

QRP HOURS 40m contest/sprint

This event was run in October 2016. In the rules for the 80m contest in April, people were asked whether they would be interested in a second QRP Hours event later in the year, on 40m. There were several favourable comments so a 40m event was announced in the September Lokey.

The timing was problematic. For most of the year until August the 40m band was downright odd, with frequent CMEs and other space weather affecting it so much it was unrecognisable as the same band we had been using so successfully in 2015 and earlier. So in the hope that the band would be more useful close to the equinox, we announced it in LoKey for Sept 2016 and published the detailed rules on the club website a few weeks later, thanks to webmaster Garry's support.

So how was the band and how much interest was there? The band was OK but there was no NVIS propagation, which caused some QRM problems. Activity: there was quite a bit, really. We received entries from 18 operators. 9 of those recorded contacts on both CW and SSB, 4 logged only CW and 5 logged only SSB contacts. The portable/battery power concept also received good support, 6 of the logs coming from portables.

From the logs it appears there were another approx 20 operators, mainly home stations, who gave the QRP operators their extra contacts. (SOTA summit-to-summit contacts are also usually QRP-QRP. Want more? Go SOTA)

Conditions were described as difficult. Without any close-in propagation it was hard to know you were on a clear frequency. Several stations answered CQs but could not hear anything of each other.

In at least two cases operators logged contacts with callsign X, but callsign Y claimed the other side of the contact including the sequence number! (Should we announce our callsigns more frequently in contests?).

So there were a few wrong callsigns and numbers logged. For wrong numbers, the benefit of the doubt is given to the sending station, it is assumed they probably sent the right number as it is the next one in their sequence. However for this event I did not penalise anyone for such errors. If we get to the point where a sheep station is the prize, the rules can tighten up a bit. For this event it was sufficient to get on the air, make some contacts and send in a log.

The scores

CW

VK4FW	18*	
VK7CW/1	12*	
VK5LJ	11*	
VK2IG	10	
VK2JDR	10*	portable with LIPO battery
VK3YE	9 *	Beach portable
VK4JAZ	7*	SOTA portable
VK1CT	6	

VK2KJJ	5	
VK2ZB	5	
VK3ANP	5	
VK3BYD	5	

SSB

VK2IG	20*	
VK3TUN	13*	QRP Portable in a National Park
VK5LJ	10*	
VK5WTF	9	
VK4FE	7*	portable, battery power
VK3YE	5*	Beach portable
VK2KJJ	4	
VK4FAAJ	4*	
VK2JDR	3*	portable
VK3ANP	3	
VK3BYD	3	
VK5ATQ	3	
VK3ZB	2	
VK3ARH	2	(omitted from published result – my error)

* Certificates awarded:

- 1st to 3rd place in CW and SSB
- VK4FAAJ for Foundation licence entry
- VK3TUN operating in a National Park at 5W SSB
- Grant VK4JAZ Portable operation at a SOTA summit, using 1.5w from a KX1.

I think this event has demonstrated that operators are certainly interested in events where they will make QRP-QRP contacts on 40m. Also the portable QRP concept was very well supported, as without those entries the list would have been much shorter! Some operated in National Parks and others from SOTA summits, some were eligible for both SOTA and Parks Award points.

Logging

The popular logging program VKCL did not cater for this event. Several operators devised workarounds for that problem. I will contact Mike 3AVV and ask what options he could include for a variable date/time/band QRP contest. For most logs it was feasible to type out the columns of data required using a text editor faster than you could open and configure a more complex tool.

Repeating the event?

It seems to be worth running this event again next year. I'm open to suggestions about bands and timing in terms of the month and the day (Saturday or Sunday?). There is

already a field day event in March, the 80m QRP hours event is usually in April and the shires contest in June and RD in August, apart from the international contests.

We cannot run a contest on 10, 18 or 24 MHz and we need to avoid QRM from other contests. To include Foundation calls, which I believe we should, 80, 40, 15 and 10m are the only options for HF and we already have the April event on 80m. As much as we would like propagation on 10m to open up nicely, it could be a very quiet event. Another idea is simply making it a QSO party rather than a contest.

One log listed contacts made on CW well into the SSB hour. Could the event run for 2 hours, and you could use whichever mode you like at any time during the event? In poor conditions it could be a very slow event, but if contacts are available on ssb when nobody is answering your CW CQ, maybe some flexibility would help.

Please email comments about bands and dates/days to contests at vkqrpclub.org.

Soapbox

5w as a home station using mains power. Next year I will operate a SOTA in a national park with solar power qrp station. (Cameron VK4FAAJ) [ticking a lot of boxes there!]

Using Drew Diamonds TCF cw transceiver at 2W (David VK3ANP)

Portable in Cobbononee National Park with a K2 set to 5w (David VK3TUN)

FT817 at home, 3w output (Mark VK2ZB)

Cw rig was Heathkit HW 8 on 1 watt output. ssb rig was Kenwood tx480hx turned down to 5 w watts output (Joe/Yurn VK2KJJ)

The FoF2 being below the operating frequency at the time (the Sydney ionograms show it was around 6 MHz during the contest - from that and the recorded virtual height of 400 km, I've computed a skip zone radius of 240 km) meant one couldn't hear the nearby stations via skywave, and sometimes it was possible to end up co-frequency with another VK2 a couple of hundred km away and not know about it. This is certainly a different dimension to the 80m version of this contest, where of course you can hear everyone.... Helen VK2FENG was going to operate on ssb but was unavailable so I stepped up to the mike. (Mike VK2IG)

Used an Elecraft K1 at about 4W. (Chris VK1CT)

Portable at Woronora Heights, NSW using LiPo battery, end fed half wave antenna, Power 5W (VK2JDR)

Youkits HB1B at 5 watts, Homebrew 40m Doublet up 3 metres, Portable at Nichols, Canberra (VK7CW/1)

Operated an FT817, portable on battery power at Port Gawler Conservation Park, SA (Marcus VK5WTF aka VK5TWF according to one log, Marcus!)

5W from home (Trevor VK5ATQ)

Location: Jindalee, QLD, portable station using battery power: Elecraft KX1, 7a/h gel cell
Output level: 3W. (Grant VK4JAZ)

It was a challenge to work stations...equipment was Elecraft K3 running 5 watts with a home brew elevated quarter wave vertical with 25 elevated radials as well as a home brew wire. (Bill VK4FW)

Portable on battery power from Wonga Beach, Far north Qld. 5w (Fred VK4FE)

Portable using battery power for FT817, at Chelsea Beach [of course!] (Peter VK3YE)

Home station at 5w (Lawrie VK5LJ)

Operated from home using KX3 at 5w and internal battery.

Thanks to all who operated and sent in their logs. I could only be there for a few minutes of the CW section but from the logs it was a good event.
Apologies to Allen, VK3ARH, who submitted his log but didn't make it into the LoKey version of the results, due to my error.

73 Andrew VK1DA VK2UH