

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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Being one of the senior hams in the region and known for his operating skill and willingness to share his knowledge with anyone wishing to learn and improve him or herself, Charlie is regularly asked all sorts of questions by newer hams. Occasionally, questions come close to stumping our old mentor. But somehow, he usually can satisfy the curiosity of the questioner. During the informal pie and coffee session after the last club meeting, Charlie ran into something that he doesn't experience very often, something that nearly stumped him.

Innocently enough, one of the new hams asked Charlie how many times his logging program had crashed on him and how many QSOs did he lose in the process? Mike, one of Charlie's best friends, nearly choked on his blueberry pie at hearing that question and before Charlie could answer, another old friend, Lou answered it for Charlie. Lou said to the newbie, "I remember once when Charlie's log crashed on top of Rufus's head and he nearly lost the entire thing when the poor dog ran out of the shack with the log riding on his back." The newbie didn't understand the humor. But, by then Mike had recovered from his choking episode and said, "Yep, I remember that too. The poor old hound was scared out of his floppy old hide." Charlie could see that the new ham was lost with these old goats' humor. He had plainly assumed that Charlie's means of logging was a computer program, just as all of his friends use. But, these guys were just having fun at Charlie's expense. They know entirely well that Charlie does not use a logging program for his normal logging and for good reason.

Charlie finally responded, "You must excuse my friends for their poor attempts at being funny. Their story about my log crashing is true, however. You obviously need information about computer logging programs. As my friends have suggested, I don't use any logging program for my DX work. I'm sorry, but I haven't met you before. Are you new to this area?"

The new person responded, "Yes, I just moved here. My name is Mark and I'm a computer technician. I've had my ham ticket for a few years now and I've been using Prolog for the last year. Last month, it crashed. After rebooting the computer, I wasn't been able to retrieve any of the QSOs I had entered into it before the crash. I guess they're lost. Someone on the repeater told me that I should use Winlog. I want to save my logs and not lose my QSO records again."

Charlie finished his coffee and said, "Well Mark, you have just perfectly described why I would never use any computer logging program for my DX work. I use an ARRL spiral bound paper logbook and a #2 pencil. It works great for me and I never can lose any DX contact time or band, QSL information, notes or other things unless I somehow throw out the logbook. I'm up to volume 47 now. They hold the records of every contact I have ever made, other than in most contests. I actually use WriteLog but only when I make contest QSOs."

Mark was puzzled and asked, "You use WriteLog for contests? So, why don't you use a logging program for everything? It's so much easier." Charlie smiled and replied, "I'm a DXer, not a contester. My DXing takes place over decades and my contesting takes place over a few hours or a weekend a few times a year. DX is my priority. In a day of DXing, I may only enter

one or two contacts into my log. A contester logs hundreds of contacts in the same amount of time. There is an obvious difference in the basic nature of the logging task for each. Furthermore, as I said, I am a DXer. I never want to risk losing my records of any DX contacts. I do some contesting, although far less seriously and only take part in contests in order to work some DX I might be chasing. When I work something in a contest that I want to record, a “keeper”, I also make an entry of that contact into my paper log.” Charlie was waiting for a reaction but Mark didn’t give one. Charlie figured that he was just being polite and didn’t want to come out and say that he disagreed and Charlie was over the hill and just didn’t get modern technology.

Mike and Lou jumped in and asked Mark if he used Packet Cluster to find DX. Mark nodded that he did and added that he had also installed rig control so that new DX spotted would automatically retune the HF radio to the DX station’s frequency. He also had installed CW software that transmitted and received up to 40 words per minute.

As politely as possible, Charlie, Mike and Lou said, “uh-huh...”, shook their heads and said nothing more. After everyone gathered up another piece of pie and cup of coffee, Charlie said to his new friend, Mark, “You know Mark; I’m a pretty avid fisherman. I’ve enjoyed fishing a lot ever since my grandfather taught me how to cast a lure back when I was about six. The deep love of fishing is something that no one but another avid fisherman could completely understand. We’re pretty fussy about fishing our way and following our own tricks. None of us want some machine to cast our line or tell us when we get a bite. The love we have for fishing is our private matter and we want to do it all for ourselves.”

Charlie continued as they enjoyed their second piece of pie, “Serious DXers like Mike, Lou and I enjoy using our skill in trying to work DX. We’ve done it for a long while and would never want to let someone else or some computer program find the DX and make the contact and log the contacts for us, while we sit back watching it happen. That isn’t why we want to chase DX. Now, having said that, I would never suggest that you ought to stop relying on your computer to find, work and log your DX. It’s the modern way, I guess. I wish you much success and I hope you enjoy it.”

Mike joined in, working hard to control his grinning, “I notice that the cashier at the market wouldn’t know how to make change without the cash register to tell her the amount to give back to the customer.” Lou added, “You’re right Mike. We’ve become so dependant on computers that when they fail, so do we. I don’t want that to happen to me. I want my computer to work for me and do what I want it to do, when I want it to do it.”

Mark wasn’t grinning. “I’m sorry, guys. I didn’t mean to....” Charlie jumped in and said, “Oh Golly Mark, don’t be sorry for anything. These guys don’t mean anything except to point out that some things should best stay in skilled trained hands; a pilot landing a plane, human driving a car, a racecar driver, engineer driving a train, fisherman trying to catch a fish and a DXer trying to work DX. The art is in the human hands of the person, even though a computer is probably capable of doing all those things quite well. We believe that there are valid reasons why human hands still are the best way to do some jobs.”

Mark wouldn't back down however, "But Charlie, we have high tech developments that could make DXing so much more efficient for you. You're probably working a lot harder than you need to." Charlie patiently replied, "Sure, I may be. You're right. But we don't want to work DX faster. I could go fishing using hand grenades and dynamite also. I'd bag hundreds of fish in a few seconds but fishing isn't about bringing home large quantities of fish. A good day of DXing for me may not produce a single new one but may still be a very good day." Mark nodded and said, "I can see your point, Charlie. It's sort of like using QRP or not using a big beam and tower to work DX." Charlie replied, "That's right Mark. It's the DXing that we enjoy." Possibly another new DXer has been shown the fun we all have on our track to DXCC. Give it a try; you don't need a big station, just need to have a little patience.