

DX Etiquette

Randy Johnson, W6SJ

Maybe it was because so little else was going on at the time that the Mellish Reef DXpedition was the only action in town. As I listened to the pileups, it was simply disgusting to hear.

Ham radio is about communication. Compared to e-mails or phone calls, we interject different, more technically difficult variables, our equipment and propagation. Those add spice and challenge to the process. We have all earned our licenses and often possess technical expertise beyond that. By those achievements we earn the respect of our fellows. So at its heart, ham radio is about communicating between people who respect each other.

Sometimes people go off on a DXpedition. In the case of Mellish Reef, a couple of guys go off to a dangerous part of the world. Just getting there is risky and they are far from medical help if they should suddenly need it. They spent a lot of money, suffer privation, eat lousy meals, stay up until odd hours and worry about the tent being blown away in 50 mi/h winds and torrential rains.

Someone willing to do this is making you a gift of a contact from a rare entity. So not only should you appreciate the gift itself, you should consider the generosity of the gift-giver.

Some people don't see it like this. We hear this comment from the pilot station, that "there have been a lot of complaints about our low band (and CW) focus, including comments that 'this is no way to run a DXpedition.'"

Complaints? Probably from some guy who sits at home with all its attendant comforts. He gets a cup of hot coffee, wanders into a warm shack and spends a little time on the air. He then complains because the operators aren't operating to his convenience. To me this shows a fundamental lack of respect, certainly not appropriate behavior to demonstrate to someone who is giving you a gift.

When you go to as much trouble as those guys, you should be able to do whatever you want when you get there.

Next, let's talk about pileup operating practices. There are two important messages when the operator says W1AW 5NN. It's a message to W1AW: "I heard you" and a message to every other ham in the pileup: "I am

not talking to you. Stop transmitting."

When the operator says, W1 W1? it really means, "Everyone whose call isn't W1, stop transmitting." Many operators seem not to grasp this. I can't believe it when the operator calls JA1? and people with calls like "W9" or "K5," people whose calls are nowhere close to JA1, keep calling. Why? They even call when the guy says W1AW 5NN when it is clear that the operator is listening 5 kHz away.

I have been the rare DX and it should come as no surprise that the contact rate is a function of being able to pick out full call signs quickly. Interference from inconsiderate operators necessitates repeats, especially when working a weak station. Remember that somewhere in the world you are the weak station and 10 other guys are louder than you are. Guys with big signals need to give those guys a break, too.

When you have to ask for repeats, all those calls from other stations only slow down the rate and make it more difficult for everyone. Every request for a repeat is a lost contact. Every ugly pileup probably means that the poor operators with 100 W stations and wire antennas never get to make even one contact.

The 150 per hour rate is a contact every 24 seconds — easy to do if you hear the call sign the first time. When interference necessitates asking for repeats, it slows the rate to 1 minute — 60 per hour. That is when you get an ugly pileup.

I know that all the good operators will read this and nod their heads because they operate intelligently. The poor operators will read this and not think I am talking about and to them. Well, I am. How would you like to go to your next DX Club meeting and have someone play an audio tape of a pileup, one that shows that you are the inconsiderate operator?

All in all, the great operators at VK9GMW made 20,000 contacts during their stay. I'd guess that if operators calling them had all shown respect, they might have hit 30,000. Wouldn't that have been nice? Thanks for the gift, guys. For the record I made contacts on 160, 80 and 40 meters with

100 W and a wire antenna. Made my day.

In the final analysis, it's really not a matter of how the DXpedition comported itself. It's about how the rest of us deported ourselves. Let's show more respect and demonstrate that we appreciate the gifts that others give us.

Randy Johnson, W6SJ, an ARRL member, was first licensed in 1951. Randy had a great time with a 40 W US Army ARC-5 tank transmitter. In December 2001 — exactly 50 years after getting his first license — Randy upgraded to Extra Class. He has made three DX-Ventures to The Bahamas where he operated as C6AWS. Randy is a member of FOC, the First Class CW Operators Club, the Southern California DX Club and the Southern California Contesting Club. He can be reached at 31 Skysail Dr, Corona Del Mar, CA 92625-1437, w6sj@arrl.net.

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