

75th Glacier-Waterton Hamfest by Tom Mandera, KE7VUX (and KF7DYZ)

Aside from a quick visit to the Bozeman hamfest last year, knowing almost no-one, not really knowing what I wanted or needed (but buying stuff anyways) and failing my Extra exam, our 2009 trip to the Glacier-Waterton hamfest was our first Hamfest Experience, and I have to thank everyone for the good time.

Starting at the end, Michelle remarked what a great time she was having / did have, and how much she enjoyed the trip completely unsolicited and without prodding. I don't always get that reaction from her after a few days of eating dust and bouncing around in a Scout in the woods. Our 3 year old daughter, Joleigh had a good time with kids activities and playground facilities, and the general allure of the camper. Audrey, at 6 months, really didn't have much to comment on, but it all seemed to agree with her.

Back to the beginning – I somewhat hastily installed one of the 2m mobiles I bought at the Bozeman hamfest before taking off for Glacier, since we were invited to join the convoy of W7TCK hams heading up on Thursday, including Don W7MRI, Bob K7HLN, Ci WU7R and Ashby KE7IMH, Dick N7RB (who probably doesn't remember administering my novice exam in May of 1992), and Rich N7GC. I paid \$10 for a pair of Azden PCS-2000 25w 2m radios. The batteries are shot, so it won't hold frequency between on/off cycles. No tones. The LEDs are dim and impossible to see in daylight – but the radio worked fine and I heard and participated in more 2m activity on that trip than I'd heard since I was licensed.



(http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/postnuke/index.php?module=mGallery2&g2_itemId=51872)

Other than a good time and Joleigh skinning herself up at the rest area, the trip up was without incident.

After ambushing the hostess at the gate and getting things sorted out, we found a spot next to Tom (WA9YFF) and Geri and set about unfolding our tent trailer and taking over the area. I must thank Tom and Geri, and everyone else (particularly Rich, who Joleigh took a particular liking to) for their fantastic attitude and demeanor toward our two small children. I keep waiting to run into the cranky cantankerous curmudgeonly old ham that I know exists – but I have yet to encounter. Instead, the older hams all seem to be the benevolent grandfatherly (or -motherly) type and extremely kind and attentive to the little ones. Thanks!

On Friday I wandered around and examined the tailgates of treasures offered for sale. I quickly discovered that Audrey's all-terrain stroller made an adequate, if somewhat limited, hand truck for transporting my acquisitions back to camp. My used equipment purchases included a few lengths of 9913 coax, my first 70cm radio (a dual-band HT and accessories), a fresh pile of CBs that I probably didn't need and a few other things I've already forgotten.

The campers rolled in one after another all day long..



(http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/gallery2/d/51945-1/img_9465.jpg)

As evening wore on we took a little trip with the girls and thanks to Tom's advice, stopped at the Goat Lick just down the road, but looked under the bridge and not up the draw like the rest of the drive-by tourists were doing. The result was a successful sighting of a few mountain goats – Joleigh frequently recounts this adventure including signing some horns on her head.



(http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/gallery2/d/52742-1/img_9555_001.jpg)

Saturday morning's omelet-in-a-bag was a new thing for us, but more good company and good food was fantastic. Michelle (KF7DYZ) showed up just in time to eat, after taking her Technician exam and passing, but skipping out on an attempt at the General because she was anxious for breakfast with everyone. Thank you Bob and everyone else that orchestrated this, and Don and Kevin Heide for boiling our bags.



(http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/gallery2/d/52306-1/img_9581.jpg)

The helicopter visit was fun for Michelle, but Joleigh wasn't courageous enough to get too close. Still, it was a real helicopter flying right over us – and almost as exciting as the freight trains that went by regularly.

The chow line for Saturday's hamburger lunch was a bit long – but then, you don't necessarily want to eat at the restaurant that doesn't have anyone anxious to get in.



(http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/gallery2/d/53203-1/img_9628_002.jpg)

I didn't attend any of the seminars on Saturday – the children didn't often want to both sit still long enough, and then the first seminar I thought I'd attend never got started. I did see Lyndel's (N7LT) presentation on 75 years of the hamfest.

The auction on Sunday was fun to watch, but I somehow managed to restrain myself from acquiring more treasures than I knew how to haul home.



(http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/gallery2/d/55403-1/img_9670.jpg)



(CCARC contingent watching the auction)

(http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/gallery2/d/55448-1/img_9685.jpg)

I resisted throwing in for the Olympia Beer bottle because I didn't want to risk the responsibility of caring for it for a year, but finally thought they were going to continue to pass the hat for an hour so I had Joleigh make a donation for me – and she took her dear sweet time dropping the money into the hat – enough so that that hour must have passed in a flash, because suddenly I found myself in a rock-paper-scissors duel.



(http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/gallery2/d/55481-1/img_9696.jpg)

A duel which I won in the second round, and the responsibility and honor of keeping the beer safe suddenly wound up mine.

Suitable transport was arranged back to the camper – remember that makeshift hand-truck I mentioned?



(http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/gallery2/d/55568-1/img_9725.jpg)

With a storm brewing along I-15, everyone else planned an alternate route home through the Swan, but we had planned to stay two more days and do some exploring in Glacier. I must say, it didn't take long for the camper-city to become a ghost town. By Sunday evening it was well emptied, and when we pulled out on Tuesday, we had the only camper not in a regular "full hook up" site, but rather up against the trees.

Sunday didn't pass without more acquisitions though. Michelle's successful testing and my inability to find a good used radio for her over the weekend (I claimed the W2A dual-bander for myself before she tested) resulted in a trip to the HRO tent and less money taking up space in my bank account. There's now a new FT-60R on Michelle's belt, and a TH-D710A waiting to be installed in the car.

On Monday we visited Polebridge and Bowman Lake:



(http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/gallery2/d/55698-1/img_9763.jpg)

Then cruised the Sun Road, saw some Big Horn Sheep and plenty of waterfalls but didn't make it up to any of the glaciers before the day ran out.

I threw out my call on 146.520 from Logan Pass, but “Nothing heard.” I did hear a little more activity once returning to camp, since a few others were still hanging around.

Tuesday we loaded up and headed for home. We went through Choteau, spotting a single ham's residence (part time, I believe) in town. The entire trip home, I only heard one APRS station between Helena and Glacier – and it was an airplane on it's way to a big fly-in in Oshkosh. No other radio activity.

That is, until we pulled into our driveway, and the hastily installed radio's power wire caused a problem. The miles of washboard roads took it's toll and the wire had rubbed itself bare in a spot, which shorted, which blew the fuse, but not before melting the inline fuse holder failed and shorted, which blew another fuse on the auxiliary fuse panel but not before the wire's insulation failed – and then the now-bare wire found itself in close proximity to the main fuse panel, which didn't take kindly to a big ground wire across it.

A few minutes of excitement and all was well again – aside from the pigtail to the radio and a few fuses.

My radio adventures weren't quite over though. I was home early enough that I thought I'd check into

the Montana Traffic Net. While tuning up the SB-1000 the RG8-Mini coax finally cried Uncle! I knew it was on borrowed time, which is why I purchased some coax while in Glacier, but haven't had a chance to install it. Thus, no contacts this month for the "where we've been" column, unless you want to count a few 70cm simplex conversations with my wife while fourwheeling.

Again, my thanks for a great time and great company. The location was great, the accommodations at the campground were fine, I did learn some stuff while I was there just listening to everyone else, definitely bought some stuff, met new friends from across Montana and Canada, participated in 75 years of history, finally had some entertaining conversations on VHF, my wife passed her test, and all of that while enjoying Glacier, too. Looks like it'll be on the schedule for next year now, too – especially since I'd rather not face the lynch mob that would come for the well-aged Olympia Beer now in my possession.

-73

Tom KE7VUX, Michelle KF7DYZ, Joleigh, and Audrey Mandera

All photos:

http://www.tmcom.com/~tsm1/postnuke/index.php?module=mGallery2&g2_itemId=51862

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