

Taking QSO Party Contesting to the Next Level

State QSO parties have been in the contesting arena for decades. Pennsylvania has had a QSO party since 1957, Washington and California since 1966; Georgia also has had one for more than 50 years.

I recall operating my state's New York QSO parties in the mid-1970s, before it went away for decades. A new sponsor revived it. Some states with little or no state QSO party activity have joined forces with neighboring states to create regional QSO parties. The New England QSO Party (NEQP) and the 7th Call Area QSO Party (7QP) are two examples. State QSO party participants may include non-contesters just stopping by to let you know you're being heard, the casual contester doing only search and pounce, or the serious contester operating full-time SO2R. Mobiles and rovers activating multiple — and often rare — counties are the lifeblood of these events. County hunters also can benefit from QSO parties by working stations in rare counties that might not have resident hams or are infrequently activated.

On any given weekend, you're likely to find a QSO party on the schedule, and they're a great way to keep your contesting skills sharp. Some states take a friendly approach, with participants taking time on the air to explain the contest or tell you about the weather. Camaraderie among operators often stems from making repeated contacts with the same stations on other bands and/or modes.

Interest in state QSO parties has

surged over the past few years, and states that had been dormant in this regard have again joined in the fun. Doing well in a contest can earn you a plaque or certificate, and some even offer modest prizes as an added incentive.

Some smaller QSO parties don't have enough on-the-air presence to attract out-of-state participants. Those of us who love to operate these events felt that something needed to be done to increase interest and activity.

As avid QPers, Dave Edmonds, WN4AFP, and Stan Zawrotny, K4SBZ, brainstormed how they could establish a national program/points system in which competitive QPers could battle it out one contest at a time throughout the year. Another objective was to tie all QSO parties together to create something bigger than just individual contests.

Dave and Stan wanted to create two programs — one for participation and one for performance. The goal would be an increase in contacts for in-state participants and more logs submitted to the QP organizers, as well as building relationships between contesters. A prime example is what Paul Newberry, N4PN (SK), brought to the contesting community. Not only could he win just about any contest but would always take time to greet his radio friends and have a short chat in the midst of the battle.

The State QSO Party Challenge

The first step was to establish the State QSO Party Challenge (SQP). This year-long competition would

award points for cumulative number of contacts made and the number of state QSO parties participated in. The goal would be to encourage operators to participate in as many QSO parties as possible and become hooked on them. The more QSO parties you work, the better your own state's party will be, because you learn how they work and how to play in them. The only requirements would be to participate in at least two QSO parties, make at least two contacts in each, and submit your scores to 3830scores.com. The results would be tabulated and results published.

The second step would be to create a recognition program for the operators who put in the effort to win the QPs they enter. This would encourage competitive QPers to participate in more events and to challenge each other weekend



VE7KPZ finds a site as a rover for the British Columbia QSO Party near the Kelowna-Mission district.



The Yaesu FT-891 up and running in contest mode.

after weekend. The QSO Party Cup leaderboard will be updated as results of each QSO party are published. The expectation is that we will see a much higher level of interest in the QPs and the QPs will gain prestige within the contesting world.

As 2020 approached, Dave and Stan decided to focus their energy on building the State QSO Party Challenge. Stan provided Dave with 3830 data in an *Excel* spreadsheet that included 1,296 operators who had participated in QSO parties during 2019. The next task was to find an internet home for the leaderboard and post statistics. Dave contacted Bruce Horn, WA7BNM, and he offered to help.

Dave hoped that they could roll out the 2020 State QSO Party Challenge before the initial QSO parties of the year took place — Minnesota, British Columbia, and Vermont all happen during the first weekend in February. That was only 7 weeks away. Just 29 days before the planned kick-off, Bruce said he would launch the State QSO Party Challenge page on 3830 once the State QSO Party website was up and running. Additional team members were recruited. Mark, WB9CIF, a very active QPer and manager for the Indiana QSO Party signed on. About 2 weeks later, Jeff, N8II, and I agreed to join the team.

Bruce launched the State QSO Party Challenge page on 3830scores.com 3 days ahead of our target date. To see current statistics, visit **3830scores.com** and click the SQP Challenge link under Special Summaries.

The team began sending out news releases, contacting managers of other QSO parties, ARRL, *CQ* Magazine, and anyone else that could help spread the word of this exciting new competition. ARRL included our news release in *The ARRL Contest Update* newsletter, and Valerie Hotzfeld, NV9L, delivered a presentation on the State QSO Party Challenge on the *Ham Nation* webcast.

The publicity seems to have stoked interest, resulting in greater participation in the early events. “I have a feeling that the Challenge provided an incentive to actively participate in all three QSO parties on the first weekend of February,” British Columbia QSO Party Coordinator Rebecca Kimoto, VA7BEC, said. With many of the logs I received for BCQP, participants mentioned that it

An Overview of the State QSO Party Challenge

The annual State QSO Party Challenge recognizes all radio amateurs’ participation in the US state and Canadian province QSO parties. It is open to any radio amateur who participates in any of the approved State QSO parties (SQPs). Participants simply submit their scores to **3830Scores.com** to be included in the Challenge.

Participants are recognized for reaching five levels of achievement: Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, and Diamond. Using the submissions to 3830Scores.com, each call sign’s cumulative score is calculated by totaling up number of reported contacts and multiplying by the number of SQPs entered year-to-date. The use of the number of SQPs entered as a multiplier is to encourage radio amateurs to enter more state/province QSO parties. The use of the number of contacts as a metric is to encourage participants to operate longer in each SQP, increase the effectiveness of their station and improve their contesting skills. — *Adapted from the State QSO Party website*



Mike, VE7KPZ, and Kevin, VE7XY, operate in the BC QSO Party.

was the Challenge that prompted them to get in the hunt for BC stations. The State QSO Party Challenge seems to be off to a great start.”

Vermont QSO Party Manager Mitch Stern, W1SJ, judged the QSO Party Challenge a winner. “This year, folks were finding and working the Vermont stations on multiple bands and modes,” he said. “This is despite the fact that conditions were quite poor with the sunspot number around 0.” He said one in-state operator who logged 276 FT8 contacts last year was able to maintain runs on CW due to the additional participation. More CW meant less FT8.

The Minnesota QSO Party obliterated its old record for number of logs submitted. “It’s pretty evident from the data that the idea of a year-long State QSO Party competition struck a chord

with a lot of participants, especially the non-Minnesota folks,” said Mark Endorf, WA0MHJ, the MNQP director.

As of this writing, Vermont has received 259 logs (117% greater than 2019), and Minnesota, 419 logs (57% greater than 2019). Something magical is happening in QSO party contesting.

Discussion of awards for both the SQP Challenge and the SQP Cup are in the works, and we recently received notice that Icom America wants to be a sponsor. We are also planning “Worked All QSO Parties” awards, which will be offered in 2021 to operators who participate in all 47 approved QSO parties during the calendar year. So, why don’t you join us in the fun?

For additional information, visit the State QSO Party website, **stateqso party.com/**.