Loggers for All Seasons and Reasons, Part 1

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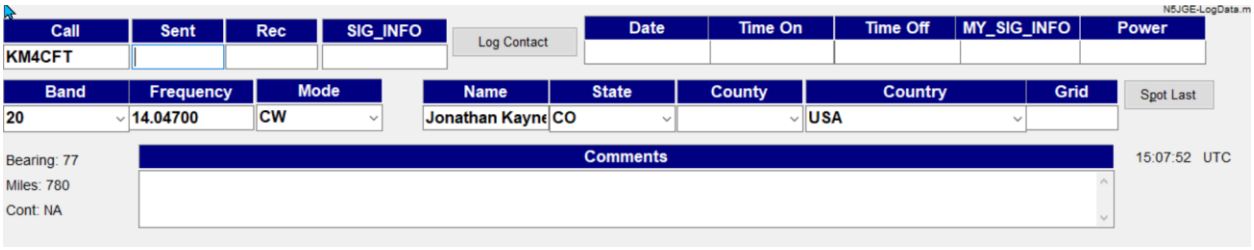
When most hams think of logging software, they probably think about full-featured general loggers or contest loggers such as ACLog (N3FJP) or N1MM+. There are many other such loggers as well as lesser known special purpose loggers. In this article, I will describe some of both types that I have found useful. Accordingly, this will not be an exhaustive review of logging software, but some information about those that I have experience with. Even with that limited scope, this will be a two-part article.

I use ACLog (N3FJP) for my main log. At the link, you can explore all of the features and see screenshots. N3FJP offers a 45-day free trial and the current price is $39.99. For an additional $20, you can also receive a license for all of their contest loggers. There is a very active user community available in groups.io. A partial screenshot of my log is shown below. The colors indicate contacts not uploaded to LoTW (black), uploaded, but not confirmed (green) and confirmed (blue).

Rec#	Call	Date / Time	Bnd	Mode	Pow...	Snt	Rec	Off	Country	ST	County	Name	SIG_INFO	S	R	Comments	Frequen...	10-10	Grid
20742	W0SK	2024/05/15 20:32	20	CW	75	529	599		USA	FL		Jim Evans	US-6312	N	N	[POTA US-63...	14.051		
20741	KD4O	2024/05/15 15:49	20	CW	75	559	599		USA	VA		Phil Moore	US-9931	N	N	[POTA US-99...	14.051		
20740	AC9OT	2024/05/15 15:46	20	CW	75	599	579		USA	WI		John G Rusfeldt	US-9857	N	N	[POTA US-98...	14.040		
20739	WW8L	2024/05/15 15:41	20	CW	75	599	599		USA	CO		Tim Annable	US-9621	N	N	[POTA US-96...	14.043		
20738	K4SWL	2024/05/15 14:12	20	CW	75	599	599		USA	OH		Thomas Wither...	US-1994	N	N	[POTA US-19...	14.061		
20737	ZL1BQD	2024/05/15 02:19	10	CW	75	559	559		New Zeal...			Roly Runciman	NZ-0581	Y	N	[POTA NZ-058...	28.044		
20736	KI7QCF	2024/05/15 02:11	20	CW	75	599	599		USA	UT		Forrest Stephen...	US-10067	Y	N	[POTA US-10...	14.043		
20735	N0EVH	2024/05/14 16:42	20	CW	75	59	559		USA	MO	JACKSON	John B. Watkins	US-7519	Y	Y		14.060		EM29
20734	W0SA	2024/05/14 16:39	20	CW	75	59	59		USA	MN		Peter D. Cross	US-2484	Y	N		14.041		
20733	WI5D	2024/05/14 16:32	20	CW	75	59	59		USA	KS		Steven J. "Steve...	US-7929	Y	N		14.048		

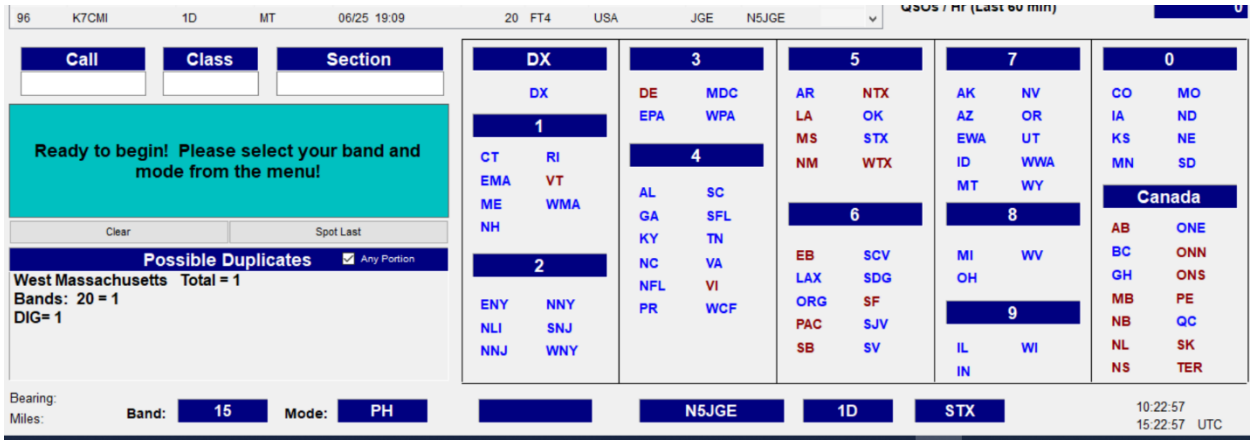
The data entry section is shown next. I have entered a callsign and then tabbed over to the "(RST)Sent" field. When doing that, you can have ACLog lookup details about the contact from QRZ or another online database. ACLog also automatically shows the distance and bearing to the contacts address in that database. (You need to be careful here as they might be operating from a different location.) Not shown in the screenshot is that ACLog will filter your logbook on the callsign to show all contacts that you have had with the current operator. This is very useful if you are a ragchewer. The entry section is customizable as to the order of the fields, which fields are presented, etc. There is a template for POTA logging.



You can also have ACLog interface with your rig to enter the band, frequency and mode as you tune around the bands. The rig interface includes the capability to control the rig using CAT commands. You can setup macros to transmit recorded CW or SSB messages. ACLog, also includes DX spotting from numerous telnet servers. With rig control, you can click on a spot and ACLog will tune your rig and set the correct mode for you to listen in and try to make the contact.

Every contact that I make under my own callsign ends up in ACLog. When I operate digital or hunt parks from home, wsjt-x, MSHV and hunterlog (see my NARC Newsletter, May 2024 article) auto-log to ACLog. When I hunt parks from a park (Park-2-Park QSOs) or activate a park, I use PoLo (Portable Logger, described in Part 2). After exporting the contacts from PoLo to the POTA site, I import those QSOs into ACLog. When I use an ACLog contest logger or N1MM+ for a contest, likewise, I export / import into ACLog. By now, I am sure that you get the idea!

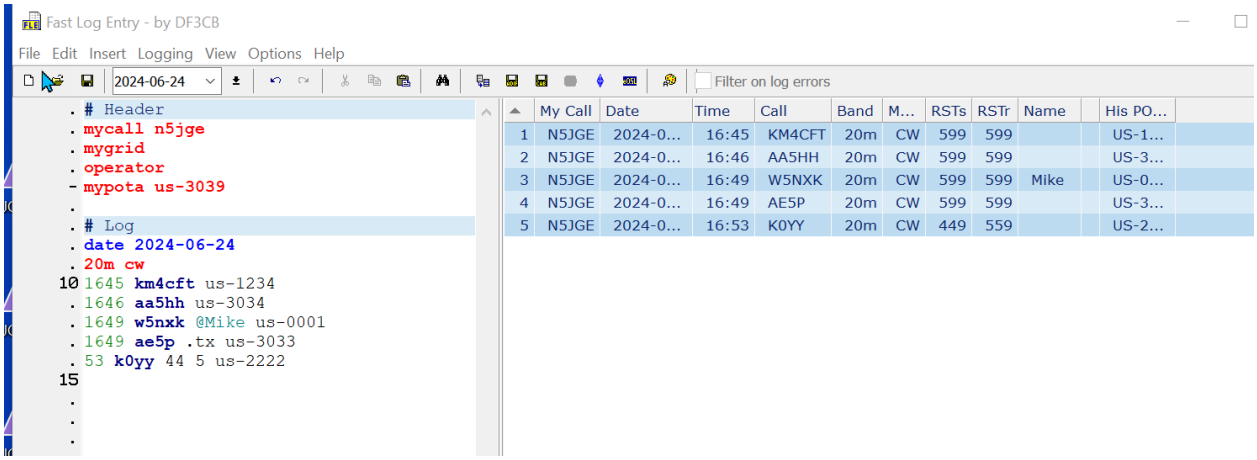
As noted above ACLog also includes numerous contest specific loggers. These have an interface designed for the contest exchange and multipliers (see below). For Example, for ARRL Field Day, the ARRL US sections for each call area and the 14 Canadian sections are listed. As you make QSOs, those change color, so that you can track which sections you still need. If you attended one of the NARC filed days, you saw that the sections can also be displayed on a map. Multiple computers running ACLog Field Day software can be networked to display the club's progress in near real-time on the map.



Contest software requires specific capabilities not present for general logging. Firstly, duplicate contacts are not allowed in most contests, so there is a warning for duplicates and some software will not allow you to log duplicates. Secondly, contesting software usually checks the callsign that you enter against a contest participant database ("Super Check Partial"}. Thirdly, contesting software usually has a history file that can fill in exchange info when you enter the callsign. Lastly, contesting software usually can write a "Cabrillo" file which is commonly used for submitting your log to the contest sponsors.

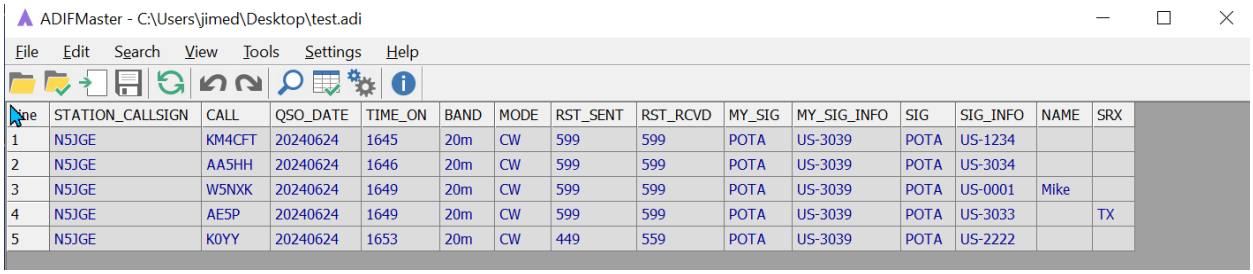
If you are trying to learn CW (see my NARC Newsletter, December 2023 article), a useful practice tool is the K1USN SST (Slow-Speed Test). This is a twice per week "contest" where the exchange is your name and state. This is the same exchange as for the North American QSO Party (NAQP). So, the ACLog NAQP logger has and option for the SST. For the SST, you do not upload a log, but rather enter your QSO and multiplier counts by band to the K1USN 3830 Scores website. The NAQP software will output a table of the data that you need to enter at the website.

Another option for K1USN SST or other simple exchange contests is a free program called FLE (Fast Log entry). This has a minimalist interface where you can quickly enter a contact's callsign and some simple exchange info. There are built-in logging options for general operation, contesting, WWFF (World-Wide Flora and Fauna), WWFF plus SOTA (Summits on the Air), SOTA and POTA. This program does not interface with your rig or any online callsign databases.



In the left-hand pane, there are sections for header info and then the log entries. You must enter your callsign after "mycall" in the header section. Your grid and the operator's name are optional. Depending on the type of operation, you can also enter your POTA, WWKK, or SOTA reference. While only the callsign is mandatory, using the header info will populate into any adif that you export making later editing of the adif easier or unnecessary. To make log entries, you must specify the band and mode first.

There are a lot of shortcuts to enter log info. For example, on line 12, the "@" means that the following word is a name. On line 13, the "." Designates that the following is received exchange. F1 inserts the current date and F2 inserts the current time. In the above screenshot, where time was 1649 (line 13), entering a "53" on the next log line changed the time 1653! Entering a 44 after the call sign on line 14 makes the sent RST 449 and entering a 5 after that makes the received RST 559 (599 is assumed if nothing is entered). Below is the adif exported from FLE for the log shown above.



ine	STATION_CALLSIGN	CALL	QSO_DATE	TIME_ON	BAND	MODE	RST_SENT	RST_RCVD	MY_SIG	MY_SIG_INFO	SIG	SIG_INFO	NAME	SRX
1	N5JGE	KM4CFT	20240624	1645	20m	CW	599	599	POTA	US-3039	POTA	US-1234		
2	N5JGE	AA5HH	20240624	1646	20m	CW	599	599	POTA	US-3039	POTA	US-3034		
3	N5JGE	W5NXK	20240624	1649	20m	CW	599	599	POTA	US-3039	POTA	US-0001	Mike	
4	N5JGE	AE5P	20240624	1649	20m	CW	599	599	POTA	US-3039	POTA	US-3033		TX
5	N5JGE	K0YY	20240624	1653	20m	CW	449	559	POTA	US-3039	POTA	US-2222		

There is very good documentation for FLE on the internet and the program is updated regularly. While a bit quirky, this looks like a good option for quick contests or POTA use. I have used it a few times for the K1USN SST.

The last essential logging tool is "ADIFMaster". This is shown above and allows extensive editing of adif files if needed before importing into your master log, uploading to the POTA site, etc. It works similarly to a spreadsheet with copy / paste, find / replace, etc to quickly edit or add info the QSOs by individual cell, columns or selected cell ranges.

Well, that is a lot of info for this installment. In the next article, I will cover N1MM+, hunterlog (brief review of May 2024 article) and PoLo.