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Introduction:

The year 2016 marks 100 years of the *National Park Service* (NPS). With so much amateur radio activity already taking place in the great outdoors, the ARRL has created the year-long *National Parks on the Air* (NPOTA) operating event to commemorate the centennial of the NPS and to showcase amateur radio to the public.

Throughout 2016, hams are encouraged to take their stations afield to activate NPS-operated units. There will be awards available for these *Activators* and there will be awards available for those hams who stay at home to work the activated units, the *Chasers*.

What qualifies as an NPOTA Unit? To keep things simple, the ARRL has chosen to use the National Park Service's own list of *NPS Administrative Units and Affiliated Areas*. This (growing) list currently includes 484 Units consisting of National Parks, National Historic Parks, National Historic Sites, National Historic Trails, National Monuments, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, National Recreation Areas, National Battlefields, National Battlefield Parks, National Lakeshores, National Seashores, National Military Parks, National Memorials, National Parkways, National Reserves, National Rivers, an International Historic Site, Affiliated Areas, and other units.

What doesn't qualify as an NPOTA Unit? National Heritage Areas, sites on the National Register of Historic Places, and National Forests. Yes—the Wayne National Forest *does not* qualify for NPOTA because it is run by the US Forest Service, not by the National Park Service.

Full rules for NPOTA can be found by browsing to the ARRL website (<http://www.arrl.org/>), clicking on "National Parks on the Air" (<https://npota.arrl.org/>), clicking on "Find out more about ARRL's National Parks on the Air Event" (<http://www.arrl.org/NPOTA>) and then clicking on "Go Now" under "Rules" (<http://www.arrl.org/npota-rules>).

Here's a list of the certificates that one can earn by Chasing or Activating:

- **Activator Award** – earned by successfully activating at least one NPS Unit; the certificate can be printed with the actual number of successful activations.
- **Chaser Award** – earned by successfully working at least one activated NPS Unit; the certificate can be printed with the actual number NPS Units worked.
- **National Parks Honor Roll** – earned by Chasers who work at least 75% of the 59 *National Parks* activated during 2016.
- **Five Star Activator** – earned by Activators who engage in exceptional outreach during activations; the Activator must perform five or more of the following:
 - Media Publicity
 - Public Information Table
 - Youth/Scouting Involvement
 - Radio E-Message
 - Digital Modes (demonstrate digital to at least one person not already familiar with digital)
 - Satellite QSO
 - Green Power (solar, wind, water, other non-fossil fuel; batteries charged using green power)
 - Battery Power
 - Social Media
 - Intrepid Traveler (successfully activate at least five different NPS Units)
 - Stamp Collector (participate in NPS Passport Program)
 - Share the Mic (have a new ham or non-ham make a QSO)

The QSO-exchange for NPOTA QSOs most often will be simply a signal report and the four-character NPS Unit designator. (Examples of designators are NP01 for Arcadia National Park and PK04 for the Natchez Trace National Parkway.)

Chasers:

Let's talk about *Chasers* now.

How does a Chaser find out when and where to look for NPOTA activity? It's simple: browse to the ARRL website (<http://www.arrl.org/>), click "National Parks on the Air" (<https://npota.arrl.org/>), and click on "On the Air" to see a list of registered events scheduled to occur within the next ten days. A link to "all upcoming events" is also available on this page. Notice that some Activators provide additional guidance—"watch SOTAWATCH.org", "look on DXSummit", "see NPOTA Facebook", etc., for more detailed information about actual times and frequencies. Also notice that these pages are associated with the ARRL's Logbook of the World program (LotW)—yes, in order to qualify for Chaser or Activator awards within NPOTA, one must be registered within and use LotW.

Once a Chaser has made a contact with an NPOTA activation, he simply uses Trusted QSL (TQSL) to upload the QSO to LotW. Once the Activator has uploaded his log of the activation to LotW, the Chaser will get credit for having worked that particular NPS Unit. By logging into the NPOTA site, one can view one's standing by clicking on "Leader Board" and can see a list of NPS Units worked by clicking on "Units Worked". For example, after I log on I can see that I have worked two NPOTA activations and have a rank of 2,121st (as of February 15), and have worked "Natchez Trace National Parkway (PK04) and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail (TR08). (Please note: computerized logging is *not* required to participate in NPOTA, either as an Activator or as a Chaser; TQSL includes a simple feature to allow one to upload QSOs logged to paper—and if this is too much trouble, Ted Jacobson, W8KVK, has offered to help local hams generate the proper files for upload within TQSL.)

Activators:

And now let's turn to the topic of *Activators*.

What if someone wishes to be an Activator and operate at the receiving end of a pile-up at an NPS Unit? This is a little more challenging but ultimately might be more fun.

First, read the full rules (<http://www.arrl.org/npota-rules>) and the "NPOTA Activator's Guide" PDF (<http://www.arrl.org/npota-docs> | <http://www.arrl.org/files/file/On%20the%20Air/NPOTA/NPOTA-Activator-Guide.pdf>). These documents explain several important things: activations can use any amateur band except 60-meters and any mode; no crossband QSOs and no repeater QSOs are allowed except for those through satellites or the International Space Station; no remote operation is allowed—the Activator and the equipment must actually be located in the NPS Unit. These documents also explain that for an activation to be considered official, the Activator must make at least ten QSOs from that NPS Unit during that operation. (But Chasers needn't worry—if an Activator fails to make the required ten QSOs, any Chasers who worked him *will* receive Chaser points for the QSO once the Activator has uploaded his log to LotW. These documents also explain the ways one can prove that the operation actually took place at the NPS Unit, should the ARRL need to request such proof.

The full NPOTA rules (<http://www.arrl.org/npota-rules>) lists additional specific rules for activations at the various types of NPS Units—National Park, National Historic Trail, National Parkways, etc.

How does one find the list of eligible NPS Units? Browse to the ARRL website (<http://www.arrl.org/>), click on "National Parks on the Air" (<https://npota.arrl.org/>), then click on "NPS Units". Wait a moment for the "State" pull-down to populate and then select the state of interest.

Please note: it is very likely the list of NPS Units will change as the year progresses, so it's important to look at the official list of Units on the website occasionally.

If we look at "Ohio", we see there are ten eligible NPS Units in Ohio. Of these, five are located in southern Ohio within driving distance of Athens County: "William Howard Taft" National Historic Site (NS78) in Cincinnati, "Dayton Aviation Heritage" National Historic Park (HP11) in Dayton, "Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers" National Monument (MN18) in Wilberforce, "Hopewell Culture" National Historic Park (HP15) in Chillicothe, and "North Country National Scenic Trail" National Scenic Trail (TR04) which runs across southern Ohio. Of these, "Hopewell Culture" and the "North Country National Scenic Trail" are closest to Athens and NCNST provides by far the most possible operating locations.

An Activator can use any sort of station that can be transported to and safely operated at the chosen location. The station might be a mobile station built into a car or truck; a station built into a camper; a 100-watt transceiver set up on a picnic table using a push-up mast supporting a dipole or two and a gasoline-powered generator; or a battery-operated QRP station and a simple tree-supported wire antenna.

The ARRL encourages all Activators to coordinate with NPS staff at a unit *before* showing up to activate a unit; this is especially important for the smaller units such as "Hopewell Culture" and "William Howard Taft" where even a small activation might cause a severe disruption in access by the public. Activators should always cooperate with the NPS staff at all times. The ARRL has made available a document especially written for NPS staff who might be unfamiliar with the NPOTA program; it's entitled "NPOTA for NPS Staff" and is available as a full-color PDF download (<http://www.arrl.org/files/file/On%20the%20Air/NPOTA/NPOTA-NPS-Trifold.pdf>).

Now—where might a southeastern Ohio ham operate?

"Hopewell Culture" National Historic Park (<http://www.nps.gov/hocu/>), located just outside of Chillicothe, is very small but might be large enough for a minimalist activation near the Visitor Center. A satellite-view of the park can be seen here: <http://www.nps.gov/hocu/planyourvisit/directions.htm>.

On the other hand "North Country National Scenic Trail" National Scenic Trail is very extensive and offers a multitude of operating possibilities. The NCNST (<http://www.nps.gov/noco/> & <http://www.northcountrytrail.org/>) is a 4,600 mile hiking trail which extends from eastern New York State to central North Dakota and passes through the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Within Ohio, much of the NCNST follows the Buckeye Trail ("Follow the Blue Blazes" - <http://www.buckeyetrail.org/>). Of interest to those of us in Athens County, the NCNST passes through the Wayne National Forest in Washington and Belmont Counties, Burr Oak Lake State Park, Hocking Hills State Park, Lake Logan State Park, Tar Hollow State Park, Scioto Trail State Park, and Pike Lake State Park. This means there are

dozens—if not hundreds—of possible locations in southern Ohio at which to set up an activation even we don't consider all of the trail that is on private land!

There are some rules specific to activations on *National Scenic Trails*. I quote from the rules: “In the spirit of the event, operating sites on National Scenic Trails should be reached under human power. Operations from National Scenic Trails should be conducted as close to the trail as possible, no further away than 50 yards from the trail itself. Operators should use discretion when choosing their operating location to maximize safety and to limit inconvenience to other trail hikers. Operating from a vehicle, or having any portion of your station attached or connected to your vehicle, is not allowed.” Unfortunately, these rules make the activation of the NCNST slightly more difficult than activations of other types of units but they don't make activations impossible. I interpret these rules to mean an Activator is allowed to drive to a point somewhere near (or even on) the NCNST, park their car or truck, and then carry their equipment (radios, power, antennas, tables, chairs, tent) some undefined distance to the actual operating location very close to the actual trail. If we consider locations along the NCNST only within Burr Oak State Park, we can find easy automobile-access to the NCNST at the entrance road to Burr Oak State Park Cabins and Lodge (near the former Ranger Station), Boat Dock 3, Boat Dock 2, Boat Dock 1, and Tom Jenkins Dam. It is very likely that similar easy automobile-access to the NCNST can be found within the other State Parks the NCNST passes through.

(We should also notice that the NCNST passes through the “Dayton Aviation Heritage” National Historic Park, which means that both Activators and Chasers can get credit for both HP11 and TR04 with a single QSO.)

Wrap Up:

Does NPOTA sound like fun? I think it sounds like a blast!

I would like to see members of the ACARA make several activations throughout 2016, at the NCNST and at other NPS Units.

Let's think about doing several radio expeditions of two, three, or four club-members working together to set up one or two stations—one CW station and one SSB station, perhaps, or two SSB stations working different bands. If the operators are interested in earning their own certificates, they can operate under their own callsigns so long as activity is brisk enough to guarantee that ten QSOs can be made with each callsign. (Making ten QSOs should *not* be hard—SCARF's Russ Ellis, N8MWK, activated NCNST at Boat Dock 2 in Burr Oak State Park on January 30 and made 139 QSOs on 40 and 20 meters using a simple ground-mounted vertical as an antenna.)

Perhaps we could do one activation of the NCNST in Burr Oak Lake State Park using modern gear—an Elecraft KX3 on CW and an ICOM IC-7000 on SSB, maybe—with a follow-up activation of the NCNST in Burr Oak at a later date using vintage tube-type gear?

I know several ACARA members have expressed interest in participating in NPOTA as Activators—Bob Curtis, KD8FRQ; Andy Young, KD8WVX; and Tom Rockhold, N0OGS immediately come to mind; who else is interested?