

NORTH TO ALASKA, CQ WW CW STYLE

Jim Price, K6ZH

My wife Joan N6KIM and I first met Rich Strand, KL7RA in Fairbanks, AK in March of 2004. We were on a tour to see the Northern Lights (we did), and one morning we had breakfast with Rich and Al Noe, KL7NO who was my first, and at that time only, KL7 QSO on 6 meters. It was incredibly cold there (down to -30 F), but we did see the Aurora, we visited the Ice Carving Festival both day and night, etc. And it was, of course, fun to “talk ham radio” with Rich and Al.

Fast forward to September of 2015. Joan and I were on our third “roll your own” tourist trip to Alaska (ya, we like it there in the Summer!) – this time to the Kenai Peninsula. By now, Rich had built a Super-Station west of the town of Kenai, in Niskiski, about 100 miles south of Anchorage “as the crow flies,” but much longer by road. I contacted Rich in advance of our trip. He invited us for the tour of the station and antenna farm, and took us out to dinner – an amazingly generous host!!

Two months later, he passed away unexpectedly from a massive heart attack.

About two years later, Steve Bloom, KL7SB, purchased the entire property – home, station, and antennas. And with the help of Wigi Tozzi, KL0R and others, has created the North Pole Contest Group with the call KL7RA as a memorial to Rich. Those of you who are active contesters know that KL7RA is THE most likely Zone 1 contact you will make in CQ WW!

Moving on to 2019. Those of you who are devotees of the CQ Worldwide CW Contest know that every six years, there are five weekends in November. CQ WW CW always falls on the 4th weekend of November, but in those rare years with five weekends, Thanksgiving is on the 5th Thursday of November. Hence there is no conflict between contesting and the family “Turkey Day.”

2019 was one of those years. And that year my friends Bud N7CW, Eric NC6K (a “frequent flyer” there), and I ventured to KL7RA to operate as part of the CQ WW CW team.

It was a fun adventure (but not much of it outside, obviously – cold!). Band conditions were so-so, and likewise for our score. But we enjoyed operating from a world-class contest station, and working shoulder-to-shoulder with some major contesters! AND we very much enjoyed the wonderful hospitality provided by Steve, Andrea, and Amy – comfortable “digs,” great food, you name it! PLUS when one operates there, one gets a personalized KL7RA coffee mug. Wigi buys two for each operator – one hangs on a peg in the ham shack, the other is given to the operator. Needless to say, I treasure mine!

About the station. The basement of the house, custom built by Rich, is all ham radio station: 10 operating positions, each with a transceiver (mostly K3s) and a full-power amp. The antenna farm is literally acres of towers – many stacks, e.g. two 4-over-4-over-4 arrays for 15 meters, each beam individually steerable. The 40 meter stacks are 2-over-2. Multiple four-squares and beverages are available on 80m and 160m. There are two station positions devoted to 15m, two to 20m, and two to 40m (separate run and mult stations). The others are tied to single bands: 10, 80, and 160. And there are WARC-band antennas as well. This is, indeed, a major contest station!!

And now to 2021. Steve and Wigi invited me (and others) to return to KL7RA for CQ WW CW, even though this was not one of those “every 6 years” events. I got “clearance” from Joan, and I ventured again to KL7RA for CQ WW CW this past November. Steve and Wigi were there, of course, and my fellow travelers were George KF2T and Rob N7QT. With a rather thin team it was decided that we would enter Multi/2 class. This year the band condx did not disappoint. Except for a few hours early Sunday, we had solid runs on at least one band, usually two. Rob and I traded off every couple of hours keeping one frequency on 15 meters going for many hours – and the pile ups just never went down. US/VE, then JAs. We had some nice EU runs on other bands as well. It was exhausting, but oh so much fun!! Being in Zone 1, and in KL7, makes it a fine place to be in the contest! Wigi has a

great T-shirt that shows a whisky glass and says “Double Mult Time!” Get it??

Our score was decent: over 7000 QSOs and 9M points, 3rd place in North America (behind KC1XX and K9CT). We had the Qs, but our score suffered some from fewer mults than the “East Coasters.”

The welcome mat is out at KL7RA – not just for CQ WW, but for many of the major contests. Wigi KL0R is the station manager and coordinates the teams for each contest. I’m hoping that Joan and I will be able to tie-in with a contest later this year during “fair-weather” times so we can do some more exploring in Alaska! Axel KI6RRN was there for the IARU HF contest in July 2021 when the group was able to sign “W1AW/KL7” as a Headquarters station. He had a great time. He and his brother Adam got in some tourist-time as well.

Check it out. Ya, it’s cold in the Winter, but it’s “pretty” outside. And once inside, you just “have to” get on the air! Not too hard to take!



AI KL7NO, Jim K6ZH, and Rich KL7RA meet for breakfast in Fairbanks, AK, March 2004



Rich KL7RA and Jim K6ZH at Rich's super-station near Kenai, AK, Sept. 2015



Welcome to the North Pole Contest Group headquarters



The KL7RA QTH, custom-built by Rich. The ham shack is in the basement.



Part of the 10-position ham shack. Note the coffee mugs hanging on hooks – one for each person who has operated here.



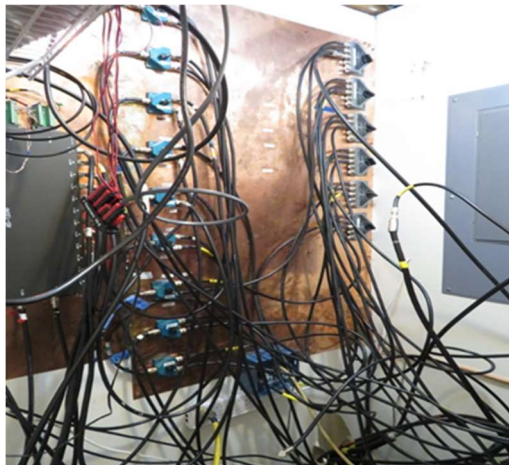
Cranking out the Qs (CQ WW CW 2019)



Wigi Tozzi, KL0R, is the Station Manager



One of the many stacks



It all comes together here!



Aerial view of KL7RA QTH. The house / shack is near the top center.
North is to the right.



Turkey dinner on Thanksgiving! Amy, Steve KL7SB, Andrea, George KF2T, Rob N7QT



Andrea and Steve KL7SB, the station owner, are just superb hosts!



Jim (author) is cranking out the Q's on 15m (2021).



And then there's the view from the front porch!!