

Feb. 2024 ARRL DX CW CONTEST P49Y

AE6Y
2/22/24

Tuesday, Feb. 13 - Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2024. Typical AA schedule, with plane set to leave SFO a little after 10 p.m. for MIA, then leave MIA at 10:30 a.m. and arrive at AUA at 2:30 p.m. (with an hour time change thrown in). I have one checked suitcase at 48 pounds containing the KPA1500 power supply and low voltage cable (together about 20 pounds) then a small carryon suitcase with the KPA1500 RF deck and a little bit of extra gear (maybe 25 pounds in all). This suitcase is just like the one I took the K4 to Aruba in last fall, but must be a bit smaller as the KPA1500, said to be exactly the same size as the K4, barely can get shoehorned in, even after removing the side handle and the side rubber feet. It's in with its back down, cushioned by a towel top and bottom and very little on the sides. Hopefully with gentle handling it will be OK. No trouble going through TSA with it at SFO. I got there early and hung out for a while and got some food at the Admirals Club.

My K4 and the shack K3 should be set up at the shack, left there by Ed, after he dismantled his SO3R CQWPX RTTY operation from last weekend, for which he was using another K3 of his own.

Planes were on time and passport control was easy. Bill, W9KKN, was on the plane on his way to doing a M/S at ZF1A on Grand Cayman. We talked radio and breakfasted at the Centurion Lounge near Gate D-12, then I went off to finish my stay in MIA at the Admiral's Club at D-30. No customs at all. Hertz unfortunately was slow, mainly waiting for the guy to bring out the car, which ended up being a small Chevy Cruze. La Bella Carolina wasn't working this day. I spent some time working on an IT problem, whereby I could connect to my MS Office but then was barred from using it. Talking to Mardi on the phone revealed that they had blocked international access to the system to reduce hacking. He changed some settings and freed it up, fortunately.

In the shack, Ed had left the K4 on the right and the K3 on the left. I recabled, using the DXD cables and switched the radios, just out of personal preference. John C came by at 7:30 and we had a quick dinner at the Wendy's in Santa Cruz. He had spent the day hooking up a new NW beverage for the contest. Back at the shack, I got CQPWIN working with the radios. Here's the hookup:

- 1) Compaq USB expander plugged into USB port on laptop. Monitor plugged into VGA-HDMI adaptor.
- 2) USB cable from the K4 USB port into expander. This set up two serial ports. I renumbered them as Com 11 and 12 in Device Manager, restarted the computer, and they were recognized for rig control, setting the baud rate on the radio at 9600.
- 3) The K3 has a USB cable also, and it seemed to set up a serial port, but at least initially rig control didn't work. Instead I disconnected the PC connection from the P3 (which with this setup is siamesed from the radio jack, and connected a 9-pin cable from the P3 to one of the com ports on the USB to 4-serial port adaptor, and that worked fine.

Unfortunately, the cable I brought is only 3 feet long. Of course, in the box labeled DB9 cables in the 2d BR on top of the closed is a 6-footer that also works (with a “W6LD” label on it).

- 4) R1/2 switching from another serial port on the adaptor.
- 5) Winkey plugged into the USB expander also set up a serial port; I renumbered it, and it opened ok.
- 6) Keyboard into PS2 adaptor, plugged into USB expander. Mouse was via wireless USB dongle on computer. If I had brought my wireless keyboard, it would have worked off the same dongle (and been more space efficient).
- 7) Note that after renumbering the com ports, you have to restart the laptop for the new designations to become effective.

Finished all of this work circa 11 p.m., and the CWT was just starting. Made a few dozen Qs without logging, on 80/40/20, just running the K4 barefoot and using hand sending only. To bed at around 11:30 but didn't fall asleep easily even though I had been tired earlier, probably due to time difference (and a mosquito buzzing around – a strange occurrence for Aruba).

Thursday, February 15, 2024. Up a bit after 8, and updated these notes plus doing a little radio checkout. The SteppIR is a bit off with SWRs of close to 3 in CW bands. I did a calibration which gave below 2 on 15 and 10 and close to 2 on 20. To Lings for \$150 of food shopping. I would normally return through O'Stad (having gone there on the new highway leaving from the airport) but there were at least two cruise ships visible in port, one of which was a mega ship, so I came back the same way to avoid the town traffic.

I continued setting things up, including putting the KPA1500 on top of the 91B, with the PS on the floor below. It works very well with the K4. I set the K4 Tune LP menu setting to 20 watts, so that works well for using the KPA antenna tune function. I ran a brief pileup of EUs on 10 more to verify the various antennas than for any other reason. Signals weren't strong and it wasn't much fun. I decided to go for a run from our roundabout to the one to the north and return, 41 min. of shuffling along. The car said the temp was 32-33 (i.e., 89-91 F.) but it felt cooler, as the sun was partly hidden by clouds and it was very breezy.

On the way back I stopped at the Ritz for a strawberry shake, then tried out the new used Acom 2000A that we had purchased from Luise. It originally had been bought by Joop Bok, P43JB (in about 2007 said JP later). It seemed to run fine with the K3. It's very quiet. I ran some guys on 10 and later 15 using the K4/1500. At 7:30 Lisandro and Lissette came by and we had a very nice dinner at a new restaurant in Santa Cruz, the Sushi Factory. Owner Sandra and her daughter Annabela are both very nice people. They, along with their sushi chef, are Venezuelan. It's on the left side of the street from here, past the Wendy's and in the far side of the cluster with Burger King, just across from the Subway. Highly recommended. Had a 50-pc combo, plus extra wasabi (apparently an inside joke involving the owners and Lisandro). Ran some guys on 40, but the pileup was quite unruly and I turned it off after a while.

Friday, Feb. 16, 2024. Slept very soundly till 8 or so, then brewed some coffee. A desultory day with one unusual event. I had driven in the afternoon over to Seroe Colorado, the north side of the southeast tip of the island past San Nicholas. I drove around on unpaved roads for a while, including past a row of dilapidated houses/shacks that look like they once were a community, but seem abandoned now. At one point, driving south, I ran into loose sand and nearly got the car stuck, but was able to reverse out and drive a ways back, where I parked and set out on a run. After a bit, on the way back, I came across a couple in their 30s with a small red Kia Picanto that they had gotten stuck in the sand. They tried to dig out the front wheels but were having trouble (though I think with some more effort they could have extricated the vehicle). Anyway, they didn't seem to know either English or Spanish, so it was hard to communicate. Turned out they were from Brazil, so I guess they were speaking Portuguese. Using gestures and a phone translator, they asked for a ride, so I drove them back to San Nicholas. Amazingly, at the first store we came to there was a guy with a big pickup truck with knobby tires who was apparently willing to help, so I left them with him, and grateful thanks from the Brazilians.

I then drove to our roundabout for a run up to the new bridge, then to Wendy's drive through for another Double Dave for my afternoon meal. Then a shower and prepared some contest food while waiting for events to begin.

Saturday, Feb. 17 - Sunday, Feb. 18, 2024. My contest activity can be seen on the rate sheet. In general,

- 1) No rates over 200, due to pileups being more difficult to manage, with everyone calling zero beat and giving their call just once. Often it was hard to decipher even a letter.
- 2) I did SO2R with alternate cq'ing at times on 40/80 and also on 10/15. This was helpful.
- 3) Got very tired Saturday morning, then got a second wind and as usual felt fine all the way up to deciding to take a few hours off early Sunday morning. I hit a wall (see 3830 writeup below) in the last few hours of the contest. Nonetheless, per their posted rate sheet, in the last 5 hours ZF1A had 605 contacts, while I had 720 – a goodly number of which were on autopilot!
- 4) It is always instructive to compare various scores. John Crovelli as P44W did virtually the same as I did, though he was unassisted in an attempt to maximize his WRTC qualifying points (assisted gets a 5% deduction). OTOH in the assisted category I finished second to VE3DZ at TO4A on Martinique who went assisted to avoid competing with 8P5A, who won the contest for the DX single ops. Interestingly John and I both had a bit over 5300 QSOs, while a benchmark ZF1A, the station that Bill was flying to MIA to get to, as a M/S with 4 ops and in-band stations, only had 6000 or so. I was very surprised that they didn't leave us in the dust, but it seems that all of us in the Caribbean suffered from the fact that the condx were outstandingly good, and when EU is pounding in for hour after hour to NA, the guys like us to the south tend to get ignored. Furthermore, not only were the high bands in great shape, but the low bands were also. They had very low noise levels, and this allowed some EU stations to have unusually high mult totals (e.g., over 325) which they normally can't achieve. A number of M/M stations reported contacts on all 6 bands in the first hour of the contest Whew!

Monday, Feb. 19, 2024. I could have slept for a few more hours, but John was going to pick me up at 8:30 to drive to Huchadas for breakfast, so I was up and brewing coffee before 8. We chatted about the contest. Interestingly he had done about 2% better than I did, which actually made me happy to be so close to the master.

I caught up on a number of work items, then went to Cris and JP's for finances and to have dinner at P.F. Chang's. It was excellent as usual, Three appetizers and three main dishes, and Cris took home enough food for another meal for them. Before that, Lisandro came over to look at our TV situation, as we had been talking about it. We verified that the Setarnet cable in the LR works fine. It is an analog cable, with no converter box so I need to make sure that a new TV has such an old-fashioned input, not just HDMI. The problem with the existing Vizio TV is that the remote is broken, so it's virtually impossible to use, plus it is quite small.

On the way back, Cris drove down the main coast road through Oranjestad, where there were two huge cruise ships in port. I was saying how I admired the bike paths they installed when they divided the highway, and also the new bridge just north of us. We got into a discussion about the color of the bridge. I said it was gray, and she said it was green. Turned out we were both right – it is painted gray, but lit up with green floodlights at night.

Tuesday, Feb. 20, 2024. Slept this time till after eight, checked emails, etc., then drove over to Pricemart, where I bought their cheapest TV, a 43 inch model by JVC for 420 florins, \$234 (plus renewing my Pricemart membership, which had expired in 2007, for \$43). It does have analog as well as a variety of "smart" inputs, and advertised that it was a Google TV. The guy at the store warned me that the only drawback to it is that the remote cannot be replaced by a universal remote if damaged, so we need to be careful with it.

Back at the cottage, I hooked it up and it works fine. We get about 40 channels. The picture isn't quite as sharp as with digital inputs, but is quite OK. It's very nice to be able to keep up with CNN, BBC, etc. at the cottage. Should have done this years ago. After noon I went for a run from Island Asia to the Coral Pyramid, then got some takeout food at Taco Bell. The weather by the way has been very nice for the whole trip. Nothing like the horribly hot and humid conditions we faced in October. Temp is 31-33deg. C. and scattered clouds and sunshine, absolutely no rain, but lots of wind.

Writeup for 3830

Class: SOUAB HP

QTH: Aruba

Operating Time (hrs): 41

Location: South America

OpMode: SO2R

Summary:

Band QSOs Mults

160: 270 51

80: 440 59

40:	922	59		
20:	1092	61		
15:	1210	61		
10:	1303	61		
Total:	5237	352	Total Score	5,530,272

Club: Northern California Contest Club

Well, the expression "a rising tide raises all boats" doesn't apply to the ARRL DX contest from the Caribbean. As others have noted, the fabulous worldwide conditions unfortunately (for us) give the US/VE stations lots of other targets for their RF energy. As an example, my score this year is almost a million points less than my best over the years (in 2012) from this location.

This was my first time using spotting assistance from here, and it was interesting but of minor assistance. My normal logging program, CQPWIN, doesn't accommodate spots, but I kept a cluster running in a window and occasionally picked up interesting tidbits, like VY1AAA or VO2AC changing bands. On Saturday night, having seen K4AB spotted on 80, I went and asked him to move to 160, where I still needed the AL mult (and he did, thanks!).

The low bands were very quiet. In fact, I never had to use the beverages on 40, and on 160 could hear numerous EU stations. I had brought my KPA1500 down with me for this contest, and it was a pleasure to use an automatic amp (actually two, with the second being an old, recently acquired Acom 2000) that enabled quick frequency jumps without retuning, particularly when tired and confused late in the contest.

Speaking of which, I nearly gave up in the last two hours, when I couldn't quite make sense what I was doing or why. A loud sound in the headphones would jar me awake and I would note that the log window was full of Js and Ks where my fingers had remained on the keyboard as I fell asleep. When rate slowed on 20 in the last hour, I thought I should switch to 40, but I couldn't for the life of me think why, or what I was actually trying to accomplish. Fortunately, I continued on autopilot logging callsigns and locations, even though I couldn't exactly figure out why, till the contest mercifully ended. Although I didn't comprehend exactly why, I told myself that quitting with an hour to go would be hard to explain at breakfast the next day to Aruban neighbor John, W2GD, P44W, so thanks to him for his unknowing support. Very strange!

Thanks also as always to co-owner John, W6LD/P40L, and Ed, W0YK/P49X, for all their recent upkeep work on the cottage and the station, and to Cris and JP (P43C, P43A) for keeping everything shipshape.

Full write-up, including rate sheet and story, will be our website, www.arubaqth.com. This was our 198th contest from here since John and I started in 2002.

*73 and thanks to all who participated,
Andy, AE6Y, P49Y*