

The "Paper Chase", award hunting, by Andrew Barron ZL3DW.

Ever since I started in the hobby, I have aspired to have the DXCC hanging on the wall of my shack. The DX Century Club certificate is awarded by the ARRL in recognition of confirmed contacts with 100 countries. It can be awarded for mixed bands and modes or for individual bands and modes. 5 band DXCC is recognised as one of the highest DX achievements in amateur radio. Working towards DXCC certificates sparked my interest in other awards and over the years I have applied for quite a few. Award hunting can be very addictive.

Many ham radio awards do not require QSL cards, a certified log can be submitted. Some awards, including all NZART awards, do not require confirmed contacts and rely on the honesty of the operator. You only need you to supply a list of the relevant contacts you have made. After all if you cheat, you are only fooling yourself. So it is possible to get some nice wallpaper, without having stacks of QSL cards. If you are only active on 80m or VHF there are many local awards available. (Check out the Call Book and join the awards net on 3.677 MHz at 08:00 UTC).

With the HF bands in poor shape, opening late and closing early, I found myself sitting in the shack wondering why all the bands were dead. With time on my hands I decided to check out the Internet and my log to see what other awards I could decorate the walls with. There are hundreds of awards available for all sorts of ham radio activity, check out <http://www.dxawards.com/> or <http://www.ac6v.com/hamawards.htm> for a fairly comprehensive list. But the first place you should check out is the NZART Call book which has an excellent section on awards. The cover of the 2008-09 Call book features some of the New Zealand awards available.

I believe that there are three main classes of ham radio awards;

1. serious DX awards
2. special event awards
3. revenue awards

Serious DX awards are issued by national organisations, established ham radio magazines, and some clubs. These include CQ, ARRL, BARTG, eQSL, WIA, NZART, RSGB and many others. Generally they are not excessively expensive and are reasonably challenging to complete. There are awards for CW, SSB, digital modes, RTTY, PSK, SSTV, VHF, UHF, 6m, 10m, Maidenhead grids, islands, lighthouses, post codes, cities, regions and areas.

Special event awards are more of a fun thing, but they can still be good value. They include awards like the NZART Railways and Captain James Cook awards. Often special event awards are issued by clubs with special interests for example the, 4X2K award is for promoting historical sites relevant to the beginning of Christianity. The Sydney Gold award is for contacts with Sydney based VK hams during the 2000 Olympic Games and the "50th Anniversary of The Republic of Korea Award" is self explanatory.

Revenue awards are often issued by smaller clubs as a fund raiser. While I would not discourage anyone from working towards these awards, I would recommend checking out the cost of the certificates for overseas revenue awards. I have seen some up to 15

Euros or 5x IRCs which is a lot, for a piece of paper confirming that you have worked 10 Castles in Europe or similar.

The major overseas DX awards include; DXCC "DX Century Club" and WAS "Worked all States" from the ARRL, CQ DX, WPX "Worked all prefixes", WAZ "Worked all Zones", and the CQ Field Award for Maidenhead fields (1st two letters of the grid), all from CQ magazine, WAC "Worked all Continents from the IARU, the BARTG awards for RTTY and PSK digital modes and WAE "Worked all Europe".

You no longer have to send your precious QSL cards overseas to the ARRL for DXCC and WAS awards. You can send them to a local approved card checker in your country or use LoTW. Having a local card checker has improved the turn around time for DXCC awards a lot and I was always a bit worried about sending some of my rare and hard earned cards away. Some groups such as BARTG will now accept photocopies of your cards which is also much less risky.

The major New Zealand awards available to local hams include; NZ Counties, NZ regions, NZART Century award, VHFCC, WAD "Worked all Districts", WAP "Worked all Pacific", ZL1, 2, 3 and 4 awards, WAZL "Worked all New Zealand, IARU Region III, and the 5x5 award, for 5 band operation. Alan Chapman ZL3GX is the co-ordinator for NZART awards, he is very helpful and is happy to answer any questions via awards@nzart.org.nz.

If you have been heard to say, "Oh goodie another QSL card" from Italy, Russia, or Japan and have added it to the 200+ other QSL cards from that country, consider applying for one of the region or city awards offered by the local ham organisations. It can add a bit of interest to working not so rare DX countries, when suddenly you need a rare Italian region or Russian RDA.

The two Internet based QSL systems LOTW and eQSL both have awards that can be achieved based on electronic QSL confirmations. Contacts confirmed via LOTW can not be used for eQSL awards and vice-versa.

LOTW "Logbook of the World" is sponsored by the ARRL and your LOTW account can be linked to your DXCC account so that QSL cards can be combined with LOTW credits to count towards ARRL DXCC and WAS certificates (and now the CQ WPX award). QSL cards that have been checked and approved by the ARRL will show on your LOTW score card. Logbook of the World is a very secure system with all log uploads being encrypted with special software. A photocopy of your licence must be posted to ARRL before you can get a logon to the system. Records once uploaded can not be edited or deleted by the user. Apparently the reasoning for all this security is to ensure no fraudulent logs are uploaded or records changed to fix busted calls etc., however the complexity does limit the number of users on the system. Many dxpeditions load their logs on to LOTW after a few months or years, or on receipt of your QSL card and / or a donation. A lot of contest stations, who are generally less interested in QSL cards, also load their logs on to LOTW. LOTW is free, but charges do apply when applying for DXCC, WAS or CQ WPX credits.

eQSL is much easier to set up and operate. Some log & digital mode programs will do the upload automatically. Users can be 'authenticated' by sending a scanned copy of their licence to eQSL by email. eQSL offers a series of awards, but as far as I know you

can't combine eQSLs with paper QSL cards. eQSL is free but a small donation is required before applying for your first award.

Another electronic system for awards is offered by the European PSK Club (EPC). Membership of the EPC is free and the PSK awards that the club issues are also free. You do not need to hold QSL cards for these awards. There are 36 classes of awards with many more sub-classes, 98 awards in total. Of course tracking credits towards all of these awards manually would be nearly impossible, but the club has a free computer program called, "Ultimate EPC Award Management Software" written by DK5UR. Download the small program then simply create an ADIF copy of your station log and feed it to the Ultimate EPC software. It summarises your status for all awards and lets you apply online for the awards you already qualify for. In a couple of days your certificates are ready to download and print. I know this sounds a "bit too easy", but in reality it is little different to supplying a list of QSOs for an NZART award. The certificates have great graphics and are high quality. I laminated mine to stop them curling up at the edges. In addition to the EPC awards, the program can check and apply for the Croatian Digital Group's Worked all Continents award (any digital mode) and two other awards. If you work a lot of PSK, have a look at the EPC web site <http://eu.srars.org>. The EPC awards are very well designed and a lot of fun.

There is other software around for award hunters; The Paper Chasers log by N0OKS, WAP for Antarctica awards by IK6CAC and IOTAmem4Win for IOTA awards. Most awards have a log sheet that can be downloaded from the Internet. To track my progress, I usually use a spreadsheet based on the log form. When you have enough contacts or QSLs to qualify for the award you can print out the spreadsheet as a check list. IK6CAC also has software for IOTA, EURA, and WAIZ awards but it will not work satisfactorily unless you change your PC time format to hh.mm.ss instead of hh:mm:ss. Also there is no function for inputting your existing log data.

Have a trawl through your logbook and QSL cards and see what awards you can apply for.