



Back in November 2023, I had the privilege to tag along with another fellow ham in town, K5SJC – Steve Chepey, on a 3-day venture traveling through Oklahoma and Arkansas, doing SOTA activations. A list of activations can be found at the bottom of this note. It goes without saying that all we did were CW operations, but SOTA is very popular with other modes including SSB, CW, FM and Digital. Everyone has heard so much lately about POTA, but SOTA (Summits on the Air) is just what you may think it is. It's yet another way to get out of the house, take your equipment out to enjoy the outdoors

with exercise to boot, but this time, it's up on mountain peaks, and not in parks. Clean air, a fantastic view, and easy to make contacts on 2-meters or 70 cm via Simplex, or on the lowbands using SSB or CW and digital is what you should expect to do. So where do you go around Texas to do a SOTA activation? The answer is that you can activate SOTA in the state of Texas but it is not very popular due to low heights and some on private land. Out in west Texas, it's a different story, but not around Northeast Texas. But you may be surprised just north of the border in Oklahoma and throughout Arkansas, there are plenty of SOTA summits where you can bring your equipment, and travel with a backpack to the destination summit peak of your choice. Then you find a spot to settle down with a portable chair you took along or maybe just sit on a rock and make the minimum required number of contacts to activate the summit which happens to be just 4 contacts. If I'm going to go that distance, I'll sometimes make 30 contacts or more in an hour timeframe on CW, then head to the next summit.

Amateur radio operators who set up stations on mountain peaks are known as activators, and others amateur radio operators who complete contacts from home with them are called chasers.

Points are given to both activators and chasers based on how high the summit is. But the one catch is that you can only activate a summit one time each year to be able to accumulate points. Nothing stops you from activating a summit as many times as you want to have fun but realize that you must wait at least 365 days from the date of the 1st activation to do another on the same summit to actually gain points. This should not limit you from going every day if you would like to get out in the fresh air and activate. There are plenty of summits within a few hours driving distance north in Oklahoma that are extremely nice and plenty in Arkansas, just across the state line from Oklahoma.

The taller the mountain, along with the difficulty to get to the peak, creates the points system from numbers 1 to 10, with 1 being an easy summit to reach with lower elevation, to a very high summit peak with a long hike to get to along with much higher altitude. So how do you activate a SOTA peak? Go to the following link to get detailed information.

[HOW TO ACTIVATE A SOLAR PEAK](#)

You can also review the Association Reference Manual (ARM) and review the appropriate ARM for the association in which the peak is defined. The ARM will contain some basic information about guidelines and activation procedures along with a complete list of all summits within that association. An example would be 'W5T' association designation, which indicates summits located in Texas. All summits will have specific associations depending on which state they are in. An example would be W5T/NT-038 which happens to be a summit just east of Possum Kingdom Lake, just southeast of the Possum Kingdom Fish Hatchery. Amazingly, no SOTA activator has activated this summit known as W5T/NT-038. Why would that be? Well, it's because it is located on private land, and you cannot get to it unless you contact the owner. The second reason is that the peak of the summit is only at a height of 1645 feet above sea level, which is not much of a challenge. And besides, it is only a 1-pointer. Most likely you could drive practically right up to the summit if you had the privilege to go on the private land.

Before you head out to activate a summit, you would want to alert the chasers that would be interested in your activity. You would do this ahead of time, even before you started your trek up to the summit. Why would you want to set up an activation before you reach the summit? It's kind of a trick question, because POTA operators like to also set up an activation that is commonplace, so that everyone would know the date and time that you will be activating and available to make contacts from a specific park. In SOTA it's similar except you may get to your summit and now have no cell or internet coverage when you get there. There are ways around this, as there is a program that can be used for POTA and SOTA that you can install on your cell phone that would not require cell coverage to use. The program is called 'SOTAMAT' but works for both SOTA and POTA.

Activators set up SOTAwatch Alerts which is the designation for activations in SOTA. You can register on the SOTA website to gain access to this information. Then, even if you are not active in SOTA, you can work the activator as a chaser from home, so you can also build up your profile on SOTA as a chaser. You would submit your contacts on a SOTA webpage to get credit.

To get started, you can go the following website to register

<https://www.sotadata.org.uk/en/>

Once registered, you can go to another URL with your login information

<https://www.sotl.as>

Here, you will get detailed maps and trails to the summits and some with directions to follow the trail. There are rules to follow when activating a summit which are also guidelines of each Association. In general, they are as follows:

- Operation must not be connected to a vehicle in any way. Drive-up summits are perfectly valid, but the actual operation of your radio must not be connected to the vehicle in any way. Not for battery power, not as an antenna support, etc. If the vehicle were to disappear, it would not affect your operation.
- Be within the Activation Zone (AZ). The AZ includes the area below the designated summit by 25 meters (82 feet) for all PNW Associations, except Oregon, which specifies 80 feet. Always check the ARMs for a detailed description of the AZ.

To be honest, planning your approach and ascent is mainly half the battle. To get to some summits, not all trails are well defined, if defined at all. As stated earlier, some summits have never been visited, so there is no data given by prior climbers of the journey. If you had a handheld with a GPS, it would be very helpful to the activator.

Be well prepared for a change in temperature, and other weather-related conditions such as rain, fog, mud, and high winds, especially at the peak of a summit. Wear water-proof boots that would be comfortable for climbing on rocks and comfortable enough for hiking.

There are also several programs for your cell phone that are designated so you can find and follow the trails. You can enter the GPS coordinates of the trail head, or what is considered the beginning of the trail at the bottom of the summit. Also, you can add significant trail junctions, and of course the summit coordinates themselves. That's half the battle, just getting there. But if you want to exercise, want to get into shape or just want to just go out and have fun outdoors, SOTA is the thing to do, especially as a ham radio operator. If you have the proper gear to carry along in your backpack, hiking up a trail and then play ham radio is a lot of fun. Then you can go directly to a SOTA spotting page and spot yourself, similar to POTA spotting, that can usually be done with a smartphone, but if you only have a regular cell phone, you can spot yourself via an SMS gateway that would allow you to send a specifically formatted text message to a special phone number where a robot will post a spot for you on the list.

Go to [this website](#) to learn the format of the message and the process.

When you are on the summit, you must put up with weather or environmental conditions or hazards such as wind, rain, lightning, and the lack of daylight and these conditions cannot be ignored.

Not long ago, I had a personal experience with Steve K5SJC who took me along in a 3-day journey where we hiked up a few mountains to the summit peak. The hikes were not too long, and some not too steep. But for starters, for me it was an eye-opener. I did climb up two 10-pointers though, and they were challenging to climb, but the view from the top was nothing short of amazing and very well worth it. It was so much better than just doing an activation at a park. Again, the fresh air, exercise and something totally new, a way to operate ham radio is something you may want to do. Similarly to POTA, hunters and chasers are looking to work activators that want to work them at their summit locations. It's easy to make contacts as there is always someone to talk to. And it's easy to make just 4 contacts, the minimum number required to have a successful activation on SOTA.

When you are finished with your activation, the next activity is results reporting. You will submit your contact log to the SOTA Database system. Unlike POTA, both activators and chasers must report their contacts to get credit, and hunters look for your report. Within POTA, logs should be sent in almost immediately after the activation so that the hunters can get credit for working the park you were activating from. They do not have to send in logs. Unlike POTA, these logs are sent in by both the activator and chaser to confirm that contacts were made. On the SOTA website, you can also determine how popular or unpopular a summit is to the people who previously visited it. Mounds of facts will provide a measurement of how much SOTA activity is going on for a particular summit, which helps drive interest and increased participation in SOTA.

As previously stated, to submit results or to get credit for your activation, you must be registered in the SOTA database and then you can submit your contacts one-by-one or all at once in an .adi file that is easily uploaded to the SOTA Database.

When I can find even more time to play ham radio soon, my plans are to again activate from a SOTA summit. Besides, it's a way to help get into shape, and for me, I need to do it before I get so out of shape that I couldn't consider it any longer.

If you are interested in just finding out more about SOTA, you can either ask me a question as I have several references to go to and get an answer, or you can register on the SOTA website and hunt for yourself. In any case, it's worth the challenge if you need to find a medium for exercise and another way to have lots of fun in amateur radio.

The following is a snapshot list of summits, only six, that I've activated in Oklahoma and Arkansas last November. It was an experience I will never forget.



KW5CW

Activator Log

[Show All QSOs](#)[Show Awards](#)[Download complete log](#)[My Activated Regions](#)[Go to Microwave Log](#)

- Last 12 Months -



Dec - Jan



Show Analysis

[Show](#)

Date	Summit	QSOs	Points	Bonus Points	Total		
2023-11-08	W5A/MA-004 (Mount Nebo)	20	4	0	4		
2023-11-07	W5A/MA-001 (Magazine Mountain)	17	10	0	14		
2023-11-06	W5A/OH-001 (Rich Mountain)	16	10	0	24		
2023-11-06	W5O/OU-002 (Winding Stair Mountain)	30	10	0	34		
2023-11-06	W5O/OU-006 (2290)	38	8	0	42		
2023-11-06	W5O/OU-005 (Sycamore Lookout)	30	8	0	50		