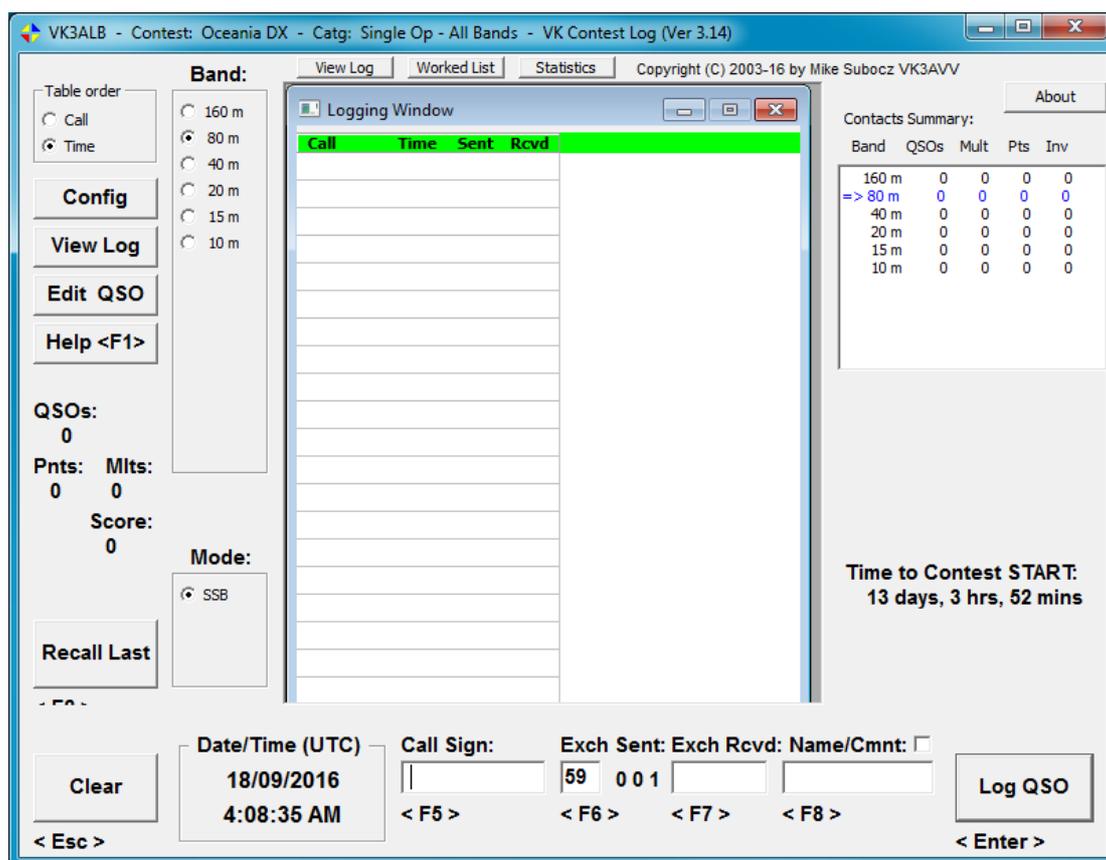


VKCL Logging Program



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Overview of VKCL

What is VKCL?

VKCL (VK Contest Log) is a logging program produced in Australia by Mike Subocz VK3AVV to cater specifically for Australian radio contests but with due consideration to a number of the bigger international contests. It produces a number of different log formats including Cabrillo which is a bare bones logging format becoming popular with many contest managers.

Where do you get VKCL?

VKCL is freely available on the internet at <http://www.mnds.com.au/vkcl/>
The program is quite mature and has been used by many people in various contests with great success. Download and installation is quite simple and the program has a very good help pages included.

Latest version

It is important to be sure you have downloaded and tested the latest version of VKCL well before you start your contest. Contest rules change all the time and sometimes an addition to the program may have unintended consequences. Check the VKCL website a couple of weeks out from the contest and if there is a new version download it and test it well ahead of time.

Getting Help

The **Help Pages (F1)** in VKCL are very, very good. As you install VKCL you will be reminded that trying to learn all the features by trial and error will take you much longer than referring to the Help Pages. Whilst the program is quite intuitive you will definitely benefit from reading the **Help Pages (F1)**. A real amateur **DOES** read the manual because he knows it will help him learn.

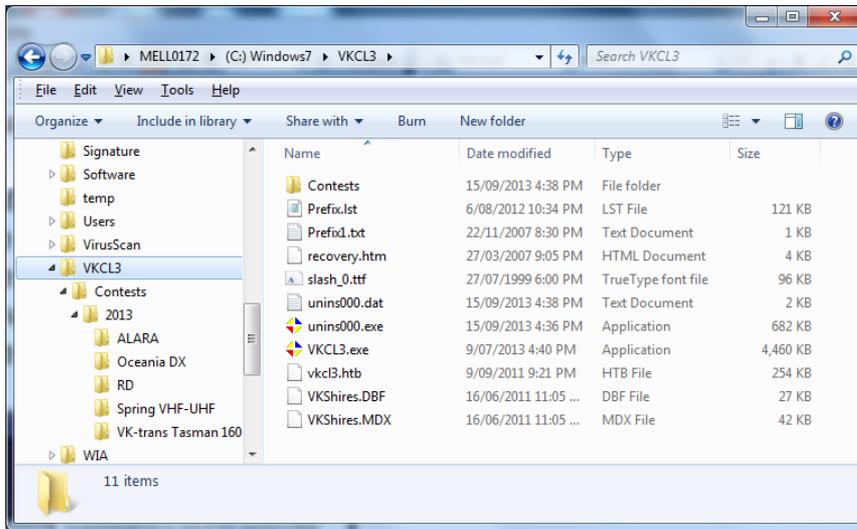
Connecting VKCL to your radio

VKCL can be used with third party program called Omni-Rig to read band and frequency data from your radio. It is important to understand that VKCL does not control the radio, only read information from it. Additionally, it is not mandatory to interface VKCL to your radio. VKCL will work just fine without any connection to your radio. Obviously, there are many radios and many ways to interface to them. More information on how to connect VKCL to radio can be found in the **Help Pages (F1)** and from the documentation for Omni-Rig. You can find Omni-Rig at <http://www.dxatlas.com/OmniRig/>.

Installation & Configuration

Installation

VKCL works equally well on Windows XP and Windows 7. Installation is straight forward and unless you have any specific reason to change it VKCL will install itself in **C:\VKCL3** on your computer. It makes minimal changes to the registry and is easy to uninstall if you make a mistake or no longer want to use it. There is no need to uninstall a previous version unless you are instructed to do so by a new VKCL installer. Once you start the installer just accept all the default settings and continue to the finish.

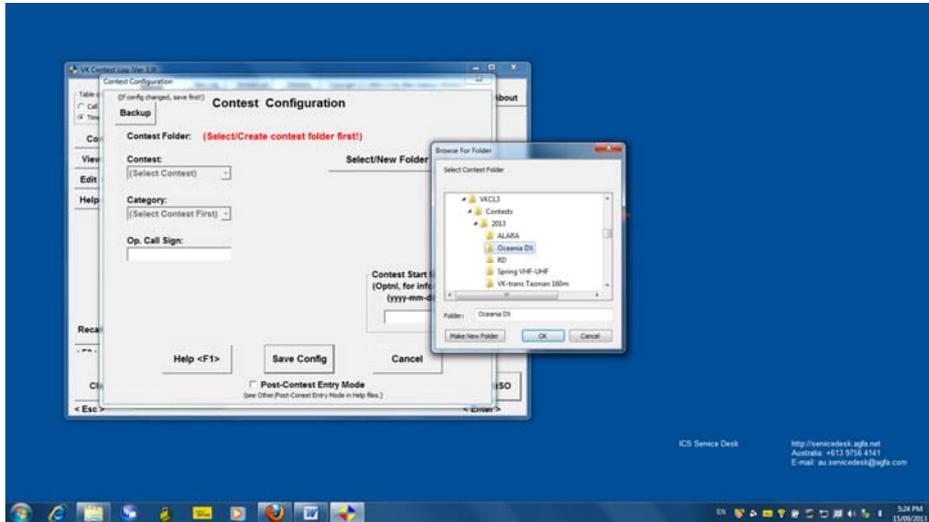


Above you can see a fresh installation of VKCL on a Windows 7 computer. It's the same on a computer running Windows XP. It is important to know where VKCL is installed so you can find your log files once the contest is complete. Note that the installer makes a folder hierarchy which includes the main VK contests.

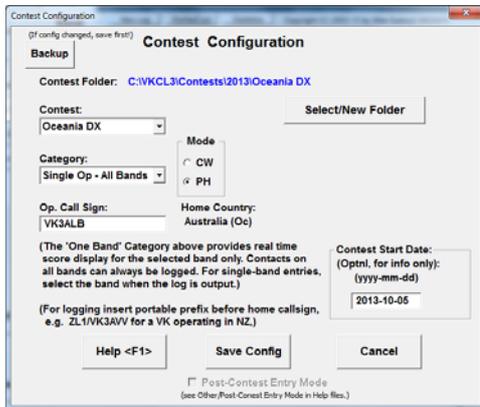
Remember VKCL and all log files can be found in **C:\VKCL3**.

Configuration

Once you've installed VKCL there are a couple of things you need to setup before you're ready to go.



Click **Config**, **Select/New Folder** then click **Save Config** to select your working folder. If you make a mistake you can change it later.



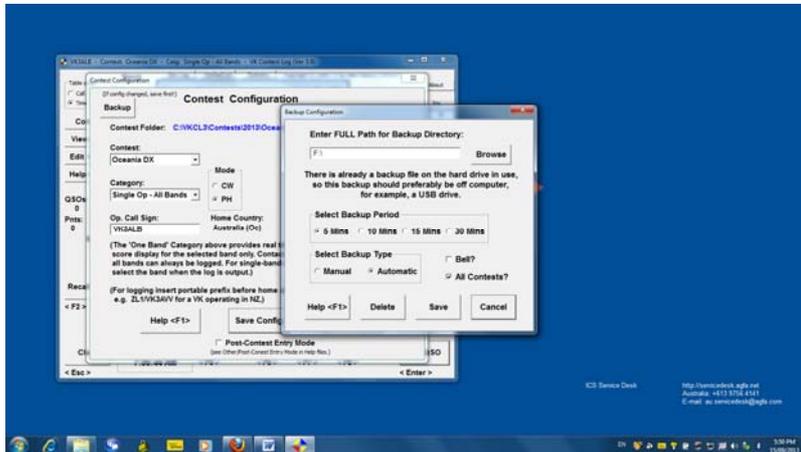
Then select your contest and category, add your call sign, enter the **Contest Start Date** and click **Save Config**.

Adding the start date is good practice as it enables a countdown clock on the main window in VKCL. It makes it really easy to know when the contest starts and when the contest is over.

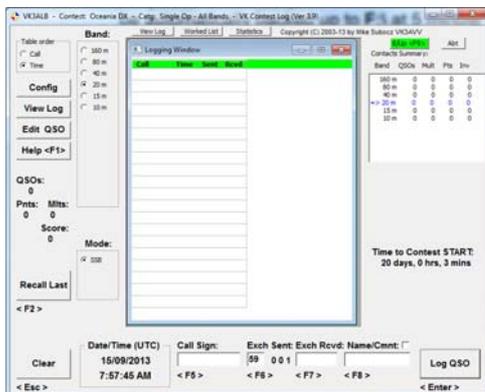
All you have to do is make sure your PC clock is set within a minute of the correct time and VKCL will do the rest. Check your PC time zone and make sure it's correct as VKCL takes the time zone into consideration when calculating UTC.

Backup

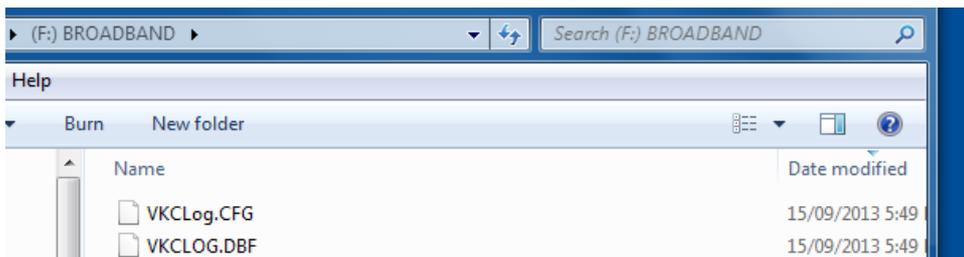
The last thing to do is to setup backups. It's best to back up your log files to a physical device that does not also contain C:\. If you have a second disk in your PC that will be fine otherwise an external device such as a USB thumb drive will be required.



From the **Config** window, click **Backup** and set your backup policy including the path to the backup disk. In this example the backups for all contests will be automatically backed up to **F:** at 5 minute intervals. Click on **Save**.



Finally, plug in your backup device then click on the **B/Up <F9>** button on the main page to start the backups. It should turn green to indicate backups are in progress. Check your backup device to make sure the backup files are there.



Using VKCL

Operation

VKCL is reasonably intuitive and after an hour or so working with it most operators will be comfortable with the way it works. Remember, the **Help Pages (F1)** are very good and will answer most questions regarding VKCL.

Logging speed

Some operators when confronted with the requirement to use computer logging may lament that “I’m no good with computers, I’m too slow, I can’t type, I’ll hold everyone up” etc, etc.

Operating a radio and a PC can reduce the contact throughput and those that are used to filling out hundreds of contacts on paper logs will tell you that the same throughput cannot be achieved with a PC. It’s true that at high contact rates a casual operator might not keep up with a seasoned contester writing in pages of logs but that doesn’t mean that the casual operator can’t become proficient at using the keyboard while talking on the radio. Like anything, acquiring these skills requires time and dedication but the return on investment can be great. A little bit of discipline and practice in the days or weeks before the contest will help the casual operator increase their logging speed.

Remember - Most of the contacts you make will be with operators battling their way around the keyboard too. Like the two blokes being chased by a lion, you don’t have to be faster than the lion, just faster than the other bloke. The same theory goes for contest logging.

HINT – A good quality full sized keyboard with **numeric keypad** is a real advantage over a laptop keyboard. Steer away from ½ or ¾ sized keyboards.

Choices during logging

Two fields in your log will not affect the outcome of your score but how you fill one of them can start heated discussions between amateurs.

Arguably, your signal report to the other station should be correct although many operators always give a default 5x9 report during contests to increase the contact rate.

The name/comment field is not a mandatory field but some operators like to note the name and perhaps the location of stations.

You will need to decide how you will run your log and whether you want to give accurate signal reports and copy extra details regarding your contact.

The VKCL interface

Spend some time exploring the VKCL interface and working out how you can move from one field to the next. It is clear that some items on the page need mouse clicks to change but text fields can be reached by hitting certain keys on the keyboard. Once you understand the way the VKCL screen works you can develop a process that minimizes your physical work and concentration on the logging and allows you to concentrate more on the radio. Using the keyboard rather than the mouse makes logging quicker and more efficient.

Band Selection

Band selection needs a mouse click or a radio interface to activate. Most of the time you will be operating on one band so this is not a big imposition. Just take a look at the band selector periodically and check you're logging on the right band.

Contact Details

The most important fields about the contact are all in the bottom part of the screen. The **TAB** key and the **ENTER** key on your keyboard allow you to navigate the fields without touching the mouse. Place the cursor in the callsign field then move your mouse away. You don't need it any more. As long as you stay on the same band you can now log contacts using either the **TAB** or **ENTER** key only.

TAB Key

The **TAB** key steps to the next field to the right regardless of the contents of the fields;

Call Sign → Exch Sent → Exch Rcvd → Name/Cmnt then back to CallSign

You can use the TAB key to quickly move between fields.

Enter Key

The **ENTER** key is more powerful than the **TAB** key and changes action depending on the contents of the field.

If the callsign field is empty the action is as follows;

Call Sign → Exch Rcvd → Exch Sent → Exch Rcvd → Exch Sent etc

If the Exch Sent field is populated (e.g. 59001) but Call Sign is empty;

Call Sign → Exch Rcvd → Call Sign → Exch Rcvd etc ringing the bell to alert you that the Call Sign field is empty.

If Call Sign, Exch Sent, Exch Rcvd are populated then the **ENTER** key will behave like the **Log QSO** button and return the cursor to the Call Sign field ready for the next contact.

Sample Contact

Assume a contact with VK3ATL and the signal report to you is 59001. You want to give the station the signal report that is already in the Exch Sent field.

You enter the following into VKCL;

V K 3 A T L ENTER 1 ENTER

That's it! The call is logged, you haven't touched the mouse and VKCL is ready for the next contact. In this case VKCL has assumed that his signal report is 5x9 and you have entered his serial number without leading zeros.

As discussed previously, in the above contact you have chosen to give the other station a 5x9 report which may or may not be correct. Additionally, you have not logged the operator's name or location. Neither action will affect your score.

If you really wanted to give VK3ATL a 5x8 report instead of the default 5x9 you would type

V K 3 A T L TAB 58 ENTER 1 ENTER

Even if you can't touch type and use "hunt & peck" it doesn't take long to enter a contact in the log. After you've been logging for a while it will become quite an easy job.

HINT - Get the flow right.

ALWAYS enter the new callsign **BEFORE** you even think about responding.

While you're at it, immediately get the cursor into the Exch Rcvd field ready for the return signal report.

V K 3 A T L ENTER then wait for his signal report

The benefit of doing it this way means you've already logged most of the contact before you've hit the PTT and all you have to do now is wait for him to come back to you with his signal report to complete the contact.

Obviously VKCL has been tailored for speedy contest exchanges. If your ethics preclude you from giving everyone a 5x9 report you can edit your sent report but it may take a second or two longer for each contact. The choice is yours.

In the event that you don't complete the contact just hit the **ESC** key and you're ready to go for the next contact.

Fixing Mistakes

It's unlikely that you could complete a large number of contacts without making a typo. Quickly resolving mistakes in VKCL is easy and doesn't take too much time.

Remember - Many of the contacts you make will be with other operators battling their way around the keyboard too.

Look at the VKCL screen again. There are a number of buttons and keys that you can use to help edit or repair entries. Consider the kinds of errors you might make in logging and think about the easiest option to repairing each problem with a minimum of fuss and time.

The **BACKSPACE** and **TAB** key are the easiest if you make a mistake and realize it before you change fields.

The **ESC** key will clear all fields and reset your cursor to the Call Sign field. Use the **ESC** key if you get everything wrong.

Use the **F2** key to recall the last logged contact. Then use the **BACKSPACE** and **TAB** keys to edit your entry. Once you're done hit **ENTER** to save the contact.

Use **F2**, **ESC**, **ENTER** to DELETE the last logged contact.

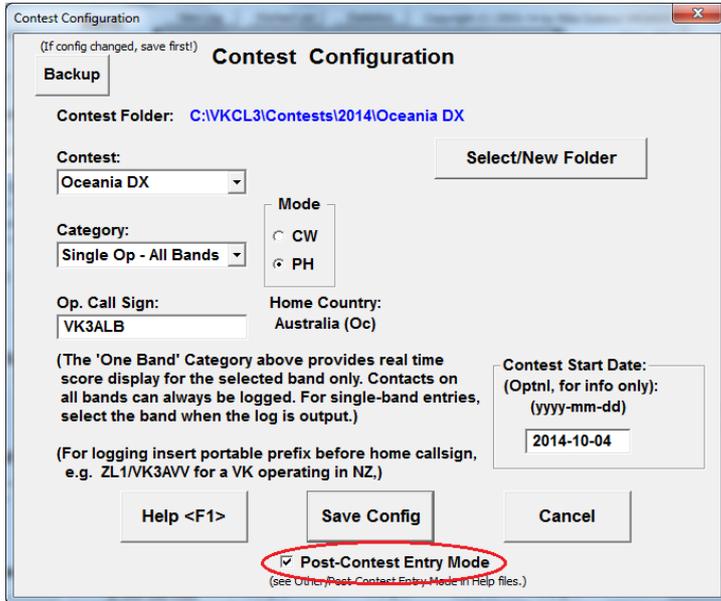
If you **MUST** use the mouse you can double click a previous entry in the Logging Window and edit any field or completely delete the contact.

DON'T use the mouse to highlight part of a field for editing as it may cause logging anomalies that you won't pick up until the end of the contest if at all.

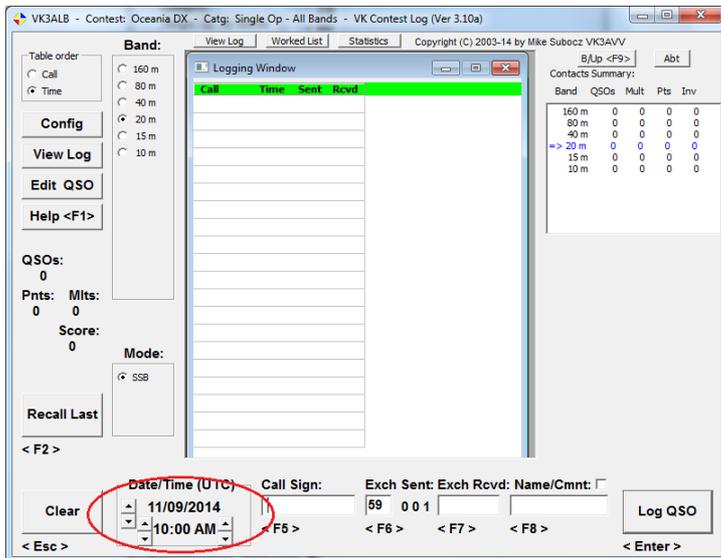
When you edit a field, re-type **all** the information in that field and hit enter to save and/or move to the next field.

Post Contest Entry Mode

Sometimes it's not practical to use a computer during the contest so paper logging is the only way to go. VKCL has a post contest entry mode that allows an operator to transcribe their paper logs into electronic form at a more convenient time.



To enter post contest mode, open the config pane and check the post contest entry mode box then save config.



Now you can manually set the time and date for each contact. Use the Up and Down arrow keys on your keyboard to change the time.

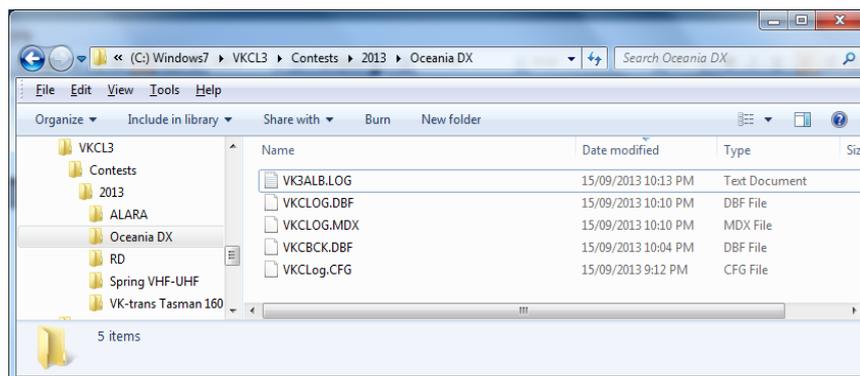
After the Contest

After the contest you need to check you log for errors and prepare it for submission to the contest manager. Click on the **View Log** button and review your log. You can make changes by double clicking the entry.

Once you're happy with your log click on **Exp. Cabrillo Log** and complete the submission details.

Then click on **Create File** to create your Cabrillo submission file.

Once you're happy with the file click **CANCEL** to close. The Cabrillo file is stored in the same directory as the contest log. In this example VKCL was configured to store the logs in C:\VKCL3\Contests\2013\Oceania DX



The Cabrillo file in this case is VK3ALB.LOG.

Email the file to the contest manager. For the Oceania Contest the correct email address is PH@oceaniadxcontest.com for the Phone contest and CW@oceaniadxcontest.com for the CW contest.

Conclusion

Overwhelmingly now contest managers require log submissions in electronic format. In some contests only electronic logs will be accepted. The days of the paper log are rapidly coming to an end. The amateur is left with two choices, stop submitting contests logs or get involved and try to make the logging program work to their advantage.

Electronic logs in large international contests are cross checked against all other logs. The beauty of this is that check logs are almost instantly available from the contest manager on request.

BE CAREFUL!

The Oceania contest uses check logs. Take special care if you use paper logging and transcribe into VKCL post contest. A single error carried through the log could have a significant effect on your score.

The matters covered in this paper are in no way a substitute for reading the **Help Pages (F1)** of VKCL.

Happy Contesting!