

G29-1-1

DXing the Contests  
by Robert Kramer

Although they have been somewhat invisible the past few years, the IRCA annually conducts several DX contests. For the most part these are contests of skill and knowledge. Thus the winner is usually a well known DX name. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't join (even if you have little chance of winning) this year's contests, for they aid in the logging of new stations. As you are tuning around looking for contest points, you are doing two things: 1. getting a better knowledge of the various frequencies, and 2. actually DXing. While you are looking for something you can use for the contest, a station you need could pop in (an example, CADX is conducting a GY channels contest. Since July 1 I have logged 7 new GYers whilst looking for contest points). Thus just joining and participating in the contests, will, more than likely, add to your log.

Probably the greatest function of the contests is to help the DXer develop his DX skills. Since many of the contests are based on logging a set number of stations from each political unit (be it state, province or country), this will make the DXer dig a little deeper on the frequencies to look for that elusive rare state. In doing so, the DXer learns what is possible and what isn't, what's there and what isn't. This will then, hopefully, be put in the DXers storeroom of information in his head for future reference. To illustrate how this works, local DXer Mike Jesiorski improved his 1980-81 contest point total by about 150 points over the previous season's contest (using identical rules) despite the fact that the conditions were considerably worse this season. The reason for this was that he developed a better working knowledge of the band and had a much better idea as to what to look for.

A reason for the more experienced DXer to join the contests, in addition to his good chance at winning, is for the challenge of relogging those tough stations you got a few years ago. And in doing so, you will probably log stations that you haven't heard yet. It also gives you something to look for while DXing (since the more stations you've heard, the less there are left to hear & the harder it is to log something new). It adds a certain amount of fun to a band crowded with stations you've already heard.

Although the rules of each contest vary greatly, there are some common guidelines that will help you compete in the contests. These are the methods I have used to win many contests:

1. Make full use of the frequency check list.
2. DX Sunrise skip & sunset skip as much as possible.
3. If possible have a tape recorder running continuously when DXing so you don't miss an ID.
4. For periods when you won't be able to DX, make use of a timer to turn on your receiver & tape recorder.
5. If you can, use more than one receiver (particularly at S/On & S/Off periods).
6. Make full use of the graveyard channels (if there is a bonus for these in the contest).
7. When possible, avoid the clear channels and go after the higher value regional, daytime & GY channel stations.
8. Use the logging columns to see what is being heard.
9. Make full use of you past DX experience (such as in a situation where a station from a rare state is in, try to recall what else has been heard under similar conditions).
10. Try for all DX tests no matter how far away. If they use CW IDs, even a GYer a thousand miles away could be heard.

DXing the GRAVEYARD CHANNELS

by Robert Kramer

Although, by the time it gets into print, this article may be a little late for this year, as Harry Hayes noted in a recent DXF, the summer months are the peak period for DXing the Graveyard (GY) channels. Actually, the time they are at their best is the period between the middle of July and the end of October, with the mid part of September to the middle of October being the peak. Exactly why this is so, I don't know. But during these months you will find different stations in nearly every night (unlike the winter months when the usual pests will dominate). In addition, it is at this time that your local GYers will be easiest to null to get stations through them. An example: here in the Chicago Area we have a local on 1490, WOAP (Oak Park, IL). At my old QTHs they were about 4-6 air miles away. Most of the time they were so strong that when their null point was reached the S meter barely dropped. But during the peak GY season they were often nullable (although not every night), but you couldn't touch the loop or they'd be right back (a very narrow null). Through them I heard such goodies as: WDM, WKBV, WBEK, WMRN, WAEB, WDXB, WITA, WTUP, WAJF and many more.

Writing an article such as this for a nationwide readership is very difficult. Even for CADX, a similar article went without listing target stations, because what is being heard at point A may not be what is received at point B. Sometimes a mile or two will produce different conditions (especially if you have a local on one of the GY frequencies). So I won't be able to tell you what to look for. Instead, I'll provide some practical tips on DXing the GY Channels and leave you to discover just what can be logged in your area.

For those of you who have spent some time on the GY channels, you probably won't get much out of this article, since you already know what they are like. But those who are new to the hobby, or have not given these frequencies such attention, probably wonder how anybody can possibly log any stations, taking into account the cluttered, congested sound these channels are known for. But it's not always like that. Stations do surface above the clutter, sometimes blasting in. However, they won't be in for long stretches at a time like you may be used to on clear or regional channels. Instead, the station will fade and come back, fade & return. Sometimes a number of stations will trade places on top of the channel and then disappear to make room for the next group. Basically, it's a matter of patience. You just have to sit on a channel and wait for something to surface.

Due to the congestion of the GY channels, some nights can be extremely frustrating, with nothing IDed. Even the stations blasting in while playing music will fade before they ID. The next night you may not be able to keep up with the IDs. There also have been times that I was sitting on a rather quiet channel (just weak clutter with nothing surfacing on top) and then suddenly the channel livened up, sounding as if somebody had activated a switch. Because of this unpredictability, I always find other things to do while DXing these channels. Sometimes I work on updating records, clean up the shack or even type CDXR. Since the receiver is not the center of my attention (something that is essential when DXing a GYer), it is necessary to have a tape recorder running constantly in order to hear something that wasn't clear across the room. Running the recorder continuously when at the dials is also wise, since you can never tell when an ID will pop in. With the recorder on, the ID won't be missed.

Although it varies from year to year, the best time of day to DX the GYers is from around local sunset to midnight or 1 AM local time (when many stations have signed off). After sign-offs, many of the frequencies will become less congested, but usually the same couple of stations will trade places. On Monday mornings some of the frequencies may seem totally dead (in the Chicago Area 1230 & 1490) due to the large number of stations that are off the air. Because of this, a GY frequency can be real productive on MMs, but only under good conditions. Under lousy conditions you may hear nothing (some MMs, 1230 sounds totally empty in Chicago). Another time to try GY DX is around the hour & half hour at sign-on times (0500+, depending on where you live). Most mornings you will hear few or no sign-ons, but occasionally a surprise will pop in.

Guidelines for Successfully DXing the GY Channels:

1. Be patient, it takes some effort to log GY DX.
2. Run a tape recorder continuously so you don't miss any IDs.
3. Don't ignore DX tests & frequency checks just because they are far away. Many DX tests run CW IDs, and with frequency checks, you can call the station and arrange for them to vary the tone pitch or turn the tone off and on rapidly (to resemble CW) to ID it if there is little chance for a voice ID.
4. Be particularly alert on the hour, when most stations ID.
5. Be on the look out for unusual conditions (such as aurora or a great western opening, or eastern openings for westerners) especially on Monday mornings.
6. Keep tape recordings of UnIDeds. Sometimes you will be able to ID it later (maybe the UnIDed is a call change or you didn't hear it right the first time).
7. Don't rule out reception just because the station is far away. Several CADXers have logged GY DX up to 1000 miles on regular schedule. The conditions just have to be right.
8. Plan to DX GY channels extensively during the period of mid July to late October.

Through the use of these guidelines, you should have great success with GY Channel DX. Good luck.