

Field Day 2021: Getting Back to Normal

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Wow – it sure was nice to have Field Day back! After the disappointing COVID-19 hiatus of 2020, what a pleasure it was to be outside in a park, conducting another fine Field Day together.

New Field Day Site

Our venue this year, Spanish Village Park, gave us some new challenges. The gazebo is located at the top of a hill, with a kids' playground on one side, and a slope down to a ball diamond on the other side. So the prime antenna territory near the operating positions was smaller and more narrow than we're used to. Still, we made the best of things and it all seemed to work out. Positives were: the gazebo and tables were very clean – no sweeping required! And we had A/C power too. Of course this was used only for lighting, computer logging, and creature comforts (coffee pot and fans). We still operated 100% battery and solar power for the radios.

Setting Up

We'd had the benefit of a few site visits prior to FD weekend, so we had a good plan for what was to go where. Rod WA9GQT and I both planned to have dipoles hanging from our 40' Spiderbeam masts. What we didn't count on: the wind! It was really breezy, with the occasional strong gust of wind. The masts got a good workout but survived. Rod did have one antenna malfunction, but after some re-engineering got things back where they belonged. One silver lining was that this gave the FT8 station some 40m airtime – more on that elsewhere!

My 80m dipole was a combined test of a few new materials for me. For the center I used a [SOTABeams Pico Balun](#) in 1:1 configuration, waterproofed with "liquid electrical tape." For the wire elements I used "[Polystealth](#)" wire in 26 gauge. This wire is also known as "kite wire" – very light yet strong copper-clad steel. I also used RG-316 for the feed going up the mast from the base. All were chosen as a compromise between weight vs. performance, and the end result seemed to work okay. It certainly seemed to shrug off the wind Saturday morning.

Larry N0SA engineered a very sturdy set of brackets to strap his 15m MFJ Moxon's mast to the gazebo. This antenna and its "Armstrong" rotor worked well, went up quickly with John AA0VE's help, and withstood the wind challenge without a hitch.

Keith KC0PP's Jackite pole and EFHW for 20m took top honors for speedy setup, and it also served us well.

Vern AE0TT gets top honors for setting up his "digital annex" for FT8/FT4 operation. AA0VE and Jon N0WL lent a hand as Vern's vertical with full radial field were deployed in the baseball diamond's outfield. The digital station's home was complete with a tent to provide some shade for the table and chairs for the operators.

Weather

Each year I try to use The Old Farmer's Almanac to give us a head-up on what to expect weather-wise. For the past several years it's been spot-on... and this year was no different. In the week leading up to FD weekend, those of us checking with official NOAA-type forecasts were dreading this year. It looked like it was going to be hot... *and* wet. But recall the Almanac predicted "isolated t-storms, warm." And boy, were we isolated – we were in fact surrounded by some torrential rains both to the north and to the south. But somehow the "waters parted" and passed on either side of us, with only a pleasant light shower Sunday morning. The breezy conditions for setup meant the heat wasn't all that bad; by the afternoon and evening I don't ever recall feeling hot. Once again, I think we had good weather luck for FD.

Satellite

Along with the usual goings-on, two intrepid hams gave satellite operations a go. Gib KE0PRK and Kevin KE0FXA picked a choice location and used a hand-held dual band yagi to try to net a contact. Radios were both hand-held HTs and Gib's Icom 705. I apologize for not having more details on which birds they tried to use. What I can say is that Field Day is a rough day to vie for a spot during those passes. They gave it a good effort and had fun doing it. Tip of the cap to Gib for his "all natural" compass rose he laid out on the ground using nothing but found materials (fallen tree branch sticks!).

Computer Logging

This year the big change was introduction of computer logging. In fairness I must say "re-introduction," as Randy Miller WA00UI (SK) had given this a shot quite a few years ago. I wasn't there for that Field Day... but I think Randy would have been pleased to see how things worked. I got several comments as people got used to the new way of doing things. I really appreciated the real-time dupe checking. Next year we ought to try networking the computers, as this would introduce another level of "magic." Namely: entering a call of a station we've already worked on one band would make their exchange

auto-fill on the form. Pretty slick! Finally your Field Day Chairman really appreciated how much easier it was to report our scores to ARRL. The task went from days to hours. Nice All told, it was a success, and more than one op may be looking to add N3FJP logging software to their own home station.

Dinner

No FD report would be complete without a mention of our continued tradition of a hearty dinner. Once again Bob K0FHG served as our BBQ chef extraordinaire, serving up some delicious pork steaks and well-above-average hot dogs. Dave NFOR provided some welcome sides to round things out. There were even a few 807s spotted. Can't have a pork steak without 'em, right?

The Results

Our 373 CW QSOs and 188 digital QSOs, plus our one phone QSO (!) gave a grand total of 562 QSOs. With CW and digital QSOs worth 2 points each, and the overall 5x multiplier for QRP operation, we claimed a point total of 5,615. Our bonus of 1,150 will give us a final claimed score of 6,765.

All told, I think this was a successful event. Our QSO total was only surpassed twice before (2017: 582; 2018: 636). However please do take a look at the digital QSO count, compared to the CW and overall counts. It's obvious our CW tally lagged quite a bit behind our usual showing. If it weren't for the "digital annex," our score would really have suffered. Here's a few observations: first, the digital modes at QRP power levels during Field Day proved to be quite productive. Next, if we want to get our CW numbers higher, we will need a combination of more participation, more CW operators, and (perhaps) staggered scheduling, with "night shift" operators etc. And finally, if we intend to feature both CW and digital again next year, we need to come up with a way to either reduce same-band interference between modes, or come up with a more formal way to "share" bands between modes.

Also, it's nice to see the higher bands coming back. Next year the 15m Moxon could get an even better workout!

Band	CW QSOs	Digital QSOs	Phone QSOs
80m	106		
40m	161	44	
20m	65	13	
15m	41	49	
10m		82	
2m			1
TOTALS	373	188	1

Recognition and Thanks

Field Day is a team effort – so to each of you that came out or helped in any way, I'd like to say thanks. Entries in the official SLQS Field Day Operator Log (ordered by appearance): John AA0VE; Jeff N0MII; Gib KE0PRK; Keith KC0PP; Larry N0SA; Rod WA9GQT; Bob K0FHG; Mark KB5YZY; Kevin KE0FXA, Vern AE0TT, Jon N0WL. (Apologies if you were here but didn't sign the book!) We also had three visitors: Jim KC0DTD, Jim K0JFB, and Mo KC0CPO/CN8CW.

For helping with bonus categories: Natural power (solar): Rod WA0GQT; Safety officers Jon N0WL and Keith KC0PP; Field Day message: Fred N9BSO and Jon N0WL.

Field Day 2022

What shall we do next year? Same location? Computer logging? With networking? Can we share bands between modes? Reduce inter-station interference? Find a bigger park so we can spread out? Can we locate and orient our antennas to help with that goal? Other ideas? Think about it and let's discuss!