LoTW Update—January 2022

Logbook Committee

Logbook of the World Status	
1,455,082,863	QSO records have been entered into the system.
308,739,811	QSL records have resulted.
153,711	Users are registered in the system
220,120	Certificates are active
48,224,224	User files have been processed

In 2020, Logbook users added almost 164 million QSO records. 2021 has surpassed this rate, with an increase of over 13%, or 171+ million QSO records being added. The numbers of certificates and users have both increased about 10%. The total number of user files processed has increased a comparatively large 41%, probably reflecting users' increasing tendency to upload smaller updates more frequently—often even for single QSOs.   This clearly demonstrates the increasing expectations of users for realtime responsiveness. (status shown—1/3/22)

Availability

Logbook availability has been excellent, at 99.999% in the last 90 days, exceeding our 99% goal. Hardware updates in 2021 have speeded up Logbook operations. There were few and only brief inaccessibility events in 2021.

Users experienced few difficulties, and user questions continued to be answered through Logbook Support and ARRL-LOTW.

2021 Developments to date

TQSL has now been updated to 2.5.9, with various improvements.

The new mode Q65 is supported by TQSL and is accepted by the Logbook database.   TQSL now also permits single locations to have up to 4 different grid squares. Newly-launched satellites are being added to Logbook proactively, rather than waiting until users complain.

It was discovered that new users on the groups.io ARRL-LOTW list had been subject to moderation before their first posts could appear. This has been removed.

A backup has been created for the signing system for Logbook submissions to secure the system against failures. Other IT systems are also being upgraded to current, supported systems, thereby improving reliability. Upgradeability continues to be limited by the uncertain support for library packages on which current code depends.

The Evolution of Logbook

In a previous report, the Committee explained the need for an evolution of Logbook to a second version. Some have interpreted this to mean that Logbook is currently just fine, and that we could wait until we were good and ready to revise it. In fact, there are current weaknesses in Logbook that demand revision. This is about much more than making Logbook processing faster.

While the Committee recognizes and agrees that Logbook cannot be upgraded as an isolated system (the update being subsumed under a much larger evolution of ARRL IT systems), recent hijacking of Logbook confirmations (see Other Awards, below) should be a reminder to the Board of the urgency of beginning meaningful progress towards a more modern, supportable and maintainable system that can easily cooperate with other award issuers and offer premium services that will attract users and help support the system.

Other Awards

In August, CQ magazine announced "LoTW May Now Be Used for RAC Awards" (CQ, August 2021, pp. 82-83). Like IOTA, WIA and others, Radio Amateurs of Canada now allows users to scrape screen grabs from Logbook to confirm its awards. This of course results in neither support for Logbook, nor revenue to ARRL. The Logbook Committee had been working with RAC to integrate the Canadaward into Logbook, but was unable to provide the needed support once programming resources were withdrawn.

Communicate, communicate, communicate

Ironically, as many including this committee have observed, many of ARRL's problems exist due to a lack of communication. The state of user concern about Logbook is a good example. Though the committee and ARRL management and Board have long been aware of the need for Logbook's modernization, this has not been acknowledged to the community. As observed numerous times, in the absence of information, people make things up, and what they make up is always worse than reality. We only need to look at the current prevalence of conspiracy theories in the world at large to see the truth of this statement. Amateur radio is no different from the rest of society.

A good deal of the community's concern about Logbook could be alleviated if ARRL were to acknowledge the need for change and detail its efforts in that direction. We have all been disappointed at how difficult that change has been to effect, but an explicit communication about what's going on would be better than stoic silence, as has prevailed virtually since the inception of the Logbook Committee in early 2013. The committee hereby volunteers to provide measured communication to the field through the ARRL-LOTW list on groups.io. Historically the role of communicating concerning Logbook has resided solely at ARRL HQ, but we believe there is a need not only for making progress on modernizing Logbook, but also for communicating about the steps being taken to do so, however slow they may be and despite the difficulties encountered in their implementation. Truthful communication, whatever the pace of change, is a potent antidote to unfounded accusations.

Submitted by,
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        for the Logbook Committee

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