The 2014 ARRL 160 Meter Contest (Dec 5 – 7) was marked by typical band conditions — up and down with a few good openings as well as other times that were not so productive. Atmospheric noise was generally low, with only a few weather-related challenges across North America. Many familiar call signs were logged, along with plenty of brand-new 160 meter explorers.

**Overall Highlights**

There were 1175 logs submitted, down about 4% from last year, but still a number similar to most of the past dozen runnings of this event. The brand-new Unlimited category was introduced, which meant that single operators using spotting information no longer needed to enter the Multioperator category. 375 contestants chose to enter as Unlimited at one of the three power levels. Along with the 44 Mutlipop logs, 35.7% of all the entries used spotting. By comparison, the 2013 contest had 27.3% Multipop logs. It appears that growing interest in using spotting information, particularly from the Skimmer-based Reverse Beacon Network (RBN — reversebeacon.net), justifies the addition of this new entry category.

Readers can see all the top scores in the accompanying tables, but I’d like to put a spotlight on the inaugural Single Op Unlimited results, which had several highly competitive performances. At QRP power, Dale, W7CS, handed out 236 QSOs from his Wyoming QTH, which he says was three times more than in any of the past 10 years. Close behind was Vlado, N3CZ, in the North Carolina Section. Although well behind the winners in the traditional QRP category, the QRP Top Ten are still the trailblazers of this new entry category.

In the Unlimited, Low Power category, Chad, WE9V, dominated the field with a margin of victory of more than 59,000 points. His was the second-highest score of all Low Power entries, single or multioperator. Part of Chad’s success was his choice of a temporary operation at his mom’s farmhouse in a quiet rural part of Wisconsin. “My TX antenna noise was an amazing S3. So all but about five QSOs were with listening on the TX antenna.”

The Unlimited, High Power winner was another Midwesterner, Craig, K9CT, in Illinois, followed by an operator well-experienced in Unlimited or Assisted categories, Charles, K3WW, in Eastern Pennsylvania. Both of these operators had scores similar to the middle of the Top Ten in the highly competitive “unassisted” High Power category.

**Regional Observations**

The Single Operator, High Power category was dominated by stations in the Eastern time zone, where proximity to the many multipliers in Europe is a recognized advantage. This was again the case in 2014, with the top 11 scores achieved from the eastern US and Canada. Your author was pleased to have this category’s highest score west of Eastern Time Zone at 12th place overall.

The advantage of an eastern QTH is a bit less in the High Power Multioperator and Single Op Unlimited categories. Spotting networks, multiple radios, and several sets of ears can efficiently locate additional QSOs and multipliers, and the Top Ten lists for these entry categories include several stations in the Central and Mountain time zones. Among them is the 4th place Multioperator team at NØNI in Iowa, who provided an example of another typical pattern — they had the highest QSO total of any station (1644), a feat often achieved from the center of North America.

The ability to make lots of QSOs from the middle of the US is evident in the Low Power and QRP results for the Single Op, Multiop, and Unlimited categories. Four of the five Low Power and QRP categories were won from the Central or Mountain time zones, with a 2nd place finish in the fifth. If you are a competitive contester from the central or western US, history suggests that your best chance of achieving a Top Ten finish is with low power or QRP.

It is true that an overall high finish is nearly impossible from the far western part of North America, but there is much fun to be had in...
regional competition, or simply participating in a major operating event on this unique band. In 2014, hams out west had significant DX activity from Japan and the Pacific to keep things interesting.

Club Competition

The camaraderie of a radio club is a big part of our hobby. With a band like 160 meters, a little help from your friends is the way to learn and improve your station hardware and operating skills. Four clubs had more than 50 members submit logs, qualifying them for the Unlimited category. This past December, the Potomac Valley Radio Club mustered 86 of their troops for both the highest participation and highest aggregate score total. The Franksford Radio Club topped the Medium Category, while in the Local Category, the Central Virginia Contest Club came out on top. If you ever wondered how important clubs are to contesting, please note that more than 50% of the submitted logs were affiliated with one of the participating clubs!

The Wrap-Up

Summer is approaching, so take advantage of good weather to upgrade your station for the 2015 running of the ARRL 160 Meter Contest, December 4 – 6!