HF SSB FIELD DAY 2024 DEBRIEF

1. The objective was to try and have 3 x portable stations, operating independently, in a restricted area without causing mutual interference (and to have a bit of fun too!)

2. I was able to get permission from a friend who owns land which has an active airstrip, to allow us to utilise some disused “crosswind” runways to achieve separation. Access to these involved driving on the active runway so a positive plan and briefing (involving minimal numbers) was needed to manage the risk. As it happens, there was thick fog and low cloud on the day so there was no flying taking place.

3. 2 operators arrived on the Friday evening and stayed overnight in camper vans and there may have been a BBQ and a drink or two… The third operator arrived on the Saturday morning in time for sausage and bacon baps!

4. All three portable stations were set up in time for the start of the FD event at 1300Z and were placed 150 meters (approx.) apart.

5. All 3 stations utilised linked dipoles for 80m/40m/30m and 20m and differing radios.

6. 2 stations had CAT linked laptops for logging and the other had a good old written log (proper portable ops!)

7. 1 station only ever intended operating in the "**QRP Get on the Air, Renewable Energy, Unassisted Portable**: Single Operator, Single transceiver, 5W max." category and the other two stations started with "**Low Power Unassisted Portable"** category and began using 20w to transmit in consideration of the close proximity of the other stations.

8. All 3 stations were using different radio equipment, and it soon became apparent that one station was "more aware" of the other stations when they transmitted on the same band. Whilst it was entirely workable like this (the "interference" was not destructive", it was agreed that all 3 stations would operate on 5 watts only for transmissions. At this power level, there was NO interference generated between the 3 stations.

9. This QRP level clearly led to hard work against all the stronger stations taking part in the event but at the same time, resulted in a great deal of satisfaction for each operator when a successful QSO was made.

10. This had only ever been intended as an experiment in operating, as single operators, in close proximity so we had no plans for a long operating session. Our session lasted just over 3 hours and clearing up was speedy as rain started to fall.

11. In those 3 hours and on just 5 watts, between the 3 stations operating at a "gentle" pace, we managed 55 confirmed QSOs into England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Norway and Austria.

Conclusions

A most enjoyable experiment proving that 3 stations, just 150m apart could work well and independently at 5 watts power HF SSB. It was very much a simple "real world" experiment rather than a meticulously planned one.
Slightly higher power levels would have been "acceptable" but it encouraged us to try and see what was possible at such low power in an HF contest and taking on the higher power stations.
It would be worth repeating the experiment (but still at 5 watts) on a "non-contesting day" to see what might be achievable, over a longer period and without the clamour contest stations.
It would also be interesting to set up just one station at this location, at higher power but with different operators for the same event perhaps?

73
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