

AE6Y Trip Notes Aruba October 2023

ALF
11/4/23

Tuesday, Oct. 24 – Wednesday, Oct 25, 2023.

A typical AA redeye, to Charlotte, leaving SFO at 10:26 p.m. I'm coming back through MIA, but for some inscrutable reason couldn't schedule a flight from SFO to MIA. I'm checking one suitcase with my usual complement of minimal clothes for Aruba. Not much radio stuff either, since I'm just planning to operate SSB with the K4, so don't need a lot cables or Winkeyer or SO2R stuff. I do have 5 Pop dolls for Cindy, provided by Ed, plus a little bit of stuff for Lissette that she had ordered on Amazon.

I have the K4 packed in my carry-on suitcase the same way I did it last time. It's wedged in with its sides against the sides of the suitcase, with front panel up and cushioning material at both ends, and a towel wrapped around the whole thing, which is also in a plastic bag. I also have my green backpack and fanny pack.

Parked at Anza Parking, and breezed through check-in and TSA and to the Admirals Club in Terminal 1, B concourse. Just hope that the antennas and amps are working OK. The first flight was uneventful, and I got a few hours of sleep. Amazingly, my seatmate was from Port Washington and had cousins who lived a few streets away from where I had grown up in Great Neck. Small world indeed.

We were the only plane in Customs, so I breezed through. They were requiring you to put all suitcases and backpacks through one of two scanners as you exited, but the four personnel sitting there didn't even appear to be looking at the screens, so I'm not sure what the point was.

My Hertz friend La Bella Carolina wished me happy birthday and put me into a Kia Rio, a small 4-door sedan with a good-sized trunk (not their usual tiny hatchback) and wished me happy birthday. So I was at the cottage by a little after 2:30, and everything looked spiffy. I unpacked and started to set up the radio, which had survived the trip unscathed. Ed had left the antenna cables in three bundles, and that made hooking them up easier.

The wifi worked right off the bat and my laptop connected right away to Linksys. I thought some antennas were problematic, but realized after testing them with the RigExpert (which had no batteries, so I was glad I had brought some AAs) that the problem was that I had the K4 set to transmit on Ant2 on some bands, a residual of the Ant1/Ant2 switching that I had been playing with before the trip. Once that was sorted out, they all seemed to be fine, except for the SteppIR. We get a "driver error" upon startup. I tried putting in my controller, which was an earlier model but should have worked. It didn't seem to be working, but I needed to do some RigExpert testing to see if I can figure out what is actually going on with the antenna itself.

K4 Setup – Note that I'm leaving the K4 in place for John to use in CQWW CW.

- 1) For frequency control a cable from the PC jack on the back (the square USB one) to the USB on computer (using the Compaq USB expander that was not actually needed.) This opens two ports, and it may be necessary to renumber them in Device Manager or change the Preferences in CQPWIN to match.
- 2) Headphone/mic plugs (or DXD cables) to jacks on the back. Recorder siamesed with phones. Note that although I tried to be diligent about recording, there are times when I forgot to turn it on or off.
- 3) Footswitch to PTT In jack.
- 4) Amplifier key cable to "Key Out" RCA jack on back (with dual jack if both amps being keyed at once). Note the concept of using two amps in this contest turned out to be completely useless. Not possible to even think of moving any one with such fierce pileups. Would work on CW or for ARRL SSB, or possibly even in this contest for the non-24 hour version at slow times in the middle of the night, but not this contest in the Classic category.
- 5) Decoders/filters to ACC 15 pin jack on back.
- 6) Key in box to ¼-inch adaptor to Key jack on back. Note that it's useful for antenna tuning, but for amp tuning the Tune LP button on K4, set to 20 watts is ideal.
- 7) Monitor to adaptor to HDMI jack on computer.

Note that the antenna tuner is not needed up to about 7200, or maybe even higher. During the contest, I ran on 7217 without it.

It was hot when I picked up the car, 33 degrees Celsius, but cooled down a bit and was fairly pleasant when I went out for a run at 6 p.m. from our roundabout to the next one up the road. Then met John at Urataka at 8 for pizza. Again, it's 1.4 km from the bottom of JP's street to the hard right turn, then just a quarter mile down the road (you can see the lights from the turnoff)

We saw lots of lightning in the distance while at dinner. Returning to the cottage, I worked on the SteppIR a bit. Found using my old control box and the AA55 that the antenna was resonant and the resonance moved when a band was selected, but they were off by several Mhz. This can easily be seen by setting the RigExpert to do an SWR chart with a center frequency of 21.000 MHz and a range of +/- 8.000 MHz. Running a calibration fixed that, so now it just a little low. Need to check tomorrow with the AA55 to pick the best freqs. There was a massive storm that woke me at 3:15 a.m. with lightning and thunder and rain for about an hour.

Thursday, Oct. 26, 2023. Up at 8. No wireless and computer was off—I had forgotten to bring the power supply from the living room when I set it up in the shack. I thought that the wireless might be messed up because of the storm, but fortunately a combination of resetting the modem, and rebooting the computer got the Linksys wifi back. But I couldn't connect to the office. There was something wrong with the Duo

dual verification program. A text message to Mardi at the office at 9 a.m. (6 a.m. in CA) was immediately returned and we talked on the phone. By using Chrome to connect to mail.office365.com, it worked properly, but not with my normal Firefox. Go figure.

Then to Ling and Sons using the new highway from the airport, relatively light shopping, only \$120. Upon my return, put on the work pants and boots that I leave in the closet to go to help John Crovelli. He was up on the tower near the house installing his new shorty forty, assisted by Humphrey, who had to leave after a while to take a friend to the hospital. I mostly pulled ropes and then after John came down we laid out beverage cables. I left circa 2:30 after 3 ½ hours. Initially very hot in the sun, but it had been cloudy earlier and then the clouds returned to make it much more bearable.

Since I was all sweaty, upon arriving back home, I went out and shortened the legs of the 80 inverted vee. There are cable ties about 36 inches in from where it had been set (it had been resonant to 3572). I shortened to that length and new resonance is 1.07 at 3680, which I think should work well for the contest [it was a good choice, as it turned out]. The ladder is needed for the house end both at rope tie-off at the tree and to reach the dropped leg, but not in the cunucu.

Running at 6 from the Santa Cruz roundabout, 41 min. Then dinner with Lisandro and Lissette at the Fish House.

Friday, Oct. 27, 2023. Up at 7 and over to John's by 7:30 to help him with his 40 and 80-meter vee beams, unrolling them and attaching strings to the ends to tie off on various mounting points. He later was very appreciative, as he would not have had time nor energy to do this himself. He's decided that there is no remaining time to put up the Skyhawk. Brutal heat and humidity. Back after about 2 hours, feeling weak.

I cleaned up for a televisit with Dr. Zuraw at 11, then tried out the 86. Seemed fine except low output on 80 and 160. I set up the k4 ant to an Alpha Delta switch with output to the two amps. Position 1, down is the right amp, position 2 is left. Need to switch antennas manually with this setup, and the right amp can only access the 6pak. [note: as explained above, this was useless, and in the contest I ended up turning off the 86 and just using the 91B on one band at a time. It can be tuned rapidly.]

Went for a run at 3 p.m. The sky was overcast by then so not very uncomfortable. Did my old Spanss Lagoenweg run from Marina Pirata to La Granja. There was a fair amount of traffic, reminding me why I've stuck to running on the bike paths for the last few trips. Then to the Ritz for a chocolate shake.

Contest Notes. I start out slowly on 40 trying to run EUs low in the band, but that doesn't seem to be working tonight, as they are mostly up above 7125. As many 3830 posters commented after the contest, 7125 to 7200 is absolute EU bedlam. I stay on 7217 for almost two hours making about 450 contacts. To 20 and 80 as well. About 20 min on 1840 yields 23 Qs. Only one EU, RL3A, though he is solid copy. First real break is at 0701. At that point, totals are 1332/144/55, distributed as 20: 446/41/21; 40:

627/56/16; 80: 228/38/13; 160: 31/9/5. These are actually very good first night totals. 80 and 160 have been noisy but not particularly difficult to work. 40 and 20 have been wide open to EU, and 80 has been open there as well. [Later, on 3830, I see that LU9ESD at 6Y1V had 800 Qs on 20 in the first two hours!!].

After a few hours sleep, got up at about 0930Z, 5:30 a.m. local time, to look for mults. In about 30 min got HR by tuning around, then JA, VK, YB, KH6 while running on 7160. then stopped hunting to save time for high band high rates.

Started on 10 at 1109Z, and first Q was a very good sign, A61BR. After a few S&P contacts, settled in for a run on 28481. I stayed there until 1406, working about 650 Qs. I took an hour off, then resumed on 15, running on 21413 for about 2 ½ hours. At the start of the pileup, it is so large that it's also unruly with EUs and slows the rate to a max of 220-230 or so, whereas later in the afternoon, when it becomes more of a US pileup the rate can go near 300 (and in fact reached 317 on Sunday on 15). Fortunately, with High Power it is easier to control the pileup; the EUS can certainly hear me, even if they are not well behaved.

I noticed I hadn't worked several SA zones and countries, including PY, LU and CE on 10, so went there and tuned around a bit with the SteppIR pointed south, quickly finding PY and CE (and later LU as well). Then a long run on 28817 till 2021, and another hour off. This is a real advantage of Classic, the ability to take some time off, relax, eat and drink, etc. To 15 at 2123Z for about 260 QSOs, at the end of which run on 21367, I again look south and find CX5A, HD1A, CE1IQQ and L71D, all new ones. I'm using the 10/15 pointed at EU, Mid-tri at NW and SteppIR south. The 19Z hour was 284, my high for Saturday.

Then finish out the afternoon with a little under 2 hours on 14262, stopping at 0020Z, with 5:30 left. Total is 3959/306/106 for 4.804k points. On 15 and 20, totals are 20:871/66/27; 15: 864/69/21.

I try to get on sporadically during the night to get mults, the theory being to operate for just a few minutes at a time, separated by more than an hour, but only bag a few: at 0146-51, PJ2T, 8P1W, and V26B on 40, then VP2MDM on 80 at 0326. Interestingly when I got back on 40 at 1019, my first Q on 40 was the same station for a new mult on that band as well. Only stayed on 40 for 10 minutes, as the expected Asians didn't materialize (other than JAs, which were already worked).

Back to bed and up at 8 or so. At 8:30 while drinking coffee, I hear loud music outside, the kind usually associated with party buses, but it is a police car, an ambulance, and a sound truck, all leading a posse of at least a hundred gaily dressed bicyclists out for some kind of mass ride. I go out to wave at them. It's very hot and will be another brutal day outside.

For Sunday, I have about 5 ½ hours left of my allotted 24, so want to concentrate on 10 and 15 for high rates. I start on 28765 at 1351Z and stay there until 1630Z (about 650

Qs), then take 2 ½ hours off. That gives me hope of breaking 5k qsos. The run brought the 10-meter total to 1900/76/21. It was still going ok, but I feel I should stop to allow some time for 15 and 20 later to try to pick up some new ones. Only 2:38 hours left.

Went out for a run at 2 p.m. Very still and hot (34 C). Went from the airport to the Coral Pyramid and saw nary another mad dog or Englishman the whole way. Then back to the Ritz for a strawberry shake which I brought back home. A very simple drink, just ice cream and milk, no syrup. I've never visited them twice on one trip before.

Back on the air on 15 for a run on 21377 starting at 1916Z, originally a mixed EU/NA run, then gradually turning into mostly NA. Have my best hour of the contest, 317 Qs in the 2000Z hour on 15, mostly US. Finished the last 45 min or so on 20 with 166 Qs, but not nearly as productive as 15 – not sure why, as the band seemed good and usually late afternoon is great on 20. I'm very excited in the last few minutes of my 24 hours to see the score slowly inch over 7M points. Finally run out the contest at 2154Z, a little before 6 pm local time.

Then went out to the Taco Bell drive-through for a nachos supreme dinner, not very good, but hit the spot tonight. Had two glasses of Frangelico on the rocks while starting to tidy up the shack.

Monday, Oct. 30, 2023. Up at 7 or so and some fresh coffee tasted great. Meet John at Huchadas in Santa Cruz for a small post-contest breakfast, then back to the station to try to figure out the SteppIR controller. The fault codes identify driver chips U5, 6, 7, and 8. There are only 4 and these are 24-pin (or so) ICs. I remove one, U8 and there is no change. Checking with the AA55 shows some movement on the antenna, but nothing like what it should be. Calibrating doesn't help. I gingerly put the chip back in.

I started to put away the radio gear and disconnect and bundle antenna cables etc. Around 2 I went out for a run from our roundabout. Very hot – 34 degrees as it was on Friday. Coming back I was so hot I stopped at the little market near the house and got three small bottles of chilled orange and berry juice, then had them over ice while cooling back down. Really hit the spot.

To JP and Cris's at 6:15. Brief talk with Cris re finances and handed her my rent. Then chatted with JP re the SteppIR. JP is quite knowledgeable and says that many guys are bitching about the chips on the SteppIR reflector. One known problem is that even with the controller powered off, there is a small current sent to the antenna motors to help them hold position. So if you disconnect the antenna cable, this can cause some kind of surge that damages the chips. This is really bad engineering, IMHO. The remedy is, when leaving, to retract the elements, then pull out the power cable, then disconnect the antenna cable.

He also said that of the 4 chips, one is for each element. Presumably we are only using two of them, so he is going to try switching chips to see if anything improves, and can report to us by email.

An excellent dinner at Barefoot with JP, Cris, and John. Then hit the sack at 10 or so, very tired for some reason.

Tuesday, Oct. 31, 2023. My plane to MIA isn't until 3 so I decided on an early morning run from our roundabout. Lots of traffic on the road at 7:30. Temp only 26 degrees C, humid but not uncomfortable (yet). All flights work on time, and I end up back home a little after midnight.

Things to bring: small files, 9v batt for vom, my work pants.