

Florida Contest Group Energizes W1AW/4

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A few years back I sent an e-mail to ARRL Executive Vice President Dave Sumner, K1ZZ, inquiring about the possibility of the Florida Contest Group (FCG) hosting a "W1AW/4" IARU Headquarters Station operation for the 2000 IARU HF Championship. In my message I mentioned that our membership included a large number of talented operators and that the K4XS station (then still in its planning stages) would be sporting three 200-foot towers. At that time I felt confident that I could twist Bill's arm a little and get him to run the show from there—although I'll admit that I had not yet approached him with the idea.

I really didn't expect such a rapid response from Dave—I received his reply the following day! He said that he was delighted to hear that the FCG was interested in hosting the HQ station operation, and that the W1AW/4 call was ours for the asking.

Similar operations had already been aired during previous Championships from W3LPL, W7RM, K4VX/Ø and WØAIH/9. We would be the first group from the Southeast to step up to the plate. What a thrill! We would have the honor of representing our nation's Amateur Radio society, the ARRL, as W1AW/4!

The first step was taken, now it was time to figure out what needed to be done to put it all together. I have organized many multi-ops over the years, and I was painfully aware of how difficult it would be to get a large number of our members together in a single location for a multi-multi operation. Our membership is scattered over a very wide geographic area—we don't even all live within what's considered an ARRL "club territory"! I had hoped that the lure of having the chance to operate as the IARU Headquarters Station and to sign W1AW would be enough to entice them into traveling whatever distance was necessary for this unique opportunity.

The HQ Edge

Shortly after the finish of the 1999 Championship, a few e-mail messages appeared on the CQ-Contest e-mail reflector posted by folks wondering how some of the European HQ stations had amassed such incredible QSO totals within the short 24-hour contest period. It was eventually revealed that some bands and modes were operated from one site and others from another. This was allowed?

I got back in touch with K1ZZ. Dave told me that not only is that permissible, but that it's even okay for HQ stations to run multiple operating positions transmitting the *same mode* on the *same band* simultaneously! At this point I began to feel a little apprehensive. I knew that to do an operation such as this justice would require at least a 20-man team (and I typically consider myself lucky to be able to scratch together five guys for a multi-op effort at W1CW/W1YL).

But hang on, if it's okay for HQ stations to sign the same call from multiple sites, we could tap our entire membership by setting up stations in several different locations spread out throughout the state. Operators who wanted to participate could travel to the closest site.

QST de FCG

In addition to the Florida Contest Group's West Central Florida core group, there are plenty of other active contesters in the state and there was, at the time, a rival contest organization: the Florida Contest Club (FCC). The gang from the FCC had helped support our club in resurrecting the Florida QSO Party, why not see if we could get some of these same guys involved in helping us air W1AW/4?

In 1999, Vic, N4TO, hosted a gathering of contesters at his Sebring, Florida home. He belongs to the FCG and was also a member of the FCC, and had invited members of both organizations. The two main topics up for discussion were the clubs' selection of a contender to send to WRTC2000 and the development of plans for W1AW/4. Unfortunately, Dan, K1TO, wouldn't be able to participate in the W1AW operation as he would be attending WRTC2000 to defend his first place finish in WRTC96. As it turned out, Jeff, WC4E, would be heading for Slovenia as well. Dang! I had originally hoped that two of our sites could be set up at their well-equipped stations.

When talk eventually came down to brass tacks—just who would be willing to host the various bands and modes for W1AW/4—Vic chimed in with "what about Pete, N8PR?" Pete, who is located in Hollywood, Florida, graciously accepted. Great! This would accomplish two objectives: it would provide a way to tap into the pool of contesters who live along Florida's lower southeast coast and would also serve to enhance the

camaraderie between the members of the FCC and FCG organizations.

Working Up the Spectrum

We assembled a tentative plan: we would set up stations in six locations. Each would cover two band/modes.

WEAG (AM?!)/NU4Y—Starke, Florida

For 160-meter CW and SSB, we ended up unearthing a real gem: AM broadcast station WEAG. Jim, NU4Y, had used the site for 160-meter contests in the past and was confident that he could convince the station owner—Ben Dickerson, K4EL—to allow us to use it for this operation. It still amazes me that someone would actually *volunteer* to operate on 160 meters in Florida in July—even from a super site! This made the task of convincing folks to fill the remaining slots seem easy.

N8PR—Hollywood, Florida

Pete's station features phased verticals for 80 meters. He'd cover CW duties. I also knew that he would be inviting Bob, N4BP, to operate with him. Bob is a big fan of 10-meter CW, so running a combination of 80 meters (nighttime) and 10 meters (daytime) from Hollywood seemed logical.

K4XS, New Port Richey, Florida

Bill, K4XS, had been playing around with a *pair* of 4-element 75-meter quads. It would be tough to find a worthier station to cover our SSB operations on that band.

Twenty-meter phone would most likely be the place where the majority of US operators would get their opportunity to work W1AW/4, and who better for that assignment than "anyone, anywhere" K4XS. Bill has a four-stack of Yagis, not to mention "some history," on 20 meters.

N4TO—Sebring, Florida

As we sat there in N4TO's backyard, gazing up at his recently installed 40-meter Yagi in a 40-2CD over 40-2CD stack, it was immediately apparent that this would be the place to base our 40-meter CW operations. Vic has stacked antennas for 15 meters as well, and he figured that he could probably convince the AE4RO/AE4SW team and KT3T to help out on SSB.

N4PN—St George Island, Florida

I had already exchanged e-mail messages with Charlie, WA4IMC. He

had expressed an interest in coordinating 40-meter SSB operations from his friend Paul's (N4PN) vacation home, which is located on an island off the Florida panhandle. Ten-meter SSB could also be set up at Paul's island getaway.

W1CW/K4OJ—Seffner, Florida

We had recently completed installation of a 4/4/4 stack at W1CW. We'd take care of 20-meter CW operation from there. The previous year 15 had been the "money band" for several of the contests. As we were even closer to the peak of the sunspot cycle, we had every reason to believe that 15 would again be hot. The 4-element 15 at W1CW had already proven itself in the Sweepstakes, the CQWW and the ARRL DX contests—we'd take on 15-meter CW duties too.

Done deal! We had lined up 12 band/mode combinations, two per site in six geographically diverse areas of the state ranging from the west (Panhandle), to the northeast (Starke), and down south to Broward. The three remaining stations were located in between. We were set—or were we?

Inter-Station Communication

Having reliable direct communications between the sites would be an absolute necessity. All of us had operated in this contest before and had experienced shutdowns due to lightning storms. Storms could force us to close down a station during important run-times on a particular band.

RF links seemed out of the question—the stations were too far apart to easily link them via VHF or UHF. So what was the alternative? The Internet, of course! Temporarily passing off band/mode duties between sites wouldn't be a problem. What about multipliers though? If we handed off band/mode assignments, how would the assisting station know if they needed to chase a particular rare zone or HQ multiplier?

We contacted several of the contesting software manufacturers and some gurus like K1TTT. It was finally decided that while it was definitely possible to fully network the six sites over the Internet, it would be pretty challenging.

We eventually decided to set up a

W1AW/4—2000 IARU HF Championship

The Florida Contest Group

<i>Band</i>	<i>QSOs</i>	<i>QSO Points</i>	<i>Zones</i>	<i>HQ Stations</i>
160	141	205	8	2
80	508	1020	17	15
40	1169	3137	38	26
20	4153	13055	49	37
15	3668	13420	54	34
10	1737	4079	33	16
<i>Totals</i>	11376	34916	199	130

W1AW/4 Participating Operators

AE4SW, AJ4Y, K4EL, K4LM, K4LQ, K4OJ, K4PG, K4XS, KD4UJK, KR4YL, KT3T, N3NN, N4BP, N4DL, N4KM, N4OX, N4PN, N4QV, N4TO, N4UF, N8PR, NA4AR, NA4CW, NU4Y, W1CW, W1YL, W4IR, W4SO, W4ZW, WA4B, WA4IMC, WD4AHZ

simple "chat room." We would use that to exchange QSO total information, identify needed multipliers and pass messages and alerts of potential shutdowns. The band totals would be tracked at W1CW on an *Excel* spreadsheet that already contained the previous year's W1AW/9 operation's running totals. Each site would report in with hourly totals and these would immediately be added to the spreadsheet. This would allow us to gauge our progress against that of the 1999 W1AW/9 operation.

All Eyes on the Prize

We did encounter some bad weather and did end up having to temporarily shut down one station during the weekend. (Thunderstorms and bikinis are just considered facts of life for those of us who live in Florida!) The shutdown lasted a little less than an hour. The W1CW site passed the 20-meter and 15-meter CW batons off to N4TO and N8PR. This ended up saving us well over a hundred contacts that would have been lost otherwise.

As the end of the contest approached, we were nearing our goal of breaking 10000 QSOs. Each and every hour we managed to top the previous year's QSO totals up to that point. Our 10k goal was easily within our grasp. The question soon became how far we would exceed the 10k barrier. At the final bell—at 1200Z—all stations reported their grand totals through the Internet chat room connection. The spreadsheet soon

confirmed that we had broken the 10k barrier by a healthy margin: 11376 raw QSOs... Wow!

Post-Contest Paperwork

Now came what turned out to be the tedious task of merging the logs. The six sites were using three different versions of *CT*. Unfortunately the different versions of the software did not merge easily. Changes in the way *CT* looks at time meant that some logs had to have their times altered by 6 hours before they would merge correctly. (A lesson here: if you are running a multi-site operation, make sure that everyone is using the same version of the logging software!)

The end results were most gratifying, and we all had a blast. We got to play the part of the rare multiplier from our own turf and we experienced some truly awesome run rates.

The Florida Contest Group club Web page—www.qsl.net/fcg—includes an extensive collection of photos of this operation. We would like to thank all of the operators—over 30 of them all told—who helped put W1AW/4 on the air. And, of course, our very special thanks to the American Radio Relay League and K1ZZ for this once-in-a-ham-lifetime opportunity. Hey, Dave! Any chance we can reserve a chance to do it again somewhere near the top of the next Sunspot Cycle? ■