

Special Events Stations

As far as I am concerned there are THREE primary aims and they are probably in the following order:

- 1 To promote the host (Mills-on-the-Air, Railways-on-the-Air, JOTA etc.)
- 2 To promote Amateur Radio to all and particularly to any visitors
- 3 To have fun playing radio as a social event

Let's find an excuse for playing radio. As Mills-on-the-Air is just a couple of weeks away we could activate a local Mill, later in the year we could help a local Scout Group do JOTA or we could find a local Railway. The list is pretty much endless and could be influenced by your own interests.

'On the Air' – Lifeboats, Guides Thinking Day, Airfields, Castles & Stately Homes, International Marconi Day, Mills, Museums, British Inland Waterways, Churches & Chapels, Railways, Scouts JOTA, there's Summits-on-the-Air (SOTA) if you feel up to it, there are many, many more...

Choose your point of interest.

First of all you need to choose your point of interest. Example: Let's choose Moredon Windmill, (Slide 001) it no longer exists but was in what is now the recreation ground off Church Walk North, (Slide 001a) just to the north of Moredon Road/Whitworth Road, (Slide 001b) Moredon. Its GR was SU139873 (Eastings 413946, Northings 187317) and nearest postcode is: SN25 3DJ (you will need this information to get the NOV.) Obtainable from (Slide 001c, then 001d) www.streetmap.co.uk

OK, we need to get permission from the landowner, in this case I guess Swindon Council. Make an application, explain what you want to do and why. Tell them you have insurance (you are an RSGB Affiliated club aren't you? Get permission in writing/email.

Apply to Ofcom for a NOV to get, say, GB0MWM, Golf Bravo Zero Moredon (Slides 002a & 002b) Wind Mill, it can be done on line and you get the NOV back immediately.

Plan your day (weekend).

Most of the 'On-the-Air' activations are leisure hours over the weekend. Organise your team of volunteers for setting up, running and packing away after.

Decide what kit you are going to use. It doesn't have to be anything special; you are not planning for DX so any old G5RV or simple aerial will do. I don't know what kind of 'sky-hooks' you guys use to hold it up, I have a pair of Racal 40' pump-up (now sadly push-up) masts.

For a transceiver – it is best to have something simple that everyone can use. Don't try to work with the latest menu driven piece of wonder kit, KISS. I use a simple Yaesu Ft-840 with a manual tuner.

I don't bother with computer logging but I always have a laptop present for visitors to look up on QRZ to see the person to whom we are talking, it adds interest for visitors.

Make sure you have a suitable shelter; you know the English weather as well as I. Refreshments are a must and access to a toilet is a necessity.

Other bits I add are an exhibition board with loads of stuff on it, (Slide 003) all about Amateur Radio. Your visitors may well read a lot of the information on the board but may be shy to actually approach you particularly if you are busy chatting to others on the radio in a language that they may not understand. On that front it is useful to have enough members of your team to be able to field questions and talk to members of the public. From this you might gain new members for your club.

I also take a map on a cork board and coloured pins. (Slides 004 & 005) Stick the pins in to the places where you have had QSOs. If there are children (or visiting adults) get them to stick the pins in, let them become involved and the kids love to learn where all the places are on the map.

Take with you: a copy from the RSGB of 'emc-leaflet-13.pdf', a copy of your license and your NOV and any permissions you have obtained.

Getting close to the event date.

Advertise that you are going to be there. Put signs on the gate to the recreation ground and in local shops. Let the local radio station know and get them interested in what you are doing. You never know, they might come and visit you on the day!

Get your team to commit to helping. Create a duty roster. Make sure you have photocopies of Log Book pages to record your events. Create a QSL card. Make sure there is a record on QRZ.com. Make sure this has fairly detailed notes of what you are doing, why and what with. Also add a QSL route.

Make a list of all the equipment you require. Do you need a generator or can you blag wiggly-ergs from a nearby resident? Have you got a radio tent? Have you got a refreshments tent? Chairs? Tables? Clip-boards? All the rest of the kit lined up?

Make sure you have a small tool-kit for running repairs (pozi, flat-bladed screwdriver, craft knife, insulation tape, adjustable spanner etc.) and a collection of various sized Ferrite Slugs!

On the morning of the event.

The first team to arrive need to put up tent(s), lay out mains cabling and start erecting the antenna supports. Get the antennae up in the air. (Slide 010)

Bring in the transceiver, tuner, clock, log sheets, pens, headphones, microphone etc.

Typically Special Events Stations (of the 'on-the-Air' variety) will normally be operating between about 0930 and 1700 local time on the Saturday and 0930-1600 on the Sunday (if applicable). I have operated outside those hours but those are the 'expected hours' by the operators at the other end.

So you are ready to start.

The usual 'aim of the game' is to talk to as many UK & near continent stations as possible. Spread the word about your host as much as you can. I always aim to speak to as many locals as I can (usually have a 2m station running as well) to try and lure them in to visit. Others, it is just 'spreading the word' that the place exists and is worth a visit. Encourage people to visit your host. Near continental love special events stations too. I always find their English to be excellent though I slow down just a little and always point them to QRZ.com to read at their leisure. They will want QSL cards.

Operating.

Make sure you have operators available to relieve. Make sure tea & biscuits are available to all.

As far as QSOs are concerned, I try and pick out and encourage M3/M6 calls, /P calls /M calls etc., try to work anyone who is making a special effort to get through to you. Your hosts will also want you to work as many like Special Events Stations and will often ask 'How many (Mills/Railways/Churches etc.,) have you spoken to toady?'

Enjoy the day. Have your team encourage as many members of the public to become involved. Remember, members of the public can 'Pass Greetings' to others over the air. Think of everyone who comes to see you as a possible new recruit.

Paper logging allows you to make extra notes in the 'remarks' column. I generally note the name and QTH of the other side. I do not give all the station information out with every QSO. Most people will have 'read the mail' and will already know. Direct people to QRZ.com, they can then read up on you whilst they are waiting their turn, it keeps them interested. That way they will also see the QSL route.

At the end of the day.

If you have time constraints make sure you announce your closing time in a countdown fashion over the closing quarter hour so that the moment of going QRT doesn't come as a shock. There will always be a few more who want you and if time permits go for it!

In most instances you will have to pack up your valuables and take them away. Hopefully you can leave tents, masts and aerials erected ready for a quick and easy start in the morning.

At the end of the Event.

Strip down all of your gear and pack it away. Take your tents down and pack away if dry. Take down your aerials and masts. Roll up your cables and go home and enjoy the rest!

I usually go through all the QSOs in the log on QRZ.com and make a note of those who do not wish to receive a QSL card. I do not usually send QSL cards to other of the Special Events Stations who were active on the day. Then I write out the QSL cards, pack them up with a copy of the NoV and a Radcom address label and send them off to the RSGB Bureau.

Having organised the first of your Special Event Stations from a given location, in this case Moredon Windmill, it is much easier to book the site the next year. When you email to thank the landowner you will have a record of the event. Use the same email thread for next year to re-establish contact and then remind them of how good you were behaved and how the public enjoyed it etc. Come back next year and enjoy it all over again with a lot less effort in paperwork terms.

Mills-on-the-Air

Mills-on-the-Air Slides:

011 – Bursledon Windmill showing the half-sized G5RV with its ladder-line hanging down over a small pond to keep it away from members of the public.

012 – Racal push-up mast with 2m collinear atop.

013 – The Shepherd's Hut at Wilton Windmill

014 – Bursledon Windmill with Ray G3HRH and his 2m SSB /P setup

015 – G3HRH in his operating position inside his Discovery

Churches-and-Chapels-on-the-Air

Ken & I do Churches-and-Chapels-on-the-Air from St Mary's Church Fordingbridge. We are allowed to use the Church Tower to support one end of the antenna so there is only the need to erect one of the push-up masts. BUT this gives me a wonderful opportunity to go up the Church Tower at 8 in the morning to sling the halyards. This gives an excellent bird's-eye view of the Avon Valley and the small town of Fordingbridge. A quick pause to look at the old bells and their mechanisms on the way! Slides 020a through to 022)

Slide 023 G4GBP with The Reverend Gary Philbrick in QSO with Skarfskerry Chapel (near John o' Groats)

Railways-on-the-Air

As some of you already know I do Railways-on-the-Air from Blunsdon Station. A number of you have already come along and helped in many ways and for that I am grateful. For those of you who are not familiar, the first obstacle is to get the antenna up and over the lake. The lake is surrounded by scrubby trees which add to the difficulty. (Slides 030, 031) Once the antenna is up everything else is easy.

I have a pair of 40ft Racal push-up masts one at the far end of the lake and the other one near the 'shack'. The near mast also supports the 2m collinear and a 20m dipole. This means we can run three stations concurrently, 80/40, 20m and 2m. Slides 032 through to 038)

We get quite a number of visitors but the best bit is the steam engines!

JOTA

JOTA for the last few years for me has been quite a big event as it has coincided with Hampshire Winter Camp so we have had upwards of 500 Scouts on site. The organisers of the Camp have us timetabled in as part of the entertainment/education of the attending Scouts. This increases our footfall dramatically as we know we will have 1/3rd of the 500 coming through in each of three 2 hour sessions, Saturday morning, afternoon and Sunday morning. I usually get three NOV's in a sequence (GB0HWC, GB1HWC & GB2HWC).

Here's how we do it.

We have radio stations on 80/40m running all the time and these will try and hook up with other JOTA stations around the UK. We will have an HF station (usually on 20m) where we will try and speak to JOTA stations on other continents. We have managed Egypt, Canada, USA, India and Europe (Slide 039 showing the SteppiR). The Dutch are always good! We will have a DATA/SSTV station, usually on 30/20m and a station on 2m FM which can be particularly useful if the band conditions on HF are poor. All of these will use GB2HWC, because this is the callsign on the QSL cards.

We also have a pair of 'handies', one in our base station and one 'out in the field' working on 2m as GB0HWC & GB1HWC.

Antenna-wise we have a full-sized G5RV for 80/40, a SteppiR for the higher HF bands, and antenna for the DATA/SSTV station and collinear on top of the nearest 40' Racal mast. Station separation is provided by Dunestar Bandpass filters (if you have got the xxMHz filter then that is your key to use that band, if you haven't then you find a different Dunestar!). (Slides 040 through to 048)

We provide crib cards for the Scouts to fill out prior to them 'passing greetings to others' over the air. This controls the extent of what they are saying (so they don't give out too much personal information) and also gives them something to read if they get a bit tongue tied. (Slide 049 – 053)

Other side shows.

In addition to the radios we have sets of Morse Buzzers laid out across a large table. We usually have 5/6 pairs along with double sided Morse crib cards. This is extremely popular and particularly with the girls. We also have two or three Arduino programming stations and at least one RaspberryPi for the Scouts to program and make things happen! (Slides 054, 055)

Again we have the exhibition stand and the map board and pins. When the kids have had a QSO let them put a pin in the map. I have recently had to replace the map because Gilwell Park expanded to about 40 miles diameter and there was a massive hole in the cork board.

The smiles on their faces make it all worth-while. This is why we do it!

(Slides 062 – 065)