

2013 ARRL 10 GHz and Above Contest – WA5YWC

The 2013 ARRL 10 GHz and Above contest was truly a unique experience for me. I decided early in the year to make this contest season special. I had read about the microwave roving in the Minnesota and Chicago area with great interest. I was amazed at the scores and number contacts these guys were making. So I decided to give the Chicago area a try and work as many stations across Lake Michigan as possible. I had never tried over the water microwaving and thought this has to be a blast. So off I went from Plano, Texas to Chicago for a new operating adventure.

Prior to leaving Texas, I became very familiar with the lower west shoreline of Lake Michigan by looking at Google Earth on a regular basis. I felt like I had a good understanding of the terrain before my trip began. I also posted a message on the microwave reflector asking the local microwave groups for good locations. What I wasn't prepared for was the reality that a lot of the microwave rovers traveled to Lake Erie for the first half of the contest. I considered changing my travel dates to September but I had conflicts that couldn't be changed.

I had been in contact with a good ham friend in the Chicago area and got him all pumped up about 10 GHz microwaving. My friend, Clint, WA6TMJ has been a VHF/UHF contester for many years and always had a desire to try out microwaves. I arrived in Chicago a few days early and had a chance to explore the locations along Lake Michigan that looked so good on Google Earth. I was not disappointed. I actually did a dry run Friday before the contest so I wouldn't spend a lot of time looking for locations to operate.



Early Saturday morning I met Clint, WA6TMJ and my good friend Al Ward, W5LUA at my first location in EN62dc. Al was attending to family business in the Chicago area and was available for a few hours to join Clint and me for some radio fun. In the first hour I worked five stations, W9SNR, W9ZIH, AA9IL, K9TMS and W9NU. Neil, W9NU was located in EN64vm on the northeast shore of Lake Michigan. He was my best DX at 295 km. It was time to move to location two in EN62ci in Waukegan.



During my dry run on Friday, I was looking for a suitable location in the Waukegan area. Nothing was working out along the lake shore. As I was leaving the shore area, I spotted a parking garage along Sheridan Road. I was in luck, it was a public parking garage and four levels high. This was the second operating location and I easily worked Neil, W9NU in EN64vm again at 273 km. I also worked Jim, W9SNR in EN51xr at 72 km and Zack, W9SZ in EN50rl at 217 km. The parking garage had a great view of the lake but it was surrounded by tall buildings in Waukegan. I was able to work Jim, W9SNR on ssb between two very tall buildings. As we finished the contact, I heard a cw signal calling me. It was Zack, W9SZ. As luck would have it, we were in-line between the buildings and Zack was hearing me work Jim. We completed the contact with me on ssb and Zack on cw. By this time, my friend Clint, WA6TMJ was going crazy with excitement about working 10 GHz. He was hooked! Time to move again, going north to EN62cn.



Our third stop at Southport Park just south of Kenosha, WI was recommended by Garry, K3SIW. It turned out to be a great location for some nice dx. I worked Neil, W9NU again in EN64vm at 252 km, Bob, K2YAZ in EN74av at 298 km, Ron, W9ZIH in EN51nv at 116 km and Don, WW8M in EN72xf at 311 km.

Our fourth and last stop for the day was in EN62cs just north of Racine, WI. I only made one contact and that was with Don, WW8M in EN72xf at 314 km. This turned out to be my best dx for the weekend.

Sunday morning, August 18, I met Clint at his home in Hanover Park, IL and we traveled to a well-known contest location in EN52sa. We set up in the parking lot of a local high school and I made my first contact with Ron, W9ZIH in EN51nv. I received a phone call from Herbert, AF4JF in EM48sq in St. Louis wanting to try a contact. Wouldn't you know it, Murphy decided to show up for a visit. I was having intermittent issues with my LO on the 10 GHz transverter. After fooling around with it for an hour or more, the problem disappeared. I contacted Herbert and we attempted a contact. Herbert was hearing my signal but I wasn't hearing him. I was running over 30 watts on 10 GHz and he was running 2 watts. So much for a 407 km QSO. Then Ron, KO0Z in EM59ji contacted me. We made an easy contact at 303 km. I completed two more contacts from this location with Jim, W9SNR and Garry, K3SIW. Off to the next location.



Clint and I traveled to a well-known hill in EN51xr. It's a reclaimed landfill with a great horizon. I made two more contacts at this location with Ron, KO0Z in EM59ji at 282 km and Ron, W9ZIH at 72 km. It was pushing 3 PM in the afternoon and conditions were poor. I did make an attempt to contact Bob, K2YAZ in EN74av but neither of us heard anything. It was time to go home. So I packed up, said good-bye to Clint and headed south on I-55 for Texas.

Some people think I'm crazy to drive 800 miles to make radio contacts on 10 GHz. I can't wait to do it again. Who knows where I'll end up next year? I know one thing, Clint, WA6TMJ will be a new addition to the 10 GHz operators.

I roved central Texas the second weekend of the contest. My first stop was in EM12bc in the middle of no-place! My first contact was with Brad, N5WCO in EM12lb at 79 km. My next contact was with Al, W5LUA in EM13qc at 161 km. Activity as sparse to say the least. I packed up and continued south towards

Austin. I was in EM01xl and worked N5WCO again at 114 km and W5LUA at 224 km. I attempted a few contacts with the guys south of Austin but the terrain was blocking signals. I made two more stops on Saturday, one in EM11gk and made contact with Al, W5LUA at 201 km and again in EM11kw at 138 km. It was late in the afternoon and I headed home to Plano.

Sunday morning I met Al, W5RLG on our favorite parking garage in Frisco, TX. We both worked Al, W5LUA and Kent, WA5VJB. Conditions were poor by 9AM. I moved to a new location in EM12mw and worked W5RLG at 24 km and W5LUA at 36 km. By mid-morning, activity ceased to exist.

So how did I do for the 2013 ARRL 10 GHz and Above contest?

14 unique stations worked
30 QSO's
Total score: 5,528
Best dx: 314 km
Distance driven: 2,000 miles

My rig:

Homebrew 10 GHz transverter with integrated Icom IC-706 I/F radio
Siemens TWTA running 30+ watts
Flex 1500 SDR
20 inch offset dish with homebrew feed



The 2013 contest was one of my most memorable experiences. I made new friends along the way and inspired a new 10 GHz operator. What about 2014? Who knows, maybe Chicago, Minneapolis, California?

73,

Bob WA5YWC
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