

Editorial

Field Day and the Serious Contester

I know ARRL Field Day is not a “real” contest. Conceived in the 1930s as an emergency preparedness exercise, it was never intended to be an event where contesters would worry about rate and outscoring other clubs or individuals. I know the emphasis belongs on exposing Amateur Radio to the public. At the same time Field Day participation can plant the seed that inspire and develops future contesters. I applaud the bonus point structure that puts the focus on aspects other than total number of contacts made over a 24-hour period. For more than 10 years I served as Field Day chairman for our radio club, and we put on a “full-service” operation with lots of publicity, mentoring, food and fun. Recently, however, I have discovered the fun of doing Field Day as an all-out contest with a few good friends who are also serious contesters. We plan in advance, just as if we were going on a small DXpedition. We strategize and look for every advantage that might allow us to score at or near the top of our category. I don’t feel the least bit guilty about it either.

The way I look at it, Field Day is what you want it to be, as long as you define your objectives up front. Having additional small groups of serious contesters on during Field Day adds more stations for everyone to work. Where clubs get in trouble, I believe, is when serious contesters commandeer Field Day, and those there for the fun and the newbies may feel unworthy or intimidated.

For the serious contester, Field Day offers a tremendous opportunity to work on a lot of things related to more-serious contesting efforts during the rest of the year. Field Day arguably attracts the most activity on the most bands and modes of any domestic contest during the year. It’s a great time to experiment: Start with antennas. Often your Field Day location has a lot more room for antennas than your home station does, providing a ready-made opportunity to test all kinds of antenna ideas. Perhaps you want to compare high dipoles with low dipoles on different bands. Maybe you want try out a wire beam or different types of loops. Or see how a multiband Windom at 60 feet compares with a Yagi at 40 feet on the high bands. Perhaps you want to experiment with various receiving antennas, such as Beverages. The nice thing about Field Day is that whatever you put up only has to last 24 hours, so it’s pretty easy to beta test a variety of antennas.

There are a lot of other things you can

test on Field Day. You may want to try out that new SO2R box. Or perhaps you want to set up a local *CW Skimmer* to see how that works. I know that several top US competitors in WRTC 2010 used Field Day to try out their WRTC setups before shipping them off to Russia. With the WRTCs apparently transitioning to in-the-field operations anyway, ARRL Field Day is an excellent time for teams to check out their gear ahead of the international competition. This includes “testing” the teamwork.

If you chose to operate in a full-blown Field Day operation to expose the public and new hams to Amateur Radio, more power to you. If instead you chose to use Field Day as practice and beta testing for the upcoming contest season, go for it!

Receiving Antennas

Recently I was speaking with a local antenna expert who told me he had realized in a rare moment of clarity that he was spending a lot of time trying to get the SWR down on his various antennas when his biggest problem was being able to *hear* other stations. He spoke of the layer of signals he can hear replying to his contest CQs that are not quite readable above the noise on 160 and 80. Boy, this is something that I can identify with! With a city lot, I don’t have the space for Beverages but plan to start playing around with loops for the next contest season. For those of you with a little more room, a couple excellent articles on low-band receiving antennas

are in this issue. John, W1FV, describes “A Compact Dual-Band, 9 Circle Receiving Array” that requires a circle of just 140 feet in diameter. John, N3HBX, discusses a 160 meter Beverage with a few innovative twists. If you’ve got the real estate and the initiative perhaps *you* can hear better on the low bands this season too.

NAQP Online Certificates are Back!

If you placed first in the Single Operator category in your state, province, or North American country (outside the US and Canada) in the past five years, you should have received an e-mail indicating where you can download your first-place certificate. As of this writing, Bruce, WA7BNM, has notified 586 certificate recipients, providing a link to download your colorful wallpaper (a few e-mail addresses are still being researched).

The infrastructure is now in place so that, going forward, first-place certificates will be mailed to all state, province and North American country winners in the Single Operator category for the CW, SSB and RTTY North American QSO parties. If you believe you’ve earned a first-place certificate since January 2006 and have not yet received an e-mail to download your certificate, contact Bruce at bhorn@hornucopia.com. Thanks to Bruce for all his work in putting this in place! The plaque program for overall winners in each category — administered by Brian, K9QQ — will continue unaffected.

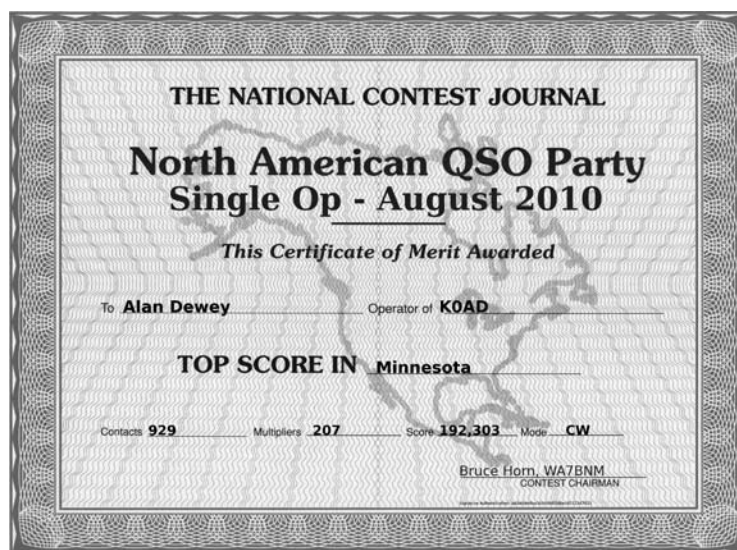


Figure 1 — Certificates like this are now available for download for first-place winners of all CW, SSB, and RTTY North American QSO parties since 2006.