

Parks on the Air (POTA) outing is planned at Batsto Village, NJ

- US-5000 Wharton State Forest
- US-6609 Pinelands Preserve National Conservation Area

Event Details:

- Location: Batsto Village, NJ
- Date: Saturday April 13th 2024
- Time: Arrive at 10:00AM
- Meeting Point: Main Parking Lot

POTA Summary:

The morning of 4/13 was just about 50 degrees overcast and windy. Although the weather was expected, it was not the ideal conditions for POTA. I wasn't sure who was actually going to come out and I contemplated sending an email cancelling the event. I reasoned to myself that in an emergency the weather wouldn't be perfect, and the weather was honestly mild, so I decided that I was going to go to the park even if nobody else decided to attend. The event was on.

At home I sipped my coffee and packed my gear.

Radio: Yaesu 857b
Antenna: Gabil Telescopic Portable Antenna
Gabil Tripod
Faraday cloth "Magic carpet" (ground plane/radial)
Battery: Miady 20Ah LiFePO4

I packed the club filters along with my radio gear in the Bronco. Then I also loaded a table, chair, a warm coat, and some snacks. Truth be told; I also brought a bunch of other misc. radio gear with me in case I (or anyone else) needed anything.

I chatted with Jack [WA2RHJ] on the repeater as I pulled out of my driveway. We chatted for a few minutes before signing off. It was a leisurely drive and I arrived at Batsto Village right on time at 10:00AM.

As I pulled in, the parking lot was unexpectedly busier than I expected:



I had originally wanted to set up along the tree line next to the parking lot because I thought we might be able to get some interest by people coming and going from the parking lot. Unfortunately, I realized

that the area wasn't as easily accessible as I had hoped (by looking at google maps) and I abandoned the idea. With the wind, my 2nd location wasn't ideal either.

As I parked, I was met by Joe [N2JJG] and we quickly decided to activate from a picnic area next to the parking lot.



This area was open enough to set up in, but was fairly sheltered from the wind.

Joe and I were fairly leisurely as we set up.

Unfortunately, Frank and Bonnie had decided that they weren't going to attend due to the weather. I was happy to realize that Frank [K2SQS] was very interested and we were chatting via text throughout the day regarding our activity and frequencies.



Joe as using his Icom 7300 and his Buddi-stick antenna. He set up on 20M.



Joe also brought with him some brochures that he made up. He made two: a POTA brochure, and a BCRC brochure. These looked great and I thought would definitely help us share information about

POTA and our club to any interested passers-by. Even in the protection of the picnic area, it was too windy to leave the brochures out on a table. What was really cool was that Joe made some 3D printed stands for the brochures. (You can see the green plastic stands laying down next to Joe in the picture above.)

While Joe got started, I was still getting set up. I was using the Gabil antenna for the first time so I had some experimentation to do during the setup. At our last POTA (at Rancocas State Park) I had some trouble using the faraday cloth. One of the issues was that I needed a better way to keep it from blowing in the wind. Based on that experience, I added 6 grommets to the faraday cloth and used old tent stakes to pin the cloth to the ground. From there I set up the tripod and extended the whip.



I spent quite a bit of time changing the length of the whip and the coil to see how it impacted SWR.

I've watched several videos on this antenna. I was aware that it is a "compromise antenna" and that it might be finicky to get set up. I hooked up the antenna analyzer using my RG58 coax and started experimenting. I found this antenna to be really easy to use, while also being really difficult to optimize. What I mean is that I can very quickly get the SWR to about $2.0 \pm .2$. I could do this on every band that I tried in a matter of minutes. (For those of you following my experiences with home-built coil/whip vertical antenna, I didn't bring it today.)

I don't have an antenna tuner so I always pay attention to the SWR of my antenna. My goal is to get under 1.5 on the frequency I'm using. This was possible, but it was a tedious process of very, VERY small adjustments.



I love how small this antenna packs, and it seems "easy enough" to tune. Now it's time to get it on the air.

By about 11:00 or maybe 11:15 I was able to get the antenna hooked to the filter and the radio, and I started hunting POTA. (As I always do).



I was pleasantly surprised as I tuned around the band and could hear quite a few stations (on 40M) loud and clear. I could also hear quite a few stations that were harder to hear in the static. I was expecting to hear the loud stations, but wasn't expecting to hear the weaker ones. It didn't take me long to make a few contacts hunting. When I exhausted the current spots, I decided to call CQ. This was around 11:30 or so. Frank spotted me and I was able to quickly activate the park. (Frank as also one of my contacts. I was glad that he was essentially participating from home.)

In all honestly, I was confident that my signal was getting out, but I started having doubts about this antenna's ability to listen/hear. It was at that time that I decided to set up my reliable EFHW antenna. I took a few minutes to set it up, and began calling CQ again. I was relieved to find that the EFHW seemed to perform similarly to the Gabil. I don't think either antenna was hearing as well as I expected, but I'm assuming it was just the band conditions since both antenna's seemed comparable.

When I POTA, I normally start on 40M and move to 20M for a little bit before packing up. Since Joe was on 20M, I decided to try 10M. I was able to make a few contacts hunting on 10M, including a contact in Italy. After spotting myself and calling CQ for 15 mins without a response, I switched to 15M. I quickly made a few contacts while hunting on 15M, and as about to spot myself and start calling CQ when my phone (Internet connection) died. Although I had a battery/charger for it, I couldn't get it to restart. My phone was essentially bricked.

This was basically the end of my POTA day. I could have continued to play radio, but I was upset about the phone and wasn't in the mood to continue. I packed up and went over to chat with Joe. He hadn't yet activated the park on 20M. We chatted and I hung out while he got a last few contacts.

We chatted as Joe packed up. We probably spent another 15 mins talking in the parking lot. I enjoyed hearing about his trip out west.

Overall, we had a really nice day!

One note, when I was about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ way home my phone self-healed. I'm not sure how or why, but it Techni-magically connected (via Bluetooth) to my car. It's been fine since.

I hope to see you all on a future POTA!

73,
Paul KD2ZYV

On Sunday I checked my email to find out that some of you couldn't find me. I apologize to anyone who came out and couldn't find us at the park. Bob Nelson [K2QPN] had a great idea. In the future I will set up a 2M frequency to use to help us all find each other at the POTA events. I'm sorry that I missed spending time with and learning from Bob this weekend.

I'll summarize Bob's report here: Bob set up along the tree line even though he saw nobody. Murphy struck (of course) because Bob planned to try FT8 but his laptop battery died. He had a backup plan and set up a vertical on a tripod and tried CW on 20M. The wind kept blowing the antenna over. He did make a few contacts, but understandably had enough after about an hour.

Thanks for the report, Bob. (And thanks again for the 2M frequency idea.)

Paul