

A Snowshoe Trek to Ghost Ridge with Winter Camping and "FYBO, Feb. 3, 2007"

4 Feb 07, updates 5, 6, and 19 Feb 07

The initial reason for this trip was an obscure radio contest sponsored by an Arizona low power (QRP) club, the ScQRPions. This event is like many other amateur radio operating activities that take the form of a contest with the goal of making many contacts.

However, this one has a twist -- it is aimed at getting folks into the outdoors for their ham operations, even in the dead of winter. The contest is appropriately named "**Freeze Your Butt Off**." Part of the information exchanged is the temperature at the operator's location.

I had planned on a snow camping trek around this contest. The snowshoeing and camping were the greater draw for me with the radio being secondary. I lucked out with this weekend, for our son Ron was available to join me. Ron's enthusiasm for backpacking equals my own.

The location I picked was Ghost Ridge, which is near Barlow Pass, famous as a wagon train route into the fertile lands of the Willamette Valley at the end of the Oregon Trail. Sam Barlow discovered the route and then established a toll road for the wagons.

We drove up on Friday and left my car at Barlow Pass, which is about 6 miles SE of Mt. Hood's summit. From there we proceeded south on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) for about a mile. The trail is snow covered in the winter, usually beginning in October, and does not usually become clear until June. We used snowshoes on the trail, although the snow was packed enough that we could have carried them over this part of the trip. After about a mile on the PCT, we left for higher ground. The snowshoes now became more useful. The route is now cross country through alpine timber, slowly gaining elevation for most of the way. There were a couple of places along the way that were steep enough that some extra balance was handy. I had a pair of ski poles while Ron carried an ice ax with a bale from a ski pole at the end. It was another mile from the PCT to the top at 4925 ft.

It took us a couple of hours to go from the car to the top of the ridge. It was certainly more work with a full pack than it had been on my many other winter visits to this place.

As is often the case, we carried more than we needed, being prepared for a storm of historic proportions.



This is the view of Mt. Hood's south side that greeted us at the top. The wind swept ridge usually has bare rock throughout the winter, even when the snow depth reaches several feet a short distance away.



This is the view to the south highlighted by Mt. Jefferson, about 40 miles distance. The Three

Sisters can be seen on the horizon to the left of *Jeff*.



This is a shot of yours truly during our lunch break. **(This is one of Ron's photos. To see his trip report and photos, click here: www.ronhayward.net and then look for Ghost Ridge Trip.)** Please ignore the 2M HT in my hand in this photo. I was checking to confirm that I could get into the Mt. Hood repeater, which we can actually see from here. Many thanks to the folks who put this repeater up and maintain it, for it creates a level of safety that exceeds that possible with cell phones.

After lunch on the ridge top, we dropped down on the east side to a flat area 50 feet below the top. The ridge protected us from the the predominant winds from the west. Here we put up a tent, slung an antenna in the trees, and dug a pit in the snow to shelter the stoves and ourselves while cooking. Our kitchen also served as a "ham shack". The kitchen had a bench for sitting as well as shelves for the equipment. I find the tent very uncomfortable for ham operations, perhaps more of an indicator of my age than of the suitability of the tent.



The tent provided sleeping shelter. The rain fly was included in anticipation of snow or rain. The tent was anchored to twigs buried in the snow. We each had a shovel for such chores.





Here we see two uses of our combination "room."
In one, Ron cooks some dinner while at the right things are set for radio activity.
Insulated foam prevents a literal realization of the radio contest name.



Here's the portable transceiver that I used. It is described in the section on this web site dealing with the "Micromountaineer, Revisited." [Click here to get to that section.](#) This version of the transmitter has an output of about 2 watts with a direct conversion receiver. A pack of 8 C sized flashlight cells resides in the pouch. I kept the batteries and radio in my sleeping bag to keep them warm for use on Saturday morning. (The C-cells were an overkill and a pack of AA batteries would have served for this trip.) A small "transmatch" is attached to the transceiver.

The rig worked well enough, although a larger, higher antenna would have been useful. (That's a general truism applying to any amateur radio activity.) As it happened here, my dipole at 25 feet above the snow surface allowed just enough free transmission line to reach the tent or our "kitchen."

The radio experience was mixed. I found no other 40 meter contest activity in the Pacific Northwest. However, I worked two Northwest stations who were not in the contest. One was in Washington (Al, K7IEY) and the other in Oregon (Bill, N7EU).

The only contact I had with another contest participant was with Jim, KK6MC, (a.k.a., Duffey) in New Mexico. **His signal was outstanding.**

I am always amazed at the quiet conditions I encounter in the mountains. The noise level is far lower than I have in town. My antenna, at the edge of sloping ground, was situated to provide a good "view" to the east, allowing me to hear stations all over the middle part of the country, unusual for the middle of the day from the Pacific Northwest on my frequency of 7 MHz. As is usually the case, I returned from this trip with some definite ideas for that "next" mountain rig. I also returned with a vow to get out into the hills more often, especially in winter.

This trip had the special bonus of being with Ron. We had a great time. Be sure to check out his photos at the link listed above.