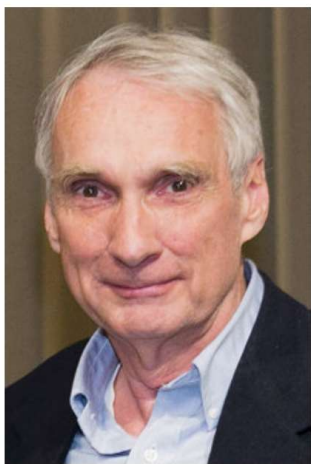


POTA Practice Makes Perfect

73 LAST WORD

Clint Sprott, W9AV



Clint Sprott, W9AV, was first licensed in 1955 at age 12 and was a professor of physics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, retiring in 2008.

[Matt Brown, K2EAG, lead photo]

You got your license and assembled a station. Now what do you do? Maybe chatting with a stranger is not your thing, and contests are too intense or time-consuming. I suggest you try becoming a “Hunter” in the Parks on the Air (POTA) program — you can do it from your home station.

The POTA website (pota.app) will list several dozen “Activators” who are, at that moment, in parks around the world looking for brief contacts with “Hunters.” The website will include the frequency the Activator is on, and the time they were last “spotted” on the air. You can make quick contacts with the ones you can hear, and the Activator will do the work of uploading their log, so you get credit for the contact, so make sure to register on the website and start downloading the awards that you can earn.

POTA is an ideal way for a new ham to develop operating skills. Take some time to listen to how callers make a contact, what to say, and when to say it. You will hear occasional bad operators, who are usually transmitting when they should be listening.

While SSB is the most popular mode, there are many CW POTA Activators who will give you a chance to hone your CW skills. They usually send slowly, and all you need to know is when to send your call, and to recognize it when they answer. Usually they give a signal report and a state or park number, but you already know that from the website, and you need not copy it since Hunters don’t submit logs. Your only goal is to get your call into their log.

Eventually, you may decide to become an Activator, which is good practice for assembling a portable or mobile station and operating away from home without commercial power — which is one of the purposes of ham radio. Fortunately, this is easy with the small radios, good batteries, and simple antennas.

Start with a common park and learn how to deal with multiple callers. It helps to maintain a steady rhythm, use few words, speak at an appropriate speed, and most importantly, let the callers know when to call and never take a caller before the previous contact has ended.

The skills you develop in the POTA program will prepare you for contests sponsored by ARRL and others, all from the comfort of your own home or the beautiful surroundings of a local park. Participating in POTA is easier than you might think. Give it a try!