Thinking Day On The Air
By Paul Lewis G4APL
February 2009

TDOTA 2009 preface
First of all welcome to the Guide and Brownie Leaders that may be reading the CatRad and Caterham Guide’s TDOTA 2009 report.

We had been notified of around 30 Guide groups operating from Amateur Radio Special Event or Club stations in UK and 7 in the rest of the world. Though there will of course others active not included. So let’s see if we can locate some of them on the Amateur Radio short wave frequencies.

The Girlguiding UK Association now issue a GOTA (Guides On The Air) badge. This event is a first step of gaining an insight to the some of the various aspects of communication via wireless, be it a mobile phone, analogue or digital television, data over radio (wireless) and computer communications.

There are two radio events that Guides and Brownies can join in. February is Guides Thinking Day On The Air (TDOTA) and Guides On The Air (GOTA).

This event is now co-ordinated to run on the third weekend of February. October is Scouts and Girl Scouts (Guides) Jamboree On The Air (JOTA). Both events are world wide, and run over a period of 48 hours from midnight Friday to midnight Sunday.

The JOTA event is the largest of the two. The first Jamboree On The Air was held in 1958. These two events are supported by Radio Amateurs worldwide. Sending and Receiving Greeting Messages.

Meeting other Guides and Scouts over the Amateur Radio Airwaves on the Short Wave bands (High Frequency) as well on the VHF (Very High Frequency) bands using the various modes available.

This is the 24th time that Caterham Guides and Brownies have held their ‘Radio Communications day’ event at the home SKY-WAVES of Ann and Paul Lewis who hold the Radio Amateur Callsigns G7BSF and G4APL.

As one can expect, some guides have revisited the CatRad event 9 to 24 times. For example Robin (24), Susanna (M3ZUS) (5), Belynda (M3BYL) (24) and Elizabeth 9th Caterham Guide (9) Hopefully later this year. Elizabeth will have her own Amateur Radio Licence. Each Brownie or Guide requires about four hours to complete the tasks.

Brownies visiting for the first time are working towards their Radio Communicator Badge.

First time Guides work towards their Communication in the Community and Get on the Airwave badge.

Second time guides work on additional tasks and assist the operators in running the station. Third visits, starting to get the hang of Amateur Radio assisting the other Brownies and Guides. They may then be interested enough to apply and join a Radio Amateur Foundation Course run by other clubs.

In January Paul e-mailed Radio Society of Great Britain (RSGB) to advise that the Caterham Radio...
Group (CatRad) would be active again. Also to get some publicity on the Sunday RSGB News Broadcasts.

**Preparation**

As we approached the weekend, the weather was improving, snow had melted and expected to be drier. Two weeks previously Caterham On the Hill was cut off due to heavy snow and no public transport running. Will it be warm and dry enough to fire up the Barbeque?

Paul took a couple of days annual leave on the Thursday and Friday. His wife and daughter were away on half term holiday, while the rooms in the house could be re-arranged and the aerials checked out. The aerials and HF, VHF radios were checked out with a couple of overseas contacts. The tower supporting the aerials was raised to enable sending and receiving strong radio signals.

By Friday evening, the house was set-up. Paul checked out the Short Wave band conditions on Thursday and Friday. It was not looking too good as the radio propagation on 20 Metre faded at 5PM. We are still in the low part of the 11 year cycle. On the Saturday Solar Flux index reported as 70. This has been the case for two years now, due to lack of sun spots on the Sun for the new solar cycle 24.

The Amateur Radio Callsign used for the event was again GX0SCR, the Special Event Club Callsign of the (CatRad) Caterham Radio Group.

The Event

Saturday 21st February 07:30 all the three PC’s the guides would be using are powered on and checked out.

Paul switched on the HF (High Frequency) short wave transmitter at 07:00GMT, had a quick tune around 20 Metres

Ann G7BSF decided to come back from her holiday Friday afternoon. Feeling sorry for Paul being left on his own.

At 08:45 Janette 9th Caterham Guide Leader (Robin) arrived.

The CatRad TDOTA team John G8MNY, Bryan G0SYR, Ted G7OBF, Mike G3TWJ, Susanna M3ZUS.

At 09:00 or soon after, 4th Caterham Brownies, 9th Caterham Guides including Radio Amateurs. Belynda M3BYL, Susanna M3ZUS (7th Caterham),

Robin issued the Paper work to each Brownie and Guides. Giving guidance as to what is required of them. First they all were preparing their Greeting messages in another room at the start of their four hours of tasks.

Bryan and Mike operating on 20 Metres, found it hard going and not hearing any TDOTA stations. 40 Metres skip was to Italy and France. With strong signals from stations participating in the French contest. It was time to switch to 80Metres at 10:45UTC where we spent next three hours contacting TDOTA stations and others in England.

Lunch was served so that the operators had a break before the next group of Brownies and Guides arrived at 2PM

At 14:00 we moved to the 20 Metre (14MHz) band. Paul tuned up the Kenwood TS2000e and valve amplifier and HF beam turned to the east. We could hear Helen VA1YL off the back of our beam. Though we did not have any Guides in the Radio Shack. The frequency was noted on the pad. Bryan operating and Mike check logging. Contact was had with a station in Bosnia. Now that our Brownies and Guides had prepared their greeting messages. They were ready and all eager to contact Helen VA1YL and her girls guides in Nova Scotia. We turned the HF beam around to the North West to call and make contact with our good friends and guides at VA1YL. We had a very long and excellent contact with strong S9 Signals. Our Brownies and Guides greeting the Guides in Canada. Even Robin spoke to Helen again. (after our guides left, and we had cleared up and eaten by 9PM, Paul continued monitoring Helen and her Guide’s speaking to the USA and other Canadian Stations including VE7CC until all her guides left and Helen closed down.

After our contact with Helen, our HF station contacted stations in the USA Pennsylvania, New Jersey, W3CRA Collins Radio Association Pennsylvania. VO1BZM GOTA Admiralty Museum Mount Pearl New foundland Canada. HV0A Vatican City. Turkey, CS0RCL 2/414 GOTA Radio Club in South Portugal. 8P9MD Barbados

Other Thinking Day On the Air stations contacted on HF short Wave Amateur Radio bands were:-

GB0FHG Farnham Common, GB2FOX Lyndhurst New Forest, It was good to speak and hear Liz again on 80 Metres. GB2SPX Norwich Norfolk, GB4SUN South Norwood South London, GB0HDG Horsham West Sussex. Other Countries worked Latvia, Bulgaria, Slovak Republic, Finland, England, Russia

The HF band conditions were not good, as mentioned earlier.

The VHF Station went on air with the Guides and Brownies at 09:30 and closed at 18:00 GMT. Ann
G7BSF made the few contacts and taken over by Susanna M3ZUS and Paul G4APL. Belynda M3BYL assisted with the check logging and assisting the Brownies. Ann and Paul in the background, responded as and when required.

It was very hard work on 2 Metres, lack of TDOTA Stations. Very few stations were prepared to respond to the CQ Calls. We know a lot of Radio Amateur’s Monitor the 2 metre calling frequencies. Including the person that requested us to move off the calling frequency. Those that did reply and assist in the message taking. A BIG THANK YOU.

The TDOTA stations worked were
GB0FHG South Buckinghamshire
GB4SUN South Norwood South London.

Counties worked, Surrey, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Kent, South London, East London.

VHF Messages sent 66, Messages Received 5,
VHF Stations contacted 18, some more than once.
HF Message Sent 26, Message Received 20.
HF Stations contacted 35.
The three network computers connected to the amprnet (AmateurPacketRadioNETwork) chat server network, did not get much attention. As we had no second or third time guides.

As on previous occasions, when the Brownies and Guides arrived, they had to prepare greeting Messages.

Phonetic Alphabet testing was carried out by Ted and John.

No activity in the technical area this time.

The Brownies and Guides had to participate in one of the two discussion sessions covering propagation and radios, aerials, comparing different handheld transceivers (including a very old brick mobile phone) and a home made transmitter and receiver lead by John.

The Guide Leader (ROBIN) and 1st Chaldon Brown Owl did a brilliant job of looking after the Brownies during the day. Assisted the Brownies and ensured that the paper work was being completed to enable them to gain the Guides on the Air badge. Communicator Badge.

The weather was blue sky and sunny. Paul got out the gas barbeque and set that up in the garden. Cooking the food assisted by Belynda and Ann. While Paul was cooking, some Brownies needed to be signed off by Ann.

All those that attended the TDOTA station completed all the required tasks towards their Brownie or Guides Communicator Badge.

While all this activity was going on, Paul and Bryan took the occasional photographs to be used in this report.

The number of Guide, Brownie visitors that entered in the visitors log was 19. Making a total of 590 since February 1997 TDOTA..

9th Caterham Guide Leader (Janette ROBIN)
1 Leaders Brown Owl 1st Brownies
3 from 9th Caterham Guides
4 from 1st Chaldon Brownies
7 from 4th Caterham Brownies
3 from 7th Caterham Guides

Supported by CatRad Radio Amateurs G0SYR, G4APL, G7BSF, G7OBF, G8MNY, Caterham Guides M3BYL, M3ZUS plus all those Radio Amateur’s that came on during the day and gave our TDOTA station a call to make our event successful.

After tidying up the house, Paul, Ann, Belynda, John and Bryan ended the evening sitting down to the usual Chinese meal and a well earned rest. It was agreed that this was a hard event, due to lack of TDOTA activity on VHF and HF Bands.

Following the event Paul will spend several evenings, extracting the information for this report, preparing the data to produce the QSL card for all contacts and Guides spoken to.

Thank you all, Guider’s, Guide Helpers and the CatRad TDOTA Team
JOTA 17/18th October 2009
http://www.theskywaves.net