

Pacific Northwest SOTA Newsletter

November-December 2017

Mount Seymour – VE7/GV-006 by John-VA7 JBE

Answering the Question, “What are you doing?” – When we are activating a summit busy with other hikers, we are sometimes asked if we are fishing or communicating with Mars. But some of the more thoughtful questions are typically, “What are you doing?” or “Is ham radio still a thing?” or “People still use Morse Code?” Any of these questions are a chance to talk about our hobby in a positive way.

Communication infrastructure was destroyed in Puerto Rico, also in the recent California wildfires and during Texas floods and Florida hurricanes – sometimes for many months. The amateur radio that we practice doesn’t require cell towers, mains power, or fiber optic networks. We can communicate within a few minutes, point to point, over thousands of miles, using portable equipment that we have carried on our backs.

Consider how your skills, abilities and the equipment that you’ve assembled might serve your community and how other hams have offered public service. With the attention in the news on recent natural disasters, we have a chance to enlighten the public that we encounter, and be proud of how our [fellow amateurs step up](#) to emergency communication when all else fails...

Northwest Bonus Season is Upon Us – Check out your local [Association Reference Manual](#) for the exact dates and summit elevation for bonus points. Most have a winter bonus season that starts December 1st.

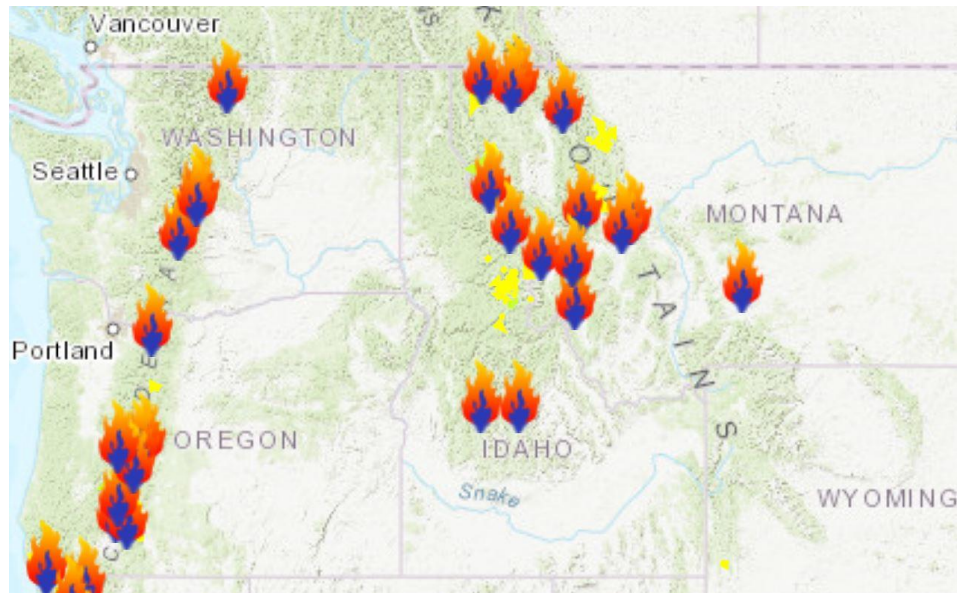
One View of “What to Bring on your Activation” – I’ve always suggested to people that they should bring “Whatever they want to carry...” Which is to say, in my considerate opinion, something lightweight. But here’s a more thoughtful answer from Andrew-VK1DA to a new Activator’s question about the “Best radio for backpacking...”

I think the emphasis on radio brands is misleading. Any power between 5 and 15 watts is almost impossible to distinguish at the receiving end. Additional receive sensitivity measured in the lab often does not translate to any observable difference in the field, due to the background noise being far higher than the weakest signal detectable on a test bench. Beyond a certain point, extra sensitivity or RF gain is pointless and in fact weakens the receiver's ability to deal with high interference levels.

Success on SOTA is not due to using the "best brand" of radio, or ATU, or commercial antenna. The skill of the operator is more important than the radio, in choosing the right band for the conditions, using the right mode, posting alerts sufficiently in advance, spotting yourself on SOTAWatch.org, using decent antennas that are resonant and don't rely on ATUs, using the right frequency, projecting their voice correctly, speaking clearly, using recognised phonetics and operating consistently, saying just what is needed and not rambling on about rubbish, giving fair treatment to all callers and giving priority to S2S and QRP stations, being flexible and tolerant. These things are not learned from the operating manual and do not flow from buying the "best" radio. They are learned by doing, watching experts, copying the techniques that work, practicing and repeating. So my advice is be patient, start slow and simple, expect it to be a mixed bag of success and occasional disappointments, remember you are dealing with nature. Conditions vary just like the physical weather.

West Coast Fires and SOTA

Summit Access – Fires in the region have made some SOTA summits inaccessible – in the Columbia River Gorge Oregon summits Larch Mountain, Mount Defiance, Buck Peak, Indian Mountain are in an area that is [off limits to hiking](#) for an inordinate length of time. For your area, check out the [Fire Incident Information System](#) to see what peaks could be affected. For Oregon, a map of the exclusion zone can be found [here](#).



2017 Willamette Valley and Puget Sound Summit-to-Summit Parties – We had some good weather over a late September weekend and folks turned out in droves to work other nearby summits in Oregon and Washington. [Puget Sound](#) had twelve operators on seven summits, and the [Willamette Valley](#) event had fourteen operators on ten summits. And a few contacts were not so nearby, with one between the two parties covering over 170 miles.

A highlight for those in W7O-land was the pub gathering afterwards – a chance to meet new activators and pass along the ‘trade secrets’ of SOTA activations (group photo➔). We were pleased to have new Oregon Mountain Goat, Phil-NS7P and North American Top Chaser, Rich-N4EX there to share stories about our radiosport.



A Good Deal on a Telescopic Pole – Many of us use telescopic fiberglass poles to support our wire antennas. Roland-K7FOP has ordered a couple of these and found them to be serviceable. As of this writing, these are still available: <http://www.ebay.com/itm/222553725541>.

These are great for LIGHTWEIGHT wire antennas (think 26 gauge Polystealth). An end-fed halfwave set up as an inverted vee or el, or a 'vertical dipole' will work great with these poles. I suggest getting TWO of the 7.2 meter versions. If (when!) you eventually have a failure in two poles, you'll likely be able to reassemble them into a third, as they probably won't both fail in the same place. And before you lose it, secure the cap typically found on these poles with a short length of cord. Note that the “7.2m” pole is only 5.4m or about 18 feet.

Airline Travel with Ham Radios – It's fun to venture to other Associations and pursue recognitions like the [SOTA Mountain Explorer Award](#). And even better, travel lets you experience new terrain and to have the chance to meet other SOTA folks. If you are flying and bringing your radio, there's a whole section on ["Transport Security" on the SOTA Reflector](#) and the range of experiences people have had in flying with their radio equipment. Recently there has been [news that laptop computers may be banned from checked luggage](#). Since many people power their radios with the same type of Li-ion battery that is of concern in computers, changes in what we can carry-on or check for air travel is something to watch.

Logging Contacts for SOTA – There are three major ways of accumulating points for Summits on the Air. There are Activation Points for contacting at least four stations during an activation, there are Chaser Points for contacting a station that is activating a SOTA Summit, and there are Summit-to-Summit Points for doing both of these at the same time.

To get Summit-to-Summit points, you need to enter Activation Contacts and Chaser Contacts. Summit-to-Summit is credited with a check box during manual Chaser Contact entry. This can be done manually at <http://www.sotadata.org.uk> using the "Submit Log" drop down menu. You can also create a csv file to be uploaded –it's easier and you can keep a record of your contacts on your computer as a text file or by using a spreadsheet. A csv file that works for both Activating and Chasing looks like the example below, with commas between each of the fields:

V2	Your Call	Your Summit	UTC Date	UTC Time	Band	Mode	Other Call	Chased Summit
V2	K7ATN	W7W/LC-094	28-Oct-17	20:07	144MHz	FM	K7FOP	W7W/LC-101

Note that the date format is Euro: d/mmm/yyyy and that contacts need to be in the proper order. If you are chasing only, leave Your Summit blank. If you are activating only, leave the Chased Summit blank. Include both summits if it is a Summit-to-Summit contact.

Fast QRT in a Storm by NS7P, August 2017 – As Phil-NS7P was closing in on his Mountain Goat award, he published this account on the [NASOTA Reflector](#). It's not worth it to activate anywhere NEAR an electrical storm is my takeaway here...

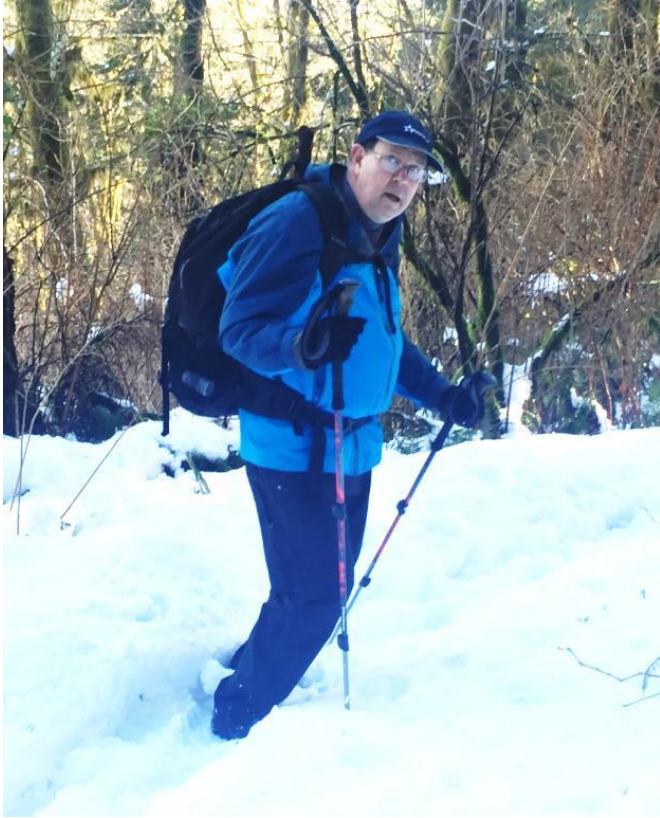
I worked or was trying to work several chasers from W7O/CE-049-Calimus Butte. This summit is north of Klamath Falls, Oregon and has great views. It sports a cupola style lookout that is staffed by a nice YL. She was very receptive to my activation, and knew I was a ham by the "NS7P" license plate.

The lookout told me to, "Go for it" but be prepared for the incoming storm. I quickly set up the 20m EFHW mast lashed to a wooden flagpole. I set up the KX3 on her picnic table and started to grab some quick QSOs. I knew it wouldn't be easy as soon as I turned on the rig and heard S9 static drowning out what would otherwise have been good signals. My second clue was the static shocks I was feeling as I touched the rig. My wife got frantic as the first of several lightning/thunder strikes hit about two miles away. I was feverously logging the four contacts I needed - I actually got six!

After that, we pulled it down and quickly packed up. My XYL felt shocks as she gathered in the antenna wire as I pulled it down. As we said thanks and goodbye to the lookout, the rain started. Probably a close call.

Thanks to the great chasers who I was able to get into the log (VE2JCW, K2JB, N4EX, AB4PP, N6KZ and WA7JTM). It was a challenge to hear you. Sorry to those I couldn't get as sanity barely won out and I went QRT.

Phil-NS7P – The First All-W7O Mountain Goat – We often think of Phil-NS7P as our consummate regional Chaser, finding us on summits wherever we might be. He's got the chaser score to show for it with over 85,000 points and a Summit-to-Summit score of over 5,000. He also accomplished another SOTA feat when in mid-September he activated his 290th summit and achieved Mountain Goat status with all his summits in Oregon. And since then, he's activated six more summits. We expect that he'll be going out and activating as well as keeping up on his Chasing career.



Over the six years it took for Phil to gather the 1,000 points for his Mountain Goat, some of his favorite summits have been W7O/WV-014–Grass Mountain (10 activations), W7O/WV-017–Holland Point (7 times), W7O/CC-001–Marys Peak (7), W7O/WV-004–Fairview Peak (6) and W7O/WV-002–Bohemia Mountain (6 activations).

He's also a major contributor to trip reports on PNWSOTA.org with many clear descriptions of road and trailhead access, trail conditions and summits, as well as giving us fair warning about peaks that are not accessible. Thanks Phil, for all your great Chasing, and Congratulations on your Mountain Goat!

SOTA Frequently Asked Questions – Yes, there is a FAQ, put together by the SOTA Management Team for those questions that are asked again and again. Here's the URL: <http://www.sota.org.uk/Joining-In/FAQs>.

Highlights for the next Pacific Northwest SOTA Newsletter – It's rare that I have more ideas than space for each of these newsletters, but here are a few things to look forward to in January:

- Highlights of an epic 11 mile, 12 point traverse over three summits in the W7W Lower Columbia region
- Recommended "Classic" SOTA summits in each association that we'd want others to enjoy
- An outline of "Pay to Play" on private forest lands where summit access is by permit
- Mapping resources and <https://www.listsofjohn.com/>
- Maybe some wire antenna ideas for a winter project

Please let me know what you'd like to see in the newsletter – because most of the time I'm short of ideas. Share it with others or subscribe or unsubscribe by email to climb2ski@gmail.com. This newsletter is brought to you by the W7O Association Manager, Etienne-K7ATN. Find back issues here: www.pnwsota.org/content/pacific-northwest-sota-newsletters.