

A Contest, me and DXCC
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The DXCC award is a testament to a radio amateur making confirmed contacts with 100 DX entities, and is a worthy accomplishment for any amateur. Achieving this award usually takes many months of air time, chasing QSL's and applying for the award. The award usually gets a prominent position within the shack or operating location.

What if you could get to 100 entities in a weekend? With a 48 hour DX contest, it can be done. You normally see this feat accomplished by the stations with directional antennas and amplifiers; some use multiple transmitters and team up for a contest score. These stations often get 100+ entities on multiple bands.

What about the more modest stations, like the guys running 100 watts to a basic dipole or vertical? Is this a reachable goal? I say yes, and that's what I set out to prove.

My station consists of a 100 watt transceiver (FT857D) with a 300Hz filter for CW, a 40/20/10 fan dipole at 20', and an inverted L for 80M. I use a tuner to get some use from the inverted L on other bands, it's a bit of a compromise, but it does work. All this from a suburban Chicagoland location.

I knew the task was going to be tough, so I opted for assistance. I've used the cluster networks for contests in the past, and saw mixed results as I tried to get the filters set just right. This time around I utilized CC User from VE7CC as my host. I was able to tightly configure the filters using the user interface to get spots I could actually use. I pointed N1MM+ to my local instance of CC User and was set to go.

The CQ WW CW is a 48 hour contest, with plenty of action from around the world. With 48 hours you get 2 days, 2 nights, 2 sunrises, and 2 sunsets which should be ample opportunity to make contacts with stations around the globe. The fickle nature of propagation is somewhat mediated with the long duration of the contest, as you will get openings at some point if you are vigilant, and hopefully poor conditions won't last all 48 hours.

I know from past experience in DX contests that running is an unproductive activity for my station. I only get the stations that can hear me well enough to try calling. Others will just pass me by as too weak to bother stopping. Not to mention stations that might be able to hear me that I cannot hear due to my local noise conditions. My operating mode of choice is S&P. It's a tradeoff: running you don't get stations that never S&P, and S&P you don't get stations that never run. My thinking is that stations operating in desirable (i.e. rare) locations will opt to run, and there will be plenty "run of the mill" stations from countries with ample participation for both running and S&P. I'm fighting the onset of a cold, so I'm not exactly at my best, but there is no category for "under the weather", so I just deal with it.

I start the event at the opening bell on 40M. The activity is frenetic, and the pileups even for common stations means I need to work to get in the log in a timely manner. Hour 00 shows 21 DXCC.

I spend 2 hours on 40M before moving to 20M. Hour 01 shows 43 DXCC.

Conditions on 20M seem flat, I don't know of any other way to describe it. I work some stations, and then hope down to 80M. Hour 02 shows 51 DXCC.

I exhaust 80M and return to 40M, where I return to putting contacts in the log at a steady clip. Hour 03 shows 66 DXCC.

At this point, my activity appears to be slowing down. I work the band map quickly, and then jump to 80M, then to 20M and back to 40M. By now it's slowed to the point where I'm not making a whole lot of progress. Daylight is creeping over Eastern Europe, and it's still light over the Pacific. I opt to get some sleep with plans to get up before sunrise and see about the Pacific activity. Hour 04 shows 76 DXCC.

The sleep was fairly restful and I slept past when I wanted, but this cold is starting to show, so I was glad to rest. After a quick breakfast I'm back in the chair. I hit 40M looking for Pacific stations. I see a few JA's spotted, along with some VK and KH6. I can barely hear any of them, this is disappointing. I log one VK and two KH6, and a few other VE's. Not a productive start to the morning. Hour 12 shows 78 DXCC.

Morning has broken so I abandon 40M in favor of 20M. There is some activity and the conditions seem watery, as if everything is coming via a polar path with auroral conditions. I clear my band map, and then hop to 15M where I find ample stations and better conditions. Hour 13 shows 78 DXCC.

There are plenty of stations on 15M but nothing new. I hop back to 20M, hoping that the conditions have improved. I'm making progress with plenty of stations to work, again clearing my band map. Hour 14 shows 85 DXCC.

I return to 15M and activity seems to have picked up quite a bit over the last hour. I clear my band map once more. Hour 15 shows 87 DXCC.

I take a quick break for a bite to eat and stretch my legs. Returning to the fray I finish some new entries on the band map before it dries up, so I jump to 20M. More stations on the band map. At this point in the game I'm working the multipliers on the band map first, and then clearing the other stations. Hour 16 shows 87 DXCC.

I make a quick sweep of 10M and don't find any activity. I settle on 15M and find plenty to keep me busy. I go to the top of the hour before I must attend to domestic issues. Hour 17 shows 89 DXCC.

I return and see that 10M appears to have decent activity. I hop up there and work any stations I can hear. Not much new at this point, but I got some band mults. I switch to 15M and score an FG. Hour 19 shows 90 DXCC.

The new hour brings a few band mults before 15M dries up for me. I bounce over to 20M and resume logging stations. I'm getting mults with regularity at this point and it's looking good. Hour 20 shows 96 DXCC.

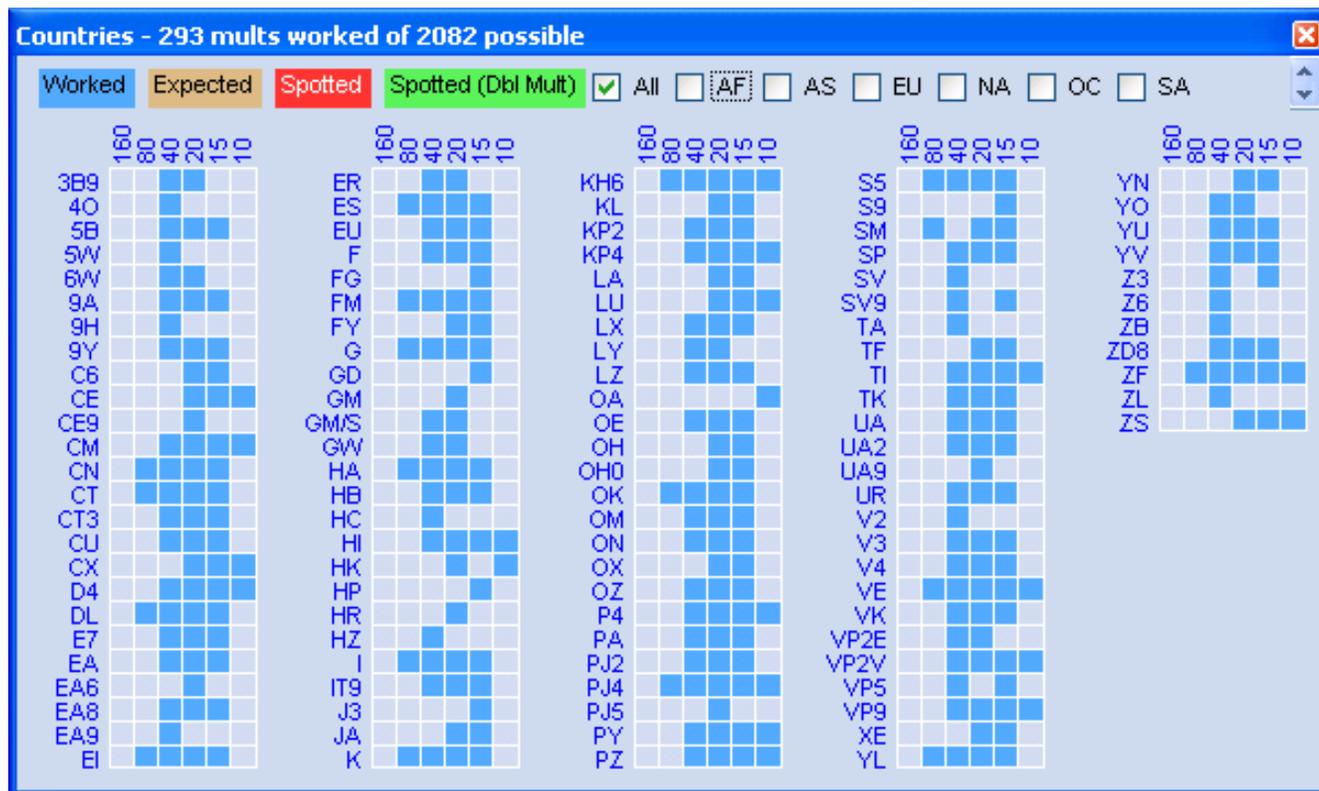
The new hour isn't very productive mult wise. I continue to work my band map, clearing out the mults first, and then clearing all the other stations. I split time between 20M and 15M trying to be where the action is, which hopefully is an opening to someplace new. Hour 21 shows 98 DXCC.

Again, a new hour has me bouncing between 15M and 20M, with wasted jaunts to 10M. Again, clear the band map and change bands. Hour 22 shows 98 DXCC.

I'm on the cusp of achieving my goal, and I can feel my next two entities are out there... somewhere. I see that 40M appears to be the place to be, so that's where I move. There are plenty of stations, and some promising looking mults. I quickly score a 6V and I'm getting giddy. Only one more to go. I put stations in the log hoping the next one I work will be the one. There it is! At 23:21 on day one of the contest, I work EA9UG for #100! I did it! One hundred entities in less than 24 hours, with 14:45 of operating time – it only took 418 QSO's to do it. An accomplishment for my station. Hour 23 shows 100 DXCC.

The start of the new day (GMT) brings a TA and CE9. Go figure. I spend two hours trying to get 2 entities, and here I've gotten 4 in just over an hour! From here on out, I'm in happy time. I'm just trying to fill out my score, to make a good showing. The rest of the event I'm working the band map, mults first, and then clearing the other stations. I casually slip through pileups to land HZ. It's nice to get in and out quickly on those. The same thing happened on KH0, where a pileup was just a din of noise, but I managed to get in and out quickly. It also happened with 3B9 on two bands.

I wrap up my contest with 650 QSO's and 111 entities, all with 22:45 hours of seat time. My cold kept my BIC time down a bit more than I would have expected, but all in all, it was satisfying.



Now, for some observations.

My call is not really that unique, at least not in my experience. I often times get called K9YC, AB9Y,

or in the case of DX events, HB9YC – this one is really tough because the European stations know this as a local call and when I send zone 4, they immediately know they busted the call and ask for a clarification.

I'm amazed at the quality of many of the operators I encountered. On many first contacts (meaning I'm not already in their log) they send 9YC? 5NN 15 AB9YC 5NN 15. They didn't get my call, but figured it out all before I sent it a second time. Those are some really good ops. Others who have me already in the log send 9YC? AB9YC 5NN 14. Impressive. I don't think my CW skill is at that level just yet so I have some new goals on my list.

I didn't document how I used my antennas for any single contact so here's how I put them to use. I have both a horizontally and a vertically polarized option. When working a more challenging station, I always toggle the antennas to determine which one is best for the current situation. Sometimes the vertical reaches VK better, at other times the dipole gets to VK on the first call. I've yet to discover a pattern, but switching is part of my operating habits. Often I find that I leave my antenna on the last one that made a contact and don't change it unless I'm not getting through when I think I should. Having differently polarized antenna options made the difference on more than a few contacts, many of them new mults. Conventional wisdom says the vertical should carry the load for DX, but for my station, that doesn't seem to be the case as the dipole is often my primary choice.

Something that the beam stations contend with is openings to parts of the world. In order for them to get through, they must rotate their antennas. If they are not pointed to an opening, they miss out on stations. With my near-omni dipole, and omni-vertical, I hear stations from all directions all the time, and can work all the points of the compass in consecutive contacts. Perhaps this is a case where having less is actually more.

One thing that seems to slip by less experienced operators is presuming that you are heard by a station at the same readability as you hear them. They find a weak station and pass it by thinking they won't be heard. On the contrary, I scored 5W (40M 13:15z) when my S meter never moved. He was buried so deeply in my noise (S2 at the time) that if I was spinning the dial I would have passed right over it. Because I saw the spot I knew there was something there. I adjusted every setting (preamp, attenuator, DSP, RF gain, etc.) I had, including way higher volume when I heard my call – I got him in the log (already confirmed on LotW just days following the event!). This is just one memorable example from my notes, but it played out in a similar fashion for many of the more distant contacts.

There you have it, a DXCC in a weekend from a modest suburban station. If I can do it, anyone can. Is it easy? No. Is it work? Yes. Is it fun? YES! Anyone up for a friendly competition next year? Or maybe collaborate and coordinate our efforts and team up on those unique stations?

Don't let the CQ WW pass you by. It can be loads of fun. You will learn so much about myriad aspects of radio, your station, and you – you will be all the better for it.

See you on the air.

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