Take Field Day on Vacation

Utilize this ham's arrangements to have a successful ARRL Field Day during any getaway.

Jim DeLoach, WUØI

My wife and I like to explore our beautiful continent, travel across America frequently, and have implemented five Field Days from the road. For years we desired to drive the Alaska-Canada Highway into Alaska and then take the Alaska Marine Highway ferry back. In late June 2017, we finally went for it and operated the most amazing and challenging Field Day of all from Haines, Alaska. Our experience illustrates how you can implement a successful Field Day from wherever you happen to be vacationing during the fourth full weekend in June.

Preparations

We weren't familiar with the region, so I investigated state and national parks in the area. I quickly realized some rules prohibited securing ropes to trees and discovered other restrictions that made these parks unsuitable for our purposes. Vacation rentals turned out to be a much better option.

After searching a few vacation rental websites, I found a local rental agent in the area and described our unique needs. I explained that I was looking for a clear view to the southeast, preferably on the coast in a rural setting, with space for wire antennas and tall trees to hold them up. She was eager to help and found us a beautiful spot south of Haines.

The site had a lot of tall trees and occasional clearings, so wire antennas seemed like the way to go. I used Google Earth to determine where an antenna might fit, but I packed several designs because I couldn't be sure.

Jim DeLoach's, WUØI, Subaru Impreza packed with gear on the Alaska-Canada Highway. [Jim DeLoach, WUØI, photo]

Simple antennas are best for Field Day, but Haines presents some unique challenges, as it is at the top of Chilkoot Inlet, surrounded by massive mountains in all directions except the southeast. Fortunately, much of western North America lines up perfectly with this narrow opening, but I knew working the Midwest or East would be unlikely. Thus, I needed as much horizontal gain as possible directed down the narrow inlet, with a vertical takeoff angle broad enough to work from Vancouver, Canada, to San Diego, California.

I searched for ideas in *The ARRL Antenna Book for Radio Communications* and *ARRL's Wire Antenna Classics*, then used the *4NEC2* software to model several promising designs. I looked for multiband antennas that might fit within the forest clearings while maintaining a broad vertical takeoff angle at different heights. I selected the seven most promising designs, including my rhombic loop twofer (available in the June 2017 issue of *QST*). I constructed the antennas using 18-gauge multi-stranded wire and chose ladder line because it packs tighter than coax and has lower losses.

We would arrive in Haines just before Field Day, so I tried to get as many things done ahead of time as possible.

I prepared the training and promotional materials, received permission from the rental property owner for visitors to access the site, and applied for a special 1 × 1 call sign. I authored a press release for the local newspaper using the ARRL template, and they were eager to cover the event.

I made sure all of the necessary software was loaded on our laptops and purchased a license for the *N3FJP* logging app. I tested Winlink, which I planned to use for message handling and Section Manager emails. I found the W1AW and K6KPH bulletin schedules and used the *VOACAP* propagation website to predict what frequencies and times would most likely work.

Jim DeLoach, WUØI, deploying the rhombic loop twofer antenna. [Maggie DeLoach, KK6DZS, photo]

Packing Up

I assembled and tested the station end to end and listed every item. Then I made sure to have spares and a backup plan. The entire station had to fit within an already pretty full Subaru Impreza, so space was limited. I protected the transceiver and key accessories in a well-padded Pelican case. I placed the wire antennas and other parts in plastic bags to keep things organized. These items, along with the ladder line, power cables, an AirBoss antenna launcher from Olah Technologies, safety equipment, and tools, were packed in a larger shipping trunk. I placed two deep-cycle batteries, which I charged using solar panels, behind the driver and passenger seats. With our Impreza stuffed to the gills, we were ready to hit the road.

Haines Field Day

Two weeks and 4,000 miles after leaving home, we made it to Haines. I immediately saw that there was only one clearing suitable for antennas. I set up the rhombic loop twofer antenna because it could get us out on four bands with solid gain.

Friday morning, we deployed the antenna. We set up the station in the rental cabin, and everything was going great until the Field Day laptop died. Fortunately, I had my work laptop as a backup. By late Friday, we were on the air and ready.

On Saturday morning, we worked SSB on the low bands and sent Winlink messages. Visitors showed up right away, and we spent much of the day promoting amateur radio and getting to know the friendly residents of Haines. I ran a training program on amateur radio satellites and easily made an FM satellite contact. By late afternoon the crowds had thinned, and it was time to really make some contacts.

Jim DeLoach, WUØI, making an FM satellite contact. [Maggie DeLoach, KK6DZS, photo]

We switched the antenna to rhombic mode but struggled to get through on 20-meter SSB to the lower 48 states. Alaska is far from most North American hams, link margins are lower, and beams are rarely pointed north. Digital was dominated by PSK31, which was ridden with interference and almost unusable. However, CW worked well.

Contacts started flowing once I got the courage to dust off my rusty key. The noise floor was delightfully low, and I was able to make CW contacts on 20 and 40 meters throughout the contest. It took 30 to 50 W to get through reliably.

As expected, we worked western stations from British Columbia, Canada, to San Diego, and as far east as North and South Dakota and West Texas. I could barely hear the W1AW bulletin, but the K6KPH bulletin from California boomed in on 20 meters.

In the end, we scored 1,608 points, with 92 contacts, coming in second in Alaska. Alaskan stations rarely have big contact totals, so bonus points were key.

All in all, it was a successful and fun effort. There is no way this Alaska expedition could have succeeded without the preparations we made before we left. Tackling Field Day while vacationing is challenging but also very rewarding. It can take you to surprising places and connect you with people you would otherwise never know.

More information about Jim DeLoach's, WUØI, Alaskan Field Day can be found at **www.deloach.net/Alaska.htm**. His next Field Day will be from Hawaii with Denning Powell, WH6GDC; Jon Griffiths, W6PI, and Andreas Wachter, K6AKW. Listen for K6H in June 2025. Jim can be reached at **jim@deloach.net**.

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