

How to have fun in the Indiana QSO Party

Make lots of contacts and score big....

OK, easier said than done. There are stations who struggle to make a dozen QSOs in 12 hours, and others that make almost a thousand. Why the difference? Here are a few hints (some are pretty obvious):

1. **Be LOUD** ! If you are at home, run as much power as you can. Use those high antennas for long distance contacts. But for close-in QSOs (like across the state) a low dipole at 20 feet will usually be louder than one at 60 feet. Consider a temporary low dipole just for the QSO party to work those in-state multipliers. If you insist on QRP, spend time to improve your antennas to make your signal as loud as possible.
2. **Call CQ**. Get over that mike fright and make your presence known. On the other hand, you may have to search and pounce up and down the band to find a new multiplier. If you can operate CW, you can often punch through more easily than with phone.
3. Use **phonetics** on phone. ALWAYS use standard phonetics ("K9DBM" can be copied a lot of ways). When you give your county, give the 3-4 letter abbreviation phonetically.
4. Be a rare **multiplier**. If your station is in Brown County they will find you. Or you can set up temporary operations in rarer county, or on a county line, where every QSO counts double. Going out as a mobile or rover can achieve the same results. But you have to call CQ to make lots of QSOs, even with a QRP signal and a ham stick.
5. Work **both modes** (SSB and CW) to optimize the number of multipliers. Sure phone is fun, and it's easy to get a new ham or non-ham into the routine. But it takes a lot more power to be heard on phone than it does on CW. If you have a hard time sending CW, use a contest logging program that sends CQ, the other guy's call, and the contest exchange for you. You just need to be able to copy his information. If you send at a speed you can copy, a good CW operator will match your speed when he replies. Remember, CW points count more, and mobile stations often rely on CW to make their puny signals heard.
6. Use all the **available bands**. That means you can work the same stations over and over as you change bands (160 meters may not provide much action in May). If you use all six INQP bands, and work both modes, that's 12 points and TWO multipliers (one phone, one CW). If you make 12 CW/SSB contacts with your friend across town you will have 36 points in the log. Make one more CW QSO with the next county or state, and you have three multipliers and 13 QSOs for 114 points. Obviously the points rack up fast if you put more multipliers (states/counties) in the log.
7. Use available **propagation**. Use simple free programs like W6EL-Prop to see which bands are best at different hours of the event. Don't forget 40 meters, which is always open and almost every mobile will try all day. And don't forget to try 80 meters before sunset to catch those in-state multipliers that may not be workable after dark. Don't be fazed if the contacts are slow coming. Maybe a different band will be better. Things usually heat up after dark.
8. Use a **logging program**. Once you are heard, and there's more than one station calling, you want to be able to log the first one and catch the second one before he gets bored and looks elsewhere for a QSO. If you spend two minutes writing things down the second guy won't be there when you finally finish with the first. There are free logging programs out there (try N1MM) but they do require some practice, so don't load it onto your PC the day of the QSO Party.
9. Look for the **mobiles & rovers**. Let's say you have a big signal on phone and there's plenty of Ohio stations calling. You already have Ohio, but you don't have the weak mobile in a rare county who has been trying to get your attention for the last three CQs. If you don't stop the run often and ask "who's the mobile" you'll miss the multiplier. A mobile may have already worked you and your county, so he's doing you a favor by calling you... he has little to lose by passing you by.
10. Use of **packet** places you in the multi-operator category, but to optimize multipliers and QSOs, packet helps. Even if you don't use packet spots, it helps the mobiles/rovers if you spot them.
11. Participate in the **QSO party reflector** and study the planned activity map to know which stations will be active in which counties, and to know the rover/mobile's driving plans. Copy the list of counties and their abbreviations, so you can log them correctly.
12. Participate in **other events** the same day. Indiana QSO party overlaps with the W-zero QSO party, the 7 Area QSO Party, and the New England QSO Party. When you hear one of those folks calling CQ, work them! You may need to add a serial number to your exchange to make them

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happy, and they may give you information you don't need. For example, if you call W1X in NEQP, he gives you "59 CT New Haven" (you log 59 CT). If you send him "59 Indiana Lake" he will likely log only 59 IN... but he's now in your INQP log. If you set up your log to also record other states' counties, you can later separate the logs (many use Excel) to create logs for the other QSO parties as well.

13. Work the **special event station** for a certificate. Most years it's W9UUU.

Look for Fun !!

1. Contact a new ham or tech class ham to **guest operate** at your fully tricked out HF station. Let them enjoy the QSO party while you supervise.
2. Enter as a **multi-operator** station. Not only do you share the operating chores, but you have somebody to repair antennas without taking a signal off the air, and you have somebody to fetch refreshments. Multi's are either single transmitter (one signal on the air at a time) or multi-transmitter (all out go-for-it warfare).
3. Use the QSO party as an opportunity for your club to shake down their **Field Day setup**. If you go to a rare county, so much the better. Be sure to take extra coax, rigs, antennas, etc. Something will break.
4. **Scout out the operating site**. If you are going rover or portable, be sure you have a location with no line noise, is not in a deep valley, and won't be bothered by guest operators from the sheriff's department. Get permission to set up, especially on private land or just across fence lines. Let the neighbors know what you are doing. Put a sign on the car. Know where the nearest toilets are.
5. **Go mobile**. Although mobile signals are much weaker than those from fixed stations, the mobiles get LOTS of action because they often will be the only signals from some counties. However, it takes time to set up a mobile rig that won't be bothered by ignition noise or fuel pump RFI, has decent antennas for at least two bands, and is capable of SSB and CW operation on the move. A logging program on a PC interfaced to the rig is even more important for mobile, as it sends better CW than a hand key while traveling a twisty gravel road, and is a lot less trouble than hand writing the log. Winning mobiles will make 80 percent or more of their contacts on CW, since their puny signals can be copied better. However, mobile-to-mobile contacts are rare, especially across the state. It is also helpful to have a driver who knows the route and when/where to stop on those county lines. This means that your driving route should be worked out before you start driving, with plenty of slack time for traffic, bad roads, weather, pit stops, and unexpected pileups while operating on county lines. Don't commit to more counties than you can easily handle. Be sure to post your schedule on the QSO Party reflector so folks can look for you.
6. **Compete as a club**. There is a prize for the Indiana club with the highest aggregate score from three or more members. Even if individual scores are not winners, their combined total may be.

TURN IN A LOG...

All that effort means little if you don't share your results. There are certificates and plaques for those who show significant effort. Even if you do not score as big as you hope, you can contribute to your club's aggregate score... and your log helps the log checkers. If you work enough different counties you can qualify for the Worked All Indiana award.

If you made contacts with stations active in other QSO parties, send them a log too.

It would be great if every Indiana County is well represented in the coming INQP. How well Indiana shows itself to the world is up to you.

More information is at www.hdxcc.org/inqp

Our Winning Ways... or how did we do it?

Reflections on INQP 2010 by some of the plaque winners, presented at HDXCC meeting Sept 15, 2010.

Top Indiana High Power, K9NN. Dale credits the use of a digital voice keyer to call CQ to provide some time for short breaks. During heavy SSB activity he minimized the length of his exchange (he did not ever say "Please copy....") to keep his rate up. And he studied winning contesters (like K5TR and K5ZD) on You Tube. He also credits Morse Runner code practice software that helped him make CW contacts and get more multipliers. His own station being rather modest, he borrowed the super station of W9RE to have what was likely the biggest Indiana signal that weekend, a fact that no doubt helped his score a lot.

Top Indiana Low Power, K9WX. Rather than operate from home, Tim chose to relocate temporarily to a "rarer" county in order to attract more attention and have less county competition. He chose low power because of his more modest antennas (a low dipole for local QSOs helped). He also did not ignore SSB, as SSB multipliers add to the total. This is a repeat win for Tim.

Top Indiana QRP, W9ILF. Ivin kept his CQs short, but called CQ on CW a lot, figuring that folks would come looking for his small signal eventually. His QRP signal was more effective on 40 and 20 meter CW but he found some SSB contacts to get extra multipliers. Ivin suggests that QRP needs the best antenna you can get, his being a vertical with 35 radials. Ivin is also a repeat winner.

Top Portable, N9FN. Dave and Dave (K9FN, the second op) have done this many times before and from year to year they fine tune their team setup and routine. They have their favorite (and not so favorite) county lines to roost on (some are too far from toilets). Believing that their station on wheels should be "emergency ready" they keep it ready to go, and can set up and tear down quickly. They use a converted TV station van with a 40 foot pneumatic mast, but admit that any portable near tall trees would have better antennas. They try for a good mix of CW and SSB contacts, and are repeat winners.

Top Mobile, KJ9C. Mel spends more time planning BEFORE a QSO party than he does driving it (solo). Targeting 30 minutes per county, he uses mapping software to calculate the shortest driving time to cover 24 counties, then tries to plan as many minutes parked on county lines as possible to double QSO points. He uses Excel to calculate expected arrival times to each stop and sets firm departure times to keep on schedule; there is about an hour of slack in the schedule in case some stops produce high rates (up to 200 QSO/s per hour peak) or if there's car trouble. He quickly hit W1 and W7 QSO parties to get multipliers on SSB, where he rarely CQs since a mobile can't be easily heard on phone. Rooftop antennas for 20, 40 and 80 meters, using a rig with auto-tuner and memories, VOX on SSB, and a DOS based logging program using config files for each county and F key commands for CW (rough roads are tough with a mouse). This year Murphy stayed away, leading to a full 12 hours on air and no need for the full backup station he carries (rig, cables, antennas, PCs, etc). Mel made a point of asking EVERY QSO for their county so he could enter the W1 QSO party, W7 QSO party (top mobile non-W7), and county hunter party (top USA mobile SSB). Mel also credits his win to K8MR and WT9U, who did not mobile this year.

Top Rover and Top Overall WN9O. Tim and Don (W9IU) are also a repeat winner team, and fine tune their routine each time they go out. Murphy stayed away from them this year, too. The driver had his own rig and antenna for monitoring band conditions for the operator. They scouted out sites and pre-set antennas before INQP so they could "drive up and plug in". They like Write Log for multiple QTH's. They both caution about parking on private property and being obvious that they have "friendly" intent. Using familiar locations from year to year can be a plus.

Top Club Aggregate Score, Lafayette DX Association. Tim N9LF and Steve W9TN credit a few big logs that helped their club score, although the Fort Wayne guys rolled out a LOT of logs and came very close to winning. This is a repeat for LDXA but there are others gunning for them, especially since there will be a multi-op/multi-transmitter class next year.

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General observations by participants. The W7 QSO Party guys are really cooperative and look for Indiana contacts, but folks who want to participate in the New England QSO Party seem to want nothing to do with us and often won't give a "freebie" QSO to us just so we can get their state as a multiplier. Beside Write Log, some participants may want to try CQX software to handle county line QSOs more easily. Folks who did not win said that the INQP is actually a lot of fun, and winning is not the reason they play each year. We all agree that we have a great weekend on the ham radio schedule and that INQP is gaining in activity.



INQP 2010 Indiana winners. Front – W9ILF (QRP), KJ9C (mobile). Rear W9TN & N9LF (for Lafayette DX Club). K9WX (LP), N9FN and K9FN (Portable), WN9O and W9IU (Rover). Absent – AK9F (multi-op), K9NN (HP).