

November 2014 Edition - Vol 3 Issue 5

A publication of the Four State QRP Group and OzarkCon QRP Conference

www.4sgrp.com

Group callsign WQ5RP

Ozark QRP **BANNER**



Blue Whale, Catoosa, OK – Photo by KV6Z

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CQ from the Blue Whale

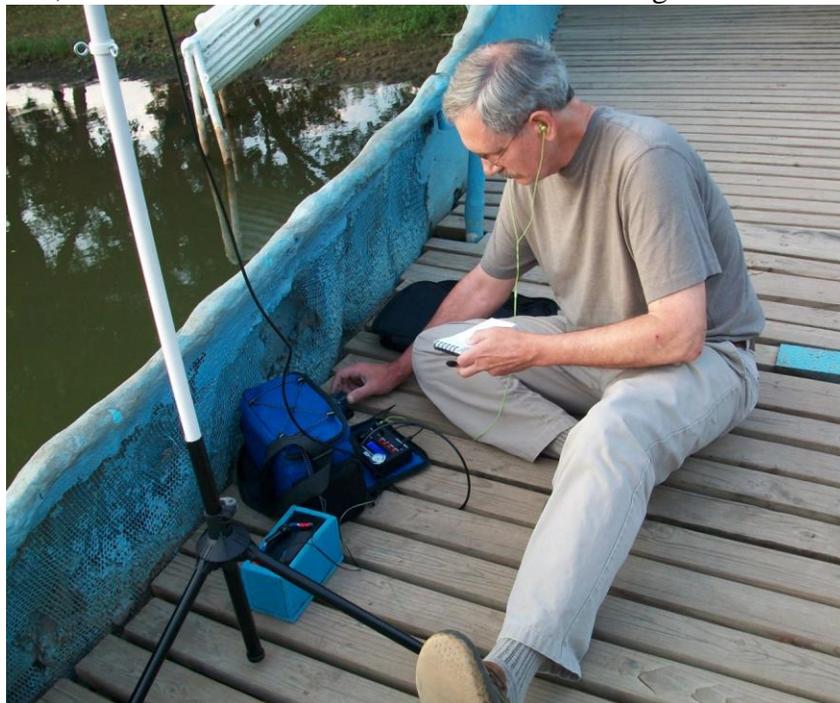
Bill, KV6Z

One of the many attractions along Historic Route 66 is the Blue Whale in Catoosa, Oklahoma. Check out <http://bluewhaleroute66.com/blue-whale-in-catoosa/> for a description of the whale and details of its history and construction.

I'm always looking for unusual locations to set up a portable QRP station so it occurred to me that the whale would make a great portable site. I tried to contact the caretakers to see if it would be ok to set up a radio station on the grounds but I was never able to contact anyone. I even drove out to the site the day before the event but there was no one around. So on Wednesday October 1st I packed up the HB-1B and Alex Loop and headed out to the whale at 7:30 in the morning. My objective was to check into the Sunrise net on 7123 kHz at 1300z and then try 7122 kHz and 14060 kHz for a few 4S stations. When I arrived there was still no one around but the gate to the whale was open and the admission price fit my budget (it's free) so out I marched onto the beast itself.

Set-up only took a few minutes so I made a quick pre-net QSO with the Sunrise Net NCS for that day (Al, N4SNB in Medina, Tn.) to confirm he could hear me and when that concluded I was surprised to get a call from Bruce (AA5CO) in Tulsa.

After formally checking into the net, I moved to 7122 and quickly worked Walter (K5EST). Later, I moved to 20m and worked stations in Michigan and Illinois.



I was just getting ready to pack up and remember thinking to myself that radio just doesn't get any better than this. Then it did. I heard the footsteps approaching along the whale and just figured that it was someone about to "throw the bum out". But, no, it was Mike (KF5RAU) and his granddaughter. He had seen my reflector post and came by for a surprise visit. Mike was my very first Rockmite QSO – one that I'll never forget – and I was delighted to have a chance to meet and chat with him.



KV6Z with KF5RAU and his granddaughter

What a great morning! Thanks to the stations I contacted, to Mike for driving out to meet me, and to my wife, Ursula, for taking the photos. What a great hobby!

Copying QSO's and Calls Practice

By Unc Phil, W0XI

Copying QSOs Practice

I had a breakthrough practice this morning, copying pretty much all of three QSOs in my head (without writing the words down as they arrived). The source of the material was my CW practice program from Nu-ware (<http://www.nu-ware.com/>). I used the program's QSO generator and had set it at 24 WPM with a small increase in the inter-word spacing. When away from my desktop – sometimes when standing in line at the post office - and for a bit of variety in the QSO format, I also use the APP in my iPhone titled Ham Morse (aa9pw.com/hammorse/). Both programs allow one to go as high as 50 WPM. I'm dreaming there.

Why did I have the breakthrough? I think there are a number of influences: practicing twice each day for about 20 minutes per session, working on call signs as well as QSO content, practicing at 15, 20 and 25 WPM, and knowing what to expect about the content of the QSOs. I think the last item might be key. If one knows what to expect in a conversation, then familiar words – including their arrangement - stand out and one begins to hear words more so than letters. While I don't have enough data, I think the process begins to work better above 20 WPM, maybe just a hint that 25 is easier than 20! Here one begins to hear letters grouped together as words. You hear the code words as if someone spoke them.

Remember the memory trick we use to copy phone numbers; we “group” ten numbers into three sub-groups, e.g. 816-555-1212. If someone says a number to you grouped like that, it is definitely easier to write the number down on a piece of paper – after it has been fully said – than to do it after hearing 8165551212. Phrases become easier in Morse too, like “my name is.” Both practice programs listed above scramble the order of the usual parts of a QSO: RST, QTH, name, rig, WX, etc. This variety is helpful.

Copying Call Signs Practice

I've been fiddling with my metal process in copying call signs too. I've found it a challenge to listen to the whole call sign before writing it down – but one must make it over this hump, particularly for contesting! Both of the programs mentioned above have call sign generators. I chose not to use Rufz since I don't plan to type during a contest or QSO.

The challenge here is to wean yourself from writing the call letter by letter as it comes in. This, of course, takes time/practice, particularly if you learned to copy code first by pencil! I'm attempting to do this by listening to the first second characters before writing them down. This seems to be working for me solidly at 20 WPM and sometimes at 25. As I'm writing down the first two letters (or a letter and a number), I simultaneously hear the remaining letters of the call and then write them down. This is a form of grouping as mentioned above.

Dits and Dahs

If you like to vocalize Morse, perhaps you've noticed that when you say – for example - the letter A you say di-dah. Have you ever noticed that when you say “di” that your lips form a smile. Yet, when you say “dah,” you jaw drops as when you say ah!

4-States Hospitality

By Sam Binkley, AL7V

My wife (Marijo, WL7FE) and I recently returned from a month long vacation in the lower 48 and we had the pleasure of meeting one of the 4 state group members, KV6Z, Bill from Claremore, OK. Bill and I had made contact on the air and I had read some of his posts and seen pictures of his kayaking/radio adventures, and since we were going to be traveling through Claremore I thought I would see if we could meet for a cup of coffee or something and have an eye-ball QSO. I sent Bill an email from Oklahoma City a few days before and in his reply he invited us to his home for lunch! Bill's lovely wife Ursula had fixed snacks which we enjoyed on the patio. Then we went inside for an excellent meal. After lunch Bill showed me his shack and invited me to sit down and try to make some contacts. His paddles were set up just the opposite from what I am used to (dits on the thumb side, dahs on the finger side), so I just turned them around and reached over the top. The rig (little HB1B) was all ready to go on 20 meters so I found a clear spot and called CQ. It wasn't long before I had worked two or three contacts. Bill showed me his antenna(s), "fan" dipoles for 20 and 40, and the clever system he has designed for lowering them during thunderstorms. Before Marijo and I left Bill treated me to a look at another of his hobbies, building bamboo fly rods. That guy is a craftsman! What fantastic work he does on those. I wish we had had time to further pursue some more of our common interests, like blue-grass music but we had to be on our way.

I have been involved with the 4 state QRP group since it started. I lived in Oklahoma City at the time and I heard about a ham fest in Fort Smith, AR so Marijo and I decided to attend that. Marijo said it was the best one she had been to. It turned out to be the last one that would be held in Fort Smith and soon after that 4sqrp was born. The next few ham fests were held in Joplin, MO and Marijo and I attended most if not all of those. In the mean time we moved out of the area (Alabama) and were not able to make it to any of the events in Branson. We keep hoping we can get to one of those but now we are a lot farther away (Juneau, AK) so that is less likely. I've never enjoyed ham radio more than being part of the 4 state group. While we were in Alabama I helped kit the "Ham Can" kits. My hat is off to all those who do any of the kitting, it's not as easy as it may seem! I still read the reflector regularly and I have enjoyed the Banner since it started. Unfortunately I do not have much success with operating from up here but I keep trying. I keep trying to promote QRP and CW with our local club but I'm not very successful with that effort either.

Dan – KB6NU's Column

Are knobs and buttons toast?

By Dan Romanchik, KB6NU

In a recent column on EETimes (http://www.eetimes.com/author.asp?doc_id=1324283), an old colleague of mine, Martin Rowe, says, "Knobs and buttons are slowly on their way

out. Get used to it.” He’s referring to the controls on oscilloscopes, but if he were a ham, he might just as well be talking about amateur radio transceivers, too.

We already see this happening in amateur radio. FlexRadio, and a couple of other companies, already make transceivers with no front panel controls. You must have a computer to use them.

Might we even start to see this with handheld and portable equipment? For example, how much cheaper could they make a Baofeng if to use it, you had to also have an Android or iPhone app to act as the human interface?

To be honest, I haven’t really thought about this much myself. I’m enough of a dinosaur to still prefer buttons and knobs, but having to use on-screen controls certainly doesn’t turn me off. Rowe claims, however, that “as the old-timers retire (or in our case as older hams become SKs), younger engineers (or young hams) will expect every user interface to function like a phone or tablet. Don’t believe me? Just wait.”

I got several interesting replies to this idea on my blog. Bill, AD8BC says, "What would be fun would be an open-source mobile radio. I picture an RF deck with a Raspberry Pi and touch screen for control, the Pi would simply tell the RF deck where to tune and handle the interface and scanning functions, it would ship with a stock app, but you could make your own. Built in support for SDR stuff, packet, APRS, remote operation...."

Most commenters, however, even the younger guys, still seem to prefer analog controls. Lucien, DH7LM, says, "I’m a newly licensed ham and I like both – experimenting with advanced computer stuff like SDRs and the great feeling a real radio provides!" Grant, KJ6ZZD, says, "Knobs perform some tasks better than a screen can. Knobs provide some tactile feedback that a screen just can’t."

So, what do you think? Are knobs and buttons toast, or do you think there's still some life left in analog controls?

When not twiddling the knobs on his HF transceiver or relatively ancient Tek 2213 analog oscilloscope, you'll find KB6NU working on updates to his "No Nonsense" study guides or blogging about amateur radio at www.kb6nu.com.



From The Editor Contesting, Computers

I’ve decided to write about a couple of subjects this month. First off, contesting! As I’m writing this, the CW portion of the November Sweepstakes has just finished, and there

has been a little chatter on the reflector about it. Since that's one of my favorite parts of the hobby, I thought I would give some of you some good tips I've found in my 20-some odd years of contesting.

First off, there are two modes of working contests: "Running" and "Search & Pounce". Running means you are staying on one frequency, calling CQ, and answering all callers. Usually, running a frequency is going to require you to be running QRO – if you're even at 100W, chances are good you're not going to be able to hold the frequency for an extended period of time. S&P means you are tuning up and down the band, looking for people calling CQ, and answering them. Since I am usually running at 100W or less, I'm usually in S&P mode myself, and a lot of my tips are going to be based around that mode of contesting.

First off, know the rules and exchange. The exchange for each contest is a little different, and before you jump in, make sure you know what it is. The site www.contesting.com has a pretty comprehensive calendar of what contests might be going on during any given weekend, and the exchange will be given there. It could be simple, like RST & State, or it could be complex (Sweepstakes exchange is quite similar to the preamble of an old-style NTS message, with check numbers, precedence, etc).

Second, computer logging is almost an essential! It helps you to check for people you've already worked (most contests you can only work a station once per band), keeps a running tabulation of your score, and makes submitting your log to the contest organizers easy and painless. The gold standard of contest loggers for Windows is the N1MM contest logger, which contains rules for just about every contest known to man. Scott, N3FJP, also makes dedicated logging packages for the biggest contests available for a minimal charge, with a UI very similar to his ACLog general logging software.

Third, contest contacts are quick – don't expect a long rag-chew during a contest – these guys are out to make as many contacts as possible in a short amount of time. Some of the big guns when they have a good pileup going can average 150-200 Q's per hour!

So, you know the exchange, you've got your logger ready to go. Tune the band for a nice loud station calling "CQ Contest" or "CQ TEST" on CW. As soon as you hear him call "QRZ" drop in your call – just once, and as quickly as you can! Hopefully he will hear you, but if he doesn't all isn't lost. Assuming he does not come back to you, listen to his exchange! Many parts of a stations exchange do *NOT* change from one contact to another, so you can go ahead and get some of those fields filled in on your logger, to save yourself some time for when he does hear you!

When he does hear you, the QSO will go something like this (Lets assume a simple exchange of RST and State):

Me (Assuming I'm actually running): CQ Contest from Norway Quebec Zero Mexico

Caller: November 1 Hotel Alpha Mexico

Me: November 1 Hotel Alpha Mexico Thanks, you're 59 Kansas

Caller: Thanks you're 59 Maine

Me: QSL and thanks. QRZ Contest from Norway Quebec Zero Mexico

See how quick that is? Of course, not all go this quickly – someone might need repeats. Also worth mentioning, in a contest environment everyone is 59 or 599 signal, even if they're just barely above the noise level!

Contesting is a lot of fun, and very addictive. It's great for filling up those empty slots toward WAS or DXCC – I have Basic WAS, as well as 40m Phone WAS, almost strictly from contest contacts. Most of the big gun contesters also upload to LOTW, so getting the confirmations that way is easy – I do most of my operating in contests, and I have about a 50% return rate in LOTW.

Second thing I'm going to touch on this month is Computers and Ham Radio. As many of you know, I'm a computer guy by trade, so I'm a big user of computers in my ham radio hobby as well. Recently, I noticed my shack computer starting to run pretty slowly. It's not that old, about a 2 year old desktop PC with a dual-core AMD processor, 8G of ram, and a pretty hefty hard drive in it. But Win 7 seemed to be slowing it to a crawl. So, I decided to see if I couldn't convert to using Linux at the ham desk.

For those of you who do not know, Linux is a free, open-source replacement for Windows. Along with it come a lot of other free programs, many of which are ham radio-related. I've managed to find replacements for almost all of my windows software (except for contest logging) available for Linux, and it seems to be doing quite well. Probably the best thing about Linux tho is avoiding the upgrade costs. In a few years, when Windows 7 no longer has support, I won't have to pay an arm and a leg to update to the newest version. Linux always has been, and always will be free.

There are many flavors (known as "Distributions") of Linux. I've chosen to use Ubuntu Linux on my ham shack computer. My research indicated that it has the best selection of Ham radio apps, and most of the ham developers are writing their software on it. It's also known as one of the most user-friendly distributions out there. Here's a sampling of some of the programs I've installed onto my new Ubuntu Linux desktop, and what their purpose is:

Logging: CQRLog (www.cqrlog.com)

LOTW Access: TrustedQSL from ARRL is available

Digital Modes: FLDigi (www.w1hkj.com/Fldigi.html)

Radio Programming: Chirp (chirp.danplanet.com)

Radio Control: Hamlib (sourceforge.net/projects/hamlib)

Web Browsing: Firefox (www.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/new/)

E-Mail: Thunderbird (www.mozilla.org/thunderbird)

This is just a sample – there are lots of totally free packages available for Linux. If anyone is interested in giving Linux a try, it's rather easy to set up a "dual-boot" system –

one that can boot to either Windows or Linux. I still have my Win 7 install on my shack computer, but more and more I'm using Linux there!



Four State QRP Group

is meeting at the Country Cupboard Restaurant in downtown Seneca, Mo. This is one of the locations that 4SQRP folks gather.

The Country Cupboard has a nice menu and they have a separate meeting room we can use.



The Country Cupboard restaurant is located in the first block north of the blinker light in downtown Seneca. From Barney's, head north on Cherokee Street (that's the main street of town). Go across the railroad tracks and keep going past the blinker light stop.

The restaurant is located at 1038 Cherokee street, on the west side of the street.

Caution: If you are headed north, do not make a left "J turn" into a parking spot. "J turns" are illegal in the downtown area. Keep going north past the restaurant till you reach the residential area north of downtown where a "U turn" is permitted. Make a U turn there (it's a wide street) and come back to the parking in front of the restaurant.

Our group is an informal organization with no officers, no rules, no dues or any other things to get in the way of having fun with QRP. **We get-together monthly for lunch and the sharing of ideas and information, parts swapping and just plain fun on our normal third Saturday of a month.**

All ham radio amateurs (or prospective hams) are invited to participate.



The Four State QRP Comfortable nets meet each Wednesday night beginning at 7:30 PM CDT, 0030z.

Note: on Nov 6 we'll be on CST.

If we have to QSY, I like to move up, Wayne likes to move down, and Dick doesn't have to move much at all.

Add anything to the exchange that you wish, temp rig, ant, etc. Checking into all sessions is encouraged.

7:30 CDT 0030z ... 40M CW Net on 7122, KCØPMH NCS

8:00 CDT 0100z ... 80M CW Net on 3564, WAØITP NCS.

8:30 CDT 0130z ... 40M CW Net on 7122, KCØPMH NCS

9:00 CDT 0200z ... 80M PSK Net on 3580.5, NØTGR

Thursday mornings ~ 8 to 8:30am
A gathering of CW ops are having fun on
7.122 MHz
....and you are invited!

Join us for the new 4SQRP Sideband Net!
Monday Nights at 7:30pm Central
on 7.285 (QSYing down as necessary)
NCS is WQ5RP/NQ0M in Iola, KS
Check QRPSpots for the actual frequency to find
us easier!

Ozark QRP BANNER is a monthly publication
of the Four State QRP Group and OzarkCon. www.4sqrp.com
Editor: Jeremy Utley, NQ0M
- Deadline for publications copy is the 25th of each month -

For news, articles, inquiries for the Banner: ozarkqrpbanner@gmail.com
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