

Pacific Northwest SOTA Newsletter

March-April 2019

Photo by Josh WU7H of Nason Ridge-W7W/CH-204

Spirit of SOTA – Earlier in the year Brian-G8ADD published the following “The Spirit of SOTA” on the reflector. You can review the comments made by others [here](#). And continue the topic with this reflector topic [here](#) regarding CW.

The spirit of SOTA is something to be cherished. SOTA people are friendly and helpful, SOTA activating and chasing is infused with an air of comradeship because we share in two fellowships, that of ham radio and that of the mountains. There is something special about SOTA, we all feel it. It was therefore disappointing to hear the pile-up for the first ever 5B4 activation descend into the type of zoo more associated with the first day of a DX-pedition to somewhere rare. Tempers frayed, hot words were exchanged, and we were treated to the spectacle of well-known chasers chanting their callsigns repeatedly **while the 5B4 was actually transmitting**. This was shameful. Yes, we are all keen to work the new Associations, but the behaviour earlier today was NOT what SOTA is all about. Guys (and it was all guys!) operate smart, not aggressively.

DX Code of Conduct – We in North America aren’t completely blameless when it comes to aggressive chasing behaviors, but it’s very rare – let’s keep it that way. I’ve included two bullet points from the [DX Code of Conduct](#) to reflect on, and say that I also appreciate when Chasers tell the activator when there is a Summit-to-Summit station calling, and remind everyone that the Activator is in charge of the pile-up – Activators should feel empowered to manage callers as needed.

- I will only call if I can copy the DX station properly.
- I will not transmit when the DX operator queries a call sign not like mine.

Take Care in the Outdoors – Here are two stories...one to encourage you to take ten essentials – not just for yourself or your hiking pals, but perhaps for someone else on the trail that needs your help.

https://www.unionleader.com/nh/outdoors/ty-gagne-s-from-high-places-footsteps-in-the-snow/article_482a2e0f-e725-5df6-9e7c-5958bdb272e5.html?fbclid=IwAR2U4pu-w9PsBnaFE00Eow0B1KOUbbMakV-bObRDAlgJNVsmMloTeFLwPt8

This article is a reminder to climb within your limits: <https://www.hcn.org/issues/50.8/recreation-death-in-the-alpine>.

Avalanche Awareness Basics – Although it’s not a substitute for an accredited backcountry safety course, here is a basic introduction that may help you make better decisions when around potential avalanche terrain. Remember that ‘whump’ sounds, cracks in the snow, unexpected settling, and snow sluffs are all warning signs of an unstable snow pack – signs that that you should be able to avoid! <https://backcountryaccess.com/avalanche-avoidance-backcountry-basics/>. Here’s a resource to check the forecast for avalanche potential in the Northwest: <https://www.nwac.us/>.

Protect Yer Rig! – For some folks a Ziploc bag might be enough, while others go full Pelican (hey, whatever you want to carry). In between there are a variety of solutions, from thrift-store camera cases to what you might find in your own closet. Fundamentals are to keep the rig from getting wet, crushed, or broken – and often to be sure that you can pull just one package out of your pack that will have everything you need to get on the air...sometimes even the antenna. If you have a particularly interesting way to secure your rig, send it over and we may feature a few more in a future issue.

Roland-K7FOP has found these on [Amazon](#):



Adam-K6ARK has his LNR FX-4 in a small camera case:



Andrew-VK1AD keeps his FT-817 in a Pelican case:



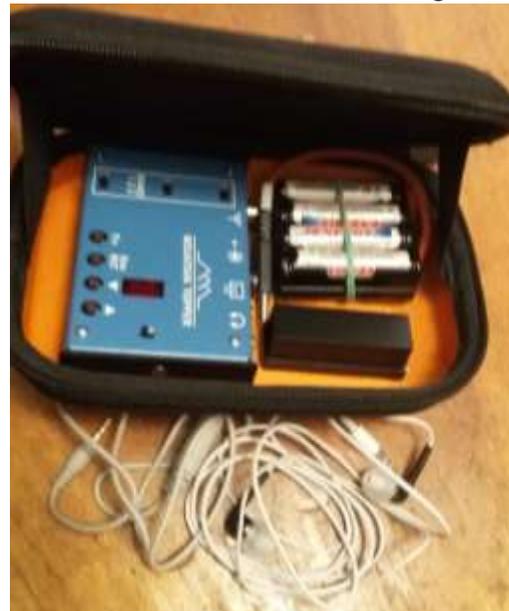
Here is what Elecraft offers with their KX2 package:



KX3 in a video camera case with 3AH battery underneath:



MTR-3 Band in a thrift-store semi-rigid case:



Leave 146.52 ON to catch that Summit-to-Summit – Even the most experienced sometimes miss out on opportunities to connect with other summits. Yes, I mean yours truly. Keeping a HT going on the calling frequency while hiking can lead to all sorts of good things – connect with another activator, having a chance to get at least one summit contact on 2m FM, and those rewarding Summit-to-Summit QSOs.



W7O Meet Up – On occasion this winter, when we believe that the weather might be benign (like dry!), we have invited new SOTA folks out to a local summit. It gives them a chance to see how an activation comes together. It finally happened on Cooper Mountain near Portland in February, with some sunshine and Rob-KI7PLB and Ken-KI7VEM joining Etienne-K7ATN for an afternoon (pictured in order <<here). We had a chance to see three different set-ups, worked some 2m FM, 20m and 60m SSB (the latter for those Chasers in Oregon and Washington) and a bit of 30m CW from Ken using retained CW skills from his Novice days.

PNWSOTA.org is Back on the Air! – After the server hosting the PNWSOTA failed, several people worked to get our regional trip report and activation resource back up and running – [see the note here](#). No other SOTA region has this kind of resource – **use it, enjoy it, contribute to it.**

Request the Newsletter! – You can now receive notices for PNW SOTA Newsletters by checking a box on www.pnwsota.org – go to “My Account” >> “Edit” >> “SOTA” and look for the checkbox at the bottom. If you don’t have an account – why not? It allows you to contribute your trip reports on how to reach summits and what’s at the top.

Willamette Valley Summit-to-Summit Party! 🎉 🎈 🏔️ 📶 🎊 W7O is planning to head to the hills on Saturday, March 23 – rain or shine. Summits between Corvallis and Vancouver will be activated, giving opportunities for S2S contacts all around. Plus, we will be gathering afterwards at McMenamins Cornelius Pass Roadhouse in Hillsboro.

If we have more than five or six activators for the S2S Party we may want to have a “directed net” to efficiently move through the permutations. Please be ready to follow instructions from the net control station to keep things moving.

If everything goes as planned we will be “hosting” **new activators** on Bald Peak ([W7O/NC-051](#)), Green Mountain ([W7O/NC-036](#)) and Round Top ([W7O/NC-015](#)) to demonstrate HF setups and VHF antennas and answer questions about SOTA. Of course, everyone is welcome to activate any summit in the northern Willamette Valley they wish. Please post an alert for your intended summit, QRV for noon (1900z), QRG 146.48-fm.

Previous S2S Parties have had a dozen or more participants on nearly as many summits – and with good weather, this March event may turn out about the same. As other PNW Associations plan Summit-to-Summit events of their own, we’ll may be featuring them here and giving after action reports on the fun that was had.

Most Activated Summits – Here’s something to geek out on...statistics of the most activated peaks in the Pacific Northwest region. I’m slightly familiar with peaks outside of Oregon, and recognize that one of the most activated peaks in Washington is actually popular due to being close to Portland (and so are the #9, #13, #18, #19 W7W peaks). Oregon’s top four are all in or close to Portland and one is down by Corvallis.

You should temper any comparisons of these Associations with their relative population density, and remember that VE7 has not added but a fraction of their qualified peaks to the database. I’m particularly impressed that 1 in 5 Washington summits and 1 in 4 Oregon summits have already been activated.

| | W7W | W7M | W7O | W7I | VE7 |
|---|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Total Summits | 2762 | 2607 | 1990 | 2459 | 877 |
| Activated Summits | 563 | 240 | 480 | 312 | 125 |
| % Activated | 20% | 9% | 24% | 13% | 14% |
| Peaks Activated Once | 196 | 152 | 185 | 208 | 65 |
| Total Activations | 2943 | 407 | 2413 | 596 | 316 |
| Average # Activations | 5.2 | 1.7 | 5.0 | 1.9 | 2.5 |
| Top 5 Summits and Number of Activations | Mount Catherine-46 | S. Scratchgravel Hill-11 | Bald Peak-87 | Shafer Butte-17 | Black Mountain-15 |
| | Wind Mountain-46 | Blue Mountain-10 | Mt. Sylvania-84 | Mores Mtn-11 | Sumas Peak-11 |
| | Mount Erie-41 | 5940-9 | Skyline Ridge-44 | 4375-11 | Mount Strachan-9 |
| | South Tiger Mtn-38 | Elk Mountain-9 | Scott, Mount-41 | Pilot Peak-10 | Bear Hill-8 |
| | Amabilis Mtn-34 | University Mtn-7 | Marys Peak-40 | Sunset Mtn-9 | Mount Douglas-8 |

Bridging the New Year on Nason Ridge – Or how Josh-WU7H and Darryl-WW7D went out of their way to max their activation points...

The weather was looking fine for New Year's Eve, and so Darryl and I planned an activation over UTC midnight of Nason Ridge, W7W/CH-204.



We parked on the side of Highway 2, just east of the turnoff for Smithbrook. This is where everyone parks that is headed up to Smithbrook for winter sports. There were some XC skiers, and snowmobiles unloading as we pulled in.

The WX was perfect - absolute bluebird day with temps in the high 20's. We strapped on our snowshoes and began walking up NF-6700 toward the trailhead to Nason Ridge. From Highway 2 to Nason Ridge Trailhead is about 4 miles and 1500 feet of gain – easy snowshoeing. (Check this newsletter’s banner photo.) We saw lots of people snowboarding down steep slopes and using snowmobiles to get back up for more runs.

We departed NF-6700 and headed up toward the summit of Nason Ridge. There were tracks for a little bit, but very soon we were breaking trail in super deep powder. The hike to the summit is less than 1 mile (and another 1000' elevation), but it was TOUGH in this very deep and powdery snow.

We arrived on the summit and wasted no time getting HF set up. We made some calls on 146.52, but made no contacts there. The sun was getting low in the sky and the temperatures were dropping rapidly. We both got cold very quickly despite piling on our extra layers.

We tag-teamed 20 and 30 meters and both got our quota just before the date changed over to 1/1/2019. Happy New Year! We worked the same stations over again and decided to pack it up before frostbite set in... 😬

It was dark before we made it back to the road – enough that we deployed headlamps. A couple more hours of slogging along in the dark and we were back at my truck! A successful mission for eighteen points!



You can find a .GPX file of our route [here](#). Josh-WU7H

First Activation of Columar Peak, BC by John-VA7JBE



Operating in extreme conditions requires a large amount of preparation, both mental and physical, as well as an ability to compromise various measures of performance in exchange for a brief window during which contacts might be made. The unexpected still happens, of course, and even the most dedicated amateur must be willing to abandon their plans in the face of reality, sometimes within a stone's throw of their objective. There are, broadly speaking, two things you need to know in order to move through the mountains safely without injury: how to get there, and when to go. Of the two, the latter is the most important.

Winter in southwest BC can bring a wide variety of weather, from sleet and snow to sun and flowers. This year there has been a persistent arctic outflow that has dropped temperatures down to as low as -35C in the high alpine and blasted

exposed ridges with strong winds from several directions. All this, however, did not prevent a good crowd from forming at the Diamond Head entrance to Garibaldi Park in February with a high of -12C and moderate winds in the forecast.

My objective for the day, Columnar Peak ([VE7/SL-111](#)), was about 14 km out and 1,100m up so I set out at a brisk pace to try and warm up a bit. Most of the crowd was on snowshoes with a few AT skiers like me thrown into the mix. The first 6 km up are through second growth forest without much of a view. Once you poke out onto the shoulder of Round Mountain you get a look North towards Columnar, as well as Little Diamond Head and Mt. Garibaldi in the distance.

The next stop was the Elfin Lakes Shelter 11 km from the trailhead. This hut is incredibly popular with snowshoe hikers and is typically booked out far in advance on weekends. There is a propane stove there for heat and I was glad to take a moment to warm up and eat lunch while trading snowpack observations with some other skiers in the area. The consensus was that any soft snow was long gone, blown away by a few massive wind events the week before.

Leaving the hut, I began the final ascent to the summit of Columnar. True to form I encountered a huge amount of hard, wind-pressed snow that got progressively worse the further up I went. The wind picked up as well and by the time I was on the ridge to the summit I had layered two insulating layers and a Gore-Tex layer on top of a nylon windbreaker.

Once I had gained the summit, I wasted no time in getting to business. The temperature was -17C with winds in excess of 25 km/h, which was enough to keep my gloves on and my camera in my pack. This was not a place to linger. First up was a quick survey of the 2m calling frequency to see what kind of action was there. A few stations came back, including longtime residents and amateur enthusiasts Keith VE7GHD and John VE7CUU. John has been tramping the coastal mountains with an FT-817 since long before I was licensed and has always been very supportive of my SOTA activities.

After a brief chat and exchange of weather reports I decided I had enough energy to set up an HF station to try and spread some love around. I was using a 20m dipole supported in the middle by my avalanche probe, which went into the wind pressed snow quite easily, and on either end by my ski poles, which refused to stay up. After a few attempts I just threw the wire on the snow and hoped for the best. One of the local operators was nice enough to spot me on SOTAwatch and the contacts started rolling in. It was at this point I realized that recording my QSOs would not be practicable given the rapidly worsening conditions. Fortunately, Keith VE7GDH was able to hear my side of the 20m QSOs and emailed a list of contacts at the end of the day.



About 20 minutes after I arrived on the summit, I packed up the station and pulled the climbing skins off my skis for a bumpy ride down. There were a few sheltered patches of soft snow where I could get some turns, but for the most part I was scraping down wind scoured snow all the way to the Elfin Shelter. I paused again to warm up and chat with some people who had just arrived for an overnight trip, then began to make my way back along Paul Ridge towards Round Mountain and a quick ski down to the parking lot. It was just getting dark by the time I got back. Car to car the whole trip took eight hours for this first activation of Columnar Peak.