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## DX Techniques

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And now, "How I DX", short essays by IRCA members stressing the techniques they use to hear DX. There are several member contributions, even one from me! Maybe you will read about a technique for DXing that you haven't tried. Try it out and let us all know how it works. Thanks to those who have made this column possible.

### Shawn Axelrod - Winnipeg, Manitoba

Well, I'm a bit new to all of this. Although a DXer since 1971, I only got into BCB DXing in the last 3 years. You might say I'm a seasoned novice, hi! I liked the idea about keeping track of what you have heard. I keep a book with the stations I've heard listed by frequency. Under each frequency I list call letters and location. I don't keep track of the format for they seem to change very often and on graveyard frequencies you can forget it as there are too many stations doing the same thing. I also keep a sort of hit list of new stations or stations I want to hear handy so I can give it a try. If, for instance, I have good skip to Ontario in the 1300-1500's, I'll try for those Ontario stations I feel that fall into the range. It gives you a fighting chance.

One very important lesson I learned from over 15 years of Ham Band DXing is that you need 3 pieces of equipment. 1) a receiver, 2) an antenna and 3) a tape recorder. My tape recorder runs constantly. It goes on when the radio goes on and off when the radio goes off. Many a time my tape recorder has landed me a new one because the tape is quicker than the ear, not to mention it loves to repeat things for you until you get it right. Hi!!

A new lesson I learned last week was concentrating on a small number of frequencies. I belong to CIDX (where I'm Ham Band editor) and we had a BCB contest. The rules were simple, one point per station for your state or province; 2 points per station for other states or provinces; 3 points per station for foreign stations outside of US and Canada. The contest went from local midnight February 21 to 2359 local February 28. The kicker was you could only contest in 2 - 100 khz sections of your choice from 530 to 1610. I chose 1310-1410 and 1420-1520, as we have no locals there. Well, to make a short story long, hi! I logged off 123 stations of which 40 were new for me! I listened various times to catch late night as well as sunrise, sunset stuff. All in all, it was very profitable for me as my station heard count is now at 700.

### John Demmitt - Bellefonte, Pennsylvania

My receiver stays on during my waking and sleeping hours. I will often conduct a quick scan to determine how well the propagation is doing and to locate any new stations or changes in programming. As soon as I notice something unusual, I get out the logbook and I am ready. I keep the log, pencil and paper near the receiver at all times because you never know when interesting DX is going to roll in. Normally, the best period to DX is around sunset so I often lay out my materials and position the Sony ICF-S5W in an area where I can make nulls. When going for the DX, I find it to my advantage not to use an outside antenna or AC power as they tend not to allow for nulling. When I detect stations from a certain area, I may try for the other frequencies assigned to that region. I'll rotate the radio in every angle possible searching for the nulls that will bring in that elusive DX. I'll search all 129,600 degrees if need be by circling the radio up, down, sideways, upside down, etc. I'll hold the receiver to the ceiling for some stations and hug the floor for other stations. I'll often use a metal door frame to null out the more powerful locals. Other interesting places to DX near are heat pipes, water pipes and along the walls. Must go after that signal sniffing it out no matter where it is. A handy reference should include a good listing of stations, your log, an atlas and a set of maps showing sunrise and sunsets. A lot of time is also very helpful. Keeping up on the latest news in the radio hobby will assist you at finding new stations so be sure to keep IRCA's DX Monitor as part of your hobby library.

### Tom Laskowski - West Lafayette, Indiana

In my opinion, a successful approach to DXing is to be very organized. This means keeping a log. This may seem trivial, but there are in fact many who don't.

I prefer to use logsheets which are commercially available as their appearance is pleasing. I keep a chronological record of my loggings, recording a station one time for each frequency or call letters used. I also keep an index card file by frequency so I can quickly tell what I have heard on a particular frequency. This could easily be done also with a computer, but personally I see no need for such an expense if it is only used for DXing. As noted in the initial "DX Techniques" column, when first starting out, you will hear only DX. A good thing to do when starting out is to spend some time to memorize the reliable stations which are being heard. This includes clear channel stations and strong regionals. By memorizing what is on a particular frequency, you will quickly be able to note anything unusual being heard. This will permit more time for actual DXing rather than spending time looking through bulletins for clues to what you're hearing.

Another thing that I consider essential is to ALWAYS keep a tape recorder running while DXing. I use a tape recorder with a digital counter and when I hear a possible ID I note the counter number of the tape, the exact time heard and frequency. This way I can always go back and listen and get an ID. I've read accounts of DXers using a stereo tape recorder with one channel tuned into WWV and the other to the station they are listening to. This provides them with accurate time when taking details. However, I have never looked upon this idea with much favor. When trying to dig weak signals out of the mud, the last thing I want to hear is more QRM. I prefer to use headphones when going back over a tape and find it essential to use both ears. Adding a time signal to one channel makes it that much harder. I really think my way of utilizing a tape recorder is more efficient.

The final thing I require in my DXing is to have up to date material regarding the latest call letter, power, pattern, and format changes. Everything I need is in DX Monitor. I will comb through the bulletin and make a list of stations being heard in the column for my region (CDXR). I note the time and the location of the reporter for the logging. This provides me with a target list for stations I want to hear. I never actually use the content of the log to ID a station, but I will only enter a station in my log when I hear an ID. This may mean keeping after a station for a very long time to catch an ID.

There you have it. I don't see my DX activity as being a science, but I think if I'm going to be putting so much effort into it I am certainly going to approach it with a good attitude and well organized manner.

DXing to me is probably one of the most enjoyable activities I have ever known and belonging to IRCA with its excellent group of DXers with the many fine loggings provided, keeps me motivated to keep tuning to hear that ever elusive great catch.

### John C. Johnson - Billings, Montana

One must first have a log of stations, and keep a record of what is heard. This does not have to be elaborate, but some kind of written information is necessary. Keep an ear on the radio at various intervals. After listening over a period of time, you will become familiar with your "regular" stations. The station format, the way the signal sounds (strong no fades; good but always fades, etc.) is a big help. The more you listen, the easier it is to tell if you are listening to something new.

If you use a loop antenna, the direction becomes important. Knowing you can "null" a regular station to hear others is helpful in logging many new stations. Listening times will give you different stations, that is, sunrise, daytime, sunset, evenings and late night you will find different stations of any given frequency.

As loggings increase, one may want to keep better records of what he has heard. I use my computer to keep track of all DX activities, and printing monthly activity reports. I use a commercial program, "IBM Filing Assistant" for filing and "IBM Reporting Assistant" for printing reports. Over the years I have found commercial station logs to be very dated, needing constant attention to keep up with call changes, new stations, etc. I have a rather large data base built using information on what I have heard and verified, my own listing of stations (currently just states/provinces that are commonly heard, plus all 50kw US and Canada stations) and using information in Broadcasting and IRCA DX Monitor I update the data base almost daily. (Each DX activity is given a code which appears in all data bases). About every 3 months, I do a printout of my own "AM Station Guide" which gives me a very very accurate and up to the minute guide which I use while DXing. At any time, I know what I have heard, when I heard it, verification information, and what I have not heard. Call changes are also included, I like to re-log call changes, many are from stations that I had logged when I lived in Sheridan, Wyoming from my early years of DX. As far as using a computer to print one's own log, well, that is not for everyone. I spent hundreds of hours entering data! The "AM Station Guide" data base is about 280,000 bytes. The guide takes over an hour to print!

When sending a reception report to a station, very complete information is given as to what I have heard. A report from me includes, if at all possible, no less than a half-hour of logging. I have received many replies from stations stating "Your's is the best reception report I have ever seen". Information as to signal, what else is being heard, fades, etc. is detailed. I also include information as to my receiver, antenna and location. I always mention a brief history of myself and my DX, including information on the IRCA. I learned "How to DX" from listening to others, my first reports look poor compared to those of later years.

### Phil Bytheway - Seattle, Washington

This is a tough one for me, as I have tried almost every DX technique I can think of. When I started DXing back in 1968, I just tuned around in the evenings, and often spent hours listening to the programming on stations just because they were far away! I had heard about verifying stations from a friend, and when I wrote to KOB, Don Erickson, then IRCA publisher, got my name and sent me a sample of DX Monitor. Things have not been the same since. I learned about Monday Morning (when stations that are on 24 hours often time go off the air), loop antennas (which can often be used to null stations, even locals, and hear others), frequency checks (when daytimers come on the air to verify their frequency, usually with full power), sunrise (when daytimers can sign on before local sunrise), sunset (when daytimers sign off every fifteen minutes, or at least they used to), DX programs (where special tests are arranged by club members), and foreign DX (which blew my mind!) I have tried, and still try (although now with a tape recorder), all these techniques and, suprisingly enough, will feature in depth studies in future DX Techniques columns.

Since August 1984, I've been using a technique that has been called "DXing while you sleep". This requires an intimate knowledge of the band at all hours of darkness. Silent periods, nulling bearings and schedules are all important to take advantage of your "DX time". This technique requires a stable receiver, tape recorder (with lots of tapes) and an accurate timer. After I'm through tuning around in the evenings, I set the radio to a frequency that I have determined might net a new station. I then peak the antenna and pointing it in a position that has proven successful in the past. The audio is then switched into my recorder, which is turned on and off by the timer. The next morning, I take the tape to work and listen to it during my lunch hour. That's it in a nut shell. I will be featuring this technique in detail in a future column.

I can't overemphasize the need for good, accurate logs and a list of stations I've heard as essential for making my DX time count. And, of course, a good source of information on what is being heard, like DX Monitor, helps with the preparation of my hit list, no matter how it is organized (by frequency, location or sunrise/sunset time).

In the next DX Techniques column, I will cover the various DX accessories that are available to help in addition to a log and DX Monitor. These will include other reference books, tape recorders, filters, tuners, etc. Those of you wishing to contribute, please send it to me by May 1st. I'm also willing to field any questions that you may have about BCB DXing. If I don't know the answer, I'll find someone who does! Take care.... phil