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Editorial

Many of today's radios are quite sophisticated, and while some of the functions certainly fall into the "bells and whistles" category, many useful tools are available to the contest operator.

Recently I was exploring some of the less-used features on my radio, namely the scanning and memory functions. I have used memories occasionally in contesting, but usually I am too busy trying to make more QSOs. There just isn't much time to spend playing with the radio's memory programming. Likewise with scanning functions, I have never used them during a contest. I even thought of scanning and memories as unnecessary functions for a contest radio, and I never really gave them much more thought. That changed recently when I found myself using the radio outside of a contest, trying to make some relative antenna performance comparisons.

I've typically used broadcast stations to determine whether my Beverages are working correctly. Two of my three Beverage antennas are located in steep, wooded terrain, and repairing them usually requires application of an ACE bandage around at least one ankle after the work is done. I have other tools that I use to check the feed lines and transformers, but tuning to a known RF source such as a broadcast station is a quick and easy "sanity check" when something seems wrong. I have a few AM broadcast stations that I use for quick checks, but re-tuning the VFO while switching through receive antennas was not very efficient. Then I remembered — I had memories available to me! I quickly loaded up a dozen or so memories with the frequencies and call letters of various broadcast stations that were located in various directions, and, in short order, I was easily hopping between stations and antennas. I then realized that these memories were useful for more than just Beverage testing. I programmed all of the WWV and CHU standard time and frequency stations, so I now have instant 24/7access to beacons to the west and the northeast, my most important contesting directions.

While learning the finer points of programming the memories, I came across the scanning functions in the radio's menu system. Again, I'd never used the scanning tools much before. I set up scan banks to scan the 6 and 10 meter bands. I was surprised to find many beacons on 10 meters, some almost around the clock. Once again, after programming these beacons into memories, I now have instant access to signals for antenna testing. They can even be used as "early warning" detectors for band openings to specific areas.

The main lesson to me was discovering that it's worth exploring some of the more esoteric functions of my transceiver. I've had this radio for a couple of years now, and yet I had barely used some of its more useful features. I've since discovered some other features that I can use in the next contest. Many of today's radios are quite sophisticated, and while some of the functions certainly fall into the "bells and whistles" category, many useful tools are available to the contest operator. It's worth taking a peek in the manual and learning how to use them.

As I write this in late November, the 2013 ARRL November Sweepstakes and the CQ World Wide DX contests are now history. We were rewarded with very good conditions, and 10 meters was in glorious full bloom to many areas across the globe. It seems like the sun still has some more gas left in the tank, and we might not be done with this solar cycle just yet. That's one of the great joys of contesting to me — the mystery of propagation and the chance openings that we encounter. Another is the friends and acquaintances that I've made in the hobby over the years. Ours can be a bit of a rough-and-tumble game at times, but there's no one I'd rather play it with. I wish all of our readers the very best in 2014.

In This Issue

N6DE describes the NAQP Club Challenge, which was a yearlong inter-club competition between the SMC, PVRC and the NCCC. We are also pleased to provide the results of several *NCJ* contests in this issue, including the August NAQP CW, September CW and SSB Sprints and the October RTTY Sprint. On the international front, K4ZW tells us about the ongoing efforts to develop ham radio and contesting in Ethiopia. KØEJ tells the story of making a contesting dream come true in his "Tale of Two Elements." On the technical side, XV4Y describes his *Q-Scope* tool for analyzing contest performance, and W7IY describes the virtual machine network used for logging the W1AW/4 multi-site, multioperator event. N4ZR's "Software for Contesters" column will not run this issue, but will return in the March/April edition. Although *NCJ*'s 40th anniversary is now officially over, we've decided to keep running the "40 Years Ago in *NCJ*" column. We've found it to be educational and sometimes amusing to have a look at contesting's past, so we will continue our periodic ventures into the wayback machine. We hope you'll enjoy this issue!