

OCDX Contest – counting 82 years of history!

The Oceania DX (OCDX) Contest is one of the longest-standing events on the amateur radio contest calendar. It has endured a world war, many sunspot lows, and huge changes in technology from early valve radios to the latest software defined digital rigs — and continues to thrive, bringing together hams from around the world every October.

The Contest Committee has recently been reviewing the early history of the contest as documented in the contest pages of the WIA Amateur Radio magazine archive at <https://armag.vk6uu.id.au/index.html>.

This research uncovered that we had been miscounting the number of times the contest has been held. We thought the 2025 contest was the 80th birthday but it's actually the 82nd birthday!

Here's what we found.

- The precursor to our contest was the Melbourne Centenary International DX Contest held in October 1934. This was a VK only contest and was run by the Victorian Division of the Wireless Institute of Australia (WIA).
- However, the contest as we know it, i.e. jointly run by the VK and ZL and designed to promote contacts with both VK and ZL, commenced in 1935. The contest was described as the 'VK/ZL International DX Contest' or 'VK/ZL DX Contest'.
- The contest ran annually until 1938 but was then suspended due to amateur licences being revoked during WW2. Rules were published for the 1939 contest, along with plans to award trophies to celebrate the centenary of New Zealand, but the event could not proceed as licences were cancelled when WW2 commenced in September 1939.
- The VK/ZL contest remained suspended throughout WW2 and was not resumed until October 1948, following the reinstatement of amateur licence privileges in most countries. The WIA did run an 'International DX contest' in October 1947 but this was a VK only event.
- The contest has been run annually without interruption since 1948.

So the 2025 contest will be the 82nd anniversary of the contest, noting the contest commenced in 1935 but then had a gap of 8 years from 1939 to 1947.

Here are some other facts that we discovered while reviewing the contest timeline:

- The contest was originally run over all four weekends of October but this was reduced to two weekends from 1951 onwards – with one weekend dedicated to Phone and the other to CW.
- The contest was initially a CW only contest – and no credit was awarded to stations receiving an RST tone report of less than T8! The 1948 contest was the first one to cater for both Phone and CW sections, with the CW section being run on the first and third weekends of October, and the Phone section on the second and fourth weekends.
- The serial number exchange for the 1935 contest was the same as that used in early ARRL contests. Each entrant allocated themselves a personal 3-digit cypher, say 456, and then added three zeros for their first QSO, i.e. 456000. The other station in the first QSO would send a similar 6-digit number, say 222000. For the 2nd QSO the first 3 figures of the received number, 222, take the place of 000 in the original number, making 456222 the serial number to be sent, and so on

throughout the contest.

In 1936 and 1937 only RST signal reports had to be exchanged. In 1938 the contest adopted the format we use today, i.e. RST plus QSO serial number, although this reverted to the 1935 format for the 1948 and 1949 contests.

- The contest was originally designed to promote contacts between VK/ZL and the rest of the world. In 1962 the contest was expanded to Oceania countries outside VK and ZL and the name was changed accordingly to the 'VK-ZL-Oceania DX Contest'.
- Contacts were not permitted within and between VK and ZL during the early years of the contest. The rules to permit such contacts were gradually introduced from 1969 onwards, with 1969 rules allowing contacts on 80M between VK and ZL but not within VK and ZL.