

General:

Shortly before the beginning of the 2003 ILQP, I called NG9R on my cell phone. "Dan, I think I have a problem. I can't hear anybody, on any band." "It's not your problem, it's OUR problem. We just had a flare!" Oh, joy..... Conditions did recover somewhat but were never as good as in the past two or three years. Activity was good, however; the faithful just kept scouring the bands, and we "made our own propagation" to some extent by the time the contest was over.

Records:

The total of 139 logs received for the 2003 running of ILQP *may* be a record. As for the "Top Ten", all records set in 2003 involved SSB. AB9DU/P, KN9T/P, and N9GXW/P all broke the in-state record for SSB QSOs, and K0HW and KK4TA broke the record for SSB QSOs from out-of-state. Though all IL counties were activated, K4XU's 2002 record of 95 IL mults (including bonuses) was unthreatened.

Illinois Fixed:

K9ZO put on another good effort from McLean and ensured that almost no one who cared missed that county. Ralph emphasized CW a bit over SSB but mentioned that 20 CW was tough compared to other years. He used 20 SSB to pick up mults from out of state (all but AK and HI) and still managed to work 83 IL counties. No one should have missed St. Clair, either, due to KI9A's presence. Chuck gave Ralph some good competition but fell a bit short on both QSOs and mults.

Illinois County-Line Portable:

Despite the absence of perennial ILQP stalwart W9DY, the team of KN9T and N9GZ put on a strong performance from the corner of Boone, DeKalb, Ogle and Winnebago to take the multi-county portable crown again in 2003. With an almost equal number of QSOs on CW and SSB, Mike and Mike made sure nobody missed those counties on either mode. Along the way, they found about half of the other IL counties and 44 states. Next in line were TWO operations from the Bureau/Henry/Whiteside corner, K9WA/P and KF9TL/P. From the former, Jim K9WA emphasized CW while KF9TL and KE0FT emphasized SSB. Still, the logistics of interstation interference must have been mind-boggling! Two SSB-only efforts were next: AB9DU/P, who made over 400 QSOs from Fulton/McDonough/Schuyler and N9GXW/P, who made fewer QSOs but found more IL counties from Adams/Hancock/Schuyler. 'GXW shared an operating location with a CW-only entry, NM9C/P.

Illinois Mobile:

It should surprise no one that the team of KF9D and W9HB as KF9D/M won this category....again. The lack of drama should not diminish the significance of the win, however. Those guys really know how to plan, and execute, a QSO Party route, be loud, find other multipliers and rack up a fine score. In the process, they put 20 IL counties on the air.

Not far behind was NN9K/M, "Mr Mobile in Motion", who used no county line/corner stops during the eight hours, put out 19 counties and provided the only CW contacts from several of those.

N9JF and N9MTX as N9JF/M also activated 19 counties but fell short on score due to a significant portion of their operation being on SSB.

Doing it "the hard way", KJ9C/M, NY4N/M and W3DYA/M all came in from out of state and battled unfamiliar roads without separate drivers. Thanks for the super effort, guys!

Speaking of "hard ways", K9IUA/M operated from four counties mobile QRP and posted a nice score.

Note the difficulty of working other mobiles when you ARE mobile in IL: Not one IL mobile worked as many as half of the IL counties!

Out of State:

Courtesy of the pre-contest solar flare, no DX logs were received and little DX was worked by ILQP participants. There were, however, logs submitted from many US states and VE provinces, and eleven entries qualified for the "ILQP Edible Award". Perennial contender

WA3HAE emerged on top again this year, with strong competition from K4BAI and N9CO/0. All three worked an identical total of 82 IL counties, but Keith just simply made more contacts on both SSB and CW. W8TM submitted a strong QRP log including 67 counties worked.

Club competition:

Green River Valley ARS really pulled out all the stops in 2003, fielded ten separate stations including some great county-line portable and mobile entries, and defeated last year's winner, WIARC, by about 10%. If you worked anybody in the north half of the state, you probably have a GRVARS member in your log! On the other hand, WIARC members covered the vast majority of the counties south of I80, submitted 12 entries and sent so many members out of the "home county" that Adams was more difficult to work than usual! A total of 13 IL local clubs sent in entries. Big Thunder ARC, Moultrie Amateur Radio Klub and Sangamon Valley Radio Club all sent out special county expeditions to add to the fun. Increased club competition will continue to build ILQP interest.

Assessing your ILQP performance:

Though all 102 Illinois counties were on the air for the 2003 version of ILQP, not all were easy to work. Some, in fact were very difficult! Based upon submitted logs, reported QSOs from each county were totaled, and the counties were ranked on degree of difficulty, both on CW and SSB. Note that this was done ONLY on the submitted logs. As many participating stations did not send in a log, the results of this investigation are somewhat skewed. For example, NO ONE sent in a log from DuPage, Kankakee or LaSalle counties!! The average number of QSOs for all counties was 88 on CW and 108 on SSB.

Counties were ranked as follows: <30 Qs = very difficult (VD), 31-70 = difficult (D), 71-150 = average (A) 151-300 = easy (E), >300 = very easy (VE)

Many counties were much easier on one mode than on the other. Several were virtually impossible on CW or SSB but easy or very easy on the other mode. If you worked the contest at all, you should have worked these counties (ranked "very easy" on at least one mode):

Adams, Boone, Bureau, Champaign, Cook, DeKalb, Hancock, Henry, Kane, McDonough, McLean, Schuyler, St. Clair, Whiteside.

The easiest county to work? You'd never guess.....Schuyler!

On the other hand, you were really digging to the bottom or doing a good job of following the mobiles it you worked these. All were ranked "very difficult" on both modes. Disregarding the three "no-shows" from submitted logs, the genuinely rare counties in 2003 were:

Calhoun, Cass, DeWitt, Edwards, Grundy, Henderson, Macon, Marshall, Mason, Menard, Mercer, Monroe, Piatt, Putnam, Tazewell, Wabash.

Any one of these would be a good place to include in a county-corner portable operation in 2004. You could be really popular.

Likely the rarest of the rare in 2003 was Mason. NG9R/M made one SSB QSO there, and no one else submitted a log from that county. Close behind were DeWitt (also from NG9R/M) with 7 reported QSOs and Macon (AGAIN, NG9R/M!!) with 10 and Piatt (who else....NG9R/M) with 16. There were only 4 QSOs reported from Henderson (by NA9Q/M) but two other county-corner portables included Henderson and did not submit logs.

Looking ahead:

The success of the ILQP in recent years had been a result of many years of support from the RAMS club and increased interest from other clubs. We're obviously doing a lot of things "right". What is working, and what needs to be improved?

"Right" things:

1) RAMS support. RAMS is a VERY small club! The membership puts in a tremendous amount of time organizing ILQP, pulling it off, and dealing with the aftermath (read: LOGS!!!)

2) Other club support: The club competition is a big plus. Keep it up! Encourage all of your members to get on and contribute to the club score. Find stations for those who would operate IF they had a place to do so. Organize a club operation, either at an established station or at a "Field Day" site. Encourage inexperienced operators to join you. Multi-ops are great, just bear in mind the "one transmitted signal at a time" rule.

3) Awards. RAMS has been great about sending out certificates and plaques for category winners. WIARC sponsors a "traveling plaque" for the winning local club aggregate. Non-Illinois stations receive "Edible Awards" for achieving a certain level of QSO's or counties worked.

4) Mobiles. We have more mobile participation every year. This keeps non-Illinois stations interested throughout the entire 8 hour period. If they run out of mobiles to work, they will work fixed stations for awhile....but only for awhile.

5) Portables: Participants love those double/triple/quadruple points. Go portable. Generate a pileup. Cheaper than going to the Caribbean....

6) Loud fixed stations: They let everybody on the bands know something is happening. The casual participants then go looking for the mobiles and portables.

7) The ILQP reflector: Great addition to the arsenal. It lets us coordinate operations and build interest in ILQP, in and out of state.

"Improve" things:

1) Electronic logs. We tried this last year. I, N9JF, will accept responsibility for it being other than a smashing success. This year, I at least have a PLAN for processing them. Rather than "back up and punt", we'll accept them again. I ask that you do the following IF YOU ARE GOING TO SUBMIT AN ELECTRONIC LOG:

a) Send it in a format such that I can separate the fields into spreadsheet columns: TIME, BAND, MODE, STATION WORKED, EXCHANGE RECEIVED; if you're not sure, trying putting it into Excel yourself. I have to be able to sort these fields in order to generate a useable log file.

b) Cabrillo format is fine, but not all "Cabrillo formats" are created equal. See (a) above.

c) In addition to the log, SEND SOME SORT OF SUMMARY SHEET including the information asked for on the official ILQP Summary Sheet (see RAMS site).

Yes, the committee will calculate your score and verify your claimed multipliers, but it will help IMMENSELY if you take the time to send a summary along with your log.

If you operate from Illinois, be sure we know what county (counties) you were in! If you are claiming bonus multipliers, you need to mark them. For a big log (like 500 QSOs,) this will take you ten minutes. It will take us about that much longer PER LOG if you don't do it. That should be reason enough....

2) Logs in general. Be sure your logging program doesn't credit you with "Coles" when you work "CO(lorado)". If you work Whiteside, don't claim "White". Read the rules. Submit a dupe sheet for >100 QSOs (not necessary if your electronic log meets specs listed above).

3) Rules: "All occupants of a mobile must use one call and one call only". Watch this. "One transmitted signal at a time."

4) More portables: The more, the merrier! Caution: Use the ILQP reflector to coordinate portable operations. With more interest in these, there is always the possibility of two groups showing up at the same corner at the last minute and having to either co-exist or flip a coin to decide who stays.

5) More mobiles: In addition to the 2003 crew, we need to get W1NN, W9MSE, KQ0B, W0GXQ, WT9U, K9IZ, K5OT, K8MR and a bunch of others in for the weekend. If you talk to any of these guys, encourage them to come and join the party!

6) Categories: More categories means more work for the organizers and the log checkers. On the other hand, are we to the point that ILQP needs categories for "unassisted

mobiles" (no driver), power categories, single and multi-op entries? If so, someone needs to step forward and volunteer to 1) help with organization and 2) sponsor the awards for these categories

7) Activity: By comparison, a well-established QSO party like CQP receives about five times as many logs as ILQP. On the other hand, their's is three times as long as well. By "talking up" the ILQP in the days and weeks ahead, we can keep the bands humming for eight hours in fine fashion. You never know where you'll find someone willing to put a rare county on the air. As an example, I found WB7BNL on 2 meter simplex while traveling through Henderson County last fall. We discussed the ILQP, and he and KA0FBJ put on a county corner operation. Without them, Henderson and Warren would have been tough to find on SSB!!

8) Reporting: Too many stations participate but don't send in a log. In an attempt to rectify this, a separate "ILQP County Records" table has been created, showing high scores from each county (fixed station or portion of county-corner portable). Perhaps this will encourage stations to submit scores???

Send your suggestions to the ILQP reflector, to the RAMS committee or to N9JF at jfunk@fossnorthamerica.com.

73, Jim N9JF