

AE6Y Aruba Trip Notes March 2026 WPX SSB Contest at P49Y

ALF
4/3/26

Tuesday, March 24-Wednesday, March 25, 2026. A completely uneventful flight leaving SFO at 11 p.m. and arriving at MIA about 7:20 a.m. Although we had been reading and seeing on TV reports of very long TSA lines at some airports due to the TSA agents not being paid during the partial government shutdown, there were no lines at SFO (which uses private contractors instead of government TSA). Got a good 5 hours or so of sleep on the plane. A three-hour layover at MIA, mostly in the Admiral's Club at D15. No customs inspection in Aruba.

I'm travelling fairly light. Just one checked suitcase, the new TravelPro hard-sided. Half of it is mostly filled with the 24-inch monitor JP asked me to bring for him. It just fits inside with its carboard packaging. Amazon Basics, \$83!

Plugged in the modem in the main bedroom and the laptop hooked up to ARRIS – B45 without problems to get on the internet.

Dinner with Lissette and Lisandro at the Sushi Factory in Santa Cruz at 7 after a run from roundabout to roundabout. We would have met tomorrow, but Lissette has a fashion design course then.

Hookup:

- 1) Laptop on radio desk. K4 is on the left feeding the KPA 1500 using John's T-cable from accessory socket to both the amp and the filter controller. The K3, not used, is on the right. Using LG wide screen monitor with hdmi cable (this was the monitor that was there, not one of the old 4:3 ones that I normally have used). It works better than the older monitors, with no resolution change needed.
- 2) K4 USB on back to USB port on the laptop (without the Compaq 4 port expander). That opens ports 14 and 15 in the laptop. I set CQPWIN up for the K4 on port 14 and set the USB-PC1 Baud Rate in the Menu on the K4 to 9600. That worked for rig control right away, so I guess PC1 is the Com 14 port and perhaps PC2 is Com 15.
- 3) Heil mic to Kenwood mic adapter to front panel of K4. Mic set to front, bias on. To trip the VOX effectively, it also needed preamp of 10 db.

On 20 SSB, the power seemed odd with an indicated 10 watts driving the KPA 1500 to full output. And rotating the power knob produced uncertain results. So I did a TX gain calibrate (then did one the next day on all 5 bands). Same process as in February: first set up a coax jumper to the MFJ Tuner, using its dummy load selection from the front panel, then set the item in the Menu "TX Gain Cal via Tune" to ON; set power to 5.0 watts, hit Tune and wait a few

seconds until power stabilizes, hit TUNE again to turn off transmitting, then repeat at 50 watts. Then return the Menu setting to OFF. Need to do it for each band. The TX gain cal was 1903 before and 520 after. That led to the normal requirement of about 26 watts for 1300 watts on the amp. To bed at about 11.

Thursday, March 26, 2026. Slept till almost 8 then fooled around a bit with the radio before a breakfast of coffee and an English muffin. Set the radio TX EQ to the recommendations from trip notes from CQWW SSB 2025: the 100 and 200 sliders to minus 6 dB; the 400 to minus 4 dB, all others to plus 16 dB.

I got on the air a bit. The bands are not very open, but some EUs show up. Meanwhile I note odd behavior in the Steppir. First I tried to calibrate it by running that option on Setup. But it seemed that only certain settings worked on the three bands: 28500, min swr 1.08 at 28250; 21475, min 1.14 at 21220, and 14400 min 1.0 at 14270. Making slight adjustments like going to 180 deg. mode or using the coarse buttons would totally throw these adjustments out of whack (all measured with the AA55 using a coax jumper direct to the SteppIR feedline). Note that this seemed to clear up later – it may be that the coax jumper was being erratic (John had put a cautionary note on it).

A run at 3 pm or so from the Island Asia store to the Coral Pyramid. Not too hot – for the first time in years the car (a small Chevy Aveo) seems to lack an outdoor temp reading, but I estimate the air temp at no more than 82 or so. As usual, nary another mad dog nor Englishman in sight. Then a stop at the Burger King drive-through for a double whopper to bring back to eat at home.

Some more radio readiness, including rerecording a few messages (the program will play all 8 from the K4, and six are pre-existing, though one had been recorded over by John for another contest).

Friday, March 27, 2026. Up before 8 and had some coffee then breakfast at the Seaport Center. As usual, there was long line for the Dutch Pancake house, but the Smits and Dorlas next door had none. An “Aruban breakfast” (scrambled eggs, bacon, fruit and pastiche, with OJ and coffee) for about \$20.

Stopped to chat with JP and deliver his monitor to him, then home. Had a scare when the K4 seemed to be acting erratically, but only on 10. It would show high swr into the amp or even into the MFJ tuner-dummy load when I TX gain calibrated it. I was thinking I’d have to replace it with a K3, but then noticed that the ATU was on, on 10m only. Turning it off solved the problem. [Note on Monday after the contest, I could not recreate this problem, so it’s unresolved. Similarly once or twice the amp seemed to stay in transmit momentarily with hi SWR lights on, but hitting the AT Tune button immediately cleared that up. There’s something going on with the radio or the amp, but it’s not clear what.]

Contest Notes. Note that I have given up on the Sony recorder for notes, though it still is ok for recording the contest. I bought a very small Chinese digital recorder that works fine for notes, and I don't have to read the manual to work it, unlike the Sony. In brief, to record, turn it on and press the red button. Then press the pause button and save button to stop. Each time you start it opens a new file to play back. Use the double arrow slider control on the right side to select which file to listen to and hit play to listen. Haven't figured out a way to just go back a few seconds, which is normally very helpful in playback mode other than to restart the whole file. Here are my notes:

- 1) A brief break at 0256, almost 3 hours into the contest. I have 574 on 20, which has been fun, with the first two hours both at a 202 rate. 15 is probably also open, but with only one radio, you can't spend much time tuning around and 20 seemed to be good with a relatively clear frequency. I'm going to try 40 now. It looks a little weird, so we'll see how it goes.
- 2) At 6 hours 36 minutes, totals now are 15: one (P45A), 20: 774, all by 518 prefixes. Last hour has been back on 20 and its wide open to EU, also working U.S. but mainly EU and the pileups have been pretty easy to handle. 40 was slower than I remember from two years ago. Only about 300 QSOs on 40, not too many in EU. The band seemed to be open but just not as much activity, maybe because 20 is still open.
- 3) It's 2:37 a.m. local time and it's great to have 20 open to Europe, using the 4 el at 30 degrees or so. I found that for US, the 2 el SteppIR works better and also had several VKs and ZLs call in on the SteppIR. There's no reason to give up for the evening, but I'm tired, and always conscious that I only get 24 hours in classic mode. [Note: this is the best 20 was all weekend, so probably should have stayed on longer.]
- 4) Saturday afternoon: It's 1316 local time, 1716Z, now have a total on the air time of 12 hours 13 minutes. On 10 for the last 4 hours, the whole time on 28394. Now at 692 on 10, 210 on 15, 774 on 20 and 324 on 40 plus 3 on 80. Total is 2003 QSOs with 807 prefixes, for a score of 5.578M points. I was trying to make 2000 before stopping for food. The pileup on 10 was very interesting. I've been using the Mid-Tri, which seems better than the SteppIR, pointing to the US, aimed at 357, working well and not too noisy, along with the monobander pointed to EU at 039 degrees. I've been running a dual pile up, switching antennas back and forth every minute or two. It's been lots of fun. I'm going to take a break then do some more high band running if I can. It also worked to use both antennas at the same time, but the pileups are actually a bit smaller and thus easier to handle when kept separate by the antenna switching. No equipment problems.
- 5) It's now 2128Z, 1728 local, and we're at 1144 on 10 now mostly US as the EU propagation went away. The Mid-Tri has been set at 26 degrees, and the 10/15 at 328 degrees, and that has worked well. There's been a fair amount of noise. I'm going to take a brief break for a drink then go to 15, since there are only 210 contacts on that

band now. Total is 2455 by 888 for 7.3M points. Have been on for 14 hours 39 minutes, so less than 10 hours left.

- 6) It's now 0144Z, 2144 local time, Saturday night. 6 hours and 8 minutes left to go, so am calling it a night. At 2945 by 934 for 9.248M points. Took an hour off for dinner and then ran some on 40, then 20 and now 15. Probably better in retrospect just to have stayed on 15 till the band wore out. JP is on 15 and now has over 2000 contacts, so he is doing very well. I'm not too tired but want to leave time for 10/15 tomorrow.
- 7) Sunday morning at 1027 local time, 1427Z, and have been on 15 for almost 2 hours, now have 4 ½ hours left in the contest. The 15 meter total is now 808 and the overall total is 3180 by 998 for 10.47M points. Using the monobander at 45 degrees, and the SteppIR for east coast US, and a few CA have called in also. That has worked well. I usually can hear someone on either antenna and can switch to the stronger one. It's fun to work EU because you get more new prefixes. Just when you think you have worked all the German prefixes, up pops a new one. I'm going to take a break, as 15 has slowed down and 10 doesn't seem quite open yet. Will take an hour off and then come back.
- 8) I've been running on 15 and then 10. It's now 1505 local, 1905Z and I have one hour and 3 minutes left in the contest (probably just should have kept going, as I ended up with only 126 contacts in that last hour). Lately been on 10, with 1363 on that band now and 1045 on 15. Now at 3635 by 1042 for 12.334M points. Been using the monobander on 10 pointing NW. Conditions have been punk. Lots of QSB. Sometimes I'll hear a station but he is completely gone when he tells me the exchange. Condx are definitely worse than yesterday, and then were worse than 2024. I went out for a run and a second Ritz milkshake of the trip, then came back for my last hour. Probably not optimal for scoring but felt good to get out in the sunshine.
- 9) Well, it's over now. Last contact was a W6 on 21352 at 2205Z. I was hoping to work EU on 20 in the last hour, but it was just bedlam so I went to 15 which was better and more productive, and also yielded a few new JA prefixes.

Monday, March 30, 2026. Up before 7 after a good night's sleep, checked 3830 and sent off my own report before meeting JP and Lisandro at Huchadas's at 8:30 for a post-contest breakfast. Most people on 3830 are reporting the same thing as I experienced: worse conditions than in the previous two years, particularly on 10. I sent my log off to the Committee and the 3830 report to that site. A nice breakfast with Lisandro and JP; they did very well in the contest. JP had 11M points as a SB 15. Back to the house and off to Baby Beach circa 1:30 for a run and some sunshine. Beautiful weather all week by the way (though a bit of scattered rain over the weekend). Temp about 83 or so, breezy and sunny now.

When I got back I decided once and for all to improve some of the old bits in the shower, so went to Kooyman's to get new bath mats and a new soap holder for the shower to replace the old, rusty one. \$67 and the mats don't quite match like the old ones, but I threw the old ones

out nonetheless. Then next door to CMart for napkins and bar soap, both of which we are out of.

For dinner I had made a reservation at the new churrascaria restaurant, Picanha, in Wayaca just south of the airport. It's visible from the main road in the newish shopping center on the right side of the road before you hit the airport roundabout. There were only a few patrons there, but we had a nice meal. Cris thinks it is Columbian churrascaria. Unlike the larger places, Amazonas and Texas do Brasil, in the hotel areas, you order specific meat skewers (we all had "Mix Deluxe", which included one shrimp also). In the Brazilian ones they keep coming around with different meat skewers, but presumably that is only possible in a large establishment. The food was good but there was a lot of traffic noise (we sat outside on the terrace facing the main highway), though it had mostly tapered off by 9 when we left.

Back home and unplugged the antennas and amps, to safeguard the station before John's arrival in two months.

Tuesday, March 31, 2026. Up at 7 and out for a run. It's rained overnight and the path is wet, but drying rapidly. There was a 10-minute wait at the roundabout. I was going to run at Marina Pirata for old time's sake, but took the roundabout to roundabout path instead in light of the traffic. Unlike midday, in the morning there are a number of walkers on the path. Many smile and say, "bon dia." Put out the trash container for Tuesday trash pickup. Cleaned up the place and worked on these notes before leaving for the airport at about noon.

Report as sent to 3830 reflector

Call: P49Y
Operator(s): AE6Y
Station: P49Y

Class: SOAB HP
Class Overlay: Unassisted Classic
QTH: Aruba
Operating Time (hrs): 24
Location: South America

Summary:
Band QSOs
160:
80: 3
40: 378
20: 880
15: 1120
10: 1350
Total: 3731 Prefixes: 1059

Total Score 12,938,272

Club: Northern California Contest Club

Comments:

This was a reprise of my Classic entry two years ago in this contest, but with about 300 fewer QSOs and commensurately lower score. Conditions were worse, particularly on 10 and 15 (for example my average hourly QSO rates in 2024 were 178 and 173 on 10 and 15, and this year 169 and 144). These two bands had shorter EU openings than before. We also seem to have developed some man-made noise sources that are annoying and hurt the reception of weaker stations.

But this is always a fun and very egalitarian contest with high scores coming from all around the world, including from this island. Congratulations to locals who are excited about contesting and enjoyed single-band operations: P45A (Jean-Pierre), P43K (Marvin), and P43L (Lisandro). Lots of phone participation from Aruba this year!

Thanks to everyone for the Qs. And particular thanks to co-owner John, W6LD, P40L, for all his work on the house and the station, along with Ed, W0YK, P49X. John had done a bunch of work just before the contest when he was here for ARRL SSB (assisted by WE9V), including repairs to our beverage system (not used much in this contest, as 40 seemed to be even more of a zoo than usual).

Thanks also, as always, to JP, P43A, and Cris, P43C for all their house maintenance.

More details will be on our website at www.arubaqth.com.
73, Andy, AE6Y, P49Y.

Station (all towers on a 100x100' lot):

Rohn 45 tower (66'): Single boom 2-element shortened 40m interlaced with 4-element 20m (68') (JK2040, long-boom version); 2 el. SteppIR at 35 feet.

North Rohn 25 tower (56'): Single boom 5-element 15 interlaced with 6-element 10 (58') (JK1015 configured for dual feed)

South Rohn 25 tower (45.5'): Tri-bander (JK Mid-Tri)

Receiving antennas: 4 Beverages controlled by K9AY 2x8
 switchbox: JA/West-US (800'), East US (500'), EU (800') and East-
 West (AF and OC) (350')

Rig: K4D
 Amplifier: KPA1500
 Logging: CQPWIN ver. 15.0

	RATES PER BAND						OVERALL
	10	15	20	40	80	160	
Hrs	8:04	7:48	5:14	2:50	0:04	--	23:59
Q/H	169	144	169	133	44	--	156
P/H	497	427	498	790	269	--	509
QSOs	10	15	20	40	80	160	Total
US	856	641	569	240	2	0	2308 (61.37%)
VE	48	57	55	17	1	0	178 (4.73%)
NA	10	8	10	12	0	0	40 (1.06%)
AF	5	5	1	1	0	0	12 (0.32%)
JA	0	17	0	0	0	0	17 (0.45%)
AS	8	19	14	3	0	0	44 (1.17%)
EU	404	365	211	97	0	0	1077 (28.64%)
OC	9	6	8	2	0	0	25 (0.66%)
SA	21	12	17	7	0	0	57 (1.52%)