



VHF - UHF FIELD DAYS

VHF-UHF Field Days: Locator based scoring or distance based scoring?

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The survey provided some valuable information and a variety of helpful comments and suggestions. Some have already been acted on, and others are being considered.

I would like to express my thanks to Andrew VK1DA for keeping the public discussion on the survey as civilised as possible. When people disagree it is very easy to resort to mud-throwing, and this does not help when the aim is to have a rational dialogue.

John Martin VK3KM

VHF - UHF Field Day: Locator based scoring versus distance based scoring

Arguments for and against

There has been some discussion about the scoring system used for the VHF-UHF Field Days. This is a discussion of arguments on both sides of the question.

Arguments for a change to distance based scoring are on the left side of the page, with comments on the right.

Arguments against locator based scoring

Comments

Locator scoring does not fully reward DX contacts.

The existing scoring system does not give equal reward to contacts of equal difficulty. Stations receive the grid locator points only once, when they first work into each locator square.

This is unfair to stations that are capable of making repeated contacts with the same station, or into the same locator square.

Locator based scoring does not compensate for unequal population distribution.

Remote areas are at a disadvantage because amateur population is not distributed equally between grid squares. City dwellers are able to make far more contacts than people in less populated areas.

Areas such as VK5 are at a disadvantage compared with VK3, which has a higher amateur population density.

The ability to make contacts varies depending on the location of the station with respect to grid square borders.

Distance is the fundamental measure of achievement on the VHF/UHF bands.

The ability to work DX should be fully rewarded.

The WIA offers awards for distance records, and the Ross Hull Contest awards points on the basis of distance worked. It would be consistent if the VHF-UHF Field Days did the same.

This is intended to discriminate in favour of the lower scoring stations.

This is quite deliberate. The aim is to limit the scores that can be made by the top DX capable stations, and to reduce the scoring gap between the highest and lowest scoring stations.

This prevents the top scoring stations from winning by enormous margins. With distance based scoring they would still win, but by bigger margins.

Neither does distance based scoring.

Remote or less populated areas would still face the same disadvantage with distance based scoring, because they do not have as many stations within working range. There is no scoring system that can give equal opportunities to everyone regardless of their location.

In the last Field Day, VK5 amateurs won three of the six sections, and VK3s won one section. Most of the highest scoring stations were VK5s.

With distance based scoring, the ability to make contacts still depends on the station location.

That doesn't mean that distance is the only possible basis for a contest.

Working DX is not the only interest of most amateurs operating on VHF-UHF.

It is not necessary for every contest to be the same. There are different contests to serve different aims. Changing to distance based scoring would mean that every WIA VHF-UHF contest would be distance based.

Other suggestions for rule changes

There may be a need for a limit on the maximum possible points per contact.

Large sporadic E or tropo openings would give some stations enormous windfall scores.

A distance-based scoring system may need to include some limits to the maximum possible points score per contact.

VHF-UHF and microwave bands should be in separate categories.

It is not fair that stations should have to compete against others who have the use of a greater number of different bands.

Separate VHF/UHF and microwave categories would allow everyone to compare their scores with stations that were using similar equipment.

Extra awards could be made.

It would be good to make extra awards for stations in different categories, for example F calls or stations operating only on 6m - 2m - 70cm.

Band multipliers should be changed.

The band multipliers for the higher bands should be reduced. Amateurs without microwave equipment are discouraged by the scores that can be made by microwave stations.

These changes would increase the appeal of the Field Days.

Comments

It would be necessary with distance based scoring, but not with locator based scoring.

Yes, consider a JA opening with 7000 - 8000 points per contact, or tropo openings over large distances.

This would contradict the aim of distance based scoring because it would not give every contact full credit for the distance worked.

Scoring limits are not necessary with locator based scoring because the scores for very long distance DX contacts are automatically limited.

This would mean less incentive to operate on a variety of bands.

By the same argument, nobody should have to compete against anyone who has better gear, more power or bigger antennas.

The results are published in full, so anyone can see everybody else's scores on every band. But it is possible to add a separate subtotal for the VHF-UHF bands, to make the comparison easier. This has been done with the Spring Field Day results.

This can be done.

F calls already receive separate recognition. Other special awards can be added.

Band multipliers will be reviewed.

There are arguments on both sides. Microwave contacts are far harder to come by than contacts on lower bands, and one of the aims of the Field Days is to encourage activity on higher bands.

But it is a good idea to review the band multipliers, and there will be a review based on the scores in the Spring and Summer Field Days.

These changes would reduce the appeal of the Field Days.

They would only benefit the top DX capable stations, and send the message that winning is all that matters. They would do nothing to encourage the majority of amateurs who enjoy the activity without caring whether or not they win.

What would be involved with distance based scoring?

Six digit locators would need to be exchanged.

Stations would need to exchange details of their location in a form that is accurate enough to allow distance calculations. The obvious method would be to exchange 6 digit locators.

Computer logging would be required because distances would have to be calculated to the nearest kilometre.

All entrants would need to use computer logging software that was capable of calculating the distance worked for each contact.

Rover stations would not fit into a distance based scoring system.

Rover stations are designed for quick location changes, and they can be worked repeatedly as soon as they change location. With distance based scoring, there would be no incentive for anyone to change their location.

Distance based scoring would have the same disadvantages for home stations as it would have for portable stations.

Most home stations are not on hilltops with good DX opportunities. Distance based scoring would increase the advantage of those that do happen to live in good DX locations.

Would there be disadvantages?

Some amateurs may not be able to do so.

Virtually everybody knows their four digit locator. But many amateurs, especially the more casual operators, may not be able to quote their 6 digit locator. That would prevent them from participating.

This would strongly discourage amateurs who do not use computer logging.

Most entrants would be unaffected. But for those who do their logs on paper, this would make the logging process too difficult for them to bother with.

That would mean that the rover category would cease to exist.

Rovers help to provide more contacts for all stations, and the rover section adds to the variety of different types of operating that stations can choose from. It would be a shame if the rover section had to be dropped.

It would not be logical to discourage home stations.

Home stations are the largest single group of operators participating in the Field Days. If they are discouraged from participating, that means less activity for portable stations as well.

Aims of the Field Days

The VHF-UHF Field Days have always aimed to be activity generators, with as much emphasis as possible on the activity and as little as possible on who wins and how they do it. The published aims of the contest are:

- The overriding aim is to get away for the weekend and have fun! But next after that, the aims are:
- to encourage more activity on VHF and microwave bands;
- to encourage people to work greater distances than usual by operating portable, and
- to provide opportunities for people to activate or work into new grid squares.

These aims - especially the first one - might not be well served by turning the Field Day into a kind of "DX Olympics" that would be dominated by the big stations.

Summary

- Distance based scoring would change the contest from an activity-oriented event into a far more serious DX contest, with the scoring slanted in favour of the most DX capable stations.
- This could discourage amateurs with smaller stations, who do not have high power or big antennas.
- It would involve extra distance calculation requirements.
- It would make the rover category irrelevant, and reduce the appeal to home stations.
- It would not compensate for the geographic disadvantage of stations in remote areas. There is no scoring system that can give equal scores to people in every part of the country.
- It would mean that every WIA VHF-UHF contest would be a DX contest.

Responses to the Specific Recommendations in the VK1DA / VK5DK Proposal

| <u>Recommendation</u> | <u>Response</u> |
|--|--|
| Change the scoring system to a distance based formula. | This would have significant disadvantages in terms of serving the aims of the contest - see Summary, page 5 above. |
| Create a category for the bands 50 MHz - 1296 MHz. | Beginning with Spring 2012, the results table now includes a separate subtotal for these bands. |
| Provide awards for the best scores for the 50 - 1296 MHz bands for each licence class or call area. Also consider other awards for different categories of stations. | Already applied for F calls, and for the best scores on the four lowest bands. This is a good idea that could be extended further. (But don't forget that the results table already shows the scores of every station on each band and in each state.) |
| Limit the maximum points per contact. | This is only necessary with distance based scoring. |
| Review the band multipliers. | There will be a full review based on the Summer 2013 results. |
| Consider the idea of a periodic review of the rules - receive suggestions every 3 - 5 years. | The rules have always been subject to continuous review. Suggestions can be received at any time. |
| Encourage, but do not require, the exchange of 6 digit locators. Do not require the on-air exchange of locators. | Entrants can exchange 4 or 6 digit locators. Six digits are not compulsory. Locators need not be exchanged if the location of the station is already known. |

Other suggestions included in the survey report

The report also included some other useful suggestions, such as:

- A review of the dates and times of the Field Days, especially the winter event.
- Concerns over the possibility of very high scores from EME contacts or the use of digital DX modes.

These will be followed up as soon as the summer 2103 Field Day results are finalised.

Analysis of the results of the VK1DA / VK5DK opinion survey

1. Figures quoted in the survey results

The published survey results were based on the views of 116 survey respondents. The survey results referred to a list of callsigns of amateurs who have sent in logs during the past five years. The total number of unique callsigns was given as 180.

However it appears that the survey counted the callsigns of multi-operator stations, but not the callsigns of the amateurs who were operating them. The correct number of amateurs sending in logs in the last five years is 465 (actually slightly less due to some amateurs changing callsigns during that five year period). These figures have been extracted from the published contest results.

2. Conclusions

Two main conclusions can be drawn.

Of those amateurs (approximately 465) who have sent in logs over the past five years:

- The survey represents the views of around 20 per cent. It does not represent the view of around 349 amateurs, or 80 per cent.
- The number of amateurs voting for a change in the scoring system amounts to around 12 per cent. The remaining 88 per cent have not expressed a complaint.

3. Outcome

It is impossible to please everybody, but it should be possible to please the majority.

While not dismissing the views of those who voted for a change to the scoring system, these figures raise serious questions as to where the majority opinion lies. It is impossible to ignore the fact that the overwhelming majority of active participants have not expressed any desire for a change to the scoring system.

(A more detailed analysis of the figures, including the full lists of callsigns derived from the published results, is not included here. It has been provided to Andrew VK1DA and to the WIA contest director.)