

THE BLACK HOLE



ARRL SS Unlimited Team Champs 2000, 2001, 2002

Official Journal of The Society of Midwest Contesters

Volume XVI Issue I

January 2008

2007 Sep VHF Recap

By Mike Kasrich, AJ9C

I hope everyone had a happy and safe New Years Eve. As I sit here looking at the snow that fell last night, reviewing some messages from the reflector and from the board, I think it is appropriate to recount some of what we as a group have done during 2007 and set a few things for 2008.

The SMC has function more as of an umbrella group for those that want to submit scores together. Steps have been taken to change some of that so that the SMC is not so much a name we use for contests but a club we belong to that features our favorite activity. Part of that problem has been a spotty transition from one club officer to the succeeding office holder. To address some of that we now have a club account with Chase Bank and our Paypal account is linked to the club rather than an individual. The board has set aside a floor amount which cannot be budgeted so that club will generally not be out of funds. Zig has created an archives of sort so that when the next person steps up to be Treasurer there will be a record of where the money is, what plaques we sponsor and what obligations occur from year to year. This doesn't sound like much maybe but will make the next group of officers job much easier.

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Upcoming Contests

ARRL RTTY Roundup	Jan 6	18Z, Jan 5 to 24Z
NAQP CW	Jan 13	18Z, Jan 12 to 06Z
NAQP SSB	Jan 20	18Z, Jan 19 to 06Z
ARRL Jan VHF SS	Jan 21	19Z, Jan 19 to 04Z
CQ 160-Meter CW	Jan 27	00Z, Jan 26 to 24Z
Minnesota QSO Party	Feb 2	14Z-24Z
NA Sprint CW	Feb 3	00Z-04Z
CQ WW RTTY WPX	Feb 10	00Z, Feb 9 to 24Z
NA Sprint SSB	Feb 10	00Z-04Z
ARRL Inter. DX CW	Feb 17	00Z, Feb 16 to 24Z
CQ 160-Meter SSB	Feb 24	00Z, Feb 23 to 24Z
NAQP RTTY	Feb 24	18Z, Feb 23 to 06Z
ARRL Inter. DX SSB	Mar 2	00Z, Mar 1 to 24Z
NA Sprint, RTTY	Mar 9	00Z-04Z
Wisconsin QSO Party	Mar 10	18Z, Mar 9 to 01Z

Is a New Solar Cycle Beginning?

By Dr. Tony Phillips, Science@NASA

From: <http://www.physorg.com>

It may not look like much, but "this patch of magnetism could be a sign of the next solar cycle," says solar physicist David Hathaway of the Marshall Space Flight Center.

For more than a year, the sun has been experiencing a lull in activity, marking the end of Solar Cycle 23, which peaked with many furious storms in 2000--2003. "Solar minimum is upon us," he says.

The big question now is, when will the next solar cycle begin? It could be starting now.

From SOHO, a UV-wavelength image of the sun and a map

The Black Hole



The **Black Hole** is published monthly, September through June, by The Society of Midwest Contesters. Permission for use of the materials is hereby granted on the sole condition that credit is given to the source of those materials.

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Brian Maves, K9QQ

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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. The club doesn't collect annual dues, but instead funds everything through member donations. For more information contact one of the following officers:

BOARD

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SMC Needs Your Financial Support

As one of the top contest clubs in the nation, we continue to sponsor plaques for a number of major contests including Sweepstakes, ARRL DX, CQWW, and CQWPX, as well as make monetary donations in the interest of promoting radio sporting.

A few years ago we decided to eliminate the formal dues of \$10 per year, and instead maintain funds through member donations. We encourage all members to consider making an annual donation to the club. Your generous donations allow us to continue to expand our support of radio sporting.

You can make your donation two ways:

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

Zig Markowski - KM9M
50 E. Eureka Drive
Lemont, IL 60439-3970

2. Use Paypal and email your donation to dues@w9smc.com.

W9SMC

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SMC Stuff

To get your SMC stuff, see the last page of the newsletter or visit the SMC website, <http://w9smc.com/merchandise.htm>



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VHF Column - New Rover Rules in Effect

By Kevin, W9GKA

The VUAC proposed rover rules have now been incorporated into the ARRL rules set, "Contest Rules Above 50 MHz". They are now in effect. QST did NOT have the rules changes in the announcement for the upcoming January VHF contest, as the magazine went to press before the adoption of the rules. But please be advised that the rover rules apply to the 2008 January VHF Sweepstakes and beyond, according to the reflectors that I monitor. There may be a few revisions to the new rules, as there are some discrepancies between the final printed version and recommended versions. For right now, here are the salient details of the new rules:

The rules clarify a few small but contentious issues that have popped up over the years. As to multiple drivers and ops, rovers are now expressly allowed two ops, as well as any number of drivers and observers (Rule 2.3). This resolves the issue of whether extra help for driving and operating is allowed. Some people also wanted a separate class for solo-person rovers if multiple drivers / ops were allowed, but this proposal did not make it into the final rules. The family rule looks like it is again allowed, this time by specific provision (Rule 2.3.1A). Also, rovers must use the / r designation on all modes (2.3.4). This has not always occurred in the past, but really is a necessity in light of existing rule 2.3.6 (see below discussion).

Now for the major changes. Rovers have been divided into three classes: 1) the existing rover class; 2) a new category for Limited rover; and 3) a new category for Unlimited rover.

The limited category has the same rules as the existing rover class, except that the rover can only submit a log with four VHF bands. Presumably (but not actually in the new limited rule itself), the limited should be able to operate more than 4 bands, submitting only the best four VHF bands in the log and then treating the other bands as checklogs. This is the same practice that is specifically allowed in the Limited Multi-op rules (2.6.2). The general intent behind the Limited was to develop a category for the non-microwave rovers and new people first getting into rovers. The danger, of course, is that we may see reduced microwave activity in future years if everyone moves into the limited rover. That is a real possibility, as there has been a migration of people to the limited-multi category

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SMC Circle Calculators

By Brian Maves, K9QQ

Thanks to the efforts of Dave, N9KT, we've added a new tool to the SMC website to help you determine if you're eligible to submit your logs for SMC in the ARRL contest club competitions. Dave developed club circle calculators for the ARRL HF and VHF contests and we've linked them to the SMC homepage.

To qualify to be in the SMC for HF contests, you must be within 175 miles of the center of the SMC HF circle which is currently centered at 40.8167, -88.7333. For VHF contests you must be within 175 miles of the center of the SMC VHF circle centered at 40.5583, -88.9500.

Most of you will be able to look at the maps and determine that you're in the circle, and can submit scores for the club. If you are near the edge of the circle though, you can use the calculator on the page to see exactly how far you are from the center, and verify whether you're in or out.

To calculate exactly how far you are from the center of the SMC HF/VHF circle, enter your latitude and longitude into the text boxes, then click the button to calculate. Dave's calculator allows you to use a variety of formats:

Preferred - Signed decimal degrees where negative indicates West/South (e.g. 39.793609, -86.23479)

Deg-Min-Sec followed by N/S/E/W (e.g. 39°47'37"N, 86 14 5 W, or 0861405W)

If you don't know your exact latitude and longitude he has a link to a site that can help you with that too.



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

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As a club I wish I could say all was sunshine and roses. The SMC was formed to give the Midwest a "personality" for competition in SS.

Apparently the SMC lacks some "personality". In 2007 our points and participation have dropped, again. Kevin/W9GKA did an excellent job trying to rally the troops and compiling the statistics for the last SS. The numbers seem to suggest the number of logs we had dropped 20% and the total points fell 14%. This is continuing a trend started since our last SS unlimited win. We are not unique though in having a fall in logs and points. Our drop just seems to be a bit more than the PVRC, Mad River and others. Oddly enough participation is up in the ARRL 160 contest without any prodding. There has been considerable discussion among the board members as to what can be done to generate enthusiasm for the SMC and SS in particular but no answers at this point.

Our club doesn't have a repeater, fox hunts or a hamfest as some local clubs do. We focus on "performance operating" as a group. Our repeater is every contest you can submit a club score for each year. I know that SS isn't everyone's cup of tea but that is our club's "hamfest" each year. It is our big event. It's what gets the rest of the country to sit up and take notice of good our operators are here in the Midwest.

We need all members to support our club activities the same as any club to provide continuation of our club persona.

I'm not sure what the answer is to generate enthusiasm that is a work in progress. I do know that we are only as good as the antz , big and small, that get on in SS, CQWW, ARRL DX and NAQP/Sprints and submit scores under our flag. I remember vaguely Tom/AE9B on the reflector back in the heady days of unlimited wins commenting on the NFL like attitude we all had. We strapped it on and delivered a lick to the opposition. We need to bring back that attitude. The NCCC is right now the only club that is maintaining that level of enthusiasm. Is California better than us? Only YOU can provide that answer.

Enough of the introspective searching. What are we doing to improve the situation?

1) Be prepared for some sort of dues/activity requirement for the SMC starting in 2008. Details are being worked out. If you want to be a member of the SMC you should either get on the air and submit a score with SMC on the participation line or kick in a bit to the treasury so we can sponsor plaques.

2) I am asking each member to go through their logs for whatever HF contest you operated and see if there is a local

you worked that isn't on our roster. Invite them to join. If you are a shy type, send me the call and will get a hold of them.

3) Hold a local meeting of the SMC somewhere. We need local gatherings so that we can get face to face to talk about our contest operations, improvements we are making and help we may need in getting the job done. Have a program to attract people. All contesters are Dxers there are lots of folks out here in our club that would be happy to share their dx experiences. If you get a meeting organized let us on the board know. Someone close can stop in and give you a club update.

There are more initiatives in the pipeline such as a club award/challenge. They will be announced as the details get hammered out. I'm excited about the SMC and I want all of you to be excited too. Back to net.....

Ninecee



The operating position at YS/K9GY. Eric traveled to El Salvador for the 2007 CQWW CW contest. He will have a write-up about his experiences in YS in the next issue of the Black Hole.

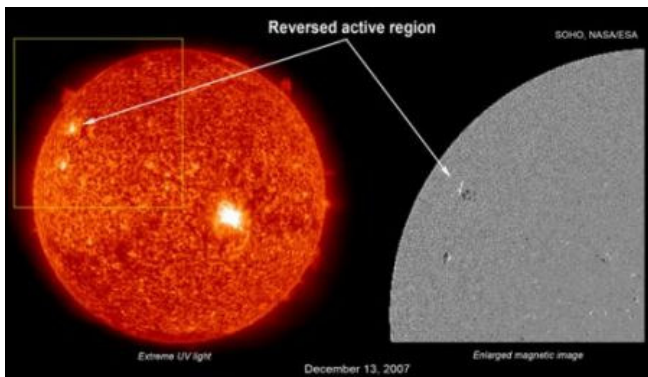


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showing positive (white) and negative (black) magnetic polarities. The new high-latitude active region is magnetically reversed, marking it as a harbinger of a new solar cycle.

"New solar cycles always begin with a high-latitude, reversed polarity sunspot," explains Hathaway. "Reversed polarity " means a sunspot with opposite magnetic polarity compared to sunspots from the previous solar cycle. "High-latitude" refers to the sun's grid of latitude and longitude. Old cycle spots congregate near the sun's equator. New cycle spots appear higher, around 25 or 30 degrees latitude.

The region that appeared on Dec. 11th fits both these criteria. It is high latitude (24 degrees N) and magnetically reversed. Just one problem: There is no sunspot. So far the region is just a bright knot of magnetic fields. If, however, these fields coalesce into a dark sunspot, scientists are ready to announce that Solar Cycle 24 has officially begun.



From SOHO, a UV-wavelength image of the sun and a map showing positive (white) and negative (black) magnetic polarities. The new high-latitude active region is magnetically reversed, marking it as a harbinger of a new solar cycle.

Many forecasters believe Solar Cycle 24 will be big and intense. Peaking in 2011 or 2012, the cycle to come could have significant impacts on telecommunications, air traffic, power grids and GPS systems. (And don't forget the Northern Lights!) In this age of satellites and cell phones, the next solar cycle could make itself felt as never before.

The furious storms won't start right away, however. Solar cycles usually take a few years to build to a frenzy and Cycle 24 will be no exception. "We still have some quiet times ahead," says Hathaway.

Meanwhile, all eyes are on a promising little active region. Will it become the first sunspot of a new solar cycle?

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since the multi class was segmented several years ago. It has gotten to the point where only the really big players are in the original multi class, while everyone else is a Limited-Multi (even then, we have some big stations like K9NS that are only on four bands). We will have to see how things shake out with these new rules.

The limited class also has an express power limitation as those defined for the SOLP (2.1.1) while there is no reference to power limit with the existing rover class. I suppose this means that the existing rover class can have B class power levels, although there is no specific reference that I can find to power levels in the regular rover class. A big change intended to address the pack rover situation is that both the existing rover class and the new limited class has a 100 QSO limit on the number of contacts that can be made with other rovers (2.3.8). This effectively makes pack roving legal for these two classes, up to 100 QSO's. There are no new restrictions placed on captive rovers, so the practice of sponsoring rovers will continue unaffected (it is not a problem in the Midwest, but has been a big concern on the east coast).

The Unlimited class is specifically exempt from the 100 QSO limit; is allowed to have more than 2 ops; and has no express power limitations (2.5). The intent here was to create a separate class for the major pack operations (i.e. California rover teams) without outright banning the practice. Personally, I would have just prohibited these operations as artificial point production factories, and then go with the 100 QSO limit for all rovers. But all rules revisions tend to be an art form that balances competing interests and objectives.

There are currently no express restrictions on rovers contributing to the club aggregate score. Some members of the VUAC have indicated that the intent of both the advisory committee and the League Program & Services Committee was to exclude unlimited rovers from the club aggregate score, and the ARRL contest desk has also indicated that unlimited entries will be excluded from club scores. A written exclusion is now in the works to bring the new rules into full synch with the various versions of the final proposed rules. Excluding unlimiteds from the club aggregate score was considered necessary to avoid the continuing possibility that pack operations could severely distort the club competition event.

There is another wrinkle in the new rules. Regular and lim-

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ited rovers must transport all the equipment, power supplies, and antennas used at each operating site (2.3.3). This rule was not discussed during the developmental stages, so it's origin and rationale is something of a mystery to most observers. However, unlimited rovers are specifically exempt from this rule (2.5). This is also something of a mystery. The exemption may have just been intended to allow for commercial power and the like to be used by the unlimiteds at remote spots (such as mountain-tops having power). It may have also been intended to settle a question as to whether separate support vehicles could be used to transport antennas, masts, generators, and other equipment between stopovers. There has been apprehension by some that the exemption of Rule 2.5 now opens the possibility that a NCCC styled multi / single strategy may occur in the unlimited rover class. Existing VHF Rule 1.3.A dampens this possibility however, since transmitters, receivers, or antennas used to contact one or more stations may not subsequently be used under any other call during the contest period. This is unlike the HF rules that only specify a prohibition on transmitters being used under other call signs. We really dunno at this point why 2.3.3 was put into the rules, nor how 2.3.3 and 2.5 ultimately will be interpreted or used.

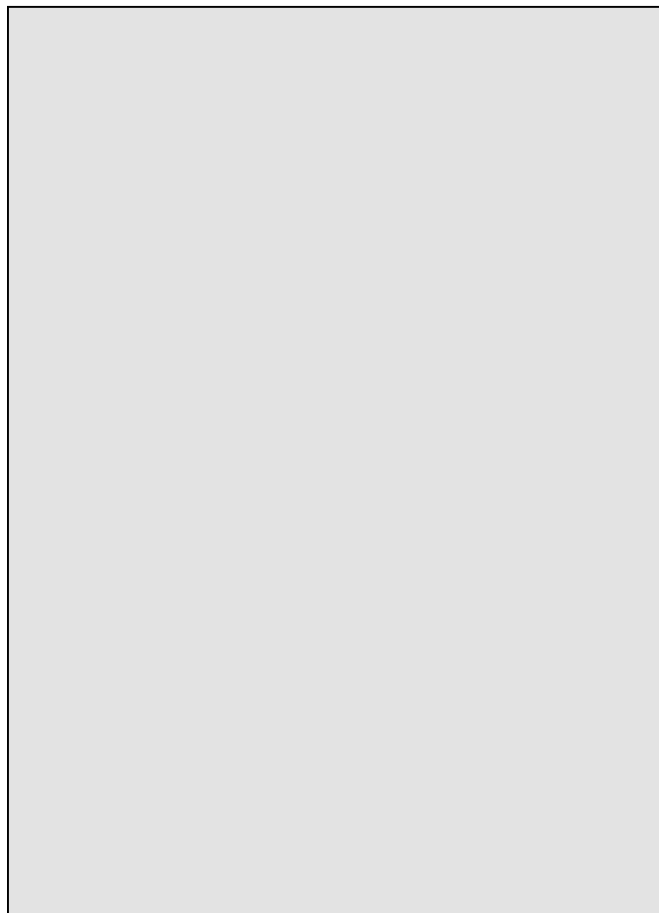
There could also be another interesting strategy developing on the four band limiteds. It may be to their advantage to develop bigger antenna systems and go to fewer grids having high ground. Instead of a "shoot N scoot" run, they may become more of a two-person portable operation, going to high ground with tilt-over / crank-up antennas on a trailer. A 40 foot antenna system with LMR 400 line, mast-mounted preamps, a set of stacked antennas on 4 bands, generator power, and which casually moves to 4 + high hills / grids over a contest weekend would certainly be feasible for a two person deal to do. A nicely equipped camper or RV could round out the accoutrements. Such an operation would begin to look and feel more like a limited-multi than a rover, except that it moves around during a contest weekend. It would take lots of advance planning and clearance for locations, but that type of rover would have excellent ears and capable power levels. It would simply be hard to beat. In fact, I can't really see a rover with antennas at rooftop and on batteries having a chance against a well-organized operation with substantial antennas. Anyone from the SMC interested in this????

Also in the existing rules but something that we should more seriously look at, Rule 2.3.6 expressly allows rover operators to submit separate logs for their own QTH as well as their own rover entries. Thus, we could increase our log counts simply by operating from the QTH and then running a rover across several grids. The same call would be used, only with the / r designation when rover. I think the op can even contact the same stations from the same

grid and bands, so long as he is at the QTH on one contact and in the rover on another contact. For those stations with a decent antenna system at the QTH, double log entries could really zoom the club aggregate points. Imagine hitting all the same SMC members a second time as a QTH QSO. That would not only provide additional points and logs from the QTH activation, but it would also enhance all other club member's points through the additional contacts. If all rovers in the club would have a dual log policy, the cumulative effect on the club aggregate could be quite noticeable.

Overall, the new rover rules attempt to achieve several objectives, not the least of which are to reduce pack activities, encourage new rovers, and address "de facto" microwave arguments. In addition to these objectives, the new rules may end up providing additional strategies to our well-informed club members.

I want to again thank Dick, W9GIG, and Kermit, K9XA, for their Central Division activity and for their continuing League involvement. The process was much more transparent this time around than in the 2003-2004 rules revision cycle.



SMC Stuff

SMC Clip-on Badge

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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KC9FD

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