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This month:

- Pixie kit construction
- Thoughts on DX-ing
- Morse code revival?
- Oceania DX contest

Trawling the web

- Ian ZL2AIM #14136

Straight keys, bugs, paddles… if you enjoy looking at various keys and paddles I am sure you have come across the Morsemad site on the net.

Dennis K6DF #3076 has a great site too. Have a look at his collection of keys (and a lot more besides) at K6DF.net

Editorial

Chris VK1CT #9057

The year is 1998... the Lunar Prospector spacecraft is launched into orbit around the Moon, France beats Brazil 3-0 in the football World Cup final, technology company Google is incorporated, and I completed my final year of high school! It was also the year that **Ralph Sutton ZL2AOH #1073** established the 'Down Under' chapter of the FISTS CW Club.

During a visit to New Zealand in 2009, Chris VK1CT took the opportunity to meet Ralph ZL2AOH at his QTH in Wellington.

Following discussions with FISTS founder Geo Longden G3ZQS (SK), Ralph set up the chapter to assist members in New Zealand and Australia. He has been at the helm ever since and has certainly embraced the goals of the club through encouraging friendships among members and promoting the use of CW.

Earlier this year, Ralph decided it was time to retire from his role as membership secretary. Former newsletter editor **Nigel Hardy ZL2TX #9040**, kindly volunteered for this job and has recently assumed his new responsibilities. As with any volunteer position, it takes time and commitment, so please give Nigel your support.

I came to know Ralph when I submitted my application to join FISTS in 2001. A few months later, there was a request for someone to take on the role of printing and posting newsletters to Australian members. I saw this as a good opportunity to give something back to the hobby, so I decided to take on the job.

I subsequently became QSL manager and newsletter editor. Through all of this, Ralph has been there to provide assistance and wise counsel. We have probably exchanged several thousand email messages in the course of club administration.

Ralph, on behalf of all members, thank you for your support, dedication and contribution to FISTS Down Under! Enjoy your retirement and we'll see you on the bands! 73

Pixie kit construction

Dave ZL2AUJ #9668

The kit arrived in the post in good order. Opened that evening and did a check of the parts list to make sure all was there. All checked out ok, even with a couple of spare ceramic capacitors in case you break one.

The board is very well made and marked out very clearly for all parts placement. The only problem I had was finding matching plugs for the power and antenna sockets. A couple of hours of careful soldering had the board all checked and assembled.

With a bit of fiddling I have got it all up and working. I tried it out with 9 volts to start with, but then went to 12 volts and it seems to work better on the higher voltage. Not had any contacts with it yet, as I have not been in the shack when the 40 meter band has been open.

Kit components. →
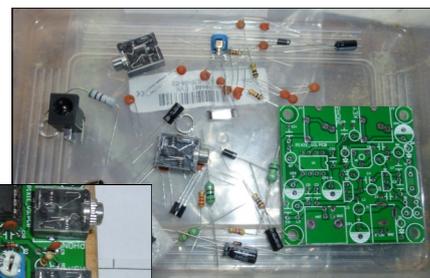

← The completed board.

Thoughts on DX-ing

Ian ZL2AIM #9683

I recently received an email asking me if I would write an article on a beginners guide to CW DX-ing. At the start, I would like to make it clear that I am not an expert DX-er. I enjoy getting on the bands and working some DX but in my heart and soul, I know that I will always return to my first love, which is CW ragchewing.

But I will try and put down in some logical order (difficult for an Irish brain) what I do to work the DX. There are of course many different ways of approaching it, but this is what works for me.

When I arrived in New Zealand, I downloaded a map to see what countries were close by. I had visions of New Zealand being at the bottom of the world (from my school days in Dublin). I was in for a big surprise...
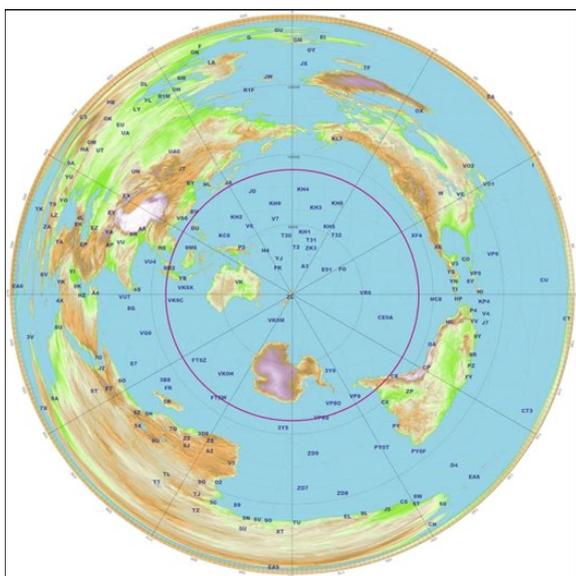
You can download a similar map at http://ns6t.net/azimuth/code/azimuth.fcgi We have a lot of water around our country and the DX countries seem a long distance away. But maybe it has some advantages.

In my hand luggage from South Africa I had brought an IC706 MKIIG and an AH4 tuner. My son-in-law drove me to Thames where I purchased a copper clad earth rod and some insulated wire. I set my shack up in a caravan on their driveway and called CQ. My first contact was Bill ZL1VS (now SK) and he reported my signal as RST 559. So that was a good start. The antenna wire was fed out the caravan window and down to the orchard on the slopes below. I can't remember the length of the wire, but it would have been about 20m to 25m. In the next few weeks I had worked ZL and VK and thought that at least I was getting good reports from distances as far away as 2500km. I don't remember the reason, but I had set my power output to 50 watts in the first few months of operation. It might have been an RF problem with my laptop.

I did not have much spare time to get on the bands, as we had arrived in a new country and there were more important things to sort out. But each evening I would listen about on the bands to see what could be heard. One of the advantages of having a long wire and

good tuner is the fact that you can work all bands from 160m to 10m. I was also able to get a rough idea as to what time of the day certain bands would be open.

About a month after we arrived, I made a contact on 20m with European Russia 16,000km away. A few days later I got Argentina into the log. The next day I got a 559 from a station in Ohio. So DX was possible from New Zealand. No longer was I thinking that Hikuai is at the bottom of the world, but in fact the possibility of it being in the centre of the world hadn't escaped me. Game on!

In 2007 (6 weeks) I had four DX countries in my log. 2008 = 28, 2009 = 37, 2010 = 66, 2011 = 58, 2012 = 112, 2013 = 125, 2014 = 120 and 87 so far this year. This is by no means spectacular, but it does show that it is possible to work DX with simple antennas. I should point out that in mid 2008 we moved to another property and I was able to put up a G5RV antenna. First of all, it was in an inverted vee formation and then later on I made it a flat top G5RV. A few years later I heard about a windom antenna dubbed a 'New Carolina Windom'. So the G5RV was taken down and the new antenna put up in its place. I still kept the long wire antenna for comparison and it had the advantage of being able to transmit on top band.

So my first thought on DX-ing is that you should have a good antenna. This can be an el-cheapo wire antenna in clear surroundings or could also be a fancy antenna mounted high up on a mast with a rotator to control where it is beaming to. (I have not had any fancy antennas in my time in New Zealand, but I do have the advantage of living out in the country with little or no QRM.) My second thought is that you need to have a bit more power than say a QRP rig. Yes, DX-ing can be done with QRP (I have had many a surprise DX in my log with 5 watts), but a bit more power will give you the advantage needed.

Ok, so now you have the antenna and the rig. How does one go about getting the DX into the log? I guess there are two ways. You can tune around the bands and when you hear a station calling CQ you answer his call and hope that he hears you. I will do this occasionally, especially if it is a country that I have not got in my log.

However, being a lazy Irishman, I prefer to find a clear spot on the band and call CQ. This can be a bit tiring for one such as myself, so I have built a few different memory keyers to do the job for me. The Ultra Pico keyer, the CMOS keyer and the EZ keyer are good examples of memory keyers. I can then do other things around the shack whilst the keyer does the work for me. As soon as I hear a station come back to my call, I can respond straight away. I have set up my keyer to call CQ CQ de ZL2AIM ZL2AIM k. I feel that calling in that format is the best way of calling and then leaving a five second gap before it automatically starts calling again. I despise those stations that call CQ repeatedly about 25 times before giving their callsigns.

So what information should I share with those DX stations that come back to my call? What I am interested in is getting his callsign correct, exchanging RST and names and sometimes my QTH. Do I

need his name? Possibly not, but sometimes the DX station can speak CW English and it is nice to be able to personalise the exchange by using his name. If you are working towards WAS CW, then make sure you get the correct state from the op. Most USA stations will give you their State, so don't rely on HRD giving you the correct one.

Here is a typical exchange (bear in mind that I was asked for a beginners guide to DX-ing!)

CQ CQ de ZL2AIM ZL2AIM k

G4NJW

G4NJW de ZL2AIM TU fer call. UR RST RST 579 579   Name Ian Ian G4NJW de ZL2AIM k

ZL2AIM de G4NJW UR RST RST 559 559 QSB QSB Name Ray Ray ZL2AIM de G4NJW k

G4NJW de ZL2AIM TNX FER QSO 73

ZL2AIM de G4NJW TU 73 CUAGN

(Dit Dit)

(Dit Dit)

The above would be a typical exchange when I have initiated the contact. Once I have the contact in my log, I will go back to automatically calling as per the first line of the above. I tend to stay on the same frequency for the full length of my session for two reasons. One reason is that some of the skimmers on the Reverse Beacon Network will have picked up my CQ call, and my callsign and frequency gets displayed. Any station looking at the RBN can see the NZ flag and can attempt to call me on that frequency. Similarly, a station might have heard me calling CQ and decides to put me on the DX Cluster. Generally speaking, once you are 'spotted' on the cluster, you will have no shortage of stations trying to attract your attention.

If this is your first experience of working a pile up, don't panic! I normally try and work the loudest station (regardless of whether I need it in my log or not) so that once I have worked him, his loud station is out of my way and I can hear other stations and choose whom I shall work. It is all good fun, and is good experience. However, I would not use the same format when a 'rare' station was calling CQ and I was answering. The rare station has no time to waste and wants to help as many people get their country into their log (and maybe even vice versa). This is typical of organised DXpeditions.

The exchange might be as follows:

CQ de FT5XO up (The station may say up 1 or up 2 etc. This means he is working split and you must set your rig to receive on his frequency, but you will be transmitting up 1 or up 2. Read your radio manual so you know how to go about working split.)

ZL2AIM (You don't waste time sending his callsign de your callsign. Just your callsign is enough.)

ZL2AIM 599

599 TU

It is a very brief exchange of reports. It is accepted that you do not exchange real signal reports as this wastes time for the DXpedition having to enter a genuine report in his log. His default log will always say 599. Now, most important for you, is to make sure you switch your rig out of split before you make your next QSO. You now have a new entity in your logbook. One of the nice things about using HRD software is that once a split station has been entered in the log, the software takes you out of split immediately. That can save a lot of embarrassment!

I would strongly suggest that before you start your calling DX on the bands, you should read and inwardly digest the DX Code of Conduct. You will find many websites that give information on it. Have a look at the QRZ.com page of Gary ZL2IFB and you will see it laid out very clearly and concisely. He has taken a lot of trouble to cover all the aspects of being a polite operator and he is a real credit to the DX fraternity.

There is a lot of fun to be had with CW DX-ing. The main thing is to get on the bands and give it a go. It must be enjoyable and only you can decide what part of DX-ing tickles your fancy.

Morse code revival?

Jim VK3PC #9679

Is Morse code going through a revival? There is some thought that since the dropping of mandatory CW proficiency tests for most radio amateurs the A1A mode is gaining popularity. The original amateur radio experimenters used it exclusively, with the voice mode of amplitude modulation becoming available commonly in the 1920s.

Until 2003 the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) mandated Morse code proficiency as part of amateur radio licensing - once considered necessary to maintain a common language for all radio users. However, the previous system of mandatory Morse code proficiency, particularly in its later years, was not translating into use, with the voice mode readily available and a more common practice.

The trend since the abolition of mandatory CW has seen the mode continue and perhaps grow. Indications are that interest in Morse code by radio amateurs may be emerging. The signs include the use of it during the QRP portable work of Summits On The Air (SOTA). Training nets are available for those who want to learn or brush up on it. The recent WIA Remembrance Day Contest (largest in VK) results are yet to be published, but there are indications of a lot more CW logs being entered.

It is promoted by all IARU member societies, included in their band plans, contests, has a plethora of YouTube videos, is often an online subject, and continues to sell keys and books. Can it be that Morse code, the original digital mode, is finding greater attraction? As they say, the jury is out, so we will have to wait and see.

Oceania Contest

The 2015 Oceania DX contest is now upon us, with the SSB phone section on the first weekend in October and the CW section on the second weekend in October.

The main aim of the contest is to promote HF contacts with stations in the Oceania region. Oceania stations can work other Oceania and non-Oceania stations. Non-Oceania stations can only work Oceania stations.

As always, this will be a great opportunity to work a lot of DX stations in the Oceania region. We are expecting another good turn out from VK, ZL and YB stations, as well as stations from some of the rarer Pacific entities.

Here is an abbreviated summary of the rules for the 2015 contest:

PHONE: 08:00 UTC Saturday 3 October to 08:00 UTC Sunday 4 October

CW: 08:00 UTC Saturday 10 October to 08:00 UTC Sunday 11 October

Bands: 160M to 10M (excluding WARC bands).

Exchange: RS(T) + serial number.

QSO points: 20 points per QSO on 160M; 10 points on 80M; 5 points on 40M; 1 point on 20M; 2 points on 15M; and 3 points on 10M.

Final Score: The sum of the QSO points multiplied by the number of prefixes worked (the same prefix can be counted once on each band).

Entry Categories:

Single Operator All Band QRP (max 5W)

Single Operator All Band Low Power (max 100W)

Single Operator All Band High Power

Single Operator Single Band QRP (max 5W)

Single Operator Single Band Low Power (max 100W)

Single Operator Single Band High Power

M1 - Multiple Operators and Single Transmitter (only one transmitted signal at any time)

M2 - Multiple Operators and Two Transmitters (no more than two transmitted signals at any time and on different bands)

MM - Multiple Operators and Multiple Transmitters (no more than one transmitted signal at any time on each band)

Shortwave Listener (receive only) All Band

Oceania region
(Source: Wikipedia)

Trophies and plaques will be awarded as listed on the website at http://www.oceaniadxcontest.com/trophies.htm Certificates will be awarded to the winning stations in each of the categories above - for each continent and country. A participation certificate will also be awarded to every station that makes at least one valid QSO.

Log Submission Deadline: All logs must be emailed (or postmarked) NO LATER than 31 October 2015. Logs are to be sent as an e-mail attachment to ph@oceaniadxcontest.com (for PHONE entries) or cw@oceaniadxcontest.com (for CW entries).

More information about the contest, including the detailed rules, is available from the Oceania DX Contest website.

73 and we look forward to seeing you in the pile ups!

Oceania DX Contest Committee - VK3MI/ ZL1AZE, ZL2IFB, ZL3GA, VK3TZ, VK4FH and VK7GN

Until next month, 73