

In early 2006, I was fortunate enough to be invited to help the contesting team at B1Z during the CQWW SSB contest for their attempt at the record for the M/S category in China. From my perspective, any place that is situated on top of a mountain with towers and antennas is a great place to visit for contesting, so I was very excited to have the chance to operate there.

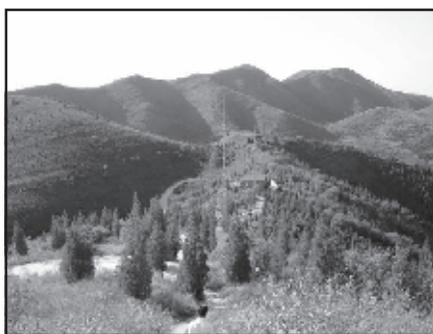
There are many hams in China and the ham population there is growing rapidly. The top level license is allowed on HF, and contesting seems to be the pinnacle of the radio sport. Contesting in China in many ways is similar to contesting here in America, yet there are some interesting differences that might be of some use to those of us here.

B1Z Bound

It was not a difficult task for me to prepare for the trip to China; I speak the language and have previous experience operating in China. This allowed me to make friends and establish relationships with the B1Z team in Beijing. During the months prior to the contest, I made arrangements and purchased a radio and amplifier to be sent in advance, helping to "beef up" the equipment in the station for the M/S record attempt. At the time, the only currency allowed was RMB (Chinese money), and most hams did not have the "foreign exchange credits" needed to purchase items from other countries. Since that time, RMB can now be converted to foreign money with the proper documentation. I planned to spend several weeks in China, so getting RMB and using it while I was there would not be a problem, and it saved me the moneychangers' rates.

After several months of waiting as the equipment was shipped by boat, it finally arrived in Beijing. The radio made it fine; however, the amplifier made a loud hum during full load and we were very confused as to what the problems were as the output appeared to be correct. It took some time but we finally discovered that the plate transformer had been dropped during shipping and the band that keeps the windings tight had become loose. Using a wooden wedge, the team there was able to tighten the band and the loud hum in the unit during full load transmit went away.

As time approached, I was anticipating the time that would be spent operating at B1Z. Even though I had other things to accomplish before the contest, my primary reason for going on this trip was to operate a contest for the first time



The B1Z site.



Our chef, tour guide, Mom and me.



Dinner with the B1Z ops.



K5SF operating at B1Z.

in China. My thoughts were of what the experience would be like. I knew it would be different than in America, yet I also knew other things would be similar. I was confident that I could contribute to the contest with the skills I had learned here.

Going to Beijing from America is not difficult, but of course it is a long trip. The trip takes about 16 hours in the air from Dallas to Tokyo. After a two hour layover, it's another four hours to Beijing; the total trip time ends up around 22 hours. If you leave in the morning, you will chase the sun around the planet and never see night time. You land in Tokyo at what would appear to be the afternoon of the same day. You lose a day as you cross the International Dateline. I like to break up the trip and stop over in Tokyo for one night. It gives me a chance to relax and go to the local mall for some shopping. Then I have about eight hours for sleep before I have to get out and catch the flight to Beijing.

Antennas and Ambiance

When the time finally arrived to go to the B1Z station, a member of the team picked me up from my hotel in Beijing to take me there. The station at B1Z is located on top of a mountain some 90 kilometers north east of Beijing. There is a two-story hunting lodge from years past at the base of the mountain. A couple of dozen people can stay and it has a separate building with a kitchen and several large dining tables. It's better than any rural hotel, but don't expect a 5-star resort.

The views from the top of the mountain are beautiful. On a clear day, from morning to evening, the views are reminiscent of the ink and watercolor paintings from China. At night, the lights from villages below give the impression you are flying low over the country, and you can always hear the sounds from the equipment in the villages miles away.

The station is located in an area that offers a more realistic view of China and is within a short drive of several other places to visit. Stone Forest Mountain is one of those places a short drive away from the station. As this area is outside of the city, the valleys between the mountains are full of orchards and fields. Almost every bit of farmable land has some form of crop growing. It is remarkable how the people grow so much without all the mechanized equipment we have here in the States. The distribution systems are quite different, as well. The market owners in Beijing will drive all the way out here at 3 AM to purchase the



B1HQ in the 2006 IARU HF contest.

The towers and antennas at B1Z.

day's supplies. From the station on top of the mountain, you can hear these three-wheel trucks moving over the highways throughout the early morning hours.

Ancient Chinese Secrets?

One thing I experienced similar to contests I have worked in America were the days spent in preparation repairing antennas and equipment — these always seem to need attention at any contest station. The amplifier had some trouble due to an antenna problem, so I spent one night replacing the band switch. Others had to climb the towers in the darkest of nights to repair the 40 meter antenna — a wire had broken off the matching unit. An 80 meter vertical was set up and the wireless network was established. Everything was checked out.

Then there were many new experiences that I had not seen in America. The first thing that stood out was the level of cooperation between the club members to see that the goals of the station were met. My previous experiences are limited to contests where there were few participants, so it was very refreshing to see a dozen local hams coming out to support the contest from every perspective. Some helped to set up and maintain radios and antennas, while others ensured the network was operating and the logging software

was up and running correctly. Some arranged for and managed the food and accommodations during the contest. It made the pre-contest tasks so much easier, helping the overall effort go smoothly. There were few failures during the contest, and those failures were handled quickly while the operator continued the run almost seamlessly.

Another difference was the difficulty in getting equipment and repair parts. It isn't that the repair parts are not available — it is more a problem of shipping them to China and the costs associated with the shipping. We had anticipated several potential problems and had brought several spare parts in case of trouble (which is why I was able to spend a night repairing the band switch on the amplifier).

A major difference in contesting in China is the amateur population mass is quite remote from China. With the exception of Japan, the EU and North America amateur population centers are quite a distance from Beijing and propagation is not always the best between them. It takes some good antennas to do well into EU and USA.

Additionally, the North American continent does not have a very good propagation path except for a few hours on 20 and 40 meters when the propagation over the pole lines up. This was a bit hard to adjust to. Then add to that the SSB offset required on 40 meters accompa-

nied by the oriental broadcast stations in the North American portion of the phone band — this rendered the 40 meter band useless for contacts to North America.

Almost Like Home

During the contest, I was able to do many of the things that I had experienced during my short time contesting here in America. There was the excitement of getting a run going during a band opening, the difficulties in maintaining a run frequency on 40 meters at night and the battle against fatigue to keep in top form and not look like a lid to the other operators on the air. It was also a challenge to keep the logging accurate and to work through the multiple weak signals that were there (but just can't quite hear except one or two letters).

One of the nice things about contesting in China is that 0000 UTC falls at 8 AM local time. This means you can get a good night's rest before the contest begins. The opening from China to USA is roughly from 2300 UTC to about 0200 UTC on 10, 15 and 20 meters. In other trips, I've seen some contacts made around 0600 UTC on 20 meters. Eighty and 40 meters are usually open from 2000 to about 0000 UTC.

Transmission on 40 meters in China is only allowed up to 7100 MHz for both CW and SSB. Above that is the oriental broadcast band. The propagation is

there, as many commented to me on 20 meters that they had heard us on 40 meters calling earlier, but due to broadcast stations in the US phone band, we were unable to hear anything. Those broadcast stations were 40 over S9 in some cases. At the time of this contest, 80 meters was very noisy. We only made a few contacts to Hawaii and Australia. I do not think the band opened well this year. The 20 meter band gave out on us a little too quickly the first day, and 40 meters gave up on the second night.

During the day, the meat of the contest from China is working the EU stations. EU has the largest ham population center that can generate the most points in a contest. The Japanese stations can generate points, but only one per QSO. It's best to make those QSOs when the bands to EU and North America are not open. Early morning can yield a couple of hours of runs to North America; however, it drops off suddenly when the band closes in North America.

In the later part of the morning and then on into the evening, the real effort was pulling in as many EU stations as possible. When 20 meters didn't work so well to EU, we would try working 15 and 20 meters with as many Japanese stations as possible, until the evening approached with reduced noise levels on 40 that allowed us to aim the beams back to EU. We would again be able to do well in the points per QSO category.

"Points Is Points"

At night the QRM on 40 meters is just as rough as ever. The good thing is below 7100 MHz, you are not competing with the other broadcast stations. I think it is always extremely difficult to run on 40 meters phone. The hardest time is trying to pick out a weak signal while still maintaining the run frequency. Many times I could hear the stations in a pile up calling me, but they were so weak I couldn't make out their full calls, only a letter or two. As long as there were many powerful stations in the pile up calling me, the frequency would remain fairly open as those stations would push off the nearby competing stations. When they left and it was only the weaker ones, the high power competitors would crouch in on the frequency and then the EU stations would have trouble hearing our CQ and we would have trouble hearing them. As always, any delays in calling CQ or using the normal tactics to keep the run frequency would result in having to look for a new run frequency. As long as the propagation held out on the bands, the runs remained good and rapid.

All in all, we had a successful attempt,

even though we did not make the all time high. We did, however, reach a respectable 2 million points for the contest. The poor conditions led to some dead time in responses to our CQs, which cost a lot of points; we tried to make up for it by pulling in as many Japanese stations during those times. They were one point per QSO, but "points is points" when there isn't any propagation to EU.

Getting Down to B1Zness

If anyone would like to operate in a contest in China, it is not difficult. The process is simply a matter of requesting an operating permit and finding a contesting club to work with. Many Chinese speak English fairly well. This is especially true of the hams in China licensed to operate on HF, as speaking English is one of the requirements for their HF permit.

One of the interesting facts about ham radio in China is that it is administered from the Chinese sporting authority, through the Chinese Radio Sports Association (the Sporting Authority is the same one that oversees the Olympics committee). The Chinese consider the Amateur Radio hobby a sport and one of the most popular sports with the young is fox hunting where they use kits or home brew equipment and antennas to seek out signals in the VHF bands. The number of hams in China is increasing rapidly through this program.

To get an operating permit, you need to forward an application, a copy of your license, a passport picture and an application fee. This Web site has all the current information about requesting an operator's permit: www.crsa.org/1_eng_visitor_certificate.html. Allow six to eight weeks to get the permit back. This must be present with you when you operate in China.

The next step is to find a club to operate with. All foreign operators visiting China temporarily must be accompanied by a licensed Chinese operator. There are several club stations around the country and contacting the station manager is a matter of looking up their information at www.qrz.com. The clubs that I know of in Beijing are the club BY1PK (at the CRSA office) and B1Z. I also know of a club in Shanghai (BY4AA).

There are many sights to see in China. The Great Wall and the Emperor's Palace are among the top attractions in Beijing. If you decide to visit, try to take in these sites. There are museums and plays of all sorts. Beijing is preparing for the 2008 Olympics and new things are opening all the time. The Emperor's Palace is being completely restored and is nearly complete. I've been there several times, and as the restoration nears completion, it is quite a place to visit now.

All photos courtesy of the author.

