

Fox Hunting Article by Glenn, AB3TQ
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In 2013, from news that was only six years late, I learned that Morse Code was no longer an Amateur Radio license requirement. I have since revisited my insufficient CW effort, but the removal of that barrier meant there was no longer anything preventing me from becoming a ham. After a December exam session that year, my amateur testing career ended as suddenly as it began. It was an overnight success story, only 40 years in the making. HF easily won out as interest number one for me. Mostly using portable antennas, batteries and compact radios to make outdoor SOTA contacts (Summits On The Air). I also wanted to try out Fox hunting, the RF search for generally low power radios hidden in outdoor public locations. I was sure that would also involve portable antennas, batteries, and compact radios. And remember, outdoor, so no down side there either.

I found a Tennessee ham advertising all of his no longer used Foxhunt gear for sale. That included a 15 mw two meter transmitter, directional antennas, and an offset oscillator attenuator (whatever that was supposed to do). I bought it, and was then surprised that most of my ham friends showed no interest in the new toys. Giving up was not an option, as I had finally found a purpose for the HT I had gotten so early on, and hardly ever used.

A newer friend I had met through Geocaching took an interest in amateur radio when he learned that I was a ham. Could I help him get licensed too? We reviewed the Tech test material and electrical principles that went beyond the basics he already knew. Ron is now K3RJW, and is currently working toward a General ticket, with the goal of a 2017 upgrade. Then I can properly introduce him to SOTA.

For now, I asked Ron if he might have any interest in Foxhunting. That got an immediate YES. He actually had previous Fox experience with CB radio, and the opportunity to take it up again very much interested him. He even placed an order for his own 700 mw radio after a successful test hunt for my 15 mw Fox. We made a few more practice runs (mostly short distance foot chases), and seemed to be having some success.

I then checked around, looking for nearby opportunities to participate in group hunts. PAARC was the only place promoting any local Foxhunting activity. Coming from the Reading area, it wasn't quite on our doorstep. We would not know the area as well, but it would do. I attended a PAARC first Friday meeting to make some Foxhunting contacts in the membership. Jim K3CHJ and Bob K3DBD were helpful and informative. In January I became a new club member, and in April the first PAARC Foxhunt of the year was announced for the last Saturday of that month.

Ron and I showed up at the starting point coordinates. In charge of placing the Fox that day, Bob K3DBD, was off making preparations at an unknown distant location. Six

other hunters would also show up at the starting point. We were the only newbies. Eight Foxhunters is a smaller turnout than I had expected from a good size club, and hunts are open to anyone (not just members). But what a great bunch they turned out to be. While getting to know some of them, we got helpful tips and looked over some of their gear of choice.

When the Fox was activated, and "contact" was established with it, I expected to see a sudden flurry of site activity, with everyone then quickly rushing off in search of the Fox. Instead, that was the most relaxed laid back "race" I have ever been a part of. More specific tips for the new guys, and nobody took off before we had a solid lock on the target direction. I expect that we will figure that out a little quicker next time.

At some point each group did start wandering off, individually making its own way toward the Fox. We didn't see any of them again until we arrived at the destination. We had been warned that after descending to a lower elevation away from the starting point, we would probably lose the Fox signal until getting closer to it. That loss of signal happened quickly. We just had to trust our initial bearing and keep going. At some point we started picking up the signal again. We made lots of wrong turns along the way, but generally increasing signal strengths told us we must be closing in. We were dead last to arrive at the 5 Watt Fox location. It and the three additional Foxes hidden in that vicinity had all been tracked down by everyone there. Soon enough we made those finds for ourselves. Thanks for the advice and patience to Bob K3DBD - Jim K3CHJ - Sal NC3U - Bill W3FRB - Jane KC3FSR - Al AG3T and Dori K3TES.

I had never attempted to locate a Fox from that distance, not having a 5 Watt Fox. It was a learning experience, and we learned that we need more practice. I am not concerned about finishing last, but getting there a bit more efficiently should be a reasonable short term goal. We will be working on that. If anyone has ever been interested to learn more about ARDF (Amateur Radio Direction Finding) by any of its common names (Foxhunting, Radio Sport, Bunny Hunting, T-Hunting, Transmitter Hunting), you are unlikely to find a better group to meet up with. Of course it can be a competition (there is always a winner), but not at the expense of fun with this group. The next hunt is on the schedule. <http://www.paarc.net/fox-hunting/> I Hope to see you at the finish, whenever I manage to get there.

Glenn AB3TQ - rookie Foxhunter

Learn more about getting involved in PAARC Foxhunting by writing to w3frb at comcast.net.

