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### **Peaks, Parks, and Prayers: CW & SSB Islands in a Digital Sea**

By Wayne Burdick, N6KR

Every day, hams worldwide, young and old, summit mountains and hills carrying the lightest possible load. They earn every calorie burned, and are rewarded with vistas most people never see. Like all adventurers, they proudly display nature's merit badges: scrapes, bruises, and stings.

And then they go back for more. The number of peaks "bagged" by some operators is staggering, as is their level of fitness and endurance.

In addition to those formally pursuing peaks (via SOTA, or Summits on the Air), there are many others who operate casually from hiking trails and parks. Some operate while they walk (pedestrian mobile, HT-style or HFpack). Some operate bicycle-mobile.

I'm writing this out of admiration for, and in solidarity with, all of those who commune equally with nature and the ionosphere.

There's one thing these hams have in common.

Upon arriving at their destination -- tired, sweaty, hungry, elated, or some combination of these -- they hope to make a few QSOs. To experience a synthesis of the outdoors and the radio art.

But it isn't always easy.

While many hams have transitioned to computer-based digital modes such as FT8, others have not. This includes ultralight travelers, as well as those who seek the satisfaction of home-building simple gear and putting it on the air.

For portable operators in particular, simplicity and pragmatics often dictate the use of CW and SSB. It may not be desirable or even possible to lug a laptop in your pack, find a place to set it up, and attach its myriad cables. You might struggle to see a washed-out LCD screen in direct sunlight. High winds might capture an open laptop and sweep your gear away.

Many, instead, choose traditional modes. These allow for small, integrated gear that can often be hand-held. And there's the bonus of immediacy such modes offer, without mediation, without constraints on duration or content.

To put yourself in their shoes, imagine that you just trekked several miles, much of it uphill. To accommodate the need for food, water, clothing, and safety gear, you've brought a minimum amount of radio equipment. It might be a 3-ounce CW QRP radio; an HF-VHF-UHF portable, an all-band/all-mode HF HT (like a KX2), or your latest home-brew transceiver.

When you arrive at your peak, you survey the spot for a suitable operating position. It might be a large, flat rock; a patch of ground not infested with ants and spiders; or a shady spot with a downslope in a favored direction. You might climb a tree. Shelter beneath a ridge. Or dangle your legs and antenna from a cliff.

Speaking of which, deployment of antennas presents another challenge. You could spin-cast or toss a wire, hoping for a good landing, without snags. You might wedge the feet of a tripod into rocks, then attach a small magnetic loop. Or you might use a simple telescoping whip.

All that effort. Now it's time to turn on the radio. And pray.

Virtually every time I've gone on such an outing, I've made contacts. At times I've been lucky. Maybe it's operating experience: knowing who to call.

But sometimes there's no one around on CW or SSB. Is it propagation? Or is everyone swimming in the digital sea, not paying attention to you, on your remote island?

You can spot yourself on RBN (reverse beacon network), or prearrange skeds. But what many of us hope for is that burst of contacts. Feeling like a rare DX station. Feeling that slap-on-the-back-at-a-distance that says:

"We hear you."

You can, of course, partake of this experience yourself.

Whether you do or not, though: Please consider listening for those who do. Formal activations are announced in advance. See for example:

<https://www.sota.org.uk/>

The band segments used are very small, or even a single frequency, making it easy to monitor them while you engage in other activity around the shack or on the air. You can use SOTA spotting websites, or just keep a receiver on one of the watering holes. (The Elecraft K3/K3S/KX2/KX3 makes this easy, with built-in scanning. You can set the rig up for either muted or live audio scans, the latter making it easier to hear weak signals when they pop up.)

One final thought. In this pandemic era, some of us have had more time to get on the air, and some of us have had more chances to get outside.

Let's do both. At the same time.

## Field Day Cleaning Your Equipment

We've received questions regarding cleaning Elecraft equipment during Field Day, this is especially important when more than one person will be operating your rig. We know that sharing is caring, however, cleaning has more meaning when it comes to COVID-19. We won't recommend any specific COVID-19 CDC approved cleaning products to clean your equipment since we have not tested any of these agents to see if they damage screens, buttons, and the outer coating. When cleaning your equipment, don't use harsh chemicals such as bleach; avoid getting moisture in any openings, and don't submerge your equipment in any cleaning agents (This may sound ridiculous but "COVID-19 clean" can make people go to extremes when it comes to sanitizing.) If you decide to use a cleaning agent on your equipment, spritz a disposable micro cloth with the solution and wipe your equipment - don't spray the cleaning agent directly on your gear. Throw away the micro cloth after use.



We also suggest placing hand sanitizer and a short note next to your equipment asking folks to sanitize hands before and after use. Don't forget that hard surfaces such as tables, chairs, pencils, pens, and clipboards should be sanitized throughout the day.

## QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo

QSO Today host Eric Guth, 4Z1UG, announced that the first QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo will commence on August 8th and 9th, 2020, over a period of 48 hours. This virtual Expo is built on a live virtual reality platform commonly used by Fortune 500 companies and major universities. The platform simulates a full convention experience with an exhibit hall and exhibit booths staffed by live attendants, speaker auditorium, lobby, and lounges. Anyone can attend from their home or office. Attendance

is free and registration can be found at [www.qsotodayhamexpo.com](http://www.qsotodayhamexpo.com). There are early bird prize benefits for registering now.

Eric and his team, including George Zafiropoulos, KJ6VU, have assembled 50+ of the best ham radio mentors in multiple tracks to address this conference from the virtual Expo's auditorium. At the Expo, amateur radio operators will be able to:

- Learn from a packed line-up of renowned ham radio speakers such as Ward Silver, N0AX, on Grounding and Bonding; Glen Johnson, W0GJ, on DXpeditions, and John Portune, W6NBC, on building slot antennas for HOA.
- See demos of the latest ham radio equipment from the world's top equipment companies. Attendees can easily ask questions and engage with Exhibitors through video, audio, or chat.
- Share ideas and network with their fellow ham radio operators at any time throughout the Expo.



While attendance is expected from traditional convention “goers”, the virtual Expo is a unique opportunity for the hundreds of thousands of ham radio amateurs who have never been to an event and can now participate without spending thousands of dollars on travel.

The QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo will commence on Saturday, August 8th, run for 48 hours as a live event, then will be available as an on-demand event for another 30 days.

Come visit Elecraft, a Gold Sponsor of the virtual Expo, and speak one-on-one with an Elecraft representative. Eric and Wayne will have scheduled chat sessions on specific products, so bring your questions!

For more information go to [www.qsotodayhamexpo.com](http://www.qsotodayhamexpo.com)

## Share Your Videos!

**Virtual Ham Expo attendees not only want to hear about Elecraft products...**

**They want to see them in Action!**

Who better than our own customers sharing their Elecraft adventures? We're looking for recent videos of you operating your KX2, KX3, K-Line - and yes K4 testers, we want to see you, too! It can be in your shack (make sure you've got good lighting), outdoors (Field Day comes to mind), or even on your kitchen table! Try to keep your videos short - a couple minutes at the most.

The first 20 videos selected for our video library at the Elecraft Virtual Ham Expo 2020 exhibit will receive an Elecraft T-Shirt.

Email us your videos at [webmaster@elecraft.com](mailto:webmaster@elecraft.com).



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## **News & Updates**

### **2020 Trade Show Schedule**

Here's a list of trade shows that we plan on attending in 2020. If you're attending any of these events, come on by and say hello!

- August 8 & 9 - QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo, <https://www.qsotodayhamexpo.com/>
- October 16-18 - Pacificon, San Ramon, CA
- November 6-8 - Northeast HamXposition, Marlborough, MA

**Subject to Change.**

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