

# Ham Radio and Scouting — A Great Combination

**A father and son Scouting team find that being prepared includes a handheld transceiver.**

## Don Kunst, W3LNE

The ARRL® and the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding designating the ARRL as a key resource for K2BSA and Radio Merit Badge training at the National Scout Jamboree. It also establishes the ARRL as the go-to source for Scouts interested in learning about and becoming involved in radio communication.



Andrew Koenig, KE5GDB, prepares to "peddle" K2BSA at the 2010 Jamboree.

In today's environment of Facebook, Twitter, cell phones and tight schedules it is difficult for ham radio to compete for the attention of today's youth. Ham radio, like Scouting, can be a life-long interest and it reinforces good citizenship and community service values as well as providing avenues for career development.

Since 1910, Scouting has served 114 million youths with 2 million (only 2%) achieving the rank of Eagle Scout and 181 (39 Eagle Scouts) becoming astronauts. Along the way, they earned 117 million merit badges.

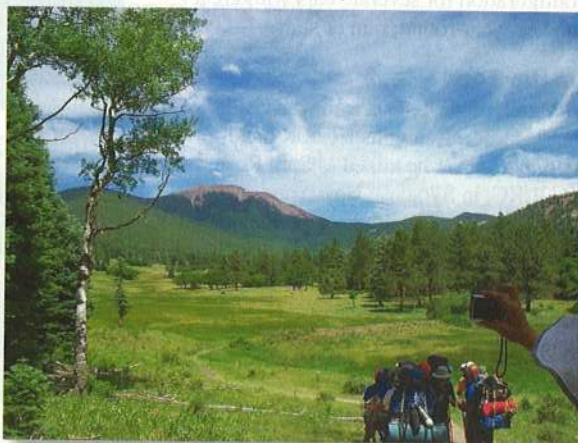
For those of us who are involved in Scouting and are also ham radio operators, it is natural to combine the two and enjoy exploring new things with your Scout children and other Scouts in the area. I returned to Scouting 7 years ago with my son, Garrison, KB3LEZ, an Eagle Scout, and have found many ways to share my interests with not only my son, but with my father, Arthur, W3WM, and mother, Sylbia, KB3HYV.

## Handy on the Trail

Scouting promotes the love of the outdoors and, yes, being prepared. Hiking and camping are my way of relaxing and staying in shape. I always carry a Yaesu VX-7 handheld transceiver with me. My son and I each have one we can use to monitor repeaters and weather alerts, to keep track of Scouts in our group and for listening to AM or FM broadcasts. Yes, I do carry a cell phone, but I can tell you that even on the Appalachian Trail in my area of Pennsylvania there are areas with no coverage. One winter

night, while I was in my tent, I sent a health and welfare message to my spouse via a ham monitoring the Appalachian Amateur Radio Group (AA3RG) repeater. It only took one call to bring a response from a local ham.

Today there are many radios that are great companions in the out-of-doors. I use the Yaesu VX-7R ([www.yaesu.com](http://www.yaesu.com)) because it covers the

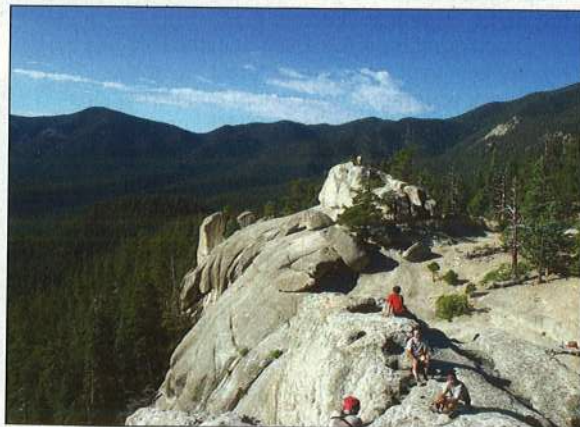


Our Philmont Crew standing in the Miranda meadow looking toward Mount Baldy, 12,441 feet, our next stop.

6 meter through 70 cm ham bands with a 5 W output and has a wideband receiver. Add to this its 450 memories, water resistance, battery capacity and compact size and you have the perfect wilderness radio.

I added a water resistant microphone and earphones, an extra battery, a MFJ-1720S ([www.mfjenterprises.com](http://www.mfjenterprises.com)) triband high-gain flexible antenna and a Pryme AL800 telescoping antenna ([www.pryme.com](http://www.pryme.com)) for extra reach. I carry the VX-7 on my pack's shoulder strap for ease of access and to keep the antenna as high and clear as possible. The microphone and earphones allow for quieter listening and lower power consumption. For extended outings, I have added a 5 W PowerFilm ([www.powerfilmsolar.com](http://www.powerfilmsolar.com)).

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Scouts on Window Rock looking down the valley to Base Camp at Philmont.

com) foldable solar roll to recharge batteries while hiking. I drape it over the back of the pack with bungee cords. I have used this configuration for several years with great success, year-round, rain or shine.

### On the Road

In March of 2006, Garrison was visiting Pearl Harbor. Using his FT-60R handheld transceiver he talked to Sam Rose, KC2LRC, in Syracuse New York via the Internet Radio Linking Project. Sam taped their conversation and used it in his Dayton Youth Forum presentation, which Garrison attended, later that year.

In 2009 we brought our VX-7s on a trip to the BSA High Adventure Florida Sea Base. We talked with many hams along the way and checked the weather for the next day's diving. We also went on multiple hikes and campouts, attended Field Day, participated in Jamboree On The Air and the Dayton Hamvention all with our handheld transceivers.

In 2010 we traveled to New Mexico and the Philmont Scout Ranch for a 100 mile hike covering three peaks, the highest being Mount Baldy at 12,441 feet. It was great to be able to talk through the local repeaters, listen to the Philmont Rangers and hear a little news from the outside world. Later that year we traveled to the Boy Scout National

<sup>1</sup>B. Morine, N2COP, "Amateur Radio and the National Scout Jamboree," *QST*, Jul 2010, pp 65-67.

## Be Prepared — Ham Radio Style

When bringing ham radios into the wilderness there are several important points to remember as you plan your outings:

- Be sure someone knows your route and time schedule, and have specific check-in times.
- Set specific overdue rules.
- Know the local repeaters and their tones.

Preprogram them into your radio and carry a list or the *ARRL Repeater Directory*.

- Don't forget the IRLP, EchoLink and D-STAR repeaters in your travel area.

- Check your repeater directory for information on the LITZ (Long Tone Zero) DTMF protocol and the Wilderness Protocol's standard simplex frequencies and calling times.

- Don't forget to program the simplex calling frequencies.
- Know your location by map coordinates, GPS or grid square.
- You may want to carry a PDF copy of your radio's manual on your smartphone.
- Keep all the accessory plugs inserted when not in use to preserve the water resistance of the radio.
- Keep your batteries warm in cold weather to preserve their power.



Don, W3LNE, and Garrison, KB3LEZ, at the 2010 Jamboree.

Jamboree at Fort A. P. Hill, Virginia. Garrison joined 45,000 other Scouts and Scouters for a weeklong celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> year of Scouting.<sup>1</sup> Cell phones were discouraged for Scouts at the event but ham radio was encouraged.

We visited K2BSA and met our good friend Andrew Koenig, KE5GDB, from Houston Texas, who was on staff. I attended as part of the EMS coverage of the event. My partner was Blake Edwards, W1IM, from Windsor, Massachusetts. We used our handheld transceivers for backup communications, to talk with Scouts, Garrison, K2BSA and the Radio Merit Badge booth. We also made use of their weather band capability to monitor the weather.

The highlight of the Jamboree was the open-air arena show held at night and attended by all the Scouts and their visitors, who together were about 55,000 people. Mike Rowe, an Eagle Scout and host of the Discovery Channel show *Dirty Jobs*, was a big hit.

### Northern Adventures

In 2011 we visited Dayton for the Hamvention where Garrison spoke at the Youth Forum on selecting an antenna for hiking and camping. In June we headed to Atokokan, Canada and the BSA High Adventure Northern Tier camp for a week of canoeing and camping. We took handheld

transceivers, with some extra antenna options, into this remote area where satellite phones are issued for emergencies. Check [www.arrl.org/international-operating](http://www.arrl.org/international-operating) for reciprocal operating information when traveling outside the country.

I can't tell how many times people have been amazed and interested in the capabilities of our handheld transceivers. It has sparked a number of inactive hams to get active again. The Scouts always love to talk on the radio and they think it's pretty cool to combine the latest handheld technology with the Internet to talk around the world. There is now an IRLP Topic Channel Reflector 9091 for Scouting.

The BSA recently announced the new Morse Code Interpreter Strip, indicating a proficiency in Morse code.

Also, at Dayton ICOM announced that it is now the BSA's official supplier for the National Jamboree. ICOM will provide equipment and support for the K2BSA radio operation, the Radio merit badge and Jamboree on the Air.

As you can see, ham radio and Scouting are the perfect marriage. I hope you will also be inspired to share your hobby with Scouts in your area. If so, you will reap the benefits of new volunteers and energy in your club. Let's open the eyes of Scouts to the adventure and fun of ham radio and make the Radio Merit Badge the one to get and be proud of. So get out there and share your hobby with some of the future leaders of America.

Please contact me, your local Scout council or go to [www.scouting.org](http://www.scouting.org) to join the fun.

Photos by Don Kunst, W3LNE.

Don Kunst, W3LNE, an ARRL member, is the assistant scoutmaster for Troop 147 in Carsonville, Pennsylvania. He was a Scout as a youth and is a Merit Badge counselor for seven badges including Radio. Don has been a paramedic for 30 years and is a wilderness first aid instructor together with being a member of RACES and an ARRL emergency coordinator. He was one of 20 paramedics selected for the 2010 National Jamboree at Fort A. P. Hill. Don is the secretary and webmaster of the Berry Mountain Amateur Radio Club ([BMARC.net](http://www.BMARC.net)) and member of the Central Pennsylvania Repeater Association ([W3ND.org](http://www.W3ND.org)). Don can be reached at 547 Luxemburg Rd, Lykens, PA 17048, [w3lne@arrl.net](mailto:w3lne@arrl.net).

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