

CLE ORIGINS – HOW IT ALL BEGAN

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IT WAS 20 YEARS AGO TODAY – WELL ALMOST.....

Apologies to the Beatles for nicking a part of one of their song titles, but somehow it seemed appropriate in this case. Just where do the years go, it is hard to believe that 20 years have passed since we first started the Co-ordinated Listening events, and yet we have just held our 265th - something that none of us would ever have imagined back in 2001, when we were still feeling our way about and trying out new things. Thankfully, there are still a few of us around who were involved in those early experimental events, and for the benefit of newer members a little history on how it all started might be of interest. It is important that these events are recorded, and this information will be added to the 'NDB List Origins' article that I have placed on the NDB List website explaining how the list first came into being back in the late 1990s. Since many of the list founders are getting on a bit now this all needs to be written down and recorded while we can still remember it.

So how did the CLEs come about then, well as with so many things it sort of evolved thanks to various suggestions from members, and even prior to the very first CLE, or 'CME' (Co-ordinated Monitoring Event) as it was originally called, but quickly renamed after member **Phil Atchley** in California rightly pointed out that was the term used for Coronal Mass Ejections, and somewhat confusing - there had been some similar types of things prior to our adoption of these projects, and current member **William G. Buchanan** in Italy had arranged an event called '**William's Marine NDB Survey**' before the NDB List had even begun, and when we were still just a small column in 'Medium Wave News', the Medium Wave Circle's newsletter, and all participants had received a nice certificate produced by William for taking part in this event. Just prior to CME01, our Guernsey member, **Lionel Roithmeir**, who also ran the Marinecomms group, had suggested a common monitoring of the 2182 kHz calling channel, which proved to be popular with members and was a lot of fun, and the NDB List had tried out a period of concentrated monitoring in 1999 when members had been invited to monitor a block of frequencies from 0000 to 0400 utc, followed by a similar daytime survey. These events proved to be quite informative about what was active, but with listeners all over the world it was not easy to coordinate things over such a short period, but it did at least show that there was a demand for such events.

By 2001 the group had been in existence for just over 2 years and all sorts of interesting ideas were being introduced, such as the **CLWSU** which later went on to become the mighty **Rxx** system, and the **NDB Awards Scheme**, both introduced by **Andy Robins** from Kalamazoo, and which went on to take on a life of their own. Back then the internet was still new, with most people still using dial up, and sharing e-mails in real time was allowing us to try out things that had never been possible before, and it was an exciting time for all. Sadly, most of the Marine NDBs had been closed in 1999, but there were still lots of the Aeronautical types around, and even new ones still appearing at regular intervals, and we were all looking for interesting new challenges to try out at that time. CLE001 (I will use the term CLE rather than CME to avoid confusion) had come about following a thread on the list, and from suggestions from **Bill Hohnstein** and Andy for a coordinated monitoring event of some kind. I have dug out Andy's mail from the archives, which shows how we were thinking about things back then. I noted Andy's comment about having been involved in some similar types of shortwave broadcast listening events back in the 1970s, which just goes to show that most good ideas will eventually get recycled by someone, which in this case was the NDB List. I thought it worth posting Andy's message below, as this does show how the original format came into being:

From Andy, dated Tuesday 16th of January 2001:

"Being very new to the list, I make the following suggestion with some trepidation, but here goes:

Bill (K0HA) and Alan (G4TMV) have suggested a coordinated monitoring event in which all interested listen to a set of frequencies during a given day and time period. I was involved in several events like this back in the late 1970's while I was a shortwave broadcast DXer and they were a lot of fun.

I assume that weekends are best for most people. So, I offer the following proposal:

Monitor 190-350 kHz from 2300 UTC 19 January to 2300 UTC 20 January, and 350-535 kHz from 2300 20 January to 2300 21 January. This should give everyone a good shot at DX no matter where they're located. With a little help from "Mr. Doughnut," we should be able to catch some interesting beacons.

The only other "rule" I would propose is that those who wish to participate should report ALL beacons heard, even 24-hour local "pests". One person's nuisance is another's rare DX.

Unless there are objections, I will follow the above and send the results to the list ASAP. I hope others will do so too. I think we'll all have a lot of fun and add a few to our logbooks.

Regards,

*Andy Robins KB8QGF
Kalamazoo, Michigan USA*

Bill followed this up by suggesting that a much narrower frequency range should be monitored, as one cannot give a detailed study of such a large range of frequencies during a short period. Eventually we settled on a 20 kHz range covering 380 to 400 kHz, and over a two-day period, thanks to another useful suggestion by **Michael Oexner** who said:

"My suggestion: pick two consecutive days on a weekend, e.g. Friday and Saturday or Saturday and Sunday. Agree on a relatively narrow frequency segment, say 370 to 400 kHz (or any other). Agree on a common time to listen - two hours in a row should be possible even for the casual listeners or those of us who have to take care of a family and are not looking for a divorce :-). Compare the results obtained on day 1 with the results of day 2. Does this make sense? I hope so :-). If we're having fun with this we could try other, more elaborate schemes."

So, as you can see, the basis for the format for the current CLEs was pretty much formed by then, and 11 members took part in this 'experimental' event, which was then followed up 2 weeks later by CLE002, which covered the frequency range 325 to 335 kHz and ran from the 3rd to the 4th of February 2001. The general conclusion was that it had been a lot of fun, but what made it work and ensured that it would continue to run on a regular basis rather than just fizzle out after a few events, was the arrival on the scene of our future CLE Co-ordinator **Brian Keyte**, who having read the various comments after the trial had said:

"I've been thinking about how the results from co-ordinated monitoring events could be put together. It seems to me that one interesting (useful?) way of displaying them would be along the lines of a table. I have 'made one up' below. Down the left hand side are all beacons received during the event, in 'country order' (here, for Europe, going round from Finland to Ireland). Across the top are all the reporters' initials, again in the same 'country order'. The numbers in the table are the time UTC in hh (ignoring minutes) when that beacon was first logged by that reporter. For example reporter 'cd' in Germany first logged beacon RW on 392 kHz at 17:-- UTC. I'm assuming here that this event started for Europe at say 16:00 UTC and ended at say 08:00 next morning (probably most listeners would have two or three listening sessions only). "

Brian had enclosed a table made up from the European results, and continued with:

"I've only dropped in a few made up 'results' - in practice there would be a lot more beacons, reporters and results. If the number of reporters were not too many, all of them could be shown across the page

of an email like this if everyone can view this Rich Text format OK (so no need for attachments). I'm assuming that States-side results would be dealt with separately from Europe, because of the relatively small overlap. The headings could be repeated so that they didn't page off screen after about 30 beacons. Limiting to a 10 or 20 kHz band would keep the table to a manageable size (as well as allowing the listening to be more concentrated). Showing the results this way easily allows you to see when beacons/countries were first received at about what times and from where, which beacons were easiest to receive, etc.

Of course it would be hopelessly tedious to compile a real table manually. However, if the reporters all followed the same simple log convention such as - Frequency, then Call, then Time, each separated by one or more spaces, followed by anything you liked - it would be fairly easy to copy them all into a database, from which the table (and other things) could be produced without too much manual effort."

On Monday 29th of January another post from Brian showed how much thought he had been giving to how the results could be presented, and I have pasted his full message below, which explains this very well:

"Hi all

You may remember that I recently floated the possibility of combining the logs together after a CME and I gave a made-up example of how a summary table of all the results might look (many thanks for your States-side comments, Andrew).

Since then I've had a go at producing a 'real' table from the trial Event on 20/21 January. I imported the logs of Alan, Kathleen, Roger and myself into my Access database and then combined them together to get a table showing when each NDB had been received by each reporter. Alan, Kathleen and Roger have commented helpfully on the initial results and I'd now like to invite your reactions too - good and bad!

Ideally I'd prefer to show the table of results within a normal 'PlainText;' email, but that is causing some problems which might be hard to solve. Alternatives that I have tried are the use of HTML ('Rich Text') and of Excel. I have attached the Excel file of results to this email but I don't know whether most of us can view that. I'm also sending you, as the separate email, the HTML version, which might cause difficulty for some, according to the email software that they use or how it is set up. (It also seems to be MUCH bigger than the Excel-attached version).

It would be good if you could say which (if any) forms of the table can be viewed OK by you. Also please give any views you have on combining CME results in this way, or on how it could be improved.

The process takes the logs as posted to the List - it does not involve my re-typing anything, unless I need to add details of any NDBs that are not already in my database. The European-side logs for the first (trial) CME were predominantly from the British Isles, but it would be really interesting if future events included several logs from around mainland Europe too.

If it's thought worthwhile, I'd be happy to have another go at combining the results from a second CME (maybe one on 3/4 Feb if that's not too soon to get properly organised) hopefully with lots of us taking part. I wouldn't be able to include the State-side logs - if there's enough interest, we could continue to try out the idea in Europe and it could be extended later if successful (probably as separate tables, because there is so little overlap on reception from opposite sides of the Pond).

This was then followed up by a table of logs showing the results in a more familiar format, and these can be found on the CLE Archive page of the NDB List website.

Brian also did the same with the results of CLE002, but it was during CLE003 that things really took off, and by then I'd invited Brian to become our CLE Co-ordinator (if only he'd known how much work he was in for), and below is my posting of the 18th of February 2001 announcing this:

"The first two CLE's (Co-ordinated Listening Events for our newer members) seemed to go off very well, and a lot of lessons were learned. We now feel ready to make this a regular event, and with a properly scheduled plan and set times and frequencies. To make these easier to plan I thought it would be a good idea to have one person in charge of planning and coordination. I am pleased to say that Brian Keyte has kindly agreed to take on this role for us, and I will leave it Brian to explain his plans, and how this will now work.

Thanks to everyone who has supported the two 'trial' events, and I'm sure that everyone will give lots of support to Brian and the forthcoming CLEs, and if you haven't already participated in one of these before why not try joining in the next one, it's a lot of fun.

Thanks Brian, and over to you....."

Here was Brian's first post in his new role showing the details of CLE003, which was the first to have the format that we all know so well now, and to have the results for all parts of the world included, and this is the reason that we are celebrating CLE003 as the 'official' start of the project rather than CLE001 & CLE002:

Date: Wed, 21 Feb 2001 12:55:38 -0000

Hi all

Our third 'CLE' is this weekend. Here are the final details:

All Members are invited to email to the List their log of NDB reception. We shall be listening from 335 kHz to 344.9 kHz starting midday on Friday 23rd (local time) and ending midday on Sunday 25th (local time). Please make sure that times and dates are all in UTC.

Why not join in, even if you can only spare an hour or so during the 48 hours? It doesn't matter how many - or how few - NDBs you hear and if one of your 'favourite' local NDBs is in the range it will be of interest too. (It's an Event not a Contest!).

I'm hoping to produce the charts, combining everyone's logs, as I did in the second trial and this time I MIGHT be able to do it (separately) for the North America Members as well. To allow easy input from logs without any re-typing here, it would help me a lot if we could all show first, on each line:

DATE(or just day no.), UTC, kHz, then CALL.

However if this is difficult, don't worry - just post your log as usual!

(Here's the reason: The position of these items - as separated by blanks, or maybe dashes, tabs, etc. - on a reporter's log really needs to be predictable. Combining the logs afterwards to produce the various charts would get difficult to handle if, for example, LOCATION were shown before one or more of these. This is because Locations can have one, two or more words - if UTC came after Location, the UTC entries would seem to jump about from line to line (maybe 6th word - 8th word, - 6th word - 7th word, etc.).

After DATE, UTC, kHz, then CALL, it doesn't matter what follows, or in what order it is, as I don't normally need to pick up other details. However continuing to put LOCATION after CALL would help a bit, especially for the Stateside logs.

Please try and post your log to the List by Wednesday 28th at 09:00 UTC - I'll need to finish preparing the combined results charts then and they should be with you by that afternoon.

Our first 'recognisable' CLE (335 – 344.9 kHz), later labelled CLE003, had a grand total of 23 of us taking part with good participation from North America too, and 196 different NDBs were logged with the 'Combined Results' looking a bit like our present ones. Members who took part in the event were:

Michael Oexner, Roschbach, Germany; **Morris Sorensen**, Winnipeg, Canada; **Jean Jacquemin**, Merville, France; **Rodney Valdron**, Canada; **Pat Vignoud**, SE France; **Phil Atchley**, Merced, Central CA, USA; **Torre Ekblom**, Nr Helsinki, Finland; **Dave Tomasko**, Chicago, USA; **Lionel Roithmeir**, Guernsey; **Andrew Robins**, Kalamazoo; **Alan Gale**, Lancashire, UK; **Doug Klein**, Hastings, USA; **Brian Keyte**, mid Surrey, UK, **Bill Hohnstein**, Nr Lincoln, USA; **Kathleen Redding**, NE London, UK; **Bob Parsons**, Gloucester City, USA; **Mike Trodd**, W. Sussex, UK; **Jack Woods**, Oregon, USA; **Robert Connolly**, Kilkeel, Northern Ireland; **Chris Steele**, while at Ft Worth, USA; **Costas Krallis**, Athens, Greece; **Roger Caird**, Dublin, Ireland and **Bo Nensen**, Ornskoldsvik, Sweden.

And the rest, as they say, is history, but none of this would have been possible, and I doubt that the events would have become so well established and as popular as they have without our Coordinator Brian stepping forward to take on the job, and of course producing his trusty 'combine harvester' to compile all the many logs. This task is now done with the newer combine harvester recently produced by able assistant **Joachim Rabe**, and which speeds up the task of preparing the results greatly. From the start the CLEs were never designed to be like competitions, and instead we wanted anyone, regardless of skill level, to feel able to participate, and any contributions, however small, were always helpful as it helped us to build up a bigger picture of which beacons were still active, and as we all know only too well, one person's 'local pest' is often another person's prime DX target.

I could add much more about the 265 CLEs that we've had to date, but I'll just say that our aim of getting people out of their comfort zone by offering them challenges and forcing them to listen in ways that they wouldn't normally do, such as our 'Barn Door' CLEs using very wide filters, and 'Noah's Ark' and 'Flight' and 'Country' challenges have done just that, and whilst at times this might feel like the events are put together by cruel torturers, afterwards we all feel the benefit of being challenged in this way, and the result is often the logging of beacons that we otherwise may have missed. The CLEs are open to everyone, whether beginner or veteran, and all are welcome to take part, even if it is just for a short session, and you don't even have to be a NDB list member to join in, anyone can, just check out the details on our CLE pages at: <https://www.ndblist.info/cle.htm>