



 **westvalley**
AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION

WVARA - May 2024

“FT8 Contesting”

K6UFO Mark Aaker

...more contesting info at nccc.cc

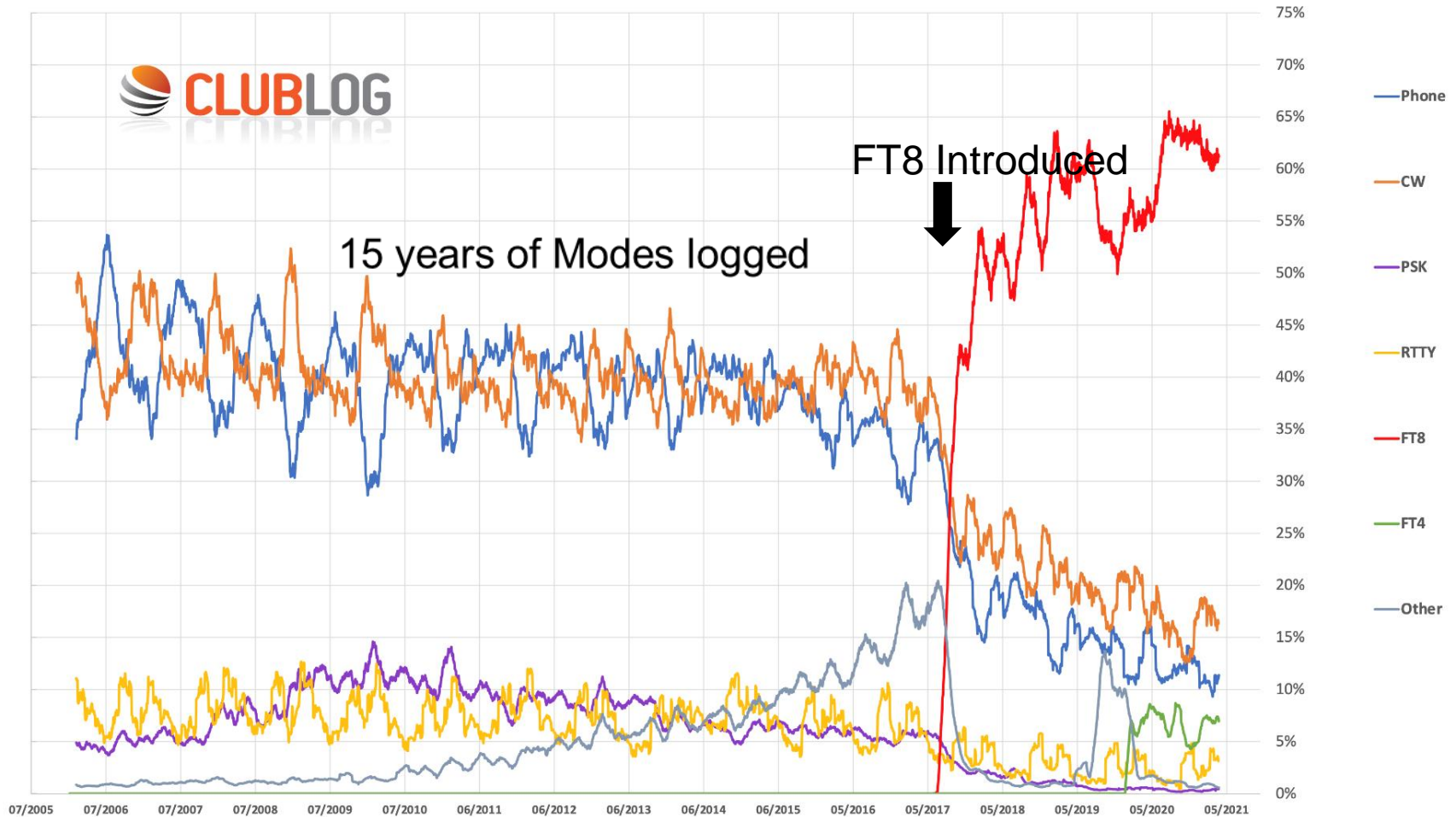
...more UFO info at k6ufo.com



What is FT8?

- FT8 is an Amateur Radio operating mode, like CW, SSB, FM, ...
- Requires connecting a computer to your radio, like Packet, PSK31, RTTY,...
- Introduced in mid 2017, within a year it became not only the most popular “digital” mode, but the most popular of ANY mode!










Modes logged in Club Log - 2006 to 2021 (60 day moving averages)



Clublog: “Most Active Modes” chart for **1 week**, Mar 8 - 15, 2024

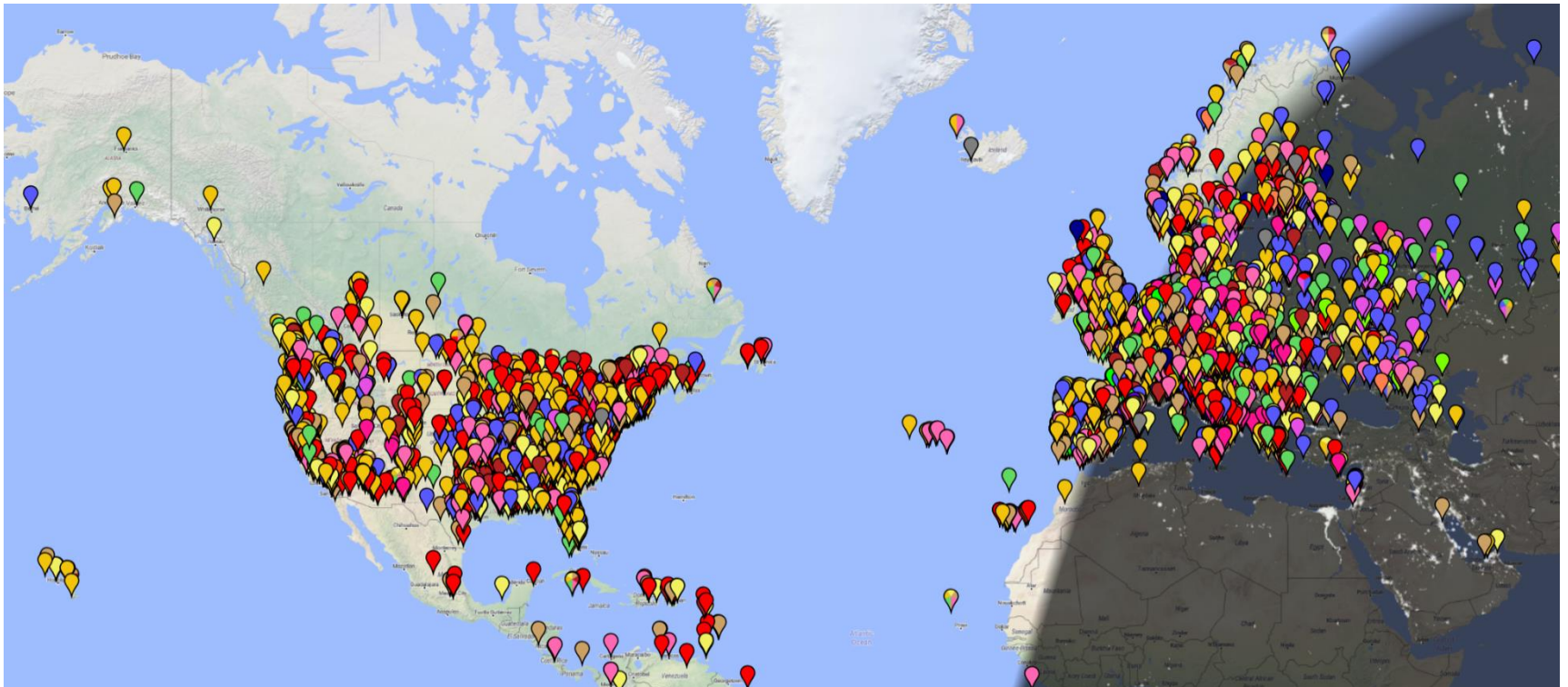
Most active modes

This chart illustrates which modes are being used most heavily during the period of this report.

Mode	% Use	QSOs	Graph
FT8	57.82	673,823	
FT4	13.96	162,746	
CW	12.73	148,390	
SSB	11.97	139,450	
RTTY	1.41	16,444	
PSK	1.13	13,184	
MFSK	0.44	5,112	
FM	0.20	2,329	
DKT	0.14	1,600	

Why is FT8 popular?

- Good for weak signals, can work distant stations “DX” with low power and small antennas, at least 6 dB better than CW, and 20 dB better than SSB.
- No need to learn high-speed morse code.
- Operating is quiet, unlike operating Phone.
- Fixed 15-second cycles, with a set of “canned” messages and auto-sequencing.
- Can operate with less attention, so you can multi-task other activities.
- Lots of daily activity, there is always someone to contact
- Automatic spotting of everyone on the air, see PSK Reporter pskreporter.info



Why think about FT8 Contesting?

- FT8 is the most popular mode for daily operation and DX chasing. It has become the "daily driver" on the bands. Some of this popularity will spill into contesting.
- Entering a fast-paced CW or SSB contest can be intimidating for a newcomer, but the fixed pace FT8 cycles reduce the frantic speed and let the newcomer join in.
- Learning to contest in FT8 can gain you more DX, improve your daily FT8 skills, and help you setup software logging and radio control that will help you in other contests, logging and QSLing activities.
- If you find you don't like FT8, its easy to switch to RTTY contesting, or just stick to CW/SSB. Only FT8 when you need the rare DX 😊

The “traditional” contest modes (SSB, CW, RTTY) are still more popular, but FT8 is in 4th place, and just getting started...

CQ WW SSB Contest 2023:	9276 logs submitted (started 1948)
CQ WW CW Contest 2023:	7648 logs (started 1948)
CQ WW RTTY Contest 2022:	3077 logs (started 1986)
WW Digi Contest 2023:	1389 logs (started 2019)
ARRL Digi Contest 2023:	939 logs (started 2022)
FT Roundup Contest 2023:	621 logs (started 2018)

Upcoming FT8 contests by date:

ARRL Digital Contest	June 1, 2024	
ARRL June VHF Contest	June 8, 2024	(also has CW and SSB)
ARRL Field Day	June 22, 2024	(also has CW and SSB)
CQ WW VHF Contest	July 20, 2024	(also has CW and SSB)
WW Digi DX Contest	August 24, 2024	
FT Roundup Contest	December 7, 2024	

Many State QSO Parties allow FT8: (TX, 7QP, NEQP, DE...)

Most VHF/UHF contests, and SOTA and POTA allow FT8 contacts.

Step 1: Get on FT8 with the WSJT-x software and your radio. Use the help files, tutorials, YouTube, help from friends, ...



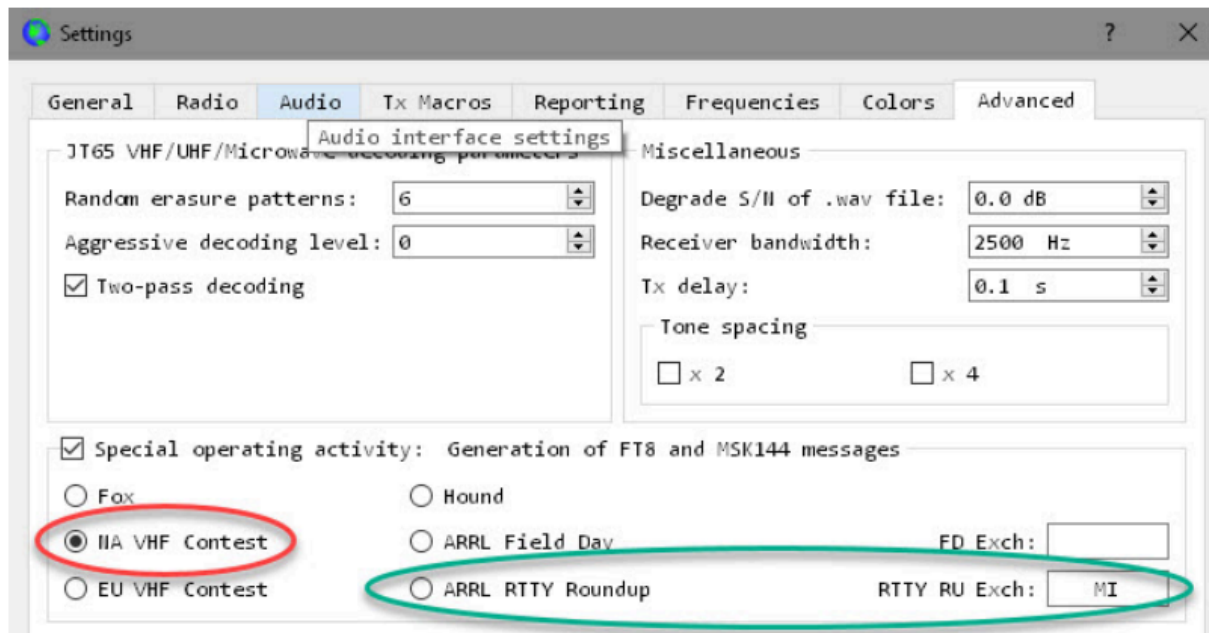
get on FT8

About 676,000 results

Can I contest with WSJT-x alone? Yes, and that's the way to start. WSJT-x can produce ADIF format logs and a few types of Cabrillo format contest logs.

WSJT-x has normal modes and **"contest" modes** called "Special operating activity" that changes the messages, Auto-sequencing, and color coding. (see File, Settings, Advanced)

Configuration for a Specific Contest (WSJT-X only)



Stay "mainstream" with WSJT-x software to get the largest user base for support, and the latest released features. But **other FT8 software** and decoders exist...

Note re "**automation**." Most contests say something like: "Each QSO must require some action by the operator, e.g., selecting a QSO partner." No contest robots!

FT Frequencies:

Usual FT8	Usual FT4	Contest FT8	Contest FT4
3573	3575	3590	3580
7074	7047.5	7090	7080
14074	14080	14090	14080
21074	21140	21090	21080
28074	28.180	28090	28080

There may also be Dxpeditons and other digital modes anywhere between x.070 – x.095
ITU Region 1 (EU) and R3 (JA) digital stations may be operating "down low" x.030- x.070.

Contesting Tips:

Periodically switch odd/even cycle and FT8/FT4. There will be new stations to contact.

Don't be afraid to CQ. When people see you CQ, they call you. CQ and be spotted.

Always be making progress by calling or responding on every TX cycle.

(Except if you need to check that you are TX in a "clear" space.)

FT8? Isn't it "boring?"

WW Digi Single Op winner made 1,487 QSOs in 24 hours
...there will be more stations to work, you are limited by the cycles

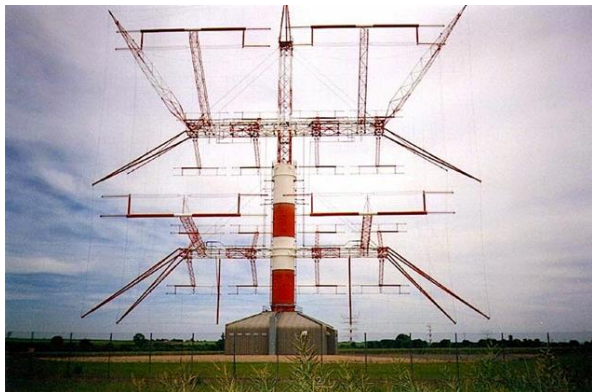
The FT8 contesting challenge is to get the "most" out of each cycle.
(new DX, new grid, most points, longest distance, ...)



FT8 is "easier" than understanding distorted SSB voices or decoding the CW in your head.
This **frees the operator for other contest tasks** like looking for Multipliers, operating two frequencies or radios, checking propagation, checking other bands, checking DX spots,

FT8 is "paced" by the cycles, so you do not need quick reflex responses like are needed in SSB and CW contesting. **Less tiring and less stressful.** (But, less pileup adrenaline rush.)

FT8 is able to work very weak signals and marginal openings to rare locations. You don't need big antennas or high power, and you don't need to strain to listen and hear it.



Questions?
Comments?
Suggestions?

Go have fun!