

NCJ Interviews: Roberto Ramirez, CE3CT — 30 Years of Contesting from Chile

Roberto Ramirez, CE3CT, operates the largest Multioperator, Two-Transmitter (M2) station in Chile and has trained numerous other contesters in Latin America. His latest protégé is Matthias Acevedo, CE2MVF, featured in this issue as a WRTC 2018 Youth Team Leader. He's also mentored Dale Green, VE7SV/CE2AWW, another WRTC 2018 participant. Roberto himself has been chosen as a WRTC 2018 referee. A fixture in most contests, CE3CT is often the loudest station from Chile. I visited Roberto in December 2017 while on a work trip to Chile to find out more. I hope you enjoy this inside look at CE3CT and his amazing contest story. — NCJ Editor Scott Wright, KØMD

NCJ: Roberto, how did you get started in Amateur Radio?

CE3CT: The history of CE3CT was born in 1985, when I was 13 years old. I enjoyed listening to rock music but could not get a suitable FM station. At that time I lived in Talca, and there were no FM radio stations to listen to music of that type, so I started looking for a way to listen to a station in Curicó, 50 kilometers north. As time went on, I realized that I needed a high-gain outdoor antenna, so I manufactured my first Yagi for VHF, and when I got great results, I became a SWL and adopted a new hobby.

After listening to all the FM radio stations near Talca, I started with the shortwave listening and soon got my first SWL license CE4-072. When I reached 15, my family recognized my passion for SWLing, so my sister asked a friend to invite me to his ham station. I remember, as if it were today, the radio shack of CE4GTC with his Kenwood TS-830S and the antennas outside. He invited me to the Radio Club of Talca (CE4TA), I joined, and soon was licensed as CE4PBB. As an operator of CE4TA, I developed my early skills there.

NCJ: How long did it take you to persuade your parents to let you have an antenna and station at your home?

CE3CT: In 1989, I managed to install my first radio station in my parents' house with an integrated antenna and Thomson CSF equipment adapted for 40 meters. I worked 100 cities and villages (communes) in Chile with this setup.

In 1991, I bought my first multiband radio

equipment, a TS-830S with a 2-element Hy-Gain quad antenna and a Heathkit SB-200 amplifier. I enrolled in a university near my parents' home and stayed at home while attending school.

In 1996 after finishing my studies in electrical engineering, I moved to Santiago for work reasons and managed to install a small station with a Mosley TA-33M tribander plus a pair of dipoles for 40 and 80 meters on the roof of a building. I had a lot of fun and success contesting from the city and was joined frequently by Lucas, LU1FAM, who remains a great friend and fellow contester. Lucas and I started doing multi-signal contests, and we were competitive from South America. My call sign was changed to CE4CT while I was living in Santiago.

NCJ: How did you get to know Dale Green, VE7SV?

CE3CT: After the CQ WW in 2006, I met Dale, who e-mailed to see if he could join us while he was on a work trip to Santiago. We forged a great friendship, and I did not imagine what a great friend Dale would become in ham radio contesting.

NCJ: How did the present day CE3CT station start?

CE3CT: Dale began to come much

more often to Chile, for vacations or work, and we usually met with Pedro, CE3FZ, to talk about DX and contesting next to the grill on a 5,000 square meter lot that I bought north of Santiago in a sector called Chicureo. The lot was to become the future home of CE3CT. And why not build a station very close to a fabulous restaurant and pub? My plans blossomed, and I was able to install a 30-meter tower with three Yagis — a KT34XA, a TA-33M, and a 2 element linear-loaded Yagi for 40 meters. It was the beginning of the CE3CT that today is the most important station of contesting in Chile. Contest-station building and relaxation over a beer make for a great friendship.

In 2010, I finished building my current house and began living full time in Chicureo. I was able to focus more on improving the CE3CT contest station. A second tower, 40 meters high, was installed, and the antennas were replaced with monoband Yagis with a setup that allowed us to dream of multioperator competitions.

Diego, LU8ADX; Dale, VE7SV; Pedro, CE3FZ; Jason, VE7AG, and I were the first to operate from the new and improved CE3CT in the M2 category. We were able to set a new Zone 12 record for the CQ



Roberto Ramirez, CE3CT, and one of his golden retrievers.



Matthias Acevedo, CE2MVF (right), and Dale Green, VE7SV/CE2AWW (left, rear), operate at CE3CT. The "flag of signatures" is on the wall next to them.



The CE3CT QTH with Roberto's two towers.

WW. Since that time, we have been able to increase our score each year as we made incremental improvements, which were enhanced by the improvements in the Solar Cycle.

Word spread throughout Zone 12 that my station was poised to set new records for Zone 12. No one had ever dreamed in Chile about attaining the scores we were consistently making! We finally hit the 7,000 QSO/contest mark, never done

before from Chile! After that, operators from all over Zone 12 and some from North America would regularly come to help us break Zone 12 records. These included LU8ADX, LU1AEE, LU5DX, LU1FAM, LU2BPM (SK), VE7SV, VE7AG, XE1KK, KQ7W, N5NU, N5ZO, CX6VM, OZ1AA, CE3FZ, CE1TT, CE4MWK, XQ7UP, CE7EEA (SK), and CE2MVF.

NCJ: I have also contested from Chile as a single operator in the CQ WW. What

is your impression of the propagation?

CE3CT: The propagation from CE is very difficult, especially on the low bands, where there are few overlapping hours of darkness between us and the ham population centers in Europe and North America. My station's proximity to the Andes Mountain Range also makes it hard to navigate propagation through to certain parts of North America and Europe.

NCJ: How close are you to the Andes?

CE3CT: About 30 to 50 kilometers.

NCJ: What is your best region to work in contests?

CE3CT: Our best conditions are toward the US, so we must quickly take advantage of the good hours of propagation to score points. Let me highlight our strategy band by band for your readers.

10 meters: When propagation is good on 10, we can count on it being open practically all day and most of the night there are openings towards VK, ZL and JA and the Pacific when North America and Europe are not on.

15 meters: There are regular openings during the mornings to Europe and then in the afternoon and evenings to North America, the Pacific and Japan.

20 meters: 20 meters opens after dawn we work long path to Europe in 20 meters for a couple of hours, then it closes until short path openings occur around 1600 UTC. Our biggest challenge with 20 meters is the North America-Europe circuit. When EU has its sights on North America, we feel very lonely in South America, as we have poor rates to either continent. When propagation is impaired between EU and North America, we often have great runs on 20 meters to Europe.

40 meters: 40 meters is consistently open around sunset (2300 UTC) to Europe, and then it opens a few hours later to North America. We find very good openings with the Pacific region and Japan in the hour or two before sunrise.

80 and 160 meters: The low bands are very difficult from our latitudes. We dedicate one of our stations to working all we can hear during the common hours of darkness we share with Europe, North America, and Asia, but our distance makes it tough even with four-square arrays. We also use Beverages to enhance weak-signal operations, but our distance makes it tough.

NCJ: You have a very clever Beverage system.

CE3CT: Well...I live in a small community 20 kilometers from Santiago. There is an expressway next to my property, and a farm across the expressway. Several years ago, I was able to snake a coaxial cable through the culvert that runs underneath the expressway. I have an arrangement

with the farmer who owns the fields across the expressway to put up my Beverages on Friday of a contest weekend and take them down on Sunday evening after the contest. He allows me to run two Beverages: One NE to Europe and one NW to the US and Asia. It works well.

NCJ: You have a compact lot, yet you have a powerful station. Describe for *NCJ* readers what you have at the station.

CE3CT: My station has three Elecraft K3 transceivers and three amplifiers. We typically operate with two operator positions.

Position 1: Elecraft K3 + Alpha 78

Position 2: Elecraft K3 + Acom 1500 + MN2000

Position 3: Elecraft K3 + Alpha 91B + MN2000

Both operators start somewhere on 10, 15, or 20. When 10 closes down, the operator goes to 40 meters. We expect the 40 meter station to operate all night long. The other station operates 15 or 20 meters until the bands close, then QSYs typically to 80 and 160.

I have invested heavily in antennas and switching equipment. On 10 meters, I have 6 elements @ 33 meters, and 6 elements @ 18 meters. On 15, I have 5 elements @ 27 meters, and 6 elements @ 15 meters fixed on NA. For 20 meters, there are 5 elements at 40 meters. On 40 meters, I have 2 elements at 30 meters. For 80 meters, there is a K8UR array, an inverted V dipole. For 160 meters, a half-wave sloper is aimed to the north for transmitting. Receive antennas are Beverages to Europe and to North America.

NCJ: Roberto, you have two teammates who qualified for WRTC outright, and you are a referee. What has been the secret of your success at mentoring and building a great M2 station?

CE3CT: I met Matthias, CE2MVF, via Facebook in 2010. He was 17 at the time and had tremendous enthusiasm for radio contesting. Dale and I decided to invest our time and energy into training and helping

Matthias become a first-rate contesteer, and he has excelled beyond our expectations. Matthias today is at a great competitive level; he has just qualified in the youth team category at WRTC 2018. We are very proud of him. My own work schedule as the chief electrical engineer for a large and growing mobile telephone company keeps me from personally doing all of the contests to qualify for WRTC, but I open my station to others who want to use it. At CE3CT, the goal is always to enjoy the passion that unites us with a group of friends. We always set goals that, in order to fulfill them, it is necessary that the station be at the level that is required.

VE7SV and CE3FZ have been a fundamental part of the project since the beginning. Now CE2MVF has been a valuable contribution in the maintenance of the station. It is only a station with two towers, but it requires that everything works perfectly compete at a high level.

NCJ: Thank you Roberto for sharing your station with all of us in this article.

Postscript

When I toured CE3CT last December, many aspects of Roberto's station impressed me. The engineering detail is exemplary. Roberto built a small house for the radio station with an operating room, sleeping quarters, a bathroom, and a small kitchen separate from his main home. There is a work room, and he has posted goals for 2018 and a project list on the wall. Roberto has a flag of Chile that every visitor signs upon entering and operating at the station. This builds team spirit and highlights his generosity at sharing the station.

Roberto and his fellow radio aficionados have a special restaurant/pub less than a 5-minute drive from his home. Nothing cements good operating fun like a meal before and/or after the contest. Finally, Roberto's golden retrievers welcome every visit with glee — what more can you say?



The neat cable runs at CE3CT.