



Motivating Amateur Radio Clubs to Open New Initiatives (MARCONI)

Program 1: POTA (Parks on the Air)

Training Program Director: Shawn KC1NQE

Operational Guidelines

Statement of Program Purpose: POTA is a 501(c)(3) radiosport program that encourages communications and portable operations to and from state, provincial, and nationally managed public lands. POTA has a large set of references and a short set of rules.

The Meriden Amateur Radio Club (MARC) utilizes the POTA program to facilitate the teaching of station set up, equipment management, radio operations and etiquette, as well as technical lessons based on audience interest and experience.

Scope of a POTA Program: POTA, in addition to Activators, described below, also has Hunters who are those amateurs who make contact with the Activators who are hams operating OnAir in a Park. POTA started as a small group of USA based volunteers who created the rules, infrastructure, and database following the 2016 ARRL NPOTA event. Now over 2,700 registered users from all over the world partake in the program. MARC has several members following varied schedules which results in a POTA site

generally being activated on a weekly basis. Collectively MARC has conducted over 100,000 contacts and more than 1,000 activations. Members have assisted the POTA administrative team in beta testing, park info updates, mapping, and other features. Also, through the efforts of a Club member, Dave NZ1J, the submillimeter band has been added to the POTA band chart.

Typical POTA Scenario (Case Study): A POTA activation foremost requires the Activator and all their equipment to be within a designated park. The Activator can use the Pota.app site to spot themselves in the park for others to know they are activating. For a successful activation, the Activator must make at least 10 QSOs in the same UTC day while inside the boundaries of the park on any band that your privileges allow, including WARC bands (30, 17, and 12 meters). There is no specific exchange for POTA beyond the callsign, although the traditional RST is usually given; Log the date, time, and band in your favorite logging program and export as an ADIF file. Submit this ADIF file to your call area coordinator along with your call and POTA park number, or upload it directly via the POTA.app website. Every activation has different challenges: terrain, space constraints, weather, accessibility. It is an opportunity to perfect your portable radio kit, always evolving and modifying it to suit your operating style and needs.

Getting Started: Utilize the POTA.app website to find a designated park you wish to visit. It is suggested to research the area you plan to visit before arriving – some parks might have additional rules or regulations an Activator must be mindful of. Set up your station where you are comfortable and safe in your surroundings. Be mindful to be a good steward of the land and Amateur Radio while in a public setting – and protect the investment in your equipment. For a successful activation, the activator must make at least 10 QSOs in the same UTC day while inside the boundaries of the park on any band that your privileges allow, including WARC bands. The social media community of Facebook, Twitter, Slack, YouTube, and Discord also provides a massive amount of up-to-date information on POTA activities.

Equipment for Setting Up POTA: POTA requires a full station to be set up in a field scenario. A full station includes an HF and/or UHF/VHF radio with power supply and antenna – each station will differ slightly, and each setup will be different with the same station. Additional items such as rope, mast, tape, or tarp/blanket to protect your station can be helpful when activating. For a backpack station, several commercial radios are available. These radios are compact, full of features, and light weight. The tradeoff is that these portable radios do not offer the power output capabilities that a base station is able to produce. A base station is a bigger rig and offers more output power and is relatively portable, but it is not recommended to do long distances. The antenna is the most important part of the station, and your environment will dictate the best one to use. Many parks offer the ability to put up a large dipole or end-fed, however, especially if you are in a parking lot of the park or dense vegetation, a vertical or ham stick might be the only options.

Conducting POTA Sessions: Every activation has different challenges: terrain, space constraints, weather, and accessibility. Operating near your vehicle or in a pavilion with accommodations in the middle of the forest, desert, or island will grant varying opportunities and obstacles. Area Noise levels will vary. Some parks do host radio and cell towers, power grid infrastructure, Electric Charging (EV) charging stations, and other potentially HF noisy installations. When backpacking away from civilized (and noisy) areas, a foremost consideration is to implement a safe hiking plan. Set up your station where you are comfortable and safe in your surroundings. Be mindful to be a good steward of the land and Amateur Radio while in a public setting – and protect the investment on your equipment.

POTA Challenges: Every activation has different challenges: terrain, space constraints, weather, accessibility. It's an opportunity to perfect your portable radio kit, always evolving it to suit your operating style.

POTA Costs: POTA activations require a radio station setup; An inexpensive HT can be used, however, to maximize success, investment into an HF radio is recommended. Antennas range from DIY random wire to very elaborate commercial and is the most important part of a station (a bad radio will work on a good antenna, while nothing works on a bad antenna) – invest in an antenna before any other piece of equipment. Additional expenses for transportation, parking fees, additional equipment, and the Ham tradition of QSL cards can quickly add up.

POTA Rewards: There are a plethora of award categories offered by the POTA program ranging from the number of parks visited or number of contacts made, to different bands worked and types of modes used. Besides earning certificates of accomplishments in different categories, the real reward is getting out into nature and gaining the confidence to do amateur radio in a field setting. The community is very active and friendly. POTA activities, either Activating or Hunting, can provide a wonderful way to invigorate a Club by showing members how much fun can be had working together in a Park, or in their shack.

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For more information: **Contact:** marconiprogram69@gmail.com

MARCONI PROGRAM

POTA Program Director: -- Shawn KC1NQE
MARCONI PI: -- Ed W1YSM
Administrator: -- MaryAnn

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