radio enjoyment. All I had to do was to wait for the next contest.

Little did I know that the hardest part was yet to come. I had the systems capability but did I have the mental capability to exploit the SO2R system to the max? Obviously not. Training was in order. So, how does one (old guy) train for SO2R operation? I couldn't find much at all on the web that I found useful.

So, a home brew training program had to suffice. Wow, this SO2R stuff was much more difficult than I had imagined. I started by training myself to just switch back and forth between radio 1 and radio 2 quickly. It was easy to get confused about which radio I was on and which log window on the monitor corresponded to what radio. Then I graduated to chasing DX on two different bands at once. That's harder than it sounds, especially at the bottom of the sunspot cycle. I kept hoping to find simultaneous pileups on two different bands so I could practice calling and working two stations in a SO2R manner.

That's where I am now, trying to gain enough proficiency to actually try SO2R in a contest.

Will I get there - who knows? Was it worth it - absolutely. Would I do it again – hard question. Now that it's done, the notion of having extra gear on the shelf doesn't seem so bad after all. Could I have done it smarter and better – you bet! Did I learn anything – absolutely. And I hope you did as you read this series.

Epilog. And then fate intervened. I decided it was time to retire. Sold my 40 acres of radio heaven (almost heaven, West Virginia – right?) along with towers, antennas, beverages, etc. and moved to East Peoria. If the snow ever melts I'll be putting up a whole new set of antennas, re-establish my SO2R station, et. al. But will I do it right this time? Have I learned some lessons? You bet. Will I learn from these lessons? Wait and see.

73 and GL... Bill ND9E



(Continued from page 1)

We enjoyed food during our introductions and discussed our interests and achievements. An interesting interchange about LOTW was pursued and Don, K9NR, made a short summary of the LOTW system and how to pursue awards. Several in the room had recently achieved the Triple Play award and they were acknowledged.

Several hams had brought DXCC cards to be checked. Jess, AI9L and Patti, AF9H worked together and checked many cards for submission. That was a very nice of them to attend and help out.

After lunch, Ralph, K9ZO, gave a presentation on trips to YN and VP9 for contests. He had many pictures of the stations and interesting scenery. The results of his efforts were outstanding and all attending were encouraged to try a DX location for a contest. Many questions were taken and answered.

Jerry, WB9Z, had recently returned from a DXpedition to Desecheo Island, KP5 using the call K5D. Many were interested in his experience in preparing for the trip, the operating conditions and stories that he could share. An informal question and answer session developed that everyone thoroughly enjoyed. He said that formal presentations were in the offing and we were encouraged to attend them at Dayton or W9DXCC.

Time went quickly by and we were out the door. Mike, N9MB said he might organize a similar gathering at his hotel in Bloomington in the next few months. I think that there would be a lot of interest. Thanks to all that attended.

See pictures on page 6



ARRL DX Phone 2009

Fernando de Noronha PSØF

By Bill Smith W9VA

Late last year I asked my usual host on Fernando de Noronha if I could come down for the ARRL CW DX test in February. The answer was “No” – his pousada was fully booked that weekend, but the March 3 to 10 slot was open, which included the ARRL Phone contest. Not really that interested in phone, I still grabbed it. Where would you rather be in March, Brazil or Chicago?

A little background – my “host” is Andre PYØFF, who owns a restaurant and pousada (B&B) on the island. I have known Andre over 20 years - he had just arrived as a government employee shortly before my first visit in 1988. Since then, he and his wife have visited us in the states, and I’ve been back to the island ten more times. He also had in the late 90’s one of the finest contest stations in South America, very active and a frequent winner in big contests as ZXØF. At its peak, the antenna farm included 7/7 on 10 meters, 5/5 on 15, 5/5 on 20, 3 el full size on 40, and a 2 el yagi on 80/75. Much assistance was provided by the Araucaria DX Group, a well funded and very active club promoting contesting in Brazil. In the last few years, Andre’s attention has been focused on his business on the island, and the Araucaria attention has been focused on two other superstations in the south of Brazil, known in contests as ZW5B and ZX5J, sometimes disguised with other calls. What’s now at Noronha is not too shabby – 7 El on 10, 5 El on 15, 5 El on 20, 2 El on 40, and inverted Vee’s for 80 and 160. The main transceiver is an ICOM IC 756 PRO II, driving an ancient but effective Alpha 76.

Fernando de Noronha enjoys a significant advantage in any contest that uses DXCC entities as multipliers, because it is not Brazil. You must work the one Noronha station in the contest to pick up a mult, not any of the dozen other PY’s that might be active. In addition, Noronha has been moving up in the DXCC 100 “Most Needed” countries list, so the result is instant pile-ups whenever a PYØF appears on the band. This is both good and bad, good in that there are always plenty of stations calling, bad in that they are all calling at the same time on the same frequency. Fortunately, my partner in this operation, Jim K9PPY, is very adept at sorting things out.

My long time friend in Recife – the jumping off point from the mainland to the island

- Jim PY7XC – had arranged a special callsign for us - PSØF. I had used this call on a 1994 trip to the island – I think unused since then – so we had a neat callsign to use before, during, and after the contest, featuring a rare prefix. We spent the days before the contest working on the 75

and 160 meter antennas, some of the control boxes, learning the N1MM software, and being as active as possible on the bands, especially 160 where Noronha was particularly rare. Being only 2 hours behind UTC, the contest starts Friday night at 10 PM local. We started on 20, it stayed open only an hour or so, and then moved down through 40, 75 and 160. Jim did a remarkable job sorting out the low band signals through the noise. We suffered greatly from the lack of a low noise receiving antenna. Jim stayed with the low bands until they closed, then in the morning I got going on 20 until 15 opened at 1230Z. We were watching for the elusive 10 meter opening, seeing on the cluster the stations to the south of us enjoying some North/South propagation. We finally heard K1RX at 1705Z and worked ten other east coast big guns before ten abruptly closed. We didn’t realize it at the time, but these were the only North America signals we would hear on 10 for the entire contest, although other DX, north and south of us, enjoyed extensive 10 meter openings on Sunday. So, then back to 15, and when the rate slowed, to 20. Anyway, Jim and I plowed away following the same operating pattern on Sunday, and finished after dupes with 4,520 QSO’s and 262 multipliers, good for over 3.5 million points. So far looks like the top Multi/Single score from South America, although a few Caribbean and a Mexican station did better, being some 2,500 or more miles closer to the Central USA. Well, yes, maybe they were better operators too! Anyway, we had a great time, with many SMC calls in the log. The logs are up on LOTW, and those old fashioned paper QSL’s will be available shortly via W9VA. 73 Bill



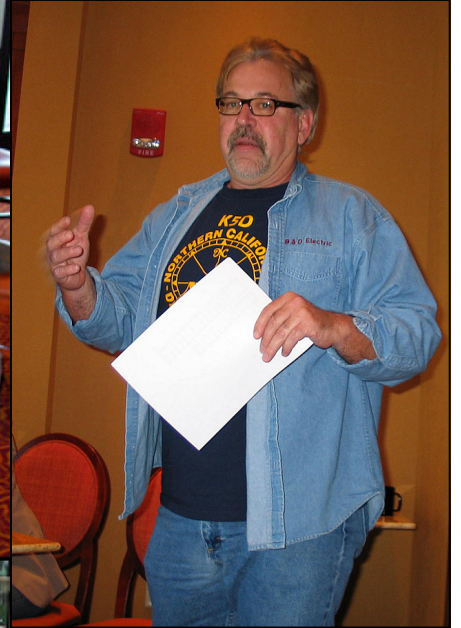
Bill W9VA looking for the 10 meter opening (actually looking at the camera) and Jim K9PPY running on 15 meters. More pictures on page 5.



After the contest in Recife, in the PY7ZZ shack, with well known Brazilian DX'ers PY7ZZ Fred (in the picture on my right) and PY7XC Jim.



The PS0F / PY0FF Antenna Farm....



SMC Stuff

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by NV5A

The SMC logo appears at the top-center of the badge in black and white. Your call sign, first name and city & state appear in dark blue. The SMC name badge as shown with the slot & strap with swivel alligator clip, but there are other choices.

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Contest University

Thursday, May 14, 2009
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Dayton OH

<http://contestuniversity.com/>

17th Annual Dayton Contest Dinner

Saturday, May 16, 2009 -- Crowne Plaza Hotel

Cash bar 5:30pm/Dinner 6:30pm

\$39 per seat/\$290 per table

<http://www.contestdinner.com/>

Dayton Contest Forum

Saturday, May 16, 2009

Afternoon

Location and Presenters TBD

Member/New Member Information/ Update Form

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