

County Hunter News

March, 2005
Volume 1, Issue 3

Welcome to issue 3 of the County Hunter News, a monthly on-line publication for all county hunters, with an orientation toward CW operation. We thank Dennis, KK7X, who has provided us web space to bring you each edition of the CHN. Please visit his site, www.countyhunter.com and explore the many pages and pictures located there.

Contributions of articles, stories, and letters to the editor are welcomed, and may be included in future issues at the editor's discretion.

The County Hunter News will attempt to provide you with interesting, thought provoking articles, articles of county hunting history, or about county hunters or events, or provide news of upcoming events.

We hope you will enjoy the new County Hunter News. Feel free to forward, or provide links. Permission is given for copying or quoting in part or all (except to MARAC, Inc, or Officers/Directors of MARAC) provided credit is given.

De N4CD

Awards Issued

AF3X USACA #1109 January 25, 2005
AA4UT USACA #1110 January 25, 2005
N7ID Bingo #262 January 26, 2005
K5OH USACA #1111 January 29, 2005
K4YFH USACA #1112 January 29, 2005
W0GXQ USA-CW-2 #11 January 29, 2005
W0GXQ Second Time #344 January 29, 2005
N4RS USA-CW #2 February 2, 2005
K8CW USACA-6th time #21 February 2, 2005
N4RS Second Time #345 February 2, 2005
WB9YCO Bingo II #33 February 5, 2005
WG6X Second Time #346 February 7, 2005
N8KIE Bingo #263 February 8, 2005
WQ7A Second Time #347 February 14, 2005
G3SPU USACA #1113 February 17, 2005

Notes from the Editor

In this issue, we address one of the trends that have appeared in county hunting over the past ten years. Obviously, the spread of PCs and the connectivity of the internet have changed the face of county hunting. Many of the changes are good for the county hunting community; some are neutral, while others might be viewed as not so good.

While some go through life just sitting back, and accepting whatever comes along without ever ‘speaking out’, your editor is willing to take a stand on issues that he feels important. Sometimes, when you speak out against what you see are discriminatory practices, or you challenge someone using bullying tactics and stand up for ‘the silent majority’, or those attacked by the bullies, who have had their way for years, they get upset and start having temper tantrums. Probably sometime during your past, maybe in grade school/high school, you recall the bullies and their tactics to intimidate folks, belittle them, ridicule them, or coerce others into going along with their actions or declarations or demands.

This month, the CHN tackles a growing trend of “X” calls and mobile club calls. Some may find them ‘welcome’ as it lets them get awards faster and easier, but I see it in a different light. Likely a few feathers will be ruffled in the process.

Grab a cup of coffee, and continue on to this month’s thought provoking articles.

Mobile Club and Vanity X Calls

There is a disturbing trend I see which are ‘cheapening’ the awards issued by MARAC. Since the mid-90s, when vanity calls and ‘club calls’ became very easy to get, some in the county hunting community have taken advantage of this ability, and have changed the way folks work towards awards. Maybe it is time to reconsider re-evaluating the award requirements for the Master County Hunter (Bingo), Five Star, and the Prefix Awards?

Imagine playing with a deck of cards, where a quarter of them are ‘wild cards’. Make it anything you want. You need an “8” to have 21? Make that wildcard good for 8. That sounds silly, but if you listen to the SSB net, you now hear increasing numbers of calls with “X”, or a station carrying along a ‘club’ call with an X in it. That makes the mobile ‘good for Bingo’ in every county.

The original award, an indeed the current award rules, note that a ‘wild card’ X would make it a ‘little bit’ easier to reach the goal of Bingo. There were some mobiles running with a star or more (having received their USACA), which is another ‘wildcard’. Also,

there were no other awards which required working people with a Bingo number until 1994, when the Master's Gold award was created. At that time, mobiles who had their Bingo number now became 'more valuable' as their counties could be used toward the new Master's Gold award. Mobiles who ran counties frequently wanted to get their Bingo number to help out others.

In the Prefix award, an "X" is a wild card for the "A" prefix, but there are also other ways that club calls are used. This reaches absurdity when one mobile operator had 3 club calls, and would give out contacts for his call, and 3 club calls with different prefixes from each county, so folks got the county, got the Bingo, and got all four prefixes. Really! (ed: I think the prefix award should be for working FOUR separate stations, on four different days, or four separate licensed operators in a car, not one operator with 4 calls!). The system is BROKE!

Listen to some of the exchanges on the SSB net. This call and that club call give the mobile this report, and the club is this, and then the mobile and the club both acknowledge and give back reports, and the stations acknowledges they got the report from the mobile and the club call. Huh? One person worked one person. What a time waster, and what a way to conveniently bend the rules!

Going back to the time when the Master County Hunter "Bingo" award was created, there were few Callsigns issued with an "X" in the suffix. In fact, the "X" could only appear in the middle or last part of the suffix, since an "X" in the beginning of the suffix indicated an 'experimental' station. So, you had a few calls on the CH net with an X, such as WA4HXG or KD4HXM. The 'wild card' appeared rarely in your listing of contacts for Bingo. Only 20wpm extra license holders could apply for a vacant Callsign before the mid-90s.

One can appreciate how mobiles want to 'be wanted'. At one time on the K3IMC forum, there was an observation made by a new mobile. He complained his call was only good to give out the county, and usually not good for Bingo. If he ran an interstate county (a 'green stamp' county), he might only have 10 contacts from those needing it for USACA or nth time around. Other mobiles with one or more stars got 'more action'. Yes, we can appreciate that one might wish to become more valuable by having a call good for Bingo, or using a club call that is good for Bingo, or club call good for other prefixes. Most of the county hunters who have been around for a few years worked hard to get that first star, so we would be good for Bingo when we put out counties. Now, however, the increasing ability to get a call with an X in it, or getting or using a club call with an X in it, has 'short circuiting' the award integrity.

Many other groups, who issue awards, such as 10-10, Century Club Net, also have tiered awards. On 10-10, after you work so many 10-10 members, you get your "VP" status, and become more valuable. The increased value as a 'contact' is EARNED by working toward your individual awards. Same in other award groups. No 'instant' upgrading by gaming the system.

Starting in the mid-1990s, hams could apply for vanity call signs. For example, you could request your initials. It didn't take long before some county hunters realized that they could make themselves more valuable as a mobile, or could help out the OM/YL if part of a team, if they had an "X" in their call. Thus, some folks started to trade in Callsigns, and applied for a new call with an X in it. That makes them instantly 'more valuable' as a mobile and able to give out Bingo contacts. OK...the genie is out of the bottle, and we are likely to see lots more X calls. That trend is likely to continue. Not all hams are going for the X call, and those who have had a call for a while are likely to keep it. I guess we can just chalk that up to smart county hunters – and the situation self corrects when they earn their first star, which also makes them good for Bingo everywhere.

Even more disturbing is the use of 'mobile club calls'. You hear one operator, with his vanity issued club call with an "X" in it, or maybe with this prefix or that one, to 'help out' others. In my book, that 'helping out' by using club calls is seriously eroding the value of MARAC awards. The mobile itself may not be good for Bingo, but the 'club call', likely consisting of a few folks with no club house, no club station, and no real 'club' behind it, just happens to have an X in it. Or the mobile may have a star, but use the club call as a 'wild card' for the prefix award "A".

The trend of using 'mobile club' calls is changing the way county hunting is done, to the detriment of the county hunting community. It is 'gaming' the system. Putting another bunch of wildcards in the deck of 52.

I've always thought of club calls associated with real club activities – like field day, mountain-topping expeditions, contesting. In the mid-1990s, the FCC relaxed the restrictions on club calls, so you and your friends can apply for a club call. In fact, all of you can, since you all can be members of everyone else's club. I'm in your club, your in my club, Jim's in both clubs, we're in his club, etc. It doesn't take much to have a 'club' call by FCC definitions. Get together once or twice a year for 'club meetings' and that is about it.

In addition, some real club calls are 'borrowed' to go county hunting. Sure, you might be a member of XYZ club of 50 members, and get permission from the trustee to use the club call while out county hunting. Likely, there is still only ONE club member in the car, or maybe two if your XYL/OM is also a club member. A club exercise? Not really! They are gaming the system. And if you use the club call to give the YL, or vice versa, or someone else in the car a 'Bingo contact' from a county you are in, even more 'gaming the system' if no one in the car is good for Bingo in the car. Legal? Yes - at least at the current time.

It's exactly like playing with a deck where lots of the cards are wildcards. The Master County Hunter Award was intended to be a challenge, not something that you get at the same time you get your USACA, since every mobile either had USACA, an X call, or had a club call 'riding along' with an X in it. Now, the proliferation of vanity X calls,

and even more so, the 'club' X calls, is making it much less than half the effort required in the past. Now that the trend has started, isn't it just going to keep increasing year after year?

The X in the Callsign also allows it to be used for a wildcard in the prefix award, where you have to work calls with AA, K, N and W in each county. Now, with some mobiles with 3 club calls, you get all with just one operator in the county, on one day at one time. That wasn't the intention.

Now, imagine the following. Someone's 'club' earned USACA about the same time as the operator (since they were done by the same person at the same time from the same transmitter). Now, that operator and the 'club' each have a star. That operator goes out mobile, and now is good for two stars, and if uses both calls, one for each call? Ridiculous! Just 'borrow' a club call with a star, and you don't even need an "X" call, you're good for Bingo and a star toward Five Star Award! "Hey buddy, can you spare a star?"

Maybe it is time MARAC re-examined the rules. If Bingo is going to be finished a few weeks after you get your USACA, since nearly every contact had either a vanity X call or conveniently had a 'X' club call riding along with them, then what is the value of Bingo?

If folks are allowed to 'carry along a club call' that has star(s), is that going to allow them to give out more stars toward the Five Star Award? Same person, using two or more calls? Now suddenly that operator is 'worth more stars' because of gaming the system?

Maybe it is time to suggest that mobile use ONLY one call during a run, and we hang up on both the mobile's call and the club call(s) running a county? The same for fixed stations and their club calls. While you're trying to work that county, time goes by with all the club non-sense. Maybe you don't get it because time runs out or the mobile runs out of the county you need?

Can you imagine what passer-by folks think of the 'club non-sense'? I heard one new station trying to run a county and trying to figure out the calls of the net control and the 'club call', and I timed it at over 1 minute 30 seconds as confusion reigned, the new op couldn't comprehend how one station had two separate calls that had to be worked, and then figured out what they were after a minute of repeating first without phonetics, screwing up each time. That is 15% of a normal run time of 10 minutes.

Could it be that the time has come to eliminate the wildcard status of 'club calls' or allowing a club call to be used for 'extra stars'? Or eliminate club calls from running counties at the same time as the single operator? One call per county run?

There certainly is precedent. During most of the ARRL operating events, a single station is not allowed to be used under any other call during the event. (Sometimes there is an exemption for a situation where multiple operators are licensed at the same location).

Maybe only the MARAC club call, or real club efforts (with only that call used) during state QSO parties, Field Day, Sweepstakes, Special Events, etc, should be allowed for MARAC awards credits?

At the current rate of growth, it isn't going to be long before every mobile everywhere is somehow 'good for Bingo' in every county. Then you'll automatically get Bingo when you get USACA. And you have double the number of stars using the 'club call' when they get stars.

This didn't happen 15 years ago, and has been a relatively recent development. New operators hear other 'club calls' running, and figure they too need to get a vanity club call with an X to 'join the others'. Maybe starting with the 'fixed' club of one calls, it spread now to the mobiles?

Rarely if ever do 'club calls' run mobile on the CW net.

Folks, what say you? Let your awards committee members know your feelings on this. You also have the option of just ignoring the mobile 'club calls' and working the awards the way they were intended, or if you have a 'borrowed' club call, can simply stop using it.

De N4CD

Eye Ball QSO – K5OH

While on the internet web Chat Room one night, I ran across Troy, K5OH. He was closing in on his USACA, and had gotten down to 15, and was asking for suggestions on how to finish up. Naturally, in the county hunting tradition, folks offered suggestions as to which county hunter might be able to get which counties. We also talked about 30M CW being good for the distance that many of the contacts required – with 20M skip usually being too long, and 40M too short.

He needed a handful of close-in counties in OK, three in AR, a handful in TX, one in KS, and one in NC. For most people, the counties 100-300 miles away can be most challenging as you don't have the skip, the ground wave distance is too far, and most mobiles are not equipped for 75/80m operation. I suggested a 'road trip' together as the ideal solution to get some of the needed counties.

From Collin, TX to the K5OH QTH in southern OK is a short trip, but we had planned an all day trip the next day to get some of the counties. We headed out in the morning, with the car headed west, going several hundred miles to get to the panhandle of TX. We then turned around, headed back to west OK to snag a few more, and then back home after a long day on the road, running nearly all the counties 'on the move'. That knocked off

many of his needs. Naturally, we had separate rigs available to make the contacts from the counties we went through.

A month later, I ran all of his remaining needs in TX, and but missed him in one. Don N5XG ran it again for him later and with some help from the other county hunters, Troy finished up working all 3077. Al, KG5J made a special trip in AR to give him last WBOW. (Using 30m for that distance).

When you hear Troy on the air, from the home QTH, he's probably using some wonderful 'vintage' radio equipment – tube type – glow in the dark! I asked Troy to provide a little background on his county hunting. He submitted the following:

“My interest in County Hunting started about 20 years ago when a local Ham and County Hunter Donny Hagler, K5CKQ, had just finished working all the counties for the first time. This seemed like a lot of fun as he was always going out on the road to put out counties but like most good intentions it was put aside for later. Since I was still working it seemed that I could never get the time to get started. I had worked some counties occasionally and logged them but didn't really get real interested until about 4 years ago.

On March 8 2001 I started my County Hunters Log. Except for an Icom IC-706 in the pickup, all of my contacts were with the old classic radios like Drake, Collins and Heathkit. There is a certain nostalgia associated with the old classic radios. It's kind of like classic cars (which is another one of my hobbies). There is nothing like the excitement of getting behind the wheel of a 454 tuned big block Chevy and giving it a workout. A similar excitement is present when tuning and operating a 40 to 45 year old radio. I love technology and the new radios are great but I get my kicks using the old classics. I enjoy collecting and working on them.

I traded in a Heathkit DX-60, that I built, and a Hammerlund HQ-110 receiver in 1966 after getting my general ticket for a shiny new Drake TR-4, AC-4, and DC-3 mobile power supply. I still have the TR-4 and it looks and operates like new. In fact I got a large number of county contacts using it. I also acquired a late model Collins KWM-2A a few years back and I used this rig a lot when county hunting. I started working some of the last counties I needed on CW, thanks to N4CD and KG5R. I added 30 meter crystals to the KWM-2A and the Drake B twins so I could work on 30 meters. I also had to add a wire to my other existing wires for 30 meters.

I have been a ham since 1965 and county hunting is the biggest challenge and fun that I have had since getting my license. I have been to two Mini Conventions and a National convention and all of the county hunters are a great bunch of people. I have made many friends and always enjoy the conventions. Thanks to all of the people the put out the counties and the net controls. What a great organization!!



H. Troy Warren, K5OH

UPCOMING EVENTS

Michigan Mini 2005 April 14, 15, & 16th

Guesthouse International's Lighthouse Inn, 1555 Phoenix Rd, South Haven, Michigan 49090, Van Buren County, tel: 269-639-9900. Rooms 59.00...double or single, Registration is \$12.00 couple, \$9.00 single, Banquet \$21.00 each, Make reservations before 4/01/05

SSB County Hunting History

In the beginning, as county hunting started, there were no specific net frequencies. In the 1950s, Clif Evans, K6BX, created the CHC, Certificate Hunters Club, which gave

ham radio operators many types of awards to work towards. One of the most popular awards was the County Hunter Award – USA-CHA.

Most operation was on AM, and few ever dreamed of working all the counties. Until 1966, the 40M on 7225 net ran day successfully, due to no foreign broadcast. After that time, the foreign SW broadcasters invaded the 7 MHz band and the net fell apart at night.

By the 1960s, county hunting was a popular activity. The CHC established chapters in many states to encourage county hunting within those states. K6BX became associated with CQ Magazine, and that allowed widespread distribution of information on the awards. At the height of its success, the CHC had over 4000 members in 175 countries.

CQ Magazine began to offer county hunter award in 1961 and called it the USA-CA. Back then, the 40 meter band was very popular, and a net was started in 1963 for that purpose. On 20M, both the CHC and YL International System (YL-ISSB) shared 14.333 until March 1963. After that time, as county hunting activity increased, the YL-ISSB moved to 14.332 and the CHC net moved up to 14.340.

In the early days, county hunting was quite different. Most counties were worked with fixed stations, due to the lack of mobiles.

The 20m net was primarily a CHC net, not just county hunting. Some of the CHC folks did not like the amount of county hunting activity on 14.340. A group of county hunters broke away from the CHC and created the Independent County Hunters Net in November 1966, and used 14.336. And that is why folks county hunt on 14.336

Sources: County Hunter Handbook, published by the B&B Shop, 21st edition
World Radio Magazine, County Hunter Column by N3AHA, July 2002

State QSO Parties – A Great Way to Work New Counties by Alan, KI7WO

I write from the perspective of a “New” County Hunter. I have only been actively pursuing Counties since the middle of last year, and I have found that State QSO Parties are a GREAT way to pick up new counties.

I had finished CA during that State QP and saw that MN was coming up this past weekend. I had been less than successful in previous efforts to work regular CH Mobiles who had been recently running through MN.

Not all Mobiles are equipped to run 40 Meters and I knew that 40 would likely be the only band, other than perhaps 30 M, that I would be able to work MN from MO.

I checked out the MN State QSO home page where many of the mobiles had put their scheduled routes on the web page, so I was able to track their progress during the day. I missed 10 counties that I needed, however I did work 57 counties, of which 33 were “all time new ones”, all on 40 M CW.

Not too bad for a “humble” set up, with 100 watts and an Inverted Vee up about 24 ft at the peak. I will certainly be keeping an eye out for the upcoming State QSO Parties also.

One interesting side note - Perhaps I have discovered “how long is too long” for sitting at the radio in one stretch. After about 9 and a half hours at the radio, I found myself staring off into space when I finally realized that the “Poor Fist” that I was trying to copy was in fact the high tones of an RTTY signal that had drifted down into my pass band.

Alan KI7WO

On the Road with N4CD

Last summer, while headed north and running counties in Michigan, I had the pleasure of an eyeball QSO with ED, K8ZZ. We first met at the Dayton Hamvention a few years ago, and had an interesting conversation about cw operation at the dinner we have each year on Friday evening. . That was the start to his CW net participation, and now Ed is a very active CW mobile, giving out counties in many states as he makes trips here and there. Ed uses a loop antenna at home for 30M operation, and operates 20/30/40m CW when on the road. His son, W8JJ, is also an active county hunter.

Ed sent along a picture of his mobile installation, so you'll can see what puts out the big signal from Michigan.

