

B-PLUS

Albany Amateur Radio Association – AARA

May 2024

Gerald Murray WA2IWW
PRESIDENT
518 482-8700
wa2iww@arrl.net

Art Ceas KB2JZJ
VICE PRESIDENT
KB2JZJ@AOL.COM

Saul Abrams K2XA
TREASURER
518 439-5700
k2xa@arrl.net

Bruce Goldstein WA3AFS
SECRETARY/WEBMASTER
518 765-2893
wa3afs@arrl.net

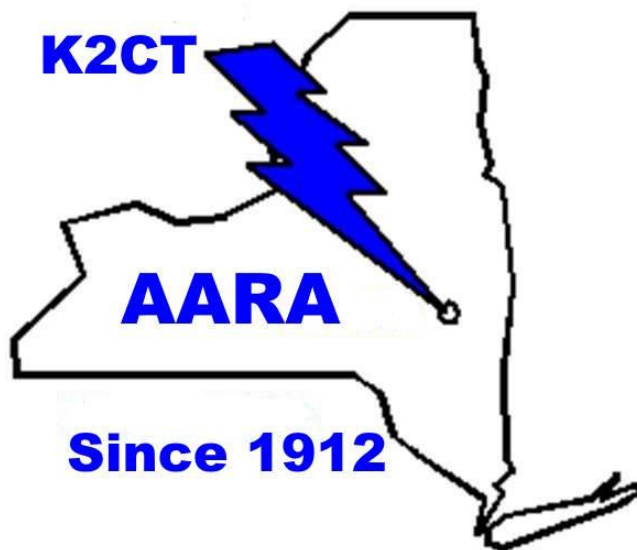
Don Herring KB2SCO
DIRECTOR
518 281-9986
dgherring@hotmail.com

Fred Lass K2TR
DIRECTOR
k2tr@arrl.net

Nathaniel Greenman KB2HPX
DIRECTOR
518 439-5008
ngreenman@verizon.net

John Fritze K2QY
TRUSTEE of K2CT
PAST PRESIDENT
k2qy@arrl.org

Don Herring KB2SCO
B-PLUS Editor



AARA Next Meeting:
May 1st, 2024 @ 7:00 PM
Slingerlands Fire Dept.

Topic:
SkyWarn Training
Note Earlier Meeting Time

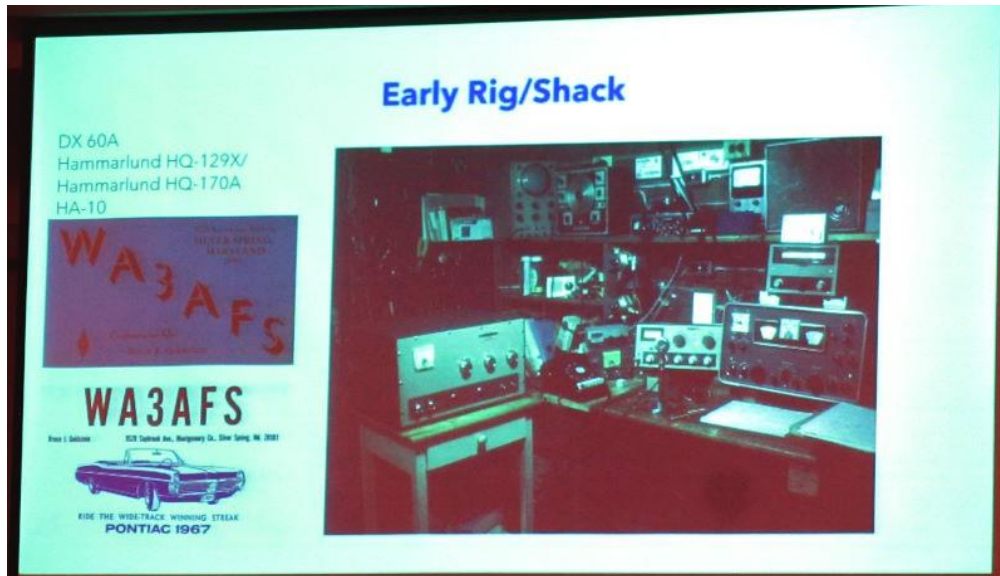
PLEASE Pay Your Dues
Dues are \$20
Checks can be sent to:

Saul Abrams, K2XA
307 Maple Rd.
Slingerlands, NY 12159

April 2024 Meeting

Bruce, WA3AFS recounted his 60 years (!) as an amateur radio operator.

And ... brought an excellent cake!



His Shack During the 1960's





NWS ALBANY SKYWARN SPRING WEATHER SPOTTER TRAINING

Date:
May 3, 2023

Time:
7:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Location:
Singerlands Firehouse
1520 New Scotland Road
Singerlands, NY 12159

**This training session will help you become
a weather spotter!**

SKYWARN® is a volunteer program with trained weather spotters nationwide. These volunteers help keep their local communities safe by providing timely and accurate reports of significant and impactful weather to the National Weather Service (NWS).



Scan for more at
weather.gov/SKYWARN



**No prior knowledge
or experience
needed!
Training is free!**

Learn about:

- Hazardous Spring and Summer Weather Events and Climatology
- Weather Spotting Criteria
- How to Report Information to the NWS and more!

**Scan the QR Code if you
would like to register!**



Questions? Contact us!
alb.stormreport@noaa.gov



Contesting for Beginners

Ken Goetz N2SQW

Amateur radio contesting is just one of the multiple areas available to amateur radio operators. Contesting can be as simple as a limited time spent in a VHF/UHF contest with a basic set-up or as involved as spending 30 or more hours over a weekend in one of the HF contests. It's up to you. Most operators tend to start with one of the VHF/UHF contests. The ARRL sponsors VHF contests January, June, and September. There are many other VHF contest opportunities as well, including VHF inclusion in most state QSO parties. Even if you only have 2 meter or 440 FM capability you can still make contacts and compete in the FM only category. As you proceed further into VHF contesting you may want to obtain a multi-mode VHF/UHF radio to allow not only FM but CW and SSB contacts as well. Of course this will likely lead to wanting better antennas, etc. Its all part of the hobby.

HF contesting is literally where the world opens up to you. A massive "contest station" is certainly not required to enjoy HF contesting. Remember that the "big gun" contest stations want to contact you for points. Most of these big stations also have some of the best receiving capability so your 100 watts or less will allow you to make many contacts and potentially work new countries. Many contesters prefer to even operate QRP at 5 watts or less. Does an amplifier help? Yes. Is one required? No.

In any contest you will need some sort of software to log your contacts. There are many programs available, ranging from free to a relatively low cost. Some of these are the N3FJP suite of programs, WriteLog (my choice), Ham Radio Deluxe, and N1MM (free). I highly advise an operator to become very familiar with their contest program well prior to the contest.

While not actually a contest as such, a good way to experience a contest type environment is to participate in Field Day. Here you have a chance to both watch some of the more experienced operators work as well a get some operating time in yourself.

Why should someone operate in a contest? First of all, its fun. The bands are crowded with stations wanting your contact. Even a few hours can put many contacts in your log. As time and contests go on, your goal may be as simple as to beat your last year's score. You may want to operate longer. You may want to try different modes. Some contests allow multiple modes, most international contests are specific to a single mode. There are even contests for the digital modes such as RTTY and FT-8. Your goal may be to work on your DXCC totals. It's not uncommon to work 100 countries for DXCC in a single weekend! If you are working on Worked All States this can also be done in a weekend in the ARRL Sweepstakes contests in the fall. A list of available contests is maintained by WA7BNM at <https://www.contestcalendar.com>

As your contesting continues you will find your operating skills improve, and you will also want to improve your station. This can be as simple as improved ergonomics to allow you to operate longer, improvements to your antenna(s), equipment changes, and many more items. The improvements available are endless and simply whatever you want to do.

As in any competitive event its important to be familiar with the rules of the contest. These are all published and readily available on the internet. The rules will also tell you what the "contest exchange" is. It may be your state, your zone (zone maps are on the internet, we are Zone 5 for most contests), your grid square or a sequential serial number. If you listen to a few exchanges, you will easily get the feel of this. The rules will also tell you how to submit your score. Most contests now require the score to be submitted in the Cabrillo format. The logging programs mentioned in this article all have this capability.

Every Day Can Be Field Day

Dave Galletly KM2O

By now, many AARA Members have heard ham radio event acronyms such as IOTA, VOTA, JOTA, SOTA and some other “OTA’s”. While I will not delve into all that here, I have been asked to discuss one of them, specifically “Parks on the Air” or POTA.

POTA has its roots in an ARRL operating event of a few years back which focused on the US National Parks system. The League set up “NPOTA” or National Parks On The Air as a year long operating event in conjunction with the 2016 centennial of the National Park Service (NPS). As ARRL put it, “Hams from across the country will activate NPS units, promote the National Park Service and showcase Amateur Radio to the public.

Once the books were closed on NPOTA in early 2017, with over 21,000 visits to over 460 National Park Service sites across the US and over one million amateur contacts were completed. This was truly one of the largest non-contest radio operating events in recent years. The exposure to the public as well as park staff was extremely positive for ham radio.

Following the sunset of the NPOTA year, a group of volunteers wanted to build on the surge of interest that NPOTA started by making this type of event more permanent. By 2018, Parks on the Air® was founded as a nonprofit organization promoting international portable “amateur radio operations that promote emergency awareness and communications from national/federal and state/provincial level parks.”

[\(https://parksontheair.com/\)](https://parksontheair.com/)

There are basically two major ways to participate in POTA and each is quite easy to get into. The fastest and easiest is to become a “Hunter.” Hunters may be located anywhere, primarily at home stations. Their goal is to contact the other type of stations, the “Activators.” Activators are those

who pack up some portable gear and travel to a registered National or State park, recreation or wilderness area. The Activators set up their portable stations and try to contact all the Hunters and other Activators they can find.

With all this, what is the payoff? Well, besides a lot of fun and development of skills, there is something that no self-respecting ham can do without...Wallpaper! Potentially, lots and lots of wallpaper! POTA is a source of a huge number of customized awards for virtually all aspects of chasing parks. All of them are available at no cost once you have registered on the POTA site (also completely free). (<https://pota.app/>)

At this point, unless you are already in on this, you may be wondering how to begin. Chances are, that if you have done any operating at AARA's June Field Day operation, you already have. This is because we operate at John Boyd Thacher State Park (POTA # US-2085) and for the past few years the K2CT call has been registered in POTA. Our Field Day logs are uploaded to POTA as well as to ARRL for the Field Day entry. Our use of N3FJP Field Day software allows operators to individually sign in as they operate. This embeds your call in the upload files at the end of the weekend. Not only does this allow us to note exceptional performance at the club level, but at POTA, the operator (your own call) as well as the club station (K2CT) are given credit. Make 10 QSO's at Field Day and you have completed a POTA activation under your own call. Make 10 QSO's on Saturday before 2359 UTC and then make another 10 QSO's after 0000 UTC Sunday and you have made 2 activations. There are categories for states, countries, early and late activation and hunting and it goes on from there.

The way to really get involved is by registering at the pota.app site noted above. Click on the "Sign Up" button at the top right corner site. It will ask you to then log in to "Cognitio", a platform used to run the POTA website. This will begin the brief process to register your callsign on the POTA system. This one-time registration is free of any charges. Once you are approved, use the same site to sign in.

There are several places to go, but you will land first on active spots of ongoing activations. Spotting is a big part of POTA as many operators are running QRP or low power field stations. Clicking on the 3 line

“hamburger” at the top left of the page will provide a menu. Since Hunters never have to upload a log, you may already have park contacts that you were not aware of. Click on the “Hunter Log” to find who may have already worked you from a POTA park. Moving up from there, if you have done a Field Day from Thacher, look at “My Activations” and be prepared to see that you too are an Activator. Keep going to “My Stats” for a look at what you have credit for. One more up is “My Awards” where you will see progress toward many of the award certificates. If you have qualified for any, this is where you may download them. Where are these parks? Click on “Maps” which shows you the location of literally thousands of them. Zoom in on your neighborhood and see what is nearby.

By now, your appetite may be whetted to try the “every day is Field Day” approach to ham radio. Becoming an activator is simple as well, but you must be prepared in advance and have a plan in place. Other than using a sophisticated Field Day station like K2CT, individual activations are very small scale. You need enough to get the job done, meaning logging those 10 contacts to make it a valid activation. Any less, the QSO’s still count, but this is considered a failed activation.

You will need to consider your location, radio, accessories, modes, power and of course, your antenna. Before you do anything, please read the rules! There are not many, but they are specific. “Rules & Documents” are on the menu as well as having a link at the top of the page. Other than Field Day, I came a bit late to the POTA Party as an activator. I have noted successes and failures by many, documented on YouTube as well as anecdotes of friends and acquaintances. This has led me to adopting a slightly different setup for a small activation. Noting the problems some have had with park personnel and their views of permits, ground mounted antennas, stringing wires in trees and driving stakes into the ground, I decided to go with a strictly mobile setup. This affords the ability for quick ins and outs as well as some stealth. I have read that the easiest way to be charged with a Federal felony is to drive a stake in the wrong National Park.

Smaller radios are a real godsend in POTA. I have an Icom 705 setup which can be used QRP or with a Xeiugu 125B 100-watt amplifier. The 125B also includes a tuner making this a good way to make full power for

field setups. The 705 may be operated wirelessly via apps from a phone or tablet. You may also attach a laptop directly via the included USB port for full rig control if you desire.

Reaching back to the shelf, I also rediscovered an old friend, that now seems perfect for POTA, the Icom 706 Mark II G. This incredibly sturdy 100-watt transceiver is mounted in a metal case that includes a power conditioner and antenna tuner, the MFJ-706 (unfortunately no longer commercially available). For either setup I have a pair of lightweight Bioenno 12V LiFePo batteries that can cover most activations. A foldable 100 solar panel can charge one battery while the other is in use.

As with all stations, antennas matter. While I have ground mounted vertical as well as pole mountable wire antennas, for the reasons mentioned above, I went back to the shelf for a set of long unused monoband hamstick style verticals on a three-magnet 3/8-24 mount. Using this setup, I can pull up to a location, making sure the parking spot is within the boundaries of the park as required by POTA rules, then deploy the magmount and selected hamstick. I run the coax back into the car, hook up the rig and power and am ready to go in less than 5 minutes. I usually fold down one of my car's rear seats to use as an operating desk. The operation is relatively unobtrusive. Teardown is equally quick.

Once there, you will need to log. Activators must upload logs to give credit to the Hunter contacts. Other than paper, which you will need to later enter electronically following your activation, here are a couple of light solutions. The first is an app that runs on Android, Windows, Linux or iOS called HAMRS. (<https://hamrs.app/>) You can set up with Park number, your band and mode settings and start logging. Spotting and maps are included if you have Internet access.

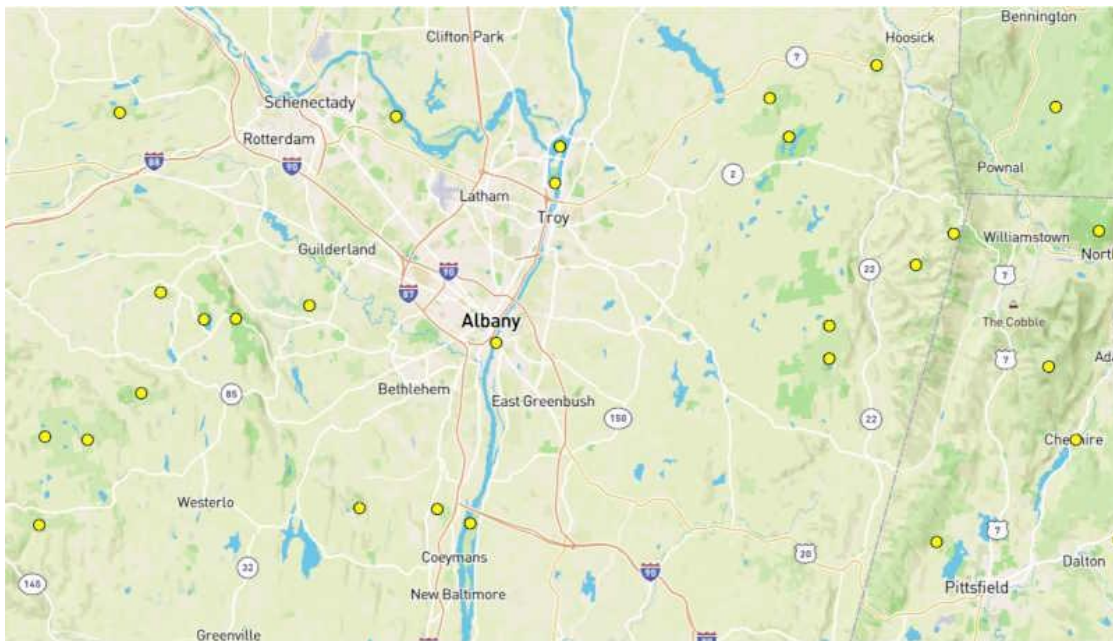
I was pleased to be asked recently to beta test another new logger: "Ham2K Portable Logger". This new app by Sebastian Delmont KI2D (a fellow member of the Hudson Valley Contesters and DXer's club) which includes spots and mapping, is constantly being updated with new features. I run it on an iPad as well as an Android phone easily. Watch for this to hit the app stores soon.

If you want to take in this information on POTA visually, give a look at "Getting Started with Parks on the Air" video on You Tube.

<https://youtu.be/odegfaGczAc?si=iO9Ydzs9muLhkgVD>) There is also a wealth of sites and videos devoted to this exciting aspect of our hobby.

Once you try this, you may have a new addiction!

POTA ON!



Park Locations in the Capital District (Yellow Circles)

Swap Shop

Have radio gear you want to buy, sell, trade, or give away?

Please send your item descriptions to wa3afs@arrl.net or dgherring@hotmail.com

Important Links:

Find a license class in your area: www.arrl.org/class

Find a license exam in your area: www.arrl.org/exam

The Eastern Iowa DX Bulletin:

<http://www.eidxa.org/EIDXBulletin.html>