# Remote Operating

*"Operating an Amateur Radio station remotely, from a control point some distance from the RF equipment, is nothing new — but today it's easier than ever."*

Radio amateurs have been controlling their transmitters remotely since at least the 1930s, first by wire and then, after the advances in technology brought about by World War II, also by radio. In some parts of the country "remote base" operation has long been popular among VHF and UHF enthusiasts. HF remote operation was relatively rare until about 20 years ago, and even then it was hardly "plug and play."

Things have developed rapidly and dramatically over the past few years. With hardware and/or software it is now possible to control an amateur station from wherever a reasonably robust Internet connection is available. You can set up such a station of your own, collaborate with friends or through a club, or even rent a station for a period of time, much as you might rent a vacation QTH but without having to leave home. It's a boon to business travelers, people with second homes, and those who must live where there are limited antenna possibilities. Remote operation makes it possible for many amateurs to be more active than they otherwise could be, including some who otherwise would not be on the air at all. This is all to the good, with some caveats.

Regulations governing remote operation vary from country to country; in some it may not be allowed. The FCC rules are rather permissive: the control operator must be able to ensure the immediate proper operation of the station, but the control point can be anywhere. For operation across international borders, both the operator and the station must be licensed by the administration where the transmitter is located. CEPT Recommendation T/R 61-01 does not apply: if, for example, a European amateur wants to operate a remote station that's located in the United States, he or she must have an FCC license. Of course, the call sign used must always indicate the location of the transmitter. Operating a transmitter in one country with a call sign indicating a different one is bootlegging, plain and simple.

Legalities aside, perhaps the most controversial aspect of remote operating has to do with awards, notably the ARRL's iconic DX Century Club. The DXCC program has always permitted remote operation as long as the transmitter and control point were located in the same DXCC entity. That condition had little practical significance until the advent of the Internet and what is sometimes referred to as "the death of distance" in telecommunications. When the Internet is the medium, the distance from point A to point B is irrelevant.

In July 2013, the ARRL Board of Directors asked its DX Advisory Committee (DXAC), which is made up of one volunteer appointee from each ARRL division plus Canada, to conduct a comprehensive review of the DXCC rules and recommend changes. When it reported a year later, the DXAC recommended that the use of remote stations be limited to no more than 200 km from the operator's home station location. The rationale for this new restriction was that using remote stations far from one's home creates an advantage over others, particularly on 160 and 6 meters.

The Board was not persuaded to adopt this recommendation, and instead referred the issue to its Programs & Services Committee (PSC), composed of five Directors and one Vice Director, for further study. Between the July 2014 and January 2015 Board meetings the PSC fielded input from members and debated the issue, ultimately concluding that placing such an arbitrary limit on the distance between a remote station and its control point would have more negative than positive consequences. Instead, the PSC recommended dropping the requirement that the control point and the station be in the same DXCC entity, with the location of the station for DXCC purposes continuing to be defined as the location of the transmitter, not the operator. At its January meeting, the Board adopted the PSC recommendation as well as a companion rule reminding those who strive for top positions in the DXCC listings that their peers will judge the accomplishment not just by the number, but by how it was achieved.

Reaction has run along predictable lines. If you regard DXCC as a competition, you might have viewed the DXAC recommendation as closing a loophole that technology had created. The problem with that approach is that it would prevent some from participating in the program at all, or at least to the extent they would like. For example, an amateur from the Northeast has retired to Florida and wants to continue DXing using a remote station near his old home; why shouldn't he be able to do? Decades ago, the DXCC rules were changed to recognize that people should not have to start all over every time they move to a different part of the country. The arguments against that change were similar to some being voiced today.

The path the Board has chosen creates new possibilities. A Norwegian amateur temporarily living in southern Europe can continue to add to his original DXCC totals, as can a Canadian who winters in the US. It also creates new opportunities for those who chase DX and eliminates an unenforceable rule. As but one of many examples, last summer I heard a station in Montenegro running a nice pileup. I had visited the German operator at his second home there, so I called in to say hello. During our short chat he mentioned that he was actually at his home in Germany, operating remotely. No doubt some of those who worked him that night needed the contact for DXCC. They would have been surprised to learn that the rules didn't allow it to count, even though the radio signals had bridged the distance between their station and Montenegro in both directions — and since we're radio people, that is what's important.

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