

My first 25 states from Northern California (without using a loop)

by Rich Toebe

Although I've been a regular DXer since 1970, our move to Davis is the first significant one since 1980. Prior to that, my various Bay Area locations have all been within a 25 mile radius (using Concord as the center), so I've kept one master logbook. With this move, I have started over again. "Starting from scratch" is quite different today compared to the days before the clear channels were broken down, the advent of almost universal 24/7 station operation, and the additional sources of interference because of widespread adoption of computers and other electronic devices.

My schedule has been such that much of my listening has been done in the car. For most of the time I have been living here, my next-door neighbor had a high speed Frame Relay connection which caused severe interference to my AM radio reception, centered on about 770 kHz, but noticeable down in the LW range and up to about 4 MHz. Only recently has that disappeared, when she changed jobs and shut off that connection.

This is an informal explanation on how, in today's environment, it is still possible to hear DX from half the United States in Northern California fairly easily, using a decent receiver and the internal antenna supplied. Many of the receptions have been with the use of a Delco stock AM-FM stereo-CD receiver, which is in my opinion a pretty hot signal inductor but is woefully inadequate on selectivity. Both co-channels to a local are completely unusable because of splash, and often the second co-channel would suffer some interference too. I was never able to hear a signal on 730 or 750, for example, in the greater Bay Area; near Sacramento, 1520 and 1540 suffer the same effect.

I have collected a number of receivers over the years, and among various portables, I have used the Grundig Concert Boy 1100, purchased in 1975, the Grundig 3400 Satellit in 1980, the GE Superadio II in 1981, the Sony ICF-2010 in 1986, the Sony M40W Walkman (1986 or '87?), and the Grundig Yacht Boy 300 in 1997. I previously had the Grundig Music Boy, which was my first DX receiver, purchased in 1970, but it literally was so abused that in the end I junked it. It was a great signal inductor; I heard WBZ-1030, WNBC-660, WABC-770, WCBS-880, Cuba 640 under KFI, KORL-650, KGU-760, KFAR-660, CKLW-800, CFRB-1010, PJB-800 etc. many times with it. I never had a loop attached to it. I didn't even know they existed at the time. I wish I had taken better care of it, but then, what does a 12 year old know?

So, it's mid-November 1999, and I am starting over with my logbook. As it's a new location, here is the chance to reacquaint myself with the radio neighborhood. I look through my old logs and wonder if I'll be able to hear many of them again. So I set myself an initial goal of 25 US states, with logs within 25 miles of home when in the car; how long would it take to accomplish that without a loop? The stations specifically mentioned were heard without a loop, but the totals mentioned include those with one.

State #1: California

Of course, it's the home state, and being the biggest in population, it has a station on virtually every AM frequency. What is surprising is how many relatively close stations are still unheard after 2 years. I've not been able to ID 1580 Merced, presently KRAN, though they are only 112 miles away. Their new X-band twin, 1660, is easy to hear day and night. 1370 in Quincy, KPCO, is another no-show; they are on-air, as Tim Hall has recently logged them while on one of his road trips. They're 105 miles from here.

I have one disadvantage to living in Davis; it's on the west side of Sacramento, and that means most of the local stations' directional patterns pour their power in my direction. Even so, it's possible to null some stations pretty effectively. 1470-KIID, for example, can be nulled almost 100% by placing the radio at one specific point in my office/shack, at a very specific angle. Move it a ¼", and the effect disappears.

Of course a lot of interesting receptions happen at sunset, and that's usually when I'm in the car. The Central Valley has pretty good ground conductivity, and some weird effects will happen; I've had 1380 KHJJ in Lancaster come up to be equal KTKZ's strength while driving in the car between Dixon and Vacaville, about 25-30 miles west of Sacramento. This would be a good time to try for KRAN, right? No, KMIK in Tempe, AZ, KGAL in Lebanon, OR, or KBLA in Santa Monica usually pound the channel, and often take turns dominating the frequency. Every frequency except for 660, 690, 720, 730, 750, 780, 820, 840, 850, 890, 1060, 1160, and 1700 has been noted with California stations from Davis. 660, 850, 890 (KLFF CP) and 1700 (TIS) are possible. 1060 opened up with KPAY's move to 1290.

State #2: Oregon

KGAL is one of many Oregon stations that are common catches here; in fact, as California makes up my #1 most heard state, Oregon is #2, and from here on, I will rank the states by number of stations heard. The stations most likely to be mentioned as catches would be the clear channels, 1120 KPNW and 1190 KEX, and they are potent, but both suffer co-channel interference nowadays; 1120 KZSJ-CA puts out a good nighttime signal, and 1190 gets help from KXXM Anaheim, KDYA Vallejo, which has been on at night a few times, and a Spanish talker other than KXXM, which I suspect is Mexican but I never have ID'ed. The most reliable signal is in fact KXL 750, whose co-channel interference is at a null to Portland. I have 44 stations logged from Oregon.

State #3: Washington

Washington, with 33 stations logged, is almost as ubiquitous. The most reliable signals are clear channels: KOMO-1000 and KGA-1510, but KGA has been known to almost disappear when we've had (rare) auroral conditions, as we did earlier this year when the northern sky here was red from the aurora. Other common signals include KVI 570, KHHO 850 and KKOL 1300.

State #4: Utah

The Beehive State has quite a few strong signals pointed at California, likely to protect stations to the east. The most reliable signal is, of course, KSL 1160, but KNRS 570, KDXU 890, and KXOL 1660 are regulars. The newest station, KBJA 1640, puts a signal over semi-local KDIA in the early mornings. 24 stations heard so far.

State #5: Arizona

This state is both more and less common than I remember; many of the old reliables like KOY 550 (now KFYI) and KTAR 620 aren't as common now, but others come in more strongly; KTNN 660, KDUS 1060, KFNN 1510 and KMIK 1580 are quite powerful. KPXQ 1360 is a good choice for sunset DX. I've got 16 Arizona signals ID'ed.

State #6: Idaho

A state with a small population, it still yields a good number of catches; I've got 15 so far, plus one tentative. KBOI 670 is the obvious choice, but 1620 KBLI is a close second even with local KSMH on. Other common catches include KSEI 930, KUPI 980 and KRXR 1480, all heard in the car as well.

State #7: Nevada

Although closer to my location than any other state, Nevada is relatively sparse with signals. One Reno station, the closest Nevada city to Davis, at 122 miles away, is still unheard: 1550 KXTO. The best choices here for Nevada are the clears: KKOH 780 and KDWN 720. 15 Nevada stations are ID'ed positively.

State #8: Montana

Now the numbers dwindle off; Montana has yielded only seven positive ID's so far. The most common are KBOZ 1090 and KOFI 1180, but KMON 560 and KBUL 970 are good choices. KMON frequently is just under KSFO.

State #9: Colorado

KOA 850 is the obvious choice; they advertise being heard in 33 states at night, and are easily heard here. Stations that were fairly common years ago have eluded me so far: KLZ 560 and KKFN (ex-

KIMN) 950 are no-shows. Clear channel busters KLTT 670 and KTLK 760 have been heard fairly regularly. KDDZ 1690 was common until local KSXX came on, but KBJD 1650 puts in a good appearance nightly.

State #10: Texas

Texas is represented by five catches on four channels here. WOAI 1200, the "original" Clear Channel station (the company, that is) is an almost nightly occurrence here, and common in the car as well. WBAP 820, which was the most common in the old days, suffers a lot of co-channel interference now from XEMVS Mexicali and KGNW in WA. KRLD 1080 is a good one to look for, and both X-banders on 1700 have been heard. Colorado is ranked above Texas because KOA has a stronger signal here than, and was logged before, WOAI.

State #11: New Mexico

KINF 1020 in Roswell is the most reliable of the four signals heard, but KKOZ 770 Albuquerque, formerly holding that spot, comes in well after KCBC goes off. KKIM 1000 was heard here too, probably on day power; it was never previously heard. The fourth station is on 1330, KGAK with Navajo programs. That was a one-time event so far.

State #12: Wyoming

Three stations represent Wyoming. The most reliable is KTWO 1030, as it has always been, but 1360 KRKK is fairly common. 1410 KWYO makes an appearance every so often.

State #13: Illinois

When I first started DX'ing in 1970, four Windy City clears made the list: WMAQ 670, WGN 720, WBBM 780, and WLS 890. Today, only WMAQ (now WSCR) has not been heard. WBBM is the most reliable now, often heard just under KKOZ, where WLS would have held that spot 20 years ago.

State #14: Iowa

The two most reliable stations are still heard here: WHO 1040 and KXEL 1540, but both are harder to hear than they were. 1540 was logged during a KFBK silent period; WHO is fairly common at sunset, but at late night tends to be drowned out by Vancouver's CKST "The Team". KBGG 1700 rounds out the list, for three stations. Illinois' signals are more reliable in general, so gets ranked above Iowa.

State #15: Oklahoma

The most reliable station used to be 1210 KGYN; now it's 1170 KVOO. #2 is still 1520 KOMA. 1210 is a jumble now, but I expect to hear Guyton eventually. Tulsa on 740 is another former catch that I expect to hear. So far, only the two heard here.

State #16: Florida

This was heard early on, and in the car a number of times to boot: WTIR 1680 was very strong at sunset, when they ran their testing programs, likely at the full 10kW. Now Radio Disney in Fresno is pretty strong. At this point, ranking is chronological.

State #17: Michigan

Another early catch, WJNZ "1680 Jams" was booming in on the car radio, practically a local. Again, KAVT Fresno is on 24/7 but there are always silent periods to look out for. I missed out on hearing New Jersey, I think: I had talk under WJNZ but couldn't make it out. No sign of previously common WJR 760. One time I thought I had it, but it was KTLK-CO.

State #18: Ohio

WLW 700 is the obvious choice and the only one so far. "Newsradio 700" has been heard in the car and at home on a number of occasions, often over co-channel stations.

State #19: Louisiana

New Orleans' WWL 870 is still the most common, though it's harder to hear through KIEV/KRLA and KLSQ in Laughlin. If KHTK 1140 would go off, KWKH 1130 is a strong possibility.

State #20: Minnesota

Previously, I would have said WCCO 830 without any hesitation; they were the clear channel station to look for. Now with KNCO

Grass Valley fairly close by (and in the same bearing as Minneapolis, the most reliable station and only MN station heard is KSTP 1500.

State #21: Missouri

Only one here: KMOX 1120. Not much else to add; KPNW can be nulled easily, so it's not a real challenge. This "clear channel" hasn't changed much except for KZSJ.

State #22: Nebraska

Although logged later, KRVN 880 is no slouch: it frequently dominates 880 at sunset, and has been louder in the car in Concord (Bay Area) than local KNEW 910. Old reliables such as 1110 KFAB (thanks to local KLIB) and 750 in Grand Island are no-shows so far.

State #23: Kentucky

Heard in late January 2000, WHAS 840 was a fluke catch on the hour. Las Vegas dominates the channel now but does have a variable signal strength depending on conditions. Other troublemakers include KMAX-WA and KSWB-OR.

State #24: Georgia

It should have been WSB 750, but those days are gone. Now the most reliable signal is the X-bander on 1670, logged as WRNC with country music, heard with the Yacht Boy 305. The 305 is a smaller version of the 400; the 305 lacks LW. A great value, I purchased it at the 1997 IRCA Convention auction in Costa Mesa. Fry's recently advertised it for \$69.00 new.

State #25: Indiana

This station was heard last year New Years' Eve, 12/31/00, thanks to a tip from Pat Martin by e-mail; it was readable in KEX null with the Joey Reynolds program on the Concert Boy without a loop. This was heard on two other occasions since, and is apparently "forgetful" at times about shifting from day pattern.

To sum up, it took about 14 ½ months to log 25 states. Some stations on the list didn't exist when I first started DX'ing, others which formerly were common have disappeared from view. I have also heard four Canadian provinces, six Mexican states and Radio Vision Cristiana on 530. This exercise did a lot to rekindle my interest in DX'ing. Now I'm getting back to more sophisticated techniques, but it's no less thrilling to hear 530 Turks and Caicos on the car stereo while driving on I-80 at the Davis city limits than it is to hear 250-watt Australians on a 450m terminated beverage. 73, RT