

Get Your QSOs on Route 66!

Since Bobby Troup wrote a catchy little tune called *Get Your Kicks on Route 66* in 1946, more than 100 musicians have recorded the song, making it—and the highway it glorifies—unquestionably famous. In that spirit, a dozen Amateur Radio organizations put “the Mother Road” on the air to celebrate its storied history.

The Northern Arizona DX Association (NADXA), based in Flagstaff, Arizona, is a small ARRL-affiliated club dedicated to DXing and contesting. During one of its 1999 meetings, members expressed a desire to try something different. Discussions on exactly what our new activity should be continued over several months. One question eventually emerged: “Is it possible to experience the thrill of a DXpedition without actually going on one?”

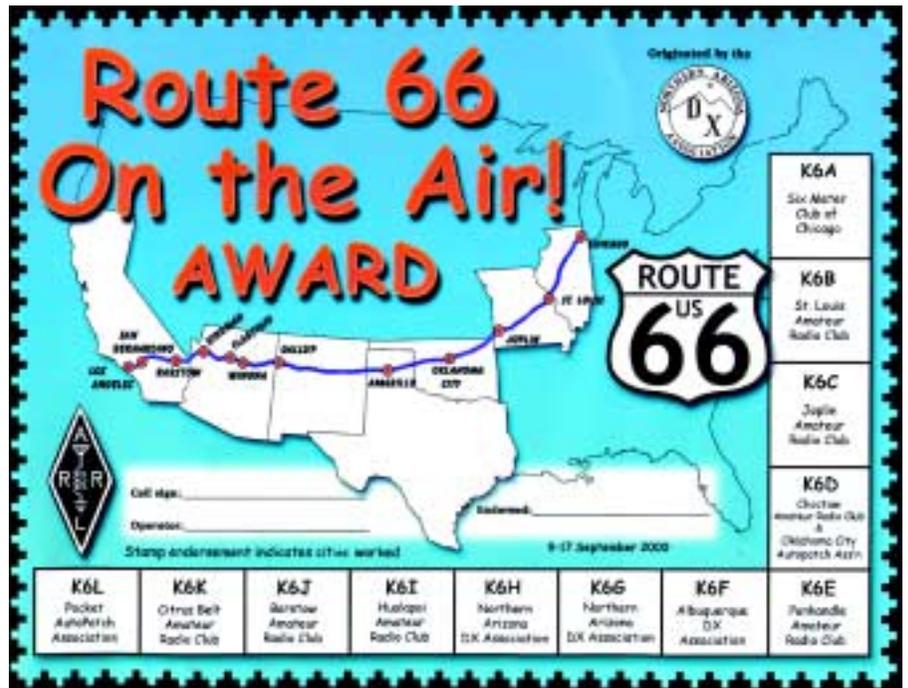
Special-event stations, eligible for temporary 1X1 call signs, celebrate specific people, places, anniversaries, etc. These operations have become quite popular, and many generate lots of activity. What special event could NADXA promote?

Route 66

US Route 66 was dedicated in 1926. It stretches 2448 miles from Chicago, Illinois, to Santa Monica, California, and passes through eight states. Paving wasn't completed until 1932. During the Great Depression, this highway was a major thoroughfare for those escaping the dust bowl and looking for a better life in the West.

After World War II, many discharged soldiers used Route 66 to get home. During the 1950s, Americans took advantage of post-war prosperity and traveled the road as part of their newly discovered leisure time. From 1960 to 1964, the popular television show *Route 66* immortalized the highway in the minds of drivers across America and around the world.

As the nation's transportation infrastructure modernized, however, stretches of this historic road were bypassed by interstate highways. The process started in 1953 (Oklahoma City to Tulsa) and ended in 1984 (Williams, Arizona). US Route 66 was officially decommissioned in 1986. Pieces of the road are still in use today, renamed “Historic Route 66.” I'm fortunate enough to live near Flagstaff,



Here is the Route 66 on the Air! certificate for the 2000 event. A minimum of one QSO with any of the special-event stations was required for the basic award. A red endorsement stamp (the outline of a US highway sign) is used to indicate the stations worked.

Route 66 on the Air—2001

In 2001, Route 66 on the Air! will be held from 0000Z September 8 to 2400Z September 16. Certificates may be obtained by sending \$3 and an application to NN7A. QSLs may be obtained directly from the individual clubs; SASEs are mandatory. We plan to add one or more new twists to our special event to celebrate the 75th anniversary, so stay tuned. For complete event information and an application, send an SASE to NN7A or check www.nadxa.com.

where some 28 miles of this highway still exists. Like many small towns in the Midwest and West, Historic Route 66 is Flagstaff's main drag.

Route 66 on the Air!

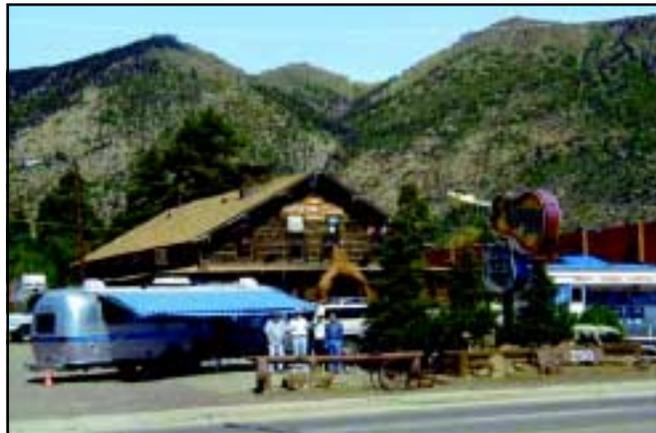
Jerry Ellison, W7ST, was the first person to suggest a Route 66 theme for our special-event operation. His arguments were quite persuasive. The road passes

through downtown Flagstaff and is integral to the city's identity. The mystique surrounding the highway has elevated it to near cult status among the many Route 66 associations the world over. (Enter “Route 66” into any web search engine and many thousands of URLs will appear.)

Route 66 is a big road and an even bigger concept, so Bob Wertz, NF7E, pro-



Here is the K6F "take-down" crew (shown top, l-r, are KE5BL, K5TA, KB5YAY and KC5WDV; shown bottom, l-r, are KB5VQC and KM5GH).



JERRY CONOVER, NE7I

The K6H remote operation was located in front of the world famous Museum Club, a popular country music dance club in Flagstaff. The operators in this picture (shown l-r are W7ST, KA7TDH, NN7A and N3AIU) graciously allowed themselves to be dwarfed by the real star of the show, historic Route 66 (foreground).

posed that we enlist the help of other Amateur Radio clubs in cities along the highway. For the sake of novelty and simplicity, Jerry Conover, NE7I, suggested that we concentrate on cities mentioned in the Bobby Troup song, *Get Your Kicks on Route 66*.

We mustered support for our growing idea in several ways. For example, we used electronic mail extensively and found it to be a great communication tool. Who says that Amateur Radio and the Internet don't mix? We also spoke to friends and handed out flyers at hamfests. There was even a chance on-air encounter that led to a club joining the fold. Isn't ham radio great?

Over the next few months, we fleshed out the details. The clubs would be responsible for reserving their respective 1X1 call signs—K6A (Chicago) through K6L (Los Angeles). Club members (and any other hams they authorize) would use these call signs. The actual operating details (times, bands, modes, etc.) would be left up to the clubs, although we did decide on a number of suggested frequencies (\pm QRM). Anyone who worked one or more of the authorized stations would qualify for a stylish certificate. Certificate requests would go to NADXA (including \$1.50 to defray printing and mailing costs), with QSL requests (including SASEs) would go to the respective clubs.

A special event sponsored by a single organization requires time and dedication, but what about a special event sponsored by 12 organizations? As far as we knew, no other group of clubs had ever attempted such an ambitious (and possibly complicated) undertaking. We had originally planned to hold the special event in 2001, the 75th anniversary of Route 66's dedication. To identify possible problems, we decided to try a "dry run" in 2000, and

2000 Event Call Signs and Clubs

Here are the 2000 special-event call signs and their associated cities and clubs. For more information about the clubs, pictures and QSL routes, see www.nadxa.com.

Call	City	Club
K6A	Chicago, IL	Six Meter Club of Chicago
K6B	St. Louis, MO	St. Louis Amateur Radio Club
K6C	Joplin, MO	Joplin Amateur Radio Club
K6D	Oklahoma City, OK	Choctaw Amateur Radio Club & Oklahoma City Autopatch Assn
K6E	Amarillo, TX	Panhandle Amateur Radio Club
K6F	Gallup, NM	Albuquerque DX Association
K6G	Winona, AZ	Northern Arizona DX Association
K6H	Flagstaff, AZ	Northern Arizona DX Association
K6I	Kingman, AZ	Hualapai Amateur Radio Club
K6J	Barstow, CA	Barstow Amateur Radio Club
K6K	San Bernadino, CA	Citrus Belt Amateur Radio Club
K6L	Los Angeles, CA	Pocket Autopatch Association

Route 66 Event Frequencies

Mode	80	40	20	15	10	6
CW	3.533	7.033	14.033	21.033	28.033	50.033
SSB	3.866	7.266	14.266	21.366	28.466	50.166

hastily scheduled it from 0000Z on September 9 through 2400Z on September 17. Thus, "Route 66 on the Air!" was born!

Year 2000

To say that our special event was successful would be an understatement. The feedback from those we worked was entirely positive. A number of hams jumped at the chance to reminisce about their personal experiences on Route 66 (see the "Soapbox" at the end of the article). Nearly 14,000 QSOs were made by all of the clubs. In spite of the large number of hams trying to work us, every QSO was handled in a relaxed, friendly manner. At the time of this writing, we verified that more than 80 hams worked the special-event stations in *all 12* cities.

Most of the special-event operators, including yours truly, had never been on

the receiving end of a pileup. I had a blast, and from what I've heard, so did everybody else. The most common questions heard among "Route 66 chasers" were, "Did you work that station?" and "Where is that station operating now?" On numerous occasions, the special-event stations were posted on the Internet DX cluster at www.dxsummit.com. We were hunted like rare DX!

Some of the clubs operated under Field Day conditions. In addition, many QSOs were generated from club members' home stations. The amount of public exposure varied among the participating clubs. The St. Louis Amateur Radio Club (K6B) operated from Route 66 State Park on the first weekend. NADXA operated K6H from the Museum Club and Buffalo Park on the first weekend, and K6G from the Winona Texaco on the second. The Albuquerque

DX Association (K6F) helped local hams in Gallup, New Mexico, on both weekends. The San Bernadino club (K6K) has a good reason to be proud. On the second weekend, members operated as part of the "Route 66 Rendezvous," a major local event. They erected towers and used trailers for sleeping quarters at their remote site. Great job, everyone!

Among the oldest hams we worked was Jim Mitchell, WA8ZTH, age 94, who drove on Route 66 in 1927 and 1928. At the other extreme we worked Tammy McCoy, AD6LH, age 10, who was born six years after the last section of Route 66 was bypassed. Other hams we worked include country music star Colin Rae, W4RAE, and Don Wilbanks, KC5MFA, from the Amateur Radio news service "Newline." Although 2-meter frequencies were not on the suggested list, a number of QSOs were made on that band, allowing some Technician ops to qualify for a certificate.

For statistics and pictures from the 2000 special event, see www.nadxa.com.

Lessons Learned

The 2000 dry run turned out to be a really good idea. What we learned will benefit Route 66 on the Air! in 2001 and other prospective multi-organization special events.

Lesson 1: Your special event will always be more popular than originally envisioned. The general consensus among NADXA members was that the special-event stations would make between 5000 and 10,000 QSOs. We significantly underestimated that number.

Lesson 2: Get all of the organizational work done ahead of time so you can concentrate on operating during the special event. Because NADXA had only a few months to organize the 2000 special event, we didn't get everything quite finished. For example, we delayed designing the certificates and QSL cards until October, but we were receiving requests while the special event was still in progress! As a result, we started preparations for 2001 almost immediately after the 2000 special event concluded.

Lesson 3: When you publicize your certificate and QSL information, make sure it's complete and accurate. Initially, there was some confusion concerning the information for the 2000 special event, but we eventually straightened everything out. We posted our information on www.nadxa.com, but unfortunately, many hams don't have access to the web. Most of the special-event operators periodically gave out the information on the air, but even this isn't a perfect solution. We've found that there is no substitute for publicity in major ham magazines.

Soapbox

"I love the program and I really appreciate it. I came back from school on Route 66 many years ago."—N1UDH

"The pileups were incredible! I had to resort to taking callers by call areas. Maybe they thought I was in North Korea?"—NF7E (K6G)

"I will never forget turning onto Route 66 in Santa Rosa, New Mexico, on a full moonlit night, heading east in my 1962 Corvette with the top down and KOMA playing the Route 66 theme. Even then I knew the Mother Road was special. It doesn't get any better than that!"—WA1MKS

"This event was so popular that we were working a station a minute in several pileups."—AC7BN (K6I)

"I grew up in San Bernadino in the 1940s and lived in two houses on Route 66, as well as attending two schools that were located on Route 66. As a little boy I remember watching the military convoys drive by on their way out of the Cajon Pass to the desert camps around Barstow and Victorville"—K6MDG/5

"I travelled Route 66 in 1941. I was in the army at San Luis Obispo. I hitchhiked from San Bernadino to Barstow..."—W5GZI

"Route 66 on the Air! was a memorable special operation for me. I was born and raised in Chicago, lived in Santa Monica and spent a lot of time at the corner where Route 66 ended."—W7LII

"I recently traveled much of Route 66 and it brought back many fond memories."—WB3DJU

Lesson 4: When the time for sending certificates and QSL cards finally arrives, give your members a unified log. Each K6G and K6H operator logged in a different manner, ranging from pencil-and-paper to various computer programs. Because of the large number of QSOs, we divided the QSLing chores among NADXA members. We found that the amount of time spent on writing out cards was negligible compared to searching through many logs in different formats. If possible, everyone should use the same logging program. If that program doesn't support a multiple-log merge feature, create ASCII files, import and combine them into a spreadsheet, and sort the QSOs by date and time (a separate log sorted by call sign is also useful).

Lesson 5: Publicize your special event, before, during and after the fact. Special events celebrate history, but they can also act as a "hook" to interest the general public in Amateur Radio. Local media outlets are ideal for this sort of publicity. If you're

operating remotely, a display poster is an effective form of advertising. And make sure to take pictures! They will come in handy when it's time to write that QST article or create a web site for the event. Chances are good that someone in your group has a digital camera or scanner. Use these digital pictures to create a web site. If you don't have or can't afford a web site, check out free web hosting services such as GeoCities or Tripod.

Route 66—2001

With all that we've learned from our year 2000 effort, we're confident that we can do a better job in 2001 and make the event even more enjoyable for everyone. Those of you who plan to participate and send us certificate and QSL card requests in 2001 can help us, too.

First, make sure your certificate and QSL information is correct. This information includes addresses, costs, etc, and may be obtained from www.nadxa.com. We expect the cost of the certificate to increase in 2001. If you don't have Internet access, ask someone who does or check the major ham radio magazines for an announcement. Always send an SASE when requesting QSL cards. Special events are generally not money-making propositions, so don't be surprised if you don't receive a card if you don't send an SASE.

Also, we noticed that about five percent of the QSL cards we received were filled out incorrectly, making it difficult to find QSOs in the log. Remember, the harder it is for us to find your QSO, the longer it will take for us to respond. The most important information on your QSL card, aside from your call sign, is the date and time. *Always* use 24-hour UTC and *never* use AM/PM local time. In this era of computer logging, some of us forget to periodically check the date and time reported by our PCs. Make sure your machine is synchronized with reality!

Greetings from the "Mother Road," and see you in 2001!

Acknowledgements

The special-event operators would like to thank everyone we contacted for their good wishes, compliments and encouragement. Also, the NADXA would like to thank the other 11 clubs for their enthusiastic and highly professional participation before, during and after the event. Everyone owes Jerry Conover, NE7I, a great deal of thanks for stepping in as overall coordinator. Last, I'd also like to thank Jerry for his Route 66 research that appears earlier in this article.

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