

# How to be a SOTA Chaser

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This documentation is intended to outline some of the primary steps to become a SOTA "Chaser". A "Chaser" is one who makes a QSO with a SOTA Activator regardless of your location but most likely from your home or mobile station. For each Activator QSO, the Chaser scores points within the SOTA system. There are a number of "tricks" that can make your Chasing efforts more effective and efficient. SOTA Activators need Chasers in order to meet their Activation requirements of a minimum of 4 QSOs. So a Chaser is very important to an Activator!

This outline is designed to serve as a general guideline for SOTA Chasers and is based on my experience and therefore is NOT a comprehensive list of techniques. It includes some of the planning steps, the "chase" itself, and post-chase steps. Hopefully, this document will become more complete as Chasers participate in SOTA activities. SOTA is becoming very popular in North America partly because it combines outdoor activities and hiking with ham radio. Beware, SOTA activity can be contagiously fun, fulfilling, and even competitive!

## Let the Chase begin: preliminary activities

1. Go to the <http://www.sota.org.uk/> website and read through each of the tabbed sections from "Home" to the "About SOTA" in order to get the "big picture" of SOTA and the organizational structure of the program.
2. Join the Yahoo North America SOTA reflector at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nasota/>. Almost all Activators post a preliminary notice ("Alert") with this group of their plans. This reflector is also valuable resource of SOTA information for all SOTA activities in North America and is not just for Activators. There is a wealth of SOTA experience on this reflector with folks very glad to help or answer questions.
3. Open a <http://www.sotadata.org.uk> account. Click on the "Logon/Logoff" tab to register. Secondly, open a <http://www.sotawatch.org> account. These two accounts will give you access to valuable SOTA websites necessary for the following activities.
4. The first effort is to become familiar with the ARM (Association Reference Manual) documents for an Association which can be a State or a FCC Call Area (W1, W2, etc). You can download a copy at <http://www.sota.org.uk/Associations>. The ARM docs are in .pdf format and contain valuable information about SOTA rules and requirements but also specific Peak information including the Peak Reference Number (ex: "W2/EH-001") system, Lat/Long data points, and in some instances the six-place Grid Square ID for each qualified SOTA summit within an Association.
5. Login to the home page of <http://www.sotawatch.org>. Click on the "Alerts" tab near the top of the page. This will give you a calendar view of upcoming or planned Activations and the Peak Reference Number. The Activator will propose

an expected ETA (Estimated Time of Arrival) or QRV (expected operation start) time and an expected frequency/mode of operation. Email an Activator for specific frequencies of planned operation as "14-ssb" is not effective or sufficient.

6. Often an Activator's planned start time is nothing more than a guess. Often the Activator has not climbed the Peak before nor driven the access roads to a trailhead. An Activator's start time can be wrong due to many legitimate reasons including inclement weather or unforeseen obstacles. Activators will not jeopardize their safety (rightly justified) if they are unable to climb a summit.
7. There are two primary SOTA "spotting" networks. Each has their advantages and also should be monitored. They are:
  - <http://www.qrpspots.com>
  - <http://www.sotawatch.org/spots.php>

Other Chasers are also waiting for the Activator and generally will post a "spot" time and frequency on both of these internet systems. If you are the first to work an Activator, please post pertinent information to both these networks as an aid for others who are also Chasing an Activation.

8. If interested in the location Region of the Activator and using the Region Identifier (ex: W7/NC-xxx), look at <http://www.adventureradio.de/mapview/index.php> . At the bottom of the page, from the dropdown menu, select the Region of interest and click OK. A map of available peaks will then display for that Region. You can "zoom in" as necessary for the appropriate detail. Clicking on any one of the tags will display that Peak information and links to SOTA resources specific to that Peak.
9. Or by clicking on the blue-highlighted hot link in the <http://www.sotawatch.org/spots.php> which will take you to a Google Map. You probably will have to zoom out to see the "green" tag for the Peak location. Also click on the "Map" icon in the upper right of this window. This will take you to a "Satellite" window and then you can select "Terrain" to get a topographical view of the Activated Peak.
10. Other very good Peak information resources often with photos included, if interested:
  - a. <http://listsofjohn.com/>
  - b. <http://www.summitpost.org/>
  - c. <http://peakbagger.com/>
11. All SOTA times are in UTC and the SOTA "activation day" is 0000 UTC to 2359 UTC. If an Activation spans the 0000 utc date change, a Chaser can make a second QSO for points, effectively a 2x number of points for the single Activation.
12. Some Activators have APRS capability. The link and SSID should be announced by the Activator. It will then be possible to "track" the Activator enroute to the Peak at <http://aprs.fi>.

## **Making the Contact with the Activator**

1. Log your QSO. Date, UTC time, call, etc. You will need this log data later for SOTA documentation and the Awards program information.

### **Post Contact Activities:**

1. Part of the appeal of SOTA is the Awards program. Both Activators and Chasers accumulate "points" which allow each group to be eligible for specific Awards. See <http://www.sota.org.uk/Awards> for specific information about Chaser Awards.
2. Go to <http://www.sotadata.org.uk/> and login. You will need to register one-time for an account on this SOTA database prior to entering your QSO information for your QSO with the Activator. Then go to the Submit Log tab and select Submit Chaser Entry and follow the instructions for submitting your QSO. Note the date format requirements.
3. SOTA Chaser and Activation operations are on the "honor system". There is no "cross-checking" to validate your QSO with the Activator log submission.
4. Post questions or concerns to the SOTA NA Yahoo reflector so others can potentially benefit from your experience.

All of the SOTA participants, from the SOTA Management Team to Activators and Chasers, want to encourage SOTA activity in North America. The Program is very successful in Europe and is growing very fast in North America. Enjoy your participation and encourage your ham radio friends to participate.