

JOTA 2022 at Cobargo

Some notes and thoughts by Bruce VK2DEQ

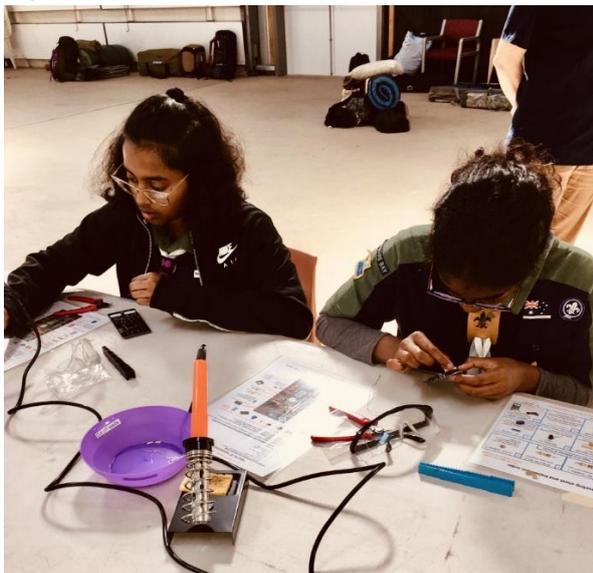
Peter VK2DIE, Peter's mate Steve Levkich, Russell VK2VRW, Fred VK2FWLB and Bruce VK2DEQ attended the JOTA event at Cobargo and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The plan was to promote the hobby of amateur radio by establishing a HF station at the site and by explaining and answering question about getting the Foundation Licence. Peter erected a wire antenna supported from the conveniently placed trees and was soon tuning around for JOTA contacts on 40-metres. Russell and Bruce set up a table with some flyers to promote amateur radio and to provide information about the Foundation Licence.

The 1st Cobargo Scout group has members of all age groups from Bateman's Bay to Merimbula and they are fortunate to have a scout leader who has a creative mind able to design imaginative and challenging electronic games, who is an electronics whiz, and who is a very good "people person" and organiser.

Saturday morning saw the younger (about six to ten year old) members involved with a variety of well planned activities which included: building the *Get-to-9* electronic game kits, fox hunting and communicating with other groups via amateur radio and the internet.

Building the electronic game kits.

About 15 solder stations were arranged in a U-shape with all the necessary components and equipment together with laminated copies of a "component sorter" and the assembly guide. A more experienced scout was positioned at each station to offer help if required. Progress was checked from time-to-time so that solder-bridges, bent IC pins etc could be repaired quickly. It was certainly encouraging to witness primary aged children concentrating on the task at hand and using a soldering iron like an old pro. The end result – each scout could take home a rather clever electronic game which they had built themselves. [Some further details on the Get-to-9 project are presented elsewhere.]



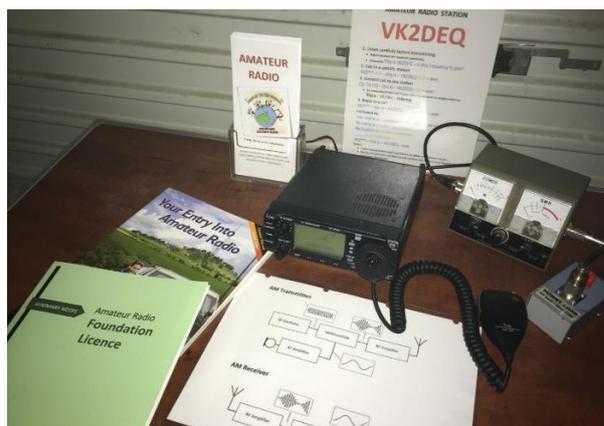
Fox hunting.

Tally-ho, tally-ho the Cobargo scouts are out to find the “fox” – in this case a hidden transmitter. The scout group have built four sets of equipment all operating on 430MHz but with the signal encoded so that four different hunts can be in progress at the same time. The transmitters were built into a small plastic box (about the size of a bathroom soap container). The receivers were mounted on the boom of a 3-element Yagi together with a 2-stage switched attenuator. Some form of RF field strength meter is being planned to improve performance.



Communicating with other scouting groups.

In a separate room, the group had set-up about a dozen laptop computers, all connected to the internet. The scouts were able to chat with other scouts around Australia and from different countries around the world. What they seemed to enjoy with this activity was an opportunity to learn about other cultures and what sort of things other groups did. Of course, they could also talk to other groups using amateur radio. Peter was able to make a few contacts, but poor propagation, noisy conditions and the difficulty (sometimes) in resolving SSB signals was a bit of a problem when compared with the internet systems.



The senior scouts arrived after lunch, but Russell and Bruce both had prior commitments and had to leave about that time. An opportunity to speak with teenagers who might be interested in finding out more about our great hobby was lost. Peter was able to continue until late in the afternoon and he returned on the Sunday.

What can we learn from this JOTA event? Scouting is very much alive and well in the Cobargo area and there are plenty of young people (both boys and girls) who are enthusiastic about technology and are very capable of completing hands-on practical projects.

But, if we see JOTA as an opportunity to interest these young people in amateur radio, we will need to be organised and plan our involvement well in advance. We can not expect that things will “just happen” with a couple of weeks’ notice. Even more important is the need to broaden the appeal. Contacts via radio certainly create interest and indeed some excitement, but few will see amateur radio as a worth-while form of communications when they have a mobile in their pocket. So what else does amateur radio offer the tech-savvy young person today?