



Scouts taking part in the first Jamboree-on-the-Air in 1958.

Radio Scouting

Has your Troop ever taken to the airwaves? **Chris James** speaks to Richard Gaskell about why amateur radio is still a relevant activity for Scouts, not to mention how Jamboree-on-the-Air is a brilliant way to complete the international element of the balanced programme

In 1957 some Scouts were sitting together in a coffee bar in the afterglow of the historic Jamboree-Indaba-Moot at Sutton Park, Birmingham. They had just celebrated the Centenary of B-P's birth and were wondering what to do next. These Scouts were also radio buffs and the Jamboree had helped run an amateur radio station which had brought them together. They struck upon one of the most enduring ideas the Movement has ever seen – a way to bring the Scouts of the world together more cheaply than getting them to travel to the same field.

So began Jamboree-on-the Air or JOTA as it is more commonly known (it rhymes with ROTA in case you were wondering). By international agreement the third full weekend in October was adopted for the event.

International at home

Remarkably, 51 such annual JOTAs have taken place, all in the same weekend each October. Over this time, tens of millions of Scouts have taken part, often without leaving their own town.

'Quite simply, it's an opportunity to do international

activities at home,' says Richard Gaskell, JOTA Co-ordinator. 'Scouts can speak to Scouts in the next town, in the next County, country and if you're lucky, the next continent.'

Getting started

Anyone in Scouting can get involved in the event. 'The best way to get started is to ask whether any Scout leaders or parents hold an amateur radio transmitting licence. If not, then get in touch with the local amateur radio club,' says Richard. 'It's quite likely that they will have helped Scouts in the past. Once you have decided to take

What: Jamboree-on-the-Air 2009

When: Midnight on Friday 16 October to Midnight on 18 October

How to get involved: Contact the UK JOTA Team at Gilwell Park or email richard.neville@scout.org.uk

Factsheet: *Jamboree On the Air* (FS120521)

Websites: www.scouting-radio.org.uk and www.scouts.org.uk/jota



part, it is also important that you inform certain people. As well as advertising the event to the members of your Group, you should also inform your District Commissioner, County Adviser (Amateur Radio) if there is one, and ACC (Activities). You should also register your interest with the UK JOTA Team at Gilwell Park.

Richard's advice is to plan your participation in JOTA as part of a day of activities. 'Because only one or two Scouts can go on air at the same time, it's best to have some other activities on offer so everyone is occupied. That way no one gets bored or impatient.'

But why in an age of mobile phones should Scouts still bother with radio? 'I liken it to going to a club or even the pub,' says Richard, 'You pop down there and just fall into conversation. I always encourage Scouts to think about what they are going to say in advance,' Richard recommends. 'They can talk about anything they like of course, but Scouting activities are always a popular subject – what skills they've been learning, what they're cooking for lunch, what badges they are going for and so on.'

Overcoming language barriers

Of course Scouting is an international language, but what about the practicalities of speaking to Scouts from another country? 'Fortunately for us, English is the world language of amateur radio,' says Richard. There are also some universally recognised abbreviations: for example QTH means 'My location is . . .'

Today Jamboree-on-the-Air goes hand in hand with Jamboree-on-the-Internet which takes place over the same weekend (again, contact Richard Neville at Gilwell or visit www.joti.org) However there is something about the thrill of the crackling airwaves, that means it still has a certain magic for Scouts of all ages.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Scouts could earn a Radio Wireless Badge as early as 1923 (Baden-Powell was an early radio enthusiast!)
- As part of Jamboree-on-the-Air, some lucky Scouts from Cawston, Norfolk made radio contact with the International Space Station. Crew Commander Frank Culbertson wore his Scouting t-shirt while he chatted to them!

GUIDELINES FOR LEADERS

- This is a chance for all Scouts to take part in an international Jamboree.
- Do make contact with leaders, parents or local amateur radio clubs well in advance. Many are willing to put their knowledge and equipment to work for the Scouts during JOTA.
- Do build up to the event with some international programme activities.
- Remember that Jamboree on the Air is a Scout event and as such you are in charge.
- Remember that radio equipment is expensive so keep a firm control of those attending.
- Do return the Jamboree-on-the-Air report form after the event.
- Don't assume that all radio amateurs are expert communicators with young people.
- Do thank the radio amateurs for their help.