

# Results of the 2015 CQ Worldwide Foxhunting Weekend

BY JOE MOELL,\* KØOV

“Sometimes we lie!” That’s what Gray Bickford, WA6BJY, wrote to the mail reflector of the South Orange Amateur Radio Association. He was telling a newcomer what to expect on a SOARA mobile transmitter hunt, which they call a T-hunt.

“Comments by other hunters during the hunt should not be taken as gospel,” he continued. “Tricks to confuse the hunters are allowed, such as swinging the beam, changing power levels and antenna polarization.”

I can’t think of another activity in ham radio where trickery and subterfuge are tolerated, let alone encouraged. But in many parts of the country, that’s what mobile transmitter hunters do, and it’s all in good fun. For instance, as you drive along on a mobile hunt, you encounter another hunt vehicle coming out of a long dead-end road. Did he find the transmitter at the end? If you ask him, will he tell the truth? Maybe it’s better to just expend the mileage and time to find out for yourself.

Not every transmitter hunt has this level of chicanery. Many cities have beginner-level hunts where friendly cooperation is the order of the day. Of course, everyone helps one another when the hunt is for harmful interference or a ham in distress. But if you join the long-time T-hunters in places such as Los Angeles, San Diego, the San Francisco Bay area, Chicago, or Long Island, be prepared for some good-natured prevarication.

## 2015 Was a Good Year

Since 1998, CQ magazine has encouraged hams to discover and rediscover the fun of hidden transmitter hunting by participating in the annual CQ Worldwide Foxhunting Weekend. As usual, the 2015 event brought reports of hams having foxhunting fun in a wide variety of ways.

Many of the hunts were during the suggested weekend in May, but Connecticut

hunters got an early start by having their annual session on New Year’s Day. Participants gathered at a school in South Windsor and set out to find a signal on the input of the BEARS repeater sent by Paul Gibson, N1TUP. He set the boundaries at a 20-mile radius but promised he wouldn’t be in Hartford or Springfield (Massachusetts).

The Connecticut New Year’s hunt is an annual event, but many groups have regular hunts all through the year. For the November hunt of the aforementioned SOARA group, WA6BJY put a tiny transmitter in an overhead light fixture in the parking structure at the Mission Viejo Mall. Gray wrote: “Alan Weddle, KK6EMC, and I sat in his

Honda beneath the fixture, watching the hunters walking back and forth. Hint: Look up now and then. Not all hidden transmitters are at eye or ground level.”

The most unusual mobile hunt of 2015 had to be in the San Diego area, where Robert Dexter, N9SCD, put a two-meter hidden transmitter under water. It was a 50-milliwatt rig about the size of a stick of Spearmint with a rubber duckie antenna inside a waterproof case of black PVC pipe. “When scouting for a location,” Robert wrote, “I was pleased to find a fountain at a shopping center with a black bottom. The recent time change helped because it was dark at the start.”



Byon Garrabrant, N6BG, used this stiff-wire, two-meter quad and window mount on his Prius for the Foxhunting Weekend hunt in Chandler, Arizona. Three half-watt transmitters were hidden within six miles of the Paseo Vista Recreation Park starting point. (Courtesy of N6BG)

\*PO Box 2508, Fullerton, CA 92837

email: <k0ov@homingin.com>

Web: <www.homingin.com>

A 50-mW underwater transmitter doesn't have much range, so Robert transmitted 25 watts from his car to get hunters into the shopping center. When they found him, they were instructed to find the second transmitter. "It was fun to watch people walk past it, look directly at it, almost touch it, and keep trying to find it someplace else," says Robert. "No, it wasn't on the lamp post, on the gate, or behind the building. Once a team found it, they watched the next team do the same and so on until the entire group had gathered."

### Foxhunt Videos Online

For a passenger's eye view of a mobile hunt, watch Ronald Zukosky, N3VTH, and Joe Betz, KF3DI, in a video made by Frank Bartalotta, N3TCS, on the annual foxhunt of the Murgas Amateur Radio Club<sup>1</sup>. It shows Ronald getting an initial bearing with his RDF loop from atop the West Side Career and Technology Center in Kingston, Pennsylvania. Then they go mobile with Ronald driving and Joe holding an L-Tronics L-Per unit, which is a favorite of search-and-rescue groups for tracking aircraft emergency locator transmitters. Will they be the first to find the foxbox that was well concealed by Bob Michael, N6FA?

Also published during 2015 was an outstanding video of fox-hunting at the 50<sup>th</sup> South East Radio Group convention at Mt. Gambier in South Australia<sup>2</sup>. Radio foxhunts Down Under take



Ken Harker, WM5R, punches in to finish the foxoring event at the USA ARDF Championships in eastern Colorado during August 2015. Ken is co-chair of the organizers for the 2016 USA championships, which will take place near Killeen, Texas in April. (Photo by Joe Moell, KØOV)



Julianne Walsh, KI6DYX, helps a young foxhunter build a measuring-tape, two-meter Yagi just before the ARRL Southwestern Division convention hunt at Angel's Gate Park in San Pedro, California. (Photo by Joe Moell, KØOV)



Dick Arnett, WB4SUV, conceals a miniature two-meter transmitter inside a log for the on-foot transmitter hunt at Dayton Hamvention 2015. (Photo by Bob Frey, WA6EZV)

---

place on various ham bands from 3.5 through 1296 MHz. Hunters attempt to drive as close as possible in their outrageously outfitted vehicles, then the driver and passengers jump out and run on foot to find well-hidden foxboxes.

### Chasing Foxes on Motorbikes

Mobile hunts don't have to be in cars and trucks. In a previous year, I told about foxhunters on bicycles in Los Alamos, New Mexico. Now from TheHindu.com comes the story of an April 2015 foxhunt in Alappuzha, on the southwestern coast of India. Members of the Quilon Amateur Radio League and the Alappuzha Amateur Radio Society were on two-person motorbikes. One person drove and the other waved a Yagi antenna in search of the two-meter signal that was 7 kilometers from the starting point.

### On Foot Hunters Don't Lie

Not everyone likes the fibs and misdirection that are the norm for mobile hunts. They would rather test their radio direction finding (RDF) skills and get some good exercise on an on-foot hunt in the woods or a local park. For instance, every year I receive a report from Bob Cutter, KIØG, about the annual family picnic and foxhunt of Ski Country Amateur Radio Club in Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Pat Fitzgerald, KVØK, hosted the 2015 event at his home. Bob says that the hunt winner this time was Chuck Kimble, NØNHJ. Other clubs are discovering the fun of simple hunts like this, including the Lee DeForest Amateur Radio Club in California.

Art Jury, KF7GD, added a "football" foxhunt to a ham radio class he taught in Newcastle, Washington. The first person to find the transmitter had five minutes to hide it somewhere else in the park. Then everyone else hunted the second location, the winner hid again, and so forth. It was so much fun that the transmitter was hidden and found eight times that day.

### Hamfest Foxhunts

Many newcomers to foxhunting get their introductions at a hamfest or convention. Mike Miller, WB6TMH, reported on the annual get-together of the Valley of the Moon Amateur Radio Club in Sonoma, California. It included two very low-power two-meter transmitters near the hamfest building. For those who didn't bring RDF gear with them, loaner antennas were available from the organizers.

The bigger the hamfest, the bigger the hunt. The traditional Dayton Hamvention® hunt on May 16 featured over 20 little transmitters in a park near the Hara Arena, concealed in bushes, logs, and so forth. Each transmitter had a small tag with a code number on it. Hunters were given slips of paper with transmitter frequencies and space for them to write down the code number of each one they found. Everyone started at the same time and was instructed to find as many as they could within the time limit.

According to hunter Mike Brost, WA9FTS, of Chicago, "It rained hard at times earlier and light rain during the hunt was enough to wet the papers, making it hard to keep them in one piece. At the end, the totals were made clear. Matt Sanderson, KC9SEM, found 16 transmitters to win for the fourth year in a row. Also impressive was his wife, Patty Sanderson, N9PLS, who found 10 to secure second place."

It has also been a long tradition to have foxhunting at the ARRL Southwestern Division convention. The 2015 convention was in Torrance, California and featured a mobile hunt by Scott Bovitz, N6MI, on Friday evening, starting from the hotel grounds. Then on Sunday afternoon, the on-foot hunt was held in Angel's Gate Park, about a dozen miles away.

N6MI put out 14 transmitters on various two-meter frequencies within the Fort MacArthur Military Museum grounds and elsewhere in the 130-acre park.

Before the hunt, there was an optional workshop for building measuring-tape Yagis and active attenuators from kits, under the direction of Julianne Walsh, KI6DYX. Then each hunter's goal was to discover and mark down the unique tag numbers on as many foxes as possible within the 90-minute time limit. But for a found transmitter to score points, the tag number had to be marked next to the proper transmitter on the competitor's frequency slip. That proved to be the hard part. Almost everyone found at least one transmitter, but almost everyone marked at least one incorrectly, also. The clear winner was Bob Cooley, KF6VSE, who found and correctly identified eight of the 14.

Two of the transmitters were especially for the beginners, with strong signals on separate clear frequencies, placed about 100 yards from the start. Three intermediate-level transmitters on separate frequencies were in the concrete gun emplacement area, 75 to 150 yards away. Five other transmitters on separate frequencies were intended to be difficult, with shorter transmissions, located at least 300 yards away. Three close-by micro-transmitters were fighting each other for dominance on 146.565 MHz. Could the hunters separate them? The 14<sup>th</sup> transmitter was very special, and since nobody found it, I won't say what or where it was. Maybe you'll have a chance to get it at a future convention.

### Compete Against the World

International competitions in on-foot transmitter hunting have been taking place for over 35 years. This sport, called radio-orienteeing and Amateur Radio Direction Finding (ARDF), has a well-established set of rules, developed by member nations of the International Amateur Radio Union (IARU)<sup>3</sup>. These rules are quite different from typical hamfest hunts. For instance, all of the transmitters are on the same frequency, cycling on and off in numbered order.

Some groups use Foxhunting Weekend to introduce hams to ARDF-style hunts. A good example is the May 22 session at Crescent Park in South Surrey, British Columbia. According to reporter John Schouten, VE7TI, "Al Peterson, VA7ALZ, and his wife were on site early to set out five two-meter foxes in different areas of the park. Each transmitted a CW identifier numbered from one to five so participants could distinguish between their signals. An additional fox was used as a training aid to familiarize the rookies on the basics of transmitter location techniques."

VA7ALZ continued, "At 10 a.m., after a short briefing by event organizer Anton James, VE7SSD, the hunt was on. Each fox was attached to a flag. Once found, participants used an attached punch to mark their scoring sheet. The completed sheet was returned to the timekeeper and the elapsed time was recorded.

"The fastest (and most experienced) participant was Les Tocko, VA7OM, who found all five foxes with an impressive time of only 31.5 minutes. In the Novice category, the top score was attained by John Brodie, VA7XB, with four foxes and an elapsed time of 94 minutes. The hunt was followed by an excellent barbecue lunch, prepared by Anton's wife, Brenda. Presentation of the coveted crystal bunny to the top scorer in the expert group and the pink fur bunny to the Novice top scorer concluded the event."

Foxhunting Weekend radio-orienteeing sessions took place in two southern California locations. The Fullerton Radio Club's annual "Antennas in the Park" foxhunting event



*Anton James, VE7SSD, gives instructions to the on-foot foxhunters at the Surrey Amateur Radio Club foxhunt in South Surrey, British Columbia. Besides the SARC, the event drew participants from other local clubs and from the Victoria area. (Courtesy of John Schouten, VE7TI)*

moved from Tri-City Park in Placentia to Hillcrest Park in Fullerton for 2015. Two days of rain prior had left the hillsides a bit muddy and slippery, but it was no deterrent to the intrepid foxhunters. For the newcomers, there was antenna and attenuator building under the direction of Marvin Johnston, KE6HTS, to start. After that, there were three practice transmitters, a five-fox ARDF course, and two 80-meter transmitters to find.

Sixteen San Diego transmitter hunters had a wet and cold day of radio-orienting near the village of Mt. Laguna on May 23. The fog was thick at this 6,000-foot elevation site in the early morning when Joe Loughlin, KE6PHB, and Joe Coronas, N6SZO, went into the woods to put out their five two-meter foxboxes. No worries about rattlesnakes on this day! It was still so chilly at 3:30 p.m. that the end-of-hunt barbecue was moved indoors.

A majority of the individuals and small groups were able to find all five transmitters. Scott Moore, KF6IKO, who traveled 275 miles from Santa Barbara to participate, posted the best time of one hour and 34 minutes.

### **USA ARDF Championships — April 6-10, 2016**

The high point of 2016 for fans of IARU-rules foxhunting will be the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual USA ARDF Championships from April 6 through 10. Primary site of the competitions will be the Parrie Haynes C5 Youth Ranch and Equestrian Center, about 10 miles southwest of Killeen, Texas.

Hosting these championships will be Kenneth and Jennifer Harker, WM5R and W5JEN respectively, assisted by members of the Austin Orienteering Club. They have competed at the USA Championships almost every year since 2003 and have won numerous medals. Optional training, sprints, and foxoring events will be held April 6-8, followed by full-course competitions on two meters and 80 meters during the weekend of April 9-10.

USA's national championships are open to anyone who can run or walk through the forest for five to 10 kilometers while carrying RDF gear. Most of America's elite radio-orienters will be there, but about 25% of the participants are expected to be first-timers. More information and registration forms are available at the event website<sup>4</sup>.

National ARDF Championships are for individuals only. No teaming or assistance on the course is permitted. Participants are divided into six age categories for men and five age categories for women in accordance with standard rules of the International Amateur Radio Union (IARU). Medals for first, second, and third places will be awarded in each category for each competitive event.

These championships will be a qualifying event for ARDF Team USA, which will form afterward to compete at the 18<sup>th</sup> IARU ARDF World Championships in Albena, Bulgaria during September. This will be USA's 10<sup>th</sup> appearance at the World Championships. Team members will be selected from the best performers at the championships in Texas and in last year's USA ARDF Championships in Colorado<sup>5</sup>.

For an "up close and personal" look at championship radio-orienting, go online for an outstanding high-definition video<sup>6</sup> with footage from the last ARDF World Championships and other international competitions. See if you can pick out Team USA and its members in these scenes.

### **Next CQ WW Foxhunting Weekend — May 14-15, 2016**

Mobile or on-foot, one transmitter or many, a radio foxhunt is sure to stir up activity in your ham club. Now is the time to plan for this year's CQ World Wide Foxhunting Weekend, which will be May 14-15. CQ doesn't impose any rules or offer any awards for Foxhunting Weekend. That's up to you and the hams in your hometown. Your hunt can be for mobiles



Joe Betz, KF3DI, watches as Ronald Zukosky, N3VTH, takes a bearing at the start of the Murgas Amateur Radio Club's mobile foxhunt. (Photo by Frank Bartalotta, N3TCS)

or all on foot. Use the international rules or make up your own. For many clubs, Foxhunting Weekend kicks off a season of regular transmitter hunts. For others, it's a special once-a-year event, like Field Day. Since the primary objective is lots of hunt participation, we don't even insist that your event be on that weekend. Any time in the spring is fine with us.

If your club has always had one kind of hunt on Foxhunting Weekend, why not try something different this year? Some hams prefer the formalities of carefully crafted boundaries, specifications for signal parameters, time limits, and so forth. Others are completely content just to have one or more signals to hunt — no need for any regulations, they say. Talk it up on the local repeater and see what your friends have in mind.

### Fun With a Purpose

Foxhunting teaches an important skill — the ability to find the source of signals from afar. RDF is useful for public service and volunteer enforcement. It can even save lives. Most of all, it's fun. Give it a try, but make sure you have safe fun. See to it that no one can be injured by your hidden transmitter or its antenna, or by trying to get to it.

Don't let the excitement of the hunt make you an unsafe runner or driver. Make sure that all transmitting and receiving antennas are eye-safe. Always be mindful of your own physical limitations and never take chances behind the wheel or in the forest. In these days of "see something, say some-

thing," it's wise to mark unattended transmitters with the hider's name and cell phone number.

Make your Foxhunting Weekend activities into a magnet for every club member. Better yet, include the whole community, especially young people. Invite a Scout troop to experience on-foot transmitter tracking or to ride along with the mobile hunters. Look for opportunities to incorporate foxhunting into Scout activities such as Camporees, Scout-O-Ramas, and Jamboree-On-The-Air. Seek out other youth groups that might be interested. Remember, no license is needed to use a receiver.

Afterwards, write up the results and send them to me. The list of information in a complete CQ Foxhunting Weekend report is posted at <[www.homingin.com](http://www.homingin.com)>. Besides the details of date, location, hiders and winners, *CQ*'s readers also want to know what was unique about your hunt and what lessons (positive and negative) you learned from it. Don't forget to include some sharp action photos. The higher the resolution, the better.

I am eager to read your reports of this year's foxhunting activities and the new ideas that you come up with. Happy hunting!

### Notes:

1. <<https://youtu.be/kcPWJMimbZ0>>
2. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHvvhdHK74>>
3. <<http://www.homingin.com/intlfox.html#rules>>
4. <<http://www.texasardf.org/usa2016/>>
5. *Homing In — RDF in the Rockies: The 2015 USA ARDF Championships*, *CQ* magazine, November 2015, page 70
6. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tl4HztSY8Mo>>