

SERVING THE BIG TOURS

The Great Ohio Bicycle Adventure

(The Great Ohio Bicycle Adventure (GOBA) is an annual week-long bicycle tour of the scenic back roads of rural Ohio. With the accent on taking it easy and enjoying the sights, the average daily distance is 50 miles. The 1997 GOBA will run from June 15th to the 21st, with the route covering the scenic southeastern part of the state. To continue its policy of offering ham communication coverage for its 3,000 riders, GOBA would like to add more hams to its corps of ham helpers. If interested, see below --Ed.)

Imagine providing all of the communications for a city of 3,000 bike riders, a city that picks up and moves 50 miles each day! That's the challenge that faces the GOBA ham volunteers. What makes it exciting is that it's emergency training for a disaster that would be more than county wide. One that would encompass a portion of the state or a region. Certainly, GOBA is the largest ham radio event for Ohio.

We are fortunate to have the "Adventure" here in Ohio because it provides us with a real situation---not to practice, but to actually provide all of the communications support for this huge mobile community. This is not field day. This is not practice. This is the real thing!

We are the largest event of its kind that uses only Amateur Radio for communication. The only week-long event that's larger, that I know of, is RAGBRAI, which has 18-20K riders. Whew! And they rely on the state police network as a primary net with hams filling in. We had 117 hams serving GOBA this past year.

HAM RADIO COVERAGE

Net control responsibilities are handled by different amateur clubs in each of the counties each day. And since the Adventure takes place for seven consecutive days, volunteers often leap-frog from one location to the next so that the best coverage can be given. Amateurs handle the communications for the three squad/medic vehicles that accompany the tour and of course the SAG vehicles as well as lead and sweep vehicles. In addition to fixed location responsibilities like the hospitals along the route, there is a sizeable cadre of bicycle mobile hams who travel in different locations within the cluster of riders. (More later.)

We've tried using cellular phones each year for the past 5 or 6 years. However, while cellular provides good point to point communications, the broadcast feature of Amateur Radio outweighs the occasional cellular benefits. Granted, cellular is good when someone wants to talk with a local store or some sort of provider about "commercial" things. And certainly it provides the privacy that's needed on occasion.

We are now using pagers that provide weather updates on a broadcast basis. There are about 10 of us that have them. Since we've been "surprised" by a tornado in one case, and torrential downpours at odd hours at other times, pagers are giving us more time to get activated.

In '96 we were fortunate to have a NOAA weather person ride with us for 4 days. He was a real asset when we got the pager notice of bad weather on the last day. We turned to him to find out exactly where the weather cell was. He called the station in Cleveland, they dialed in the doppler radar to our area specifically, and we were able to get people pretty much under

cover and have intersections manned by either sheriffs or staff, when the storm came. It was a pleasingly fast response.



Bill Sharp, W8HI, with the standard GOBA setup, a Larsen half-wave mounted aft of his saddle.

QUICK RESPONSE

In '96 we averaged one squad/medic call an hour and four hospital runs each day. Because of our ham volunteers, in particular the bicycle mobile hams, the response time continues to be right at six minutes. Said another way, when asked for, help was on the scene quicker than if 911 had been called.

Bicycle mobile hams are our front line for every member of the event. They are our eyes and ears. They give us "real time" information so that we are able to react in the shortest possible time to any event.

We seem to have quite a little group of bicycle mobile hams building from year to year. There are usually about 15 who pedal the entire 3,000 miles, enjoying the riding and helping out with emergency communications.

Since they are of such importance, we emphasize our support of them. To that end we have developed a bicycle mobile set-up that is efficient and effective. All of the parts have been standardized so that in case of failure they can be substituted from spare parts we carry with us.

BICYCLE MOBILE SETUP

This is the bicycle-mobile setup that we strongly recommend:

Antenna: Larsen NMO-150, 1/2 wave 2-meter whip and coil.

Feedline: Larsen GBR-1, with NMO mount and BNC connector. Coax is 57" long, which works best for 2-meters, and yet is not resonant in other ham bands.

Batteries: 12V 2AH with Panasonic style "claw foot" connector.

Antenna Mount: homebrew aluminum shelf attached to a Minoura dual waterbottle cage that mounts on rear of saddle.

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For bicycle mobile use we recommend only the 1/2 wave Larsen antenna because it operates well without a ground plane. But it needs to have a specific feed line length. The 57" length will either coil up in a jersey pocket or be long enough to reach the front of the bike for those who mount their radios up on the handle bars.

Just as an aside, we mobiles who put in 50 to 100 miles a day on the ride enter the day's frequency on our hand helds, lock it in so that nothing will change, tuck it in a jersey pocket (in the back) and use a speaker mike 'cause we're too sweaty to use head sets.

We use 12 volt batteries so that we have 5 watts out. That's often necessary when we're going into low profile repeaters. Finally, we use Minoura mounts for dual waterbottle cages that attach to the saddle frame. (Performance is the only source we've found.) To this we attach a small aluminum shelf (we supply a template) that becomes the antenna base.

Everything is standardized. We do this so that we can replace anything should it go bad. The participants have come to rely on hams, literally, for everything, so we have to be operational all the time. No excuses for something that doesn't work.

HAMS NEEDED

To receive a brochure about the tour itself, contact: GOBA, POB 14384, Columbus OH 43214. tel:614-447-0971. For more information, phone the Tour Director, Tom Barlow (also a ham: N8NLO) at 614-447-0888.

Along with providing the most complete communication package, GOBA encourages research and experimentation by amateurs. With this in mind, GOBA is initiating experiments in data communications and satellite locating systems. It would also be of value to see work begin in the area of cross-band communication, portable receiver sites, and mobile repeaters. If you are interested contact us now.

As usual, GOBA is looking for volunteers to handle all the more usual aspects of Amateur Radio communications: packet, satellite, GPS systems and EME, as well as FM, SSB, CW, RTTY, etc.

To apply for an experimental or operating position, please contact: Bill Sharp, W8HI e-mail: bsharp@delnet.net
tel: O: 614-363-3621 H: 614-369-7136

---Bill Sharp, W8HI, GOBA Communications Director
186 Devon St
Delaware, OH 43015

NEW HAMS

They hit the books, sweated, and got nervous at the exam site---just as we all did. But they passed! Since the last issue these members have become licensed hams:

Muriel C Schuerman, KE6TND, Downey, CA

Non-ham BMHAers, please send in your call sign as soon as you get your FCC amateur radio license. We'd like to list you in this column. If you have time, tell us how and what you studied, what helped you to pass the test. We'll pass it on to our non-ham members who are thinking about taking the exam.

BMHA NEWSLETTER

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We welcome articles, suggestions, letters, announcements, photos, artwork --- anything pertaining to bicycling while operating an amateur radio, or vice versa.

Submitted material will be edited for clarity and, if necessary, shortened to fit space constraints. Material should be submitted before Mar 1, June 1, Sept 1, or Dec 1 for inclusion in the ensuing issue.

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ABOUT BMHA

For the information of our first-time readers

Bicycle Mobile Hams of America got its start when a 'Stray' in the June '89 QST magazine asked to "get in touch with hams who operate their radios while bicycle-mobile", signed by Hartley Alley, NAOA. Twenty five hams responded, filled out questionnaires, and received a summary of the collected data.

In April of '90 we had our first BMHA Forum at the Dayton HamVention. We played to a packed house, overflowed the room, and added 54 names to our mailing list. Our six subsequent forums have drawn increasingly larger audiences, and now BMHA is firmly established as a 'regular' at this world-renowned event.

This is the twenty-sixth issue of our quarterly newsletter, which has become the clearing house for the exchange of info and ideas for the hams who go on the air from their bicycles. Since the last issue of this newsletter we have added 19 new members. The total membership now stands at 444, with members in 43 states, and six countries. BMHA is affiliated with Adventure Cycling Association and the League of American Bicyclists.

BMHA membership puts you in touch with a friendly and helpful group of bike-riding hams. You'll make contacts through our membership directory, packet and E-mail address lists, bi-weekly net on 20 meters, annual meeting and Forum at the Dayton HamVention and other regional meetings, and of course through the BMHA NewsLetter, which has articles on bike trips, antennas, other gear, operating tips, etc. Membership application blank on the next to last page.