

Turn on That Radio - Part II

I hate to sound like a broken record, but if you're sitting around waiting for the sunspots to return so you can work some good DX again, you're missing out on a lot of good DX. And the best of it this summer has been on 6 meters! The great conditions I wrote about here last month continued at least halfway through July, with the 12th and 13th featuring Asia-to-North America and North America-to-Europe openings (see VHF+ on page 86 for more). I missed out on the latest European openings (had to work, darn it!), but I did get on for a good portion of the CQ World-Wide VHF Contest and it was truly amazing! Six meters was wide open when the contest began midday on Saturday and seemed to just stay that way. It was still open when I pulled the plug for the night just after 11 PM. (It's going to be very interesting to see if there was any significant activity on two meters, since most VHF contesters move up to two when six meters has nothing to offer, and it seemed that six was open all the time.)

At times, the calls of "CQ contest" and "QRZ contest" across a 200-kHz-wide swath of 6 meters sounded more like the CQ World-Wide DX Contest (CW results this issue) than the CQ World-Wide VHF Contest! In fact, there were even enough stations to work on CW on this "CW-optional" band for several 30-wpm-plus CW contesters to be able to display a behavior I find at least as annoying on VHF as on HF—not slowing down when called by a slower station, and/or responding to a request to repeat or slow down with "CQ test..." The phone ops seem able to spend a fair amount of time trying to pull marginal signals out of the noise without hurting their scores; I don't see why it should be any different on CW, where supposedly everyone is a lot friendlier than on phone.

That frustration aside, this was probably an all-time best for me in a VHF contest—I worked 65 grids, 24 of them for the first time, including Bermuda, Labrador and double-hops to Puerto Rico, Martinique, and the western U.S. (remember, this is VHF!). My last contact before shutting down on Saturday night was with VHF Contest Director John Lindholm, W1XX. As of late Saturday night, he had already made more than 600 contacts on six! Last year, by contrast, John won his call area and placed 4th overall in the U.S. with only 356 total contacts.

With the prolonged openings on six and the resultant high levels of activity, this contest has finally come into its own, a long process that began with former Contest Director Gene Zimmerman, W3ZZ, restructuring the contest several years ago into a 6- and 2-meter only event, and excellent promotion and publicity by our current director, W1XX. Hats off to both Gene and John, and of course, to all of you who got on the air, for making the contest a success. The activity level was truly astounding. If you're not on 6 meters, you're missing out on a lot of fun—perhaps the most fun to be had on the air right now. (For you HF-only folks, Propagation Editor NW7US assures us in his column this month that conditions should be looking up as we get into autumn.)

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Katrina Plus One Year

You should be receiving this issue within a week or so of the one-year anniversary of the landfall of Hurricane Katrina, the worst natural disaster ever to hit the United States. In most parts of the U.S., after most big storms, a visit a year later may reveal some residual damage, but most everything will have been repaired or rebuilt. Not so a year after Katrina. The destruction was so massive, and the affected area so large, that in many of the hardest-hit communities, reconstruction has barely begun, and thousands of people are still living in (non-hurricane-resistant) FEMA-provided mobile homes. One of those people is Charlie Otnott, WD5BJT, of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, where the eye of the storm came ashore. We have Charlie's story in this issue (see "Mississippi Mud," page 13), and his picture on the cover (see "On the Cover," page 84), as a reminder that the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is not yet over, even as we approach the midway point of the 2006 hurricane season.

Another part of the aftermath of Katrina has been the examination of what went wrong in the nation's emergency response, which may be the storm's longest-lasting legacy. One of the major problems was communications, a weak point in any disaster, but magnified by the massiveness of this catastrophe. The FCC chartered an independent panel to study the failures and make recommendations for changes in FCC rules to help bring vital communication services back online as quickly and efficiently as possible after future disasters. The panel's report and recommendations were released in mid-June as part of a Notice of Proposed Rule Making on implementing those recommendations. "Washington Readout" Editor Fred Maia, W5YI, examines the highlights of the report—in which ham radio was recognized as one of the few systems that worked—and the major recommendations. At press time, no comment deadline had been set, so if you have input regarding the recommendations, there is probably still time to file them. As always, we recommend that you read the entire NPRM (80+ pages in this case) before filing your comments.

Of course, you don't need a named storm to cause major damage. Several days of heavy rains in the northeast at the end of June caused significant flooding in eastern Pennsylvania, western New Jersey and upstate New York, as the Delaware and Susquehanna Rivers overflowed their banks. Public Service Editor Bob Josuweit, WA3PZO, who wrote just a couple of months ago that conditions seemed ripe for such flooding, covers the ham radio response in his column (page 35).

Welcome Back, N8BJQ

Norm Koch, WN5N, has decided that 25 years as CQ WPX Awards Manager is enough, and he has decided to step down. Steve Bolia, N8BJQ, who "retired" a few years back as director of the CQ WPX contests, has agreed to take over as award administrator. We welcome Steve back into the official CQ "family," and thank Norm for his quarter-century of dedicated service to CQ, the WPX Award and amateur radio. An announcement with details on where to send WPX award applications is in this month's DX column.

73, W2VU