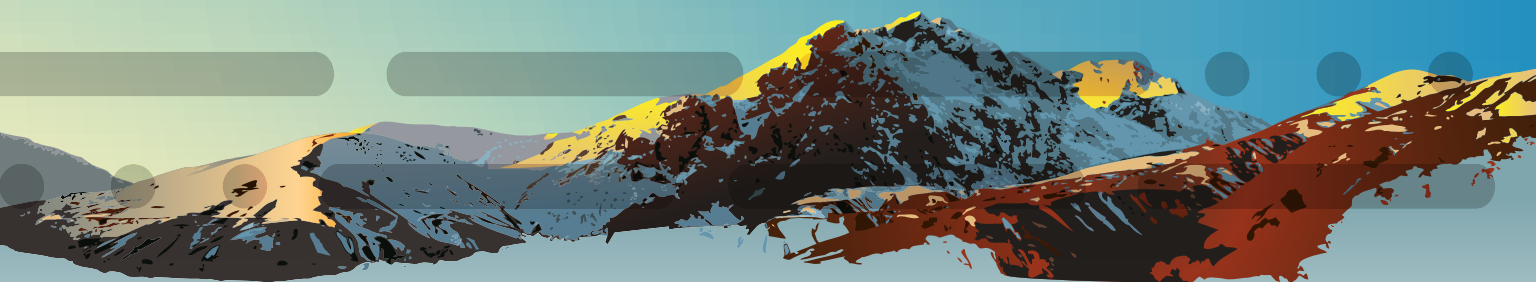


Enjoy the Journey

Amateur radio is such a vast collection of sub-hobbies (electronics, contesting, and building, to name a few) that it's easy to get overwhelmed or distracted. Choosing a path and setting goals can help you hit the heights.



73 LAST WORD

Stuart Thomas, KB1HQ

I combine my passion for radio with hiking by participating in the Summits on the Air (SOTA, www.sota.org.uk) program. This activity involves hiking summits throughout the world with your radio, making on-air contacts and collecting points for completed activations. It's a competition against yourself — I need to complete personal goals to be proficient in portable radio operation on mountain summits while dealing with a variety of elevations and weather conditions. Evaluating my past radio accomplishments and setting future goals is a way of staying on track in this pursuit.

When I started in SOTA, my first goal was to complete a summit. At that time I was using a handheld, and I knew the stock antenna and 5 watts wouldn't work very well. I found a VHF Yagi antenna project using piano wire and plastic tubing, and scrounged my parts bin for the parts. Adding coaxial cable gave me a lightweight high-gain antenna for less than \$5. I climbed a SOTA summit in northwest Maine and made contacts. It wasn't a durable solution — the antenna fell apart after a few activations — but it got the job done, and more importantly, I had fun.

Wanting to reach farther than VHF line of sight, I sold the HF radio I had at the time, and purchased a lightweight Elecraft KX3 that consumed less power and was easier to pack. After several 10-mile trips with high elevation gains, I realized I needed an even lighter radio. However, the major roadblock was CW (Morse code). Super-lightweight QRP (low power) radios predominantly are CW rigs, and while I had learned CW for my General license exam, I hadn't used it since.

My next goal was to become proficient in CW, but it didn't come easily. I spent countless hours listening to ARRL Code Practice Files, decoding CW. Becoming a better CW operator is still a goal I am working on.

My final goal is reaching "SOTA Goat" status. This status (which comes with a trophy) is achieved after completing 1,000 points in SOTA activations, and is a well-deserved recognition for those who put in the effort to operate radio under less-than-ideal conditions. I've accumulated more than 500 points and still have a long way to go. On the way to that goal, I keep in mind something my friend and mentor, Steve Galchutt, WGØAT (a two-time SOTA Goat himself) says: "Enjoy the radio journey."

While doing portable radio from summits may not appeal to you, the process is the same for whatever you might be interested in. Set goals to help keep the hobby interesting and prevent yourself from becoming overwhelmed. Use amateur radio in the way that works best for you. Remember, there are many different paths to the summit, so select one and enjoy the journey!

"Use amateur radio in the way that works best for you. Remember, there are many different paths to the summit."



Stuart Thomas, KB1HQ, lives in the Washington, DC metro area and enjoys hiking when he's not on the radio.