The most interesting question for the June 2007 VHF QSO Party is how you think it compared to the same event in 2006. Split decision! An emphatic yes for some, including the multi-operator team at K8GP and all the long-haul QSOs they had on 144-222 and 432 MHz. But for others it was a struggle to fill the logs, as 6 meters did not have the conditions encountered last year for much of the country or much of the contest period. Sixty scoring records were set last year. Undoubtedly many will say the 2007 event, held June 9-10, was a mere shadow of 2006, as there was so little propagation on 6 meters. And supporting that opinion is the fact that top scores in 5 out of 6 operating categories were about half of what they were last year.

One contestant in the Midwest put it this way, “How bad was it? It was so bad that I didn’t hear K2DRH on 6 meters all weekend.” On the other hand, single-operator K2DRH shows up with a respectable 6 meter total of 82 grids. And WB8JU/R asked, “Who turned off the propagation?” Yet 16 stations, including one low-power single op and two high-power single ops worked 100 grids or greater on 6 meters, with K8GP working 180 grids. K3GM added this note to his entry, “Once again, the Magic Band didn’t let us down for the June contest. We had a fine opening here in northeast to the midwest, and later on, to the south. I’m hooked on 6.”

Weather: Always an Adventure

The weather seemed to be more reasonable this year than it was last year. A high pressure area seemed to dominate the central part of the country. Some groups reported hot muggy weather for their portable setups, interspersed with thundershowers and lightning. K7JA, SOLP in his portable tent in DN03 (SE Oregon) told the harrowing story on the ARRL Web site soapbox of winds, rain and freezing weather that knocked down his antennas multiple times, tearing holes in his tent, allowing water to drip onto his electronics. With the moisture in his rig it wouldn’t work, but then in the daylight it dried out and came back to life again. The final straw was the ticks he found on his body, sharing the weekend with him.

Kevin, KL0RG, and Paul, K7CW, visited Prince of Wales Island, Alaska (IOTA NA-041) in rare grid locator CO35 to take part in the 2007 June contest. Kevin lives nearby, in Ketchikan, but Paul traveled by Alaska Marine Highway ferry from Bell- ingham, Washington to get there. They were able to hand out that rare grid multiplier to 74 other stations over the weekend, with many of the contacts made using WSJT and meteor scatter. (Be sure to see the Sidebar on the ARRLWeb results.)

There are several multi-op groups that bring their VHF gear and teams to the same spots each year to keep a tradition of friendly competition, continuous station improvement to facilitate the on-the-air experience for old-timers, newcomers and rovers. Single-ops have often had the experience of planning out a weekend with schedules for various WSJT modes and propagation and operating time characteristics, to use the contesting hours efficiently. The synergies created between the casual ops, single-ops, multi-ops, rovers and QRP portable stations makes for some predictable results and some challenges. The issue of use of the calling frequency has been raised again on the VHF contesting reflector. In more VHF-active areas, with higher population densities, activity is spread across 200 kHz or more, with CQ callers and CQ responders often moving up and down the band, and with the “big gun” multi-ops spacing themselves to avoid excessive QRM. Gene, W3ZZ, an active member of the Grid Pirates, related his experience this year with the calling frequency dilemma. When they called CQ on 144.200, they found many more responders from the central part of the country, but missed many of the northeast corridor stations on 2 meters and were unable to “run the bands” with them.

Although log submission numbers were down this year by almost 20% from 2006, it was up from 2005. The anomaly of 2006 in the dramatic increase in logs submitted appears to be related to the six meter conditions that year. In comparing my personal contest logs to all of the contest logs submitted to the ARRL, it appears that there are still a large percentage of participants who never submit their scores, but certainly enjoyed the event and made it fun for others. Fun, I say, as there is always joy in adding another call.
The Rover entries continue to expand, and this year the number was up to 98 rover logs. Rovers have learned that VHF contesting can be very fulfilling, once their antennas are above the treetops and buildings and looking out into the log and another band-multiplier into the score; and there is nothing more frustrating than tuning or calling QO and having no response. Even if things appear to be slow, a contact in the log every now and then with another band multiplier keeps the operators interested and operating.

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of 10 W and the use of portable power, these stations required an excellent elevation in a relatively populated area with lots of gain in the antenna to make their impressive scores. There appear to have been considerable opportunities to break section scoring records in this category.

### Multi-Operator

Pooling resources and mobilizing a team creates a common goal for a formal or informal group of VHFers, and often provides new opportunities for newcomers to participate. VHF beginners can also take this experience to appreciate the differences between the higher and lower bands, equipment, location, propagation and operating skills. Having lived in a VHF-compromised QTH, I had been a multi-op participant and for the past 20 years, I have participated as a rover. I experienced the frustration of foliage and fixed structure signal blockage, and as a result I always head for the hills. Almost all of the multi-operator groups have established themselves at excellent elevations, with towers and antennas that have a clear view of the horizon in most directions. A well planned and executed group station brings a high level of on-the-air activity to all of these radio-contesting events, with many of them propagating additional single-ops and rovers over time.

A small margin separated the top scorers in the Limited Multi-operator category. The top scoring stations in this group have been in a tight competition for several years. First, 2nd and 3rd places were separated by less than 10 percent at the 400k point level. The Wopsononock Mountain group scored 443k for top honors here, having moved into 1st place after being 2nd last year and 3rd the year before. The W4IY group also climbed a notch in each of their final scores from 169k down to 47k. They parlayed their win from last year into a credible 84 grids worked this year. They also topped an old record of 76 grids with an incredible 300,000 and 100,000 respectively.

The big story this year was the dramatic scores of two excellent multi-operator stations K8GP and W2SZ who battled it out for 1st place, as they have for several years. The winner is: K8GP, the “Grid Pirates,” taking advantage of some unique propagation, calling CQ incessantly, scouring the bands, seeking the rovers and moving stations up the bands. They amassed 2.38 million points to beat W2SZ, the “Mount Greylock Expeditionary Force” by 300,000 points. Both of these multi-operator groups beat their 2006 scores by 300,000 and 100,000 respectively.

There is no competition as keen as one between the two multi-operator giants, K8GP and W2SZ. The Grid Pirates celebrated their 10th anniversary of contesting on Spruce Knob in West Virginia at 4863 feet above sea level. With a set of well equipped vehicles that grind up the marginal mountain roads and a highly dedicated team of operators, they parlayed their win from last year into a repeat performance. It seems that everything went well for them, including a fantastic tropospheric opening into the midwest and southwest and working stations out to over 600-700 miles. They appear to have set an all time high record for 222 grid multipliers, topping an old record of 76 grids with an incredible 84 grids worked this year. They also broke their own record of 77 grid multipliers on 432 with a whopping 94 grids this year. Their final score was 2.382 million points. A complete report of the Grid Pirates contesting efforts including pictures, video and audio clips can be seen on their Web site (www.k8gp.net/).

The Mt Greylock Expeditionary Force (www.mgef.org), W2SZ, continues to set a standard for multiops with a score of 2.080 million points. This year the road and the summit of Mt Greylock was closed to the public for a major road rebuilding project. The group’s cordial relationship of more than 35 years with the state officials as well as the fact that ham radio operators are first responders in time of emergency went a long way to obtaining special permission to allow the group to access their usual portable QTH, albeit with a smaller crew and lacking a working lodge on the summit. In a band-by-band analysis, it’s clear that the MGEF
holds an advantage over the Grid Pirates in the area of microwave contacts, thanks to so many rovers in the Northeast that are equipped by the team for QSOs on the upper frequencies. On the other hand, the opening experienced by the Grid Pirates gave them a 130 grid multiplier advantage, despite having 450 fewer QSOs in their logs. This competition is bound to continue as both groups have several dedicated well-maintained vehicles with powerful transmitters and sensitive receivers, substantial towers and antennas, well situated operating locations and a loyal and finely trained group of operators.

In 3rd place, for a third year in a row W3CCX, the Pack Rats (www.packratvhf.com) scored 792k. It was a year of change for this club as the operating configurations were changed, a newer and reduced number of operators participated, and an unanticipated set of minor problems slowed some of the microwave operations. They also faced some mountain top changes in power availability, but an additional run of 250 feet of cable overcame the gap. K5QE held 4th place again with a score of 528k and in 5th place was maintained by K3YTL with 506k points. The order of finish of these top 5 multi-operator groups was exactly the same as last year. Again sharing some of the top scoring activity across the country, 6th through 10th places were captured by W4NH, N2NK, KB0HH, KM5PO and W0EEA.

Rover
N6TEB took first place this year with 322K, and improvement of 30k from last year. In second place, N6DN with 284k improved his score from 2006 by 23k. K2TER in third place with 157k and K2QO in 4th place with 106k seemed to share similar routes in western NY. W1RT in 5th place had his first serious outing in the jitney that he purchased from now silent key W3IY and scored 89k in a Mid-Atlantic set of grids. Sixth through 10th places were won by W0ZQ, W9FZ, KC3WD, VE3NPB and KF8QL with scores from 86k down to 54k. Although the Rover category continues to have some regulars in the top 10 box, there are some welcome newcomers to this revered status. Reviewing the similar QSO numbers and the grids worked on the microwave bands by the top two scorers, you can draw your own conclusions; what tactics and strategies did they use to garner scores in the 300k range when there were no other West Coast stations appearing in the top 10 box scores.

As the numbers of rovers increase, and their band capabilities continue to improve, they have become a new force and source of substantial opportunity for fixed stations. I was stung by a remark that showed up recently on the VHF contesting reflector; a rover was told by a fixed station that they would have to check and see if they needed the rover’s grid multiplier before completing a contest exchange. Hopefully this was just a misguided and mistaken comment by a newcomer rather than an attitude of that particular station toward rover activity. Each and every contact should be another building block of score, communications ability and efficiency, and no contact should be refused. What’s more, several multi-operator groups and single operators have analyzed their logs and noted that rovers account for 20-35% of more of their contest scores.

Club Competition
Watch out! The Society of Midwest Contesters put together 55 logs to post a 1.1 million point score in the Unlimited Club category. The SMC has grown in number and activity, as they entered 28 logs in ’05 and 36 logs in ’06. Competition leads to more activity, something we all enjoy. The Potomac Valley Radio Club had their three-peat topping the Medium Club category with a 3.6 million aggregate score from 35 members. The Mt Airy VHF Radio Club swapped places again with the North East Weak Signal Group coming in second with a score of 1.2 million. The NEWS Group in 3rd place had 990k points with 17 logs. Welcome to the Alabama Contest Group who made their first appearance in the Medium VHF Club Category with 3 logs and a total of 111k points.

In the Local Club listings, the North Texas Microwave Society placed first with 7 logs accumulating 773k points, tripling their scores from last year. The Downey ARC was second in this listing with 4 entries and 333k points, another welcome to a new group. The Eastern Connecticut ARA was in third with a 111k score from 5 logs.

Observations and Web scores

There were 3 brief “DX” logs reported this year, two of them with only 1 QSO each, and CU2JT adds, “Rotten conditions but glad I could give one guy the HM77 grid.”

While only a few more months to go until the 2008 ARRL June VHF QSO Party (scheduled for June 14-16) it is likely that many of the “regulars” are already setting aside the time, planning their strategy and ensuring that their gear is in top working order. With so many balls in the air to juggle, it takes a defined and disciplined plan and execution to be a top scorer. Single ops carefully track rovers, set schedules and use WSJT to enhance their efforts. Multi-ops use similar strategies, and often equip and support rovers to increase grid-multipliers. Portable QRP ops find that when they are at a good elevation and in the open that even very little power and a lightweight, directional antenna is all that is needed to work many of the well equipped fixed stations. KBSZYG, a first-time operating portable from Mt Mitchell, North Carolina, said, “Learned a lot, had a lot of fun…next time I’ll bring a table, umbrella and a friend with another band to operate.”

We are on the upslope of the next sunspot cycle, 6m conditions are bound to improve, and tropo-ducting and aurora enhancements can make their appearances at any time. If you have already been bitten by the VHF bug, stay with it, as conditions for future contests are always unpredictable. Newcomers with low or modest power and antennas are always welcome. K3NK commented, “First time in this contest. Had fun and will be back.” AK9F reported, “Operated 6, 2 and 432 using only a 6 meter loop at 15 feet…amazingly, it actually radiated.” If you haven’t yet pushed the band switch toward 50 MHz and higher on your new multi-band rig, you’re missing an exciting opportunity. Subscribe to a VHF reflector or a VHF club newsletter. Visit a VHF club near you, or perhaps their Web site if you’re not in their neighborhood. Aside from some excellent ARRL publications, there is a wealth of information available on all phases of VHF and microwave theory, construction, operation and contesting available from these resources.

The KL7FF QTH: The 2 meter 12 element Yagi can be seen mounted on the mast on the deck to the left side of the cabin. The 6 meter 8 element Yagi can be seen in the right foreground, mounted on 3 tower sections. The 2 meter station ran 400 W output and the 6 meter station ran 600 W output.

Complete Results are on the ARRLWeb

For the complete 2007 June VHF Contest Results, including scores for all entries, see www.arrl.org/contests/. Soapbox comments are at www.arrl.org/contests/soapbox/.

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