

DXtreme Reception Log

By Loyd Van Horn W4LVH (Graphics courtesy author)

Like so many of you, when I first began making my way into the world of DX, the most important part of my shack, next to the radio and antennas of course, was my trusty logbook. This station-by-station journal, chronicling each moment in time when a bit of DX was captured, has always reserved a special place on my DX station bookshelf.

Since I first put pen to paper with my first DX catch, everything has changed thanks to the Internet. We went from dial-up modems to high-speed wireless broadband in nearly the blink of an eye. There is more information at a DXer's disposal than ever before and no source has seen a bigger transformation than the logbook.

Now, computerized logbooks are nothing new as they have been around for years. From basic spreadsheets to fancy databases, DXers have been entering their catches with a keyboard for decades. However, thanks to the Internet, this generation of logbooks come with more features, customization and enhancements than my spiral-notebook logbook could ever even dream of. One such logbook is DXtreme Reception Log and it is a doozy.

❖ Out of the Box

You can order this program to be delivered to you in a CD, but I chose the download method. Once you purchase the software (\$90 U.S. for new customers to download, a little bit more for CD by mail, less for upgrades from previous versions), they'll send you an email with the download link and instructions within a few hours. The down-

load didn't take a long time with my Internet connection, but there is a chart that shows typical download times for the 54 MB file to download, so you can estimate the time for your connection.

Installation was pretty easy and standard. This is a Windows-based program for XP users or higher. No Macintosh version is available at this time.

The overall user interface is pretty simple. There is a menu of options at the top of the screen that allows you to either access information or setup the program to your preferences. Anyone with any experience using Windows-based programs, especially DX-related programs such as DX Atlas, should have no problem getting adjusted to the interface. The interface for logging catches is extremely intuitive.

How you interact with DXtreme Reception Log is really going to depend a lot on what you are logging. During my testing, I have been using it to log AM, FM, shortwave and amateur radio DX just to get a sense of what the program can offer for each of these. I found certain features are more useful for certain types of logging than others. The biggest factor in how much you get out of DXtreme is in what you put into customizing it.

Before I begin the performance test, there is a matter of getting setup. To begin with, I went to Tools>Preferences (or you can hit the 'F6' hotkey) and did a basic setup. This included entering my name, address, email address, and basic contact information. From there, you can go through each of the tabs and customize how you will be interacting with DXtreme and how it will report

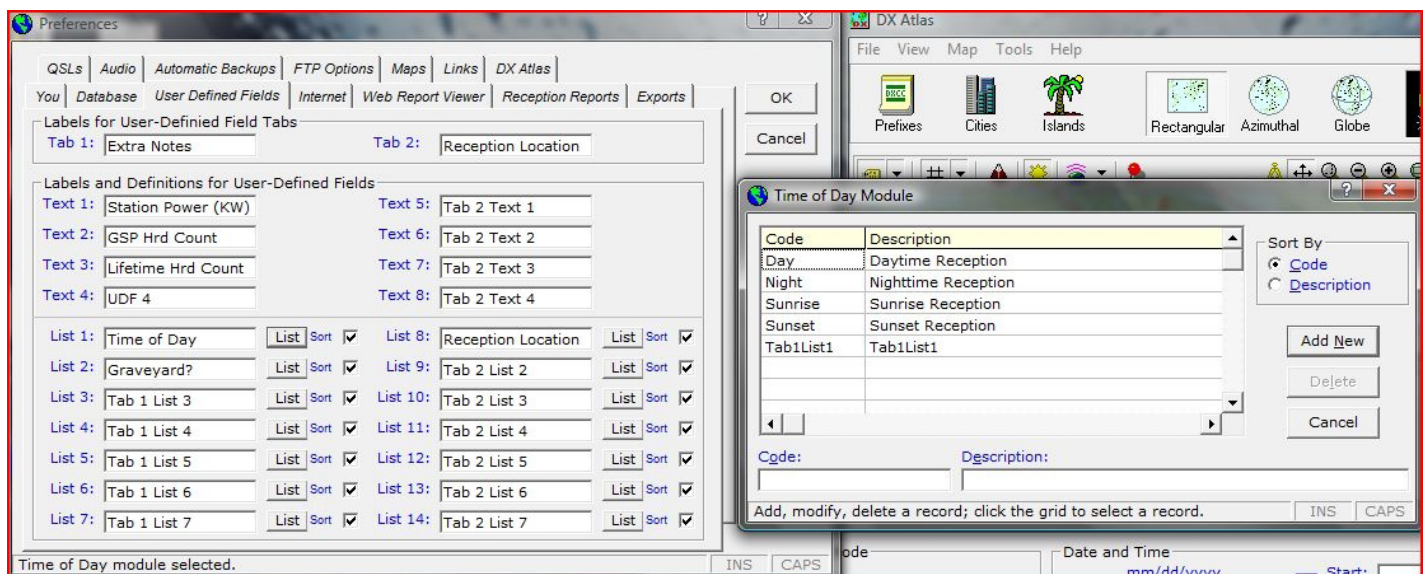
information to you. One example is that for AM DX, I turned off tracking CQ zones. Obviously, when I am tracking my ham radio contacts, this feature will be turned back on.

My absolute favorite part of DXtreme is the user-defined fields. I like to get very granular with the statistics that I track in regards to my DX. I don't want to know just how many stations I have heard from one state or on one frequency, but how many daytime versus nighttime, how many during sunrise or sunset periods, where I was when I heard it (for separating my lifetime contacts), what the transmitter power was during reception, etc. These are all fields that I was able to do with the user-defined fields' setup.

So, for an example, under the user-defined fields 'tab 1' I have setup a pick-list for 'time of day.' From here, I have created options called daytime, nighttime, sunrise and sunset. Whenever I log a new station, I not only enter my time on the main logging page, but also the time of day the station was logged. This will come in very handy when we discuss reports later.

Before you begin using DXtreme, take a look at the information you are currently tracking with your current logbook and see if you have any user-defined fields you need to create. The process is very easy and well-documented and explained in the 'Information Center' accessible through the 'Help' menu.

In addition to the user-defined fields, the other very important setup step you will want to take can be found under the 'modules' menu. Here, you will set up things like what rig and antennas you are using, you can set up the various



classes of logs you will be creating (BCB, FM, TV, ham radio, pirate radio, Utes, etc...).

One note here, I found that when setting up most of these 'modules,' you are able to define one of the options in a given module to be the "default." As such, I have set a default rig, antenna, class and a few others. By setting a default, this doesn't mean you can't change the selection if need be, it just automatically populates that option in your logbook entry, if that is the option that will be used the most.

Not all modules can have a default option, though. One of the more surprising (and a bit irritating during my testing) was the country module. As an AM DXer, I am most likely going to be logging primarily stations in my own country, which in this case is the United States. Having to enter that the station is in the United States every time I log an AM station became a bit tedious after a lengthy DX session. There are other fields that would be nice to be able to select a 'default' entry for, and will bring those up in the testing phase below.

My main mode of operation for this test is going to be AM DX. This is because the same approach for entering and tracking information you use for AM DX can be applied to most other modes as well. For the purposes of this review, I'm testing the DXtreme Reception Log - Advanced Edition version 7.0, but there is also the DXtreme Station Log - Multimedia Edition that is more ham-radio centered.

❖ Performance Test

I turned on my ICOM R-72 and began my session. DXtreme Reception Log - Advanced Edition is able to do a moderate bit of rig control by integrating with Omni-Rig and Ham Radio Deluxe (version 5 or higher) if you have a rig interface. As such, fields like frequency and mode can automatically populate into your log entry from your receiver or transceiver. I am not currently running any interface between the ICOM and my computer, so I was unable to test this feature.

As I went through the AM broadcast band, logging new stations, I did a side-by-side comparison of entering the information into my old spiral logbook and typing it into DXtreme. I wanted to get a feel for how easy entering information was into the program. My guess was that my handwritten log would be considerably easier. I was actually pretty surprised.

For instance: one of the stations I logged was WWWC - 1240 kHz in Wilkesboro, North Carolina. Once I turned to the frequency and was waiting to hear station ID, I started entering information such as country (still would like to see this be a field that can have a 'default' setting), day, time, time of day, reception location and my comments (yes, there is a large comments field on a separate tab. Outstanding!) By the time I heard the station slogan and call letters, all I had to do was complete my notes and add the ending time.

Entering the information was no more cumbersome than my handwritten log. On the contrary, it was easier, I don't have to later decipher my nearly unintelligible handwriting, and I have much more room to enter comments than my handwritten log has.

There are fields when entering logs for signal

quality, remarks (I have used this to great success for things like "fighting with co-channel splatter from....").

One of the cooler features, at least in potential, is the ability of the log to tell you the distance of the logged station from your location. As an AM DXer, though, I found this feature not nearly as user-friendly to take advantage of. The distance is calculated by what is entered in the 'transmitter site' field, which is where the 'city' would go for AM DXers. It only calculates the actual distance if the transmitter site you are entering is added to the available pick list in the 'modules' menu. So, my Wilkesboro catch doesn't have a distance without adding it manually, but Nashville, Tennessee, for example, comes with the program as a stock site, so a station logged there does show the distance.

This doesn't make it difficult to enter information; it just feels like a great feature that I would love to take advantage of, if I had more time to enter every city I log into the module as well.

Some of the other features I found interesting and even quite usable were the reception report builder and verification tab (to track verified stations), the QSL imager (get a QSL back? Scan it and keep an image of it in your logbook!), and the mapping interfaces (for tracking things like CQ Zones, grid squares and DXCC entities for ham radio logging. There is also a handy solar propagation interface, for space weather information including solar flux, A-index and K-index values, directly from the logbook. Here is a tip: to close the window that opens with this information, just hit your "ESC" key.

Overall, the work flow for entering and tracking information is quite easy and accessible to even the most computer-befuddled individual. If you just need the basics, DXtreme will pass that test with flying colors. If you are the type of DXer, though, that needs more enhancements,

MT RATING: 4 1/2 STARS



Quality - 5 out of 5 stars - This thing appears bullet-proof. No lock-ups or error messages during use so far.

Performance - 4 out of 5 stars - Lots of customization options, but the things you can't customize stick out. Entering logs is just as easy as a handwritten log, if not more so.

Features - 5 out of 5 stars - Reports, rig control, information on solar conditions, customization just about everywhere. Not much lacking in this department.

Design/Appearance - 4 out of 5 stars - It is a log book, not much you can do here to make it pretty. But it is well laid out and the various places you would need to access are easily found and easy to interact with.

Overall - 4.5 out of 5 stars - I will put it this way, I am finally ready to turn in my old trusty notebook log for a copy of DXtreme. After nearly 25 years of DXing, I can't believe I am actually saying that. That is how great this program really is.

Available: www.dxtreme.com

\$89.95 for the download for new users, \$93.95 for North American mail delivery of the new users CD, \$97.95 for the new user CD delivered outside of North America.

DXtreme has plenty here to keep you happy and your mouse and keyboard busy.

As I mentioned earlier, I am a report junkie. I used to sit for hours, counting manually every contact on a hand-drawn chart that showed every statistical category I wanted to track. DXtreme takes care of that for me!

There is a robust reporting package in DXtreme. In a matter of seconds, I can run exportable reports that will show me performance and data from any field that can be tracked in my log entries. I can tell you how many graveyard stations I have logged on 1230 kHz from the state of Georgia. I can tell you how many sunset DX stations I have logged on 1580 kHz during the month of October. If you have entered it into your log, the report package has a way to manipulate the data to show you just about anything you want.

For amateur radio operators, DXtreme has a wealth of features. In addition to your maps, you can track your various modes including all of your digital modes and detailed statistics for whatever band you want to track information in.

❖ The Final Word

There are a ton of features in this program, more than I have the space to discuss here. From an ease of operation standpoint, from the plethora of customization options and features available, not to mention the sheer amount of reporting and data crunching you can do once your DX session is complete, I highly recommend DXtreme to anyone who is ready to make that leap into the 21st Century. Maybe you are already using a computer logbook and you are just looking for a more reliable and robust option. Definitely give DXtreme a try.

There is still room for improvement, despite the overwhelming positives. The option to set more fields as a 'default' would be great, especially in the user-defined fields. An easier way to have the transmitter site/city distance accurately calculated would be really nice to see. Another thing I didn't mention earlier would be the ability to move fields within the log entry. As an example, it would be nice to be able to move the comments field to the main log entry, if that was preferable.

There is a tour of the advanced edition available on the DXtreme Web site. Do yourself a favor, check it out and see it for yourself. I am so glad I have added DXtreme Reception Log to my arsenal of tools in my DX shack, now if I could just find time to DX a little more!

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