

The ARRL National Parks on the Air Event

Pack up your gear and help the National Park Service celebrate their Centennial!



In 2014, ARRL celebrated our own Centennial with the largest on-air event of its kind, the ARRL Centennial QSO Party. It was hugely successful, generated a lot of activity on the bands, and provided a lot of time for amateurs worldwide to pursue various accomplishments in the program. The feedback we received at ARRL Headquarters almost universally included the question, “When can we do something like that again?”

The answer is: 2016.

Celebrating 100 Years of the National Park Service

Next year will be the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service (NPS). For the last century, NPS has preserved and maintained hundreds of sites of natural or historic significance, from the homes of Revolutionary War heroes and Civil War battlefields, to the volcanoes of Hawaii and cave dwellings of past civilizations. As ARRL just celebrated our own Centennial, and because Amateur Radio is often enjoyed in the great outdoors, it

seemed fitting to devise a program to help NPS celebrate their own 100th birthday.

The program, “National Parks on the Air (NPOTA),” runs throughout 2016. Activity will be promoted and encouraged from all 408 official NPS

“Administrative Units” and 25 NPS “Affiliated Areas” across the United States. This includes all 59

National Parks, plus National Battlefields, Historic Sites, Memorials, Preserves, Reserves, Rivers, Seashores, National Scenic Trails, and many other units. See the sidebar, “List of Official NPS Administrative Units, by Type,” for a list of unit types and their quantities.

Chasers and Activators

The program will have two tracks of participation — Chasers and Activators. Chasers will simply attempt to make contact with operators in as many NPS units as possible. Activators will attempt to activate as many of the units as possible. You may participate as both Chaser and Activator.

National Parks on the Air (NPOTA) is modeled after the Mixed DXCC award.



Only one contact with any given NPS unit will be required. There will be no tallying of NPS units based on bands or modes. NPOTA will be administered entirely through Logbook of The World (LoTW); no paper logs or QSLs will be accepted for NPOTA credit. All NPS units will be added to LoTW as a “location.” Both Chaser and Activator totals will be tracked via an online leader board based on LoTW data, just as it was for the Centennial QSO Party.

Three award certificates will be available — the Chaser Award and the Activator Award certificates will be available to any radio amateur anywhere in the world that has at least one confirmed contact with an NPS unit or activates at least one unit, respectively. A station’s total number of confirmed or activated units will be printed on the certificate.

Finally, the National Parks Honor Roll certificate will be available for any station who confirms contact with at least 75% of the 59 National Parks that are activated in 2016. Note that is not the same as 75% of all 59 National Parks.

Activators will also have a way to earn additional recognition as a “Five-Star

List of Official NPS Administrative Units, by Type

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|---|------------|
| National Battlefields | 11 |
| National Battlefield Parks | 4 |
| National Battlefield Site | 1 |
| National Military Parks | 9 |
| National Historical Parks | 49 |
| National Historic Sites | 78 |
| International Historic Sites | 1 |
| National Lakeshores | 4 |
| National Memorials | 30 |
| National Monuments | 80 |
| National Parks | 59 |
| National Parkways | 4 |
| National Preserves | 19 |
| National Reserves | 2 |
| National Recreation Areas | 18 |
| National Rivers | 5 |
| National Wild and Scenic Rivers and Riverways | 10 |
| National Scenic Trails | 3 |
| National Seashores | 10 |
| Other Designations | 11 |
| Total NPS Units | 408 |
| NPS Affiliated Areas | 25 |
| NPOTA Total Units | 433 |



While there is no formal partnership between NPS and ARRL for this event, ARRL has been in discussions with NPS for the past year, and they are aware of the likelihood of increased Amateur Radio activity in the parks during 2016. There have been many radio activations of NPS units for decades,

program, such as National Heritage Areas or sites on the National Register of Historic Places. Rather than engage in debate over the validity of what units should be permitted as part of the NPOTA program, ARRL chose to use the list of official NPS Administrative Units and Affiliated Areas as provided by the NPS itself. The official NPS list may be found at www.nps.gov/aboutus/faqs.htm. We encourage all Activators to review the official list before making any plans.

An Opportunity to Learn

National Parks on the Air is not just about Amateur Radio. We hope that, as you plan your trips to NPS units and keep track of your efforts on the leader board, you take the time to learn more about the unit you just contacted or operated from. Remember, these units

Activator.” National Parks on the Air is designed to be an outward promotion of the capabilities of Amateur Radio to the general public. Various Public Relations bonuses and activities will be available to Activators, similar to the PR bonus points available in ARRL’s Field Day event. A list of Five-Star Activator activities is in the NPOTA rules.

Going Portable in the Parks

It should be obvious that the success of this awards program rests on those amateurs willing to operate from NPS units. Portable operators, this event is for you! Start thinking about how you would incorporate Amateur Radio into your visit to an NPS unit. Whether you’re camping in Yosemite, driving along the Blue Ridge Parkway, or set up in a corner of Andersonville Prison, you will definitely draw a pileup! As long as you are on the property of the NPS unit, whether you operate QRP from a campsite, from your car or RV in the parking lot, or in a site’s public recreation area, you will qualify as being in the unit.

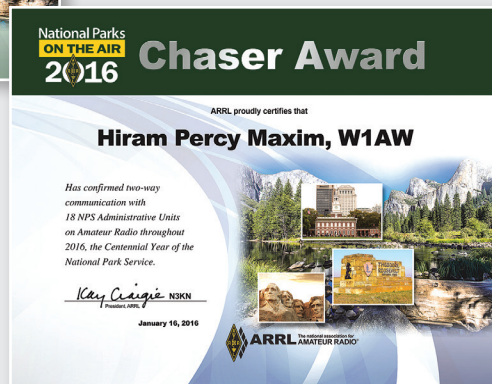
Depending on the size of your operation, you may need to secure a special-use permit. This may take some time. It’s possible the answer will be “no.” Be mindful of the size and sensitivity of the NPS unit you want to activate, and be realistic about your plans. For example, bringing a trailer with a tower and triband Yagi onto the National Mall without advance notification or planning is going to cause some problems. In general, the more portable and compact your station is, and the more creative and adaptable your plans are, the greater chance you’ll have of being successful.



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and these activations have had minimal impact on the parks or other visitors. Activators should understand that they will be required to follow all NPS rules for whatever unit they attempt to activate. Some of the units are particularly sensitive, such as the monuments in Washington, DC, or the Flight 93 monument in Pennsylvania. It is your responsibility to be on your best behavior and not interfere with other visitors at NPS units. Remember, every time you visit an NPS unit for this awards program, your conduct will not only impact the reputation of Amateur Radio throughout the NPS system, but will also directly impact the success of the next amateur who tries to activate that unit. Be nice, be courteous, and be flexible. Demonstrate Amateur Radio in the best light possible.

There are many places bearing the NPS logo that are not part of the NPOTA



have been preserved and protected for a very good reason, and you would be denying yourself a golden opportunity to learn something about your country if your interaction with the NPS unit was solely focused on radio.

Complete details about National Parks on the Air can be found at www.arrl.org/NPOTA. There, you’ll find complete program rules, links to the leader board, an Activator’s Guide with tips and tricks for making your activation successful, ways to share your stories and photos through ARRL’s social media channels, a schedule of upcoming activations, and a lot more.

Congratulations and thank you to the National Park Service for 100 years of preserving our national historic sites! We hope to hear many amateurs on the air from NPS units throughout the year.