



This ham brought radio equipment on his family trip in order to contact special event stations with a historical theme.

A view of the Icom IC-7100 and logbook on the condominium desk in Destin, Florida. [Brian Karcher, KG5GJT, photo]

Working The Annual 13 Colonies Special Event Portable

Brian D. Karcher, KG5GJT

For 7 days beginning on July 1, The Annual 13 Colonies Special Event (www.13colonies.us) features special event stations in each state that was one of the former 13 colonies. Every year, it honors the original colonies, American independence, active military personnel, and veterans.

The special event stations can operate on any mode — most work SSB, CW, and digital. They can use all of the HF bands other than 60 meters, as well as VHF, UHF, and amateur radio satellites. The stations and their corresponding states include New York, K2A; Virginia, K2B; Rhode Island, K2C; Connecticut, K2D; Delaware, K2E; Maryland, K2F; Georgia, K2G; Massachusetts, K2H; New Jersey, K2I; North Carolina, K2J; New Hampshire, K2K; South Carolina, K2L, and Pennsylvania, K2M. There were three bonus stations in 2022: Great Britain, GB13COL; Philadelphia, WM3PEN, and France, TM13COL. The European stations were featured for their historical significance in the American Revolution and added DX difficulty. WM3PEN represented the city in Pennsylvania where US independence was first declared in 1776.

Each of the 16 stations had a unique QSL card, and most offer a new card every year. The event also offers a new certificate each year — to qualify, operators need to work only one station.

Planning the Operation

I participated in 2022, the 14th year of the event. I conducted a portable operation because it coincided with my family's annual Fourth of July vacation in Destin, Florida. This scheduling conflict left me little chance to operate, but my goal was to work the event as time permitted.



Figure 1 — The Buddipole in horizontal dipole configuration, as seen from the condominium balcony. [Brian Karcher, KG5GJT, photo]



Assorted Annual 13 Colonies Special Event QSL cards from the 2022 event. [Randy Dorman, KB3IFH, photo]

As excited as I was about the special event, I looked forward to the white-sand beaches, emerald waters, and abundant coastal wildlife of the area. The views, along with the sound of waves breaking in the Gulf of Mexico, are known for their relaxing qualities.

We planned to stay at a beachfront condominium, on the seventh floor. Rainstorms were forecasted for the first several days of July, but I anticipated operating from the balcony of the condominium. With an open view to the northeast, the spot would be perfect for working the special event.

My next stage of planning focused on equipment. For my antenna, I decided on a Buddipole Deluxe in the horizontal dipole configuration (see Figure 1). I would also bring my Icom IC-7100, an HF/VHF/UHF- and D-STAR-capable transceiver powered by an EPBOWPT 12 V switching power supply. However, if I could not find access to an outlet, my backup power supply would be a Bioenno BLF-1220A 12 V 20 Ah battery.

Setting Up

My family wanted to spend the first day of our vacation relaxing at the condominium, which afforded me more operating time and a chance to set up my portable station. As predicted, there were some rain showers

moving through the area. I set up the IC-7100 and switching power supply at a desk indoors, and put the Buddipole on the balcony where I had initially planned. Though I would not be operating on the balcony, my view was still beautiful.

Tuning a Buddipole is usually easy, but the antenna's location made the process more challenging. The balcony had metal handrails, large metal window frames, and a 9-foot ceiling. With the Buddipole mounted on a tripod, I placed it against the handrail and raised its height to about 6 feet. This way, it cleared the handrail without touching the ceiling. I oriented the antenna northeast, where most of the special event stations were located relative to my position. One end of the horizontal dipole was in the open air, while the other end was close to the metal window frames. To check the SWR, I used the IC-7100's plot measurement feature — this allows users to measure the SWR over an entire band. As such, I needed less equipment because I did not have to bring an SWR meter or external antenna tuner.

I found that tuning the Buddipole to 40 meters was the most difficult part. Still, I ultimately achieved an SWR between 2:1 and 1.5:1, depending on where I was on the band. Making the extendable whip sections shorter than the manual recommendations

allowed me to find a usable SWR. On 20 and 17 meters, I achieved a 1:1 SWR.

Starting the Chase

After getting my portable station up and running, I started operating. Many of the special event stations were on multiple bands and modes. The event organizers recommend using www.dxsummit.fi to spot stations; I frequently used the website to see where the special event stations were operating. Similar to years past, there were big pileups for all of them.

The first day was enjoyable, as I spent it with both my own family and my amateur radio family. By the end, I had accumulated about 6 hours on the air and worked nine of the 13 stations, but none of the bonus stations.

I got an earlier start on the second day. The weather had vastly improved since the first day, and I was optimistic about operating outside. Rain showers still moved through the area, but I set up and used my IC-7100 on the condominium balcony for several hours. With no power outlets on the balcony, I used the Bioenno battery to power my station. I had a wonderful view of the beach, and the warm wind blowing in from the Gulf made me feel great. However, the day also brought more operating challenges. Many more hams were chasing the special event stations, so the pileups were huge. But once I finally worked New Jersey and Pennsylvania, I needed only Delaware and Georgia for the clean sweep.

I tried to work them for 2 hours with no success. Then, I checked DX Summit and found that Georgia was spotted on 40 meters. I quickly tuned my Buddipole for the band and made two calls as they were answering other stations. Georgia called me back after my third call; we successfully made the exchange and ended the contact.

Within 15 more minutes of watching DX Summit, I saw Delaware spotted on 17 meters. Again, I retuned the Buddipole and heard the station. I made my call, and to my amazement, Delaware called me back right away. We made the exchange, and I thanked them for helping me close out the 13 Colonies clean sweep before ending the contact. I was excited to have worked both stations in just 20 minutes after more than 2 hours of searching. That day, I concluded my operation after about 8 hours.

For the next 4 days, I periodically chased the three bonus stations. I heard them calling, but unfortunately, they never heard me. I spent the last day of the event traveling back home to Louisiana. When I returned, I

The 15th Annual 13 Colonies Special Event

The 15th Annual 13 Colonies Special Event will be held on July 1 through 7, 2023, and the theme of this year's event is "Signers of the Declaration of Independence." Each of the 13 special event stations will correspond to founding fathers who signed the revolutionary document in 1776.

The special call signs, and the figures that they represent, are as follows: William Floyd, K2A (New York); Thomas Jefferson, K2B (Virginia); William Ellery, K2C (Rhode Island); William Williams, K2D (Connecticut); Caesar Rodney, K2E (Delaware); William Paca, K2F (Maryland); George Walton, K2G (Georgia); John Adams, K2H (Massachusetts); John Hart, K2I (New Jersey); John Penn, K2J (North Carolina); William Whipple, K2K (New Hampshire); Thomas Lynch, Jr., K2L (South Carolina), and Benjamin Franklin, K2M (Pennsylvania). Once again, the three bonus stations will be GB13COL (Great Britain); TM13COL (France), and WM3PEN (Philadelphia).

On the success of this yearly tradition, The Annual 13 Colonies Special Event Manager Ken Villone, KU2US, stated, "The patriotic theme of the Revolution, [the event being] around the Fourth of July, and the thrill of the hunt all [fall] into place perfectly!" The special event sees a growing number of participating hams every year, so be prepared to work these historical stations in just 1 more month.

made my request for the certificate and QSL cards from all 13 Colonies stations. The certificate and QSL card instructions can be found on the event's website.

Reflection

I had an incredible time operating The Annual 13 Colonies Special Event. There were some difficulties, but I was able to work through them in the end. Success on the air, the beautiful view, and the ocean breeze made clear the joys of operating portable. Hatching a plan and getting a makeshift station on the air from somewhere different provide an exciting way to operate. If you don't have a portable station, get one ready and get on the air the next time you leave your shack.

Brian D. Karcher, KG5GJT, was licensed in 2015 and upgraded to Amateur Extra in 2017. He is active in his local club, ARES, and his ARRL Section. He enjoys HF, HF digital, VHF/UHF, digital mode, and satellite operating. Brian can be reached at kg5gjt@cox.net.

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