

CP6CW in the 2004 CQWW —A South American Odyssey

Bill Dean, WØOR

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With the excitement of a Guatemalan adventure still fresh in our minds, the four of us (Ron, NØAT; Vlad, NØSTL; Dave, WØFLS and me, WØOR) who put TGØAA on the air in November 2003 for the CQWW CW contest began talking about doing it all over again in '04. Even before we disembarked from the plane that brought us back home to Minnesota, we had all pretty much agreed on several points: a good team had been assembled, everybody had a lot of fun, and despite the odds, we had racked up a score we could be proud of. We wanted to experience the high of being the sought-after signal again.

But like any DXers or contesters worth their salt, each of us couldn't help thinking that there were things we could have improved upon. Couldn't we have grabbed more mults? Could we have found a way to put up a better antenna for 160? Shouldn't we have done better planning for an Internet connection? So the conversation went. The bottom line is that we were all thinking about the challenge implied by the proverbial, "wait 'til next year."

So what about next year? Did we want to go back to TG? (See the story in the March 2004 edition of the TCDXA newsletter *The Gray Line Report* at www.tcdxa.org.) That probably could have been arranged. We had made friends and connections with several local hams in the Guatemala City club. While the 2003 QTH offered several advantages, living conditions were primitive. Could we find an improved location, where adequate power to drive a linear and an Internet connection would be available?

As we discussed it, however, we arrived at a consensus to try something different, to go somewhere new. One of the things we noted was that the one country in South America that almost never seemed to be represented in CW contests was Bolivia. There are plenty of LUs and PYs and a sprinkling of ops from most other places in SA. But few, if any, CPs were to be found below the phone bands. So, we started seriously thinking about Bolivia as a destination.

The Plan Comes Together

During one of the early 2004 winter

meetings of the TCDXA, we put together a PowerPoint presentation for a club program. When the question of whether we would do it again next year came up, we mentioned Bolivia as one option. Did anyone have connections there? As good luck would have it, TCDXA member Bob Garwood, WØBV, did indeed have a connection. For many years, Bob has run schedules with Ray Rising (for-

merly KØLWJ, now K4LWJ), who is currently licensed in Bolivia as CP6RR.

Ray attracted international attention in the 1990s when he was abducted by guerillas in Colombia and held for ransom for 810 days before being released. Today, he works on behalf of a worldwide mission headquartered in North Carolina, whose goal it is to provide the means to communicate with various



CP6AA HQ station in Santa Cruz.

ZONE CQ 10
ITU 14

Grid: FH82je

CP6CW

CQ WW CW – 2004 contest
Bolivia, Santa Cruz de la Sierra

CP6/ ☒ NØSTL Vlad
☒ WØOR Bill
☒ WØZR Tom
☒ CP6UH Modesto
☒ KMØO Tony
☒ NØAT Ron

A special thanks to Ray CP6RR, Bob WØBV, Club de Radioaficionados de Santa Cruz and its members – wonderful people who supported and cheered for us throughout the contest. Thanks to K3WT, WØSX and KFØQR and all our friends and sponsors who made this DX-pedition possible.

Confirming QSO with				
Date	UTC	MHz	2-Way	RST

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The CP6CW team.

indigenous peoples, especially in Third World countries. This group has translated the *Bible* into a number of obscure languages, bringing its teachings to people who have heretofore had little contact with outsiders. In Bolivia, they also broadcast programs in some of the Indian languages. Ray maintains the broadcast stations.

Knowing of our interest in Bolivia, Bob put us in touch with Ray. As a ham head-quartered in the Santa Cruz area, Ray was able to set up contacts with members of the local radio club. In May 2004, we received an invitation to use their club facilities as our QTH for the contest. For the next several months, via e-mail and Sunday afternoon skeds, we formulated our plans to travel to Bolivia, and to operate in the CQWW test. Unfortunately, one of last year's crew, Dave Raymond, W0FLS, was unable to join the team for '04. His employer (Motorola) assigned him to the Twin Cities for several years, but during the year, he was reassigned to another project in Washington, DC, and the new assignment prevented him from doing a repeat performance. We knew a full blown operation would be difficult with only three, so we began trying to recruit a fourth member. The good news is that Tom Lutz, W0ZR, decided he would like to go. Tom has not been a contender, and he seemed a little worried that he might be a drag on the scoring. As it turned out, he was absolutely equal to the task. A member of FOC, Tom is an outstanding CW man. It was not much of a leap for him to catch on to DX contesting.

As November crept nearer and nearer, we attracted a second recruit. Tony Wanschura, KM0O, is also an outstanding CW operator and an experienced contender to boot. Being retired, and an experienced traveler, Tony was interested in spending some additional time in Bolivia. That turned out to be a god-send for us, as Tony is also a tower climber. There was some work to be done on the antennas at the Santa Cruz club station. Tony contributed mightily to the effort by leaving about 10 days ahead of the other four guys. Despite several days of rain, Tony and Ray had three beams up and working by the time we arrived. There were two tribanders—one for the run station and one for the mult station—and a three-element 40-meter beam. All were at about 55 feet. There were inverted Vs for 40 and 80, already in place. That left the problem of 160.

On Sunday, November 22, the four of us, sans Tony, left Minneapolis St. Paul International at 10:35AM for the 21-hour trip to Santa Cruz. Making a connection on Continental in Houston, we arrived

in Miami about 6PM EST. With plenty of time before our overnight ride to South America, we enjoyed our last US dinner in the Miami terminal. Our American Airlines flight left about 11PM. Funny how, despite having had dinner in Miami, we all ate the midnight supper served on board.

Two movies and a little shut-eye later, we awoke to see the sun rising over the snow-capped Andes. There was an hour layover in Bolivia's capital, La Paz, and then it was on to Santa Cruz. La Paz is the highest capital city in the world, at more than 12,000 feet. Santa Cruz is more than 11,000 feet lower, and only about 150 miles south of the start of the vast Amazon jungle. It is Bolivia's fastest growing area, now with more than a million souls.

Arrival

At Viru Viru International Airport, Ray and several members of the Santa Cruz club met us. All went well, until we started through the customs inspection line. We were told to place our equipment bags on a table. We complied, and watched the inspectors and our hosts talk in animated Spanish. It soon became obvious that, despite careful advance preparations to avoid customs difficulties, we were going to have a problem. Inexplicably, some of the equipment was seized while other items were passed. It seems that if it was packed in an ordinary suitcase, it was OK. If it was in a protected equipment case, it was taken. The upshot was that of the two IC-756 Pro II transceivers, one (Ron's) was held by customs and one (Tom's) was allowed through. My IC-746 and Dentron Clipperton L amplifier were held. Much later, after we had arrived at our hotel, I remembered that my underwear, which had been used as protection around some of the equipment, was still at the airport in the customs holding area. Needless to say, an unexpected shopping trip was hastily arranged!

On Tuesday we spent the day familiarizing ourselves with the club station, setting up the equipment we got through customs, and meeting some of the club members and staff. Unlike most radio clubs in America, the Bolivia club is as much a social club as it is a radio club. Wives and families are involved in association activities. They own a large building and the land it occupies. In addition to a reception room/office and the room containing the ham shack, there is a conference room, a sizeable dining room, kitchen and rest room facilities and a spacious club meeting room that is nearly the size of a small auditorium. The club employs a full time secretary,

a groundskeeper, and a caretaker who lives on the property. It feels a bit more like an American Legion club than a radio club.

On Wednesday we took some time out for a cultural experience. We boarded two Cessna single engine planes bound for an Indian village that is being served by Ray's mission. During the 150-mile flight we watched as the geography below us gradually changed from farmland to jungle. Landing at a tiny grass strip, we were greeted by a host of villagers. The children seemed especially excited to see us. Right off the bat we were escorted on a tour of the area. A number of buildings, including a new school, had recently been constructed by church volunteers from the US. Proud village residents showed us other modern enhancements, including electrical power lines. Problem was, they couldn't turn on the generators. The cost of fuel was too high. A highlight was a visit to a small, nearby river. The area near the river was teeming with several varieties of colorful butterflies. Vlad captured a picture of one species that is being used on our QSL card.

Equipment and Airtime at Last

On Thursday we finally got our equipment from customs, and finished setting up the station. Ron and I decided to stay up all night so that we could try to work 160 and 80 meters. It turned out to be total frustration. Despite spending most of the day preparing the vertical and the Beverage, nada. Not only were conditions lousy, the noise level was overwhelming. We understand we were heard all over North America, and the big guns were calling us. We could hear almost nothing. All night it was the same story—no signals, nothing but crashes.

There has been very little activity on 160 CW from Bolivia in recent years, and a major goal was to provide some contacts on topband. In addition to the extra multipliers that would contribute to our score, we all hoped to operate on 160 with our own calls before and after the contest. There was hope that we might be able to use the facilities at one of Ray's broadcast sites, where there is a 260 foot broadcast tower. As the rules prohibited us from operating from there during the contest, we would have had to set up a separate operation. That idea didn't pan out. We simply ran out of time.

What we did do is to put up a 128 foot vertical at the club site. They had a 135-foot repeater tower available. As intrepid as Tony is, he hesitated to climb that one. No problem, as it turned out. Ray knew of a young Bolivian who climbs broadcast towers. This turned out to be child's

play for him. In a matter of minutes he had the top of our vertical anchored to the tower. It took us considerably more time to string about 15 radials around the property. A quick SWR check (about 1.7:1) and we were in business. Finding room for a Beverage was a bit trickier. But we did manage to put one out at a length of approximately 275 feet, pointing roughly northeast.

Friday, during the day, we all got on the air on various bands, using CP6/our home calls. Each of us logged several hundred QSOs. But that didn't really ease the disappointment over 160. When the contest started, we occasionally tried to do something on 160, but ended up making only two contacts: a W6 and a W7. Ron worked them, and reported that they were both loud. That's

all that was ever heard.

Contest conditions were generally fair. On 10, 15, and 20, there was less noise and it was possible to maintain rates between 125 and 150 per hour. On 40 and 80, however, the noise made it a real chore. There was QSB most of the time. All the signals seemed to be at the same low level, and the pileups on us made it extremely difficult to dig out the calls correctly. It was slow going most of the time. When we tried to spread out the pile by listening up. It helped a little, but it was still difficult.

In the end, we totaled about 4700 contacts, well below our total in Guatemala. We managed more multipliers, but not as many as we had hoped, due to low totals on 160 and 80. But, because gringo contacts count 3 points, we

eclipsed 8 million points. As of this writing we may have made the top 10 in the world—a better showing than expected. We assume others suffered from some of the same sub-par conditions. Of course, it helps to be transmitting from a continent where most of your contacts are worth more.

Monday was teardown day. Sadly, we packed everything up. One casualty was my 746. Too much RF finally took out its receiver front end.

On our last night we enjoyed a festive barbeque, hosted by Modesto, CP6UH, at his beautiful home. The event was attended by many of our new friends from the Santa Cruz Radio Club, made for a great ending to an eventful week. Now, once again, it's "wait 'til next year!"

NCJ