



Episode 431 – Walt Stinson - W0CP

Transcription Sponsored by: Alan Higbie K0AV

Eric 4Z1UG:

QSO Today episode 431. Walt Stinson, W0CP. This episode of QSO Today is sponsored by Icom America, makers of the finest radios and accessories for your ham radio station, and by Nuts and Volts Magazine. Save the date for the next QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo, March 25th and 26th, 2023. Follow the link to the expo website for more information.

Welcome to the QSO Today podcast.

I'm Eric Guth, amateur call sign 4Z1UG, where I demonstrate the diversity and relevance of the amateur radio hobby and its impact on society by interviewing ham radio operators, many of whom played vital roles in shaping our technology through the amateur radio hobby. And while many people might say, "Ham radio, do people still do that?" this podcast demonstrates through in-depth interviews just how amazing, diverse and dynamic the amateur radio hobby continues to be.

The QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo is up on YouTube once again. I'm posting presentations from the last expo in September until they run out for everyone to watch. I have over 370 total presentations from five expos and posting a few every day if possible. Please help me out by subscribing to the channel. It is very important as a way to get the word out about the expo and the whole QSO Today project.

Walt Stinson, W0CP, love of shortwave listening, amateur radio and electronics, led him to a career as an entrepreneur and founder of ListenUp in Denver, Colorado. Walt remained on the cutting edge of the consumer electronics industry, leading to his induction into the Consumer Electronics Association Hall of Fame. W0CP enjoys working DX contesting and now summits on the air from the Colorado Rocky Mountains. And he is my QSO Today. W0CP, this is Eric 4Z1UG. Are you there, Walt?

Walt W0CP:

4Z1UG, W0 Charlie Papa.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Thank you for joining me on the QSO Today podcast, Walt. Can we start at the beginning of your ham radio story? When and how did it start for you?

Walt W0CP:

It started for me, Eric, in 1958. I was 10 years old and after school I was invited to go over to a friend's house. And he had a short wave radio there and we played with it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Do you remember what kind of radio it was?

Walt W0CP:

I don't remember what kind of radio it was. I don't. I think it might have been a Hallicrafters because that's what I ended up getting later. I got so enthralled with what I heard that day over at his house that I immediately went home, told my parents that I had to have a shortwave radio. And three or four months later, Christmas came around and that's what was under the tree for me.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What do you think that experience was that excited you so much about listening to that shortwave radio the first time?

Walt W0CP:

The world, the experience was of the world. I was living in Little Rock, Arkansas at the time and I had no concept of the world. And I went over to his house and we tuned around and I heard the world.

Eric 4Z1UG:

The world was alive.

Walt W0CP:

It captured my imagination in a major way, in a big way.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What kind of a receiver did you get for Christmas?

Walt W0CP:

I got a Hallicrafters S38E, which was a pretty popular entry level general coverage shortwave receiver. I think it probably cost around \$50 in 1958, which actually was a lot of money for my parents to spend on me.

Eric 4Z1UG:

My father says in those years that \$90 was a month's salary, maybe. Is that possible? He was a teacher.

Walt W0CP:

Yeah. I mean, you can go online and look up how much \$50 was in... It was a lot of money. It indicated, I think, that my parents thought that this was a worthwhile activity for me to be engaged in. And of course, my parents would've known about Marconi and Marconi got started when he was a teenager. So I think that influenced a lot of parents' attitudes about their kids getting involved in shortwave radio when they were young in that era right after World War II.

Eric 4Z1UG:

About the same time, I think we had Sputnik, I think that same year, right?

Walt W0CP:

Sputnik went up. Yeah, I remember trying to tune in Sputnik. I don't remember ever hearing it, but I certainly tried to hear it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So you became a serious shortwave listener. Did you write away for QSL cards and things like that?

Walt W0CP:

I did. I was a shortwave listener. I never had an Elmer, so I didn't know anything about ham radio at that point in time. I just listened and eventually I heard about ham radio and started hearing hams. And I wanted to get their QSL cards, so I got a QSL card that said SWL-W0. I was in the suburbs of St. Louis at the time when I got those cards from Walter Ashe Radio Company in St. Louis, Missouri. I had moved from Little Rock to St. Louis at that point.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And Walter Ashe made what kind of radios?

Walt W0CP:

They were a dealer, a very large ham radio dealer in St. Louis, Missouri. And they sold everything and anything that a ham could want. But when I started out as an SWL, I didn't know anything. I remember hearing about the call book and my mom bought me a call book. And I tuned in the ham bands and one day I heard K5 Alpha Juliet Yankee, a man named Pappy on 80 meters, and he was booming in. And so I looked him up in my call book and he was maybe six or seven miles away. I looked him up in the phone book, I called him on the phone, I asked him if I could come over to his house and see his ham station. And my mom took me over there. I was 11 years old when I saw my first ham station.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And how did Pappy react to you when you came in?

Walt W0CP:

Oh, he was fantastic. He took me into his ham shack, which was very impressive, and told me all about ham radio. And I think I spent about an hour at his house. But unfortunately we moved away shortly after that. I never had an Elmer, so I had to figure out how to navigate into ham radio more or less on my own.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And what was your next step after that? Once you moved again, you set up a shortwave station?

Walt W0CP:

Yeah, I set up my SWL station in St. Louis. And then I got into junior high school and I heard about some teenage hams in St. Louis that were on the air. I never met any of them, but I met a friend who knew somebody who was a ham, and we both made a pact that we would get our novice license. I got a license manual, started studying it, and off I went.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And you got your first license when?

Walt W0CP:

1963, five years after I... So I was an SWL for five years and it was a good education. I certainly learned a lot about propagation. I could tune the entire spectrum from AM all the way up to the top of 10 meters. And I was always listening and exploring and seeing what I could hear. I loved to listen to Radio Moscow, by the way. I thought that was very exotic.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What was your first call sign?

Walt W0CP:

My first call sign was Whiskey November Zero Germany Juliet Zulu.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And did you like CW at the time?

Walt W0CP:

I did, I loved CW. I mean, that's really all I had. It's funny, when all you have is CW, you just kind of accept it. So I just accepted, I learned CW by having a friend send CW to me until I could pass the five word a minute test. And then as soon as I got my license, I was on the

air as a novice. Eric, I think about that today. We had watering holes back then and you could get on the air as a brand new ham and you could have QSOs at five words a minute. I don't hear that happening today. A lot of the hams that I Elmer don't think that they can really have a QSO until they can master 20 words a minute.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I mean, I feel the same way, frankly, that we go to CW Academy and we do a lot of practice in order to make our Broadway debut.

Walt W0CP:

Right, exactly.

Eric 4Z1UG:

We don't want to play a smaller stage. I get that. And I get the impression perhaps that a lot of new hams go straight to, say, if on HF they go to FT8 or one of the digital modes.

Walt W0CP:

Yes, they do. Yeah.

Eric 4Z1UG:

There's less risk of screwing it up.

Walt W0CP:

Yes, that's right. And the hijinks that we engaged in in the novice bands back in that day when we got on the air at five words a minute. I mean, I remember my first QSO with a DX station. The guy was in Canada, and I had him repeat his call sign 10 times to me because I couldn't imagine that I was possibly talking to somebody outside the United States. I mean, it didn't even cross my mind that that was even possible to do that. Eventually he went away and I had a whole piece of paper with where I'd written down everything 50 times. And eventually I put it together that what his call sign actually was. And wow, I can talk to somebody outside the United States. As a kid it didn't even cross my mind that was even possible.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What was the first rig?

Walt W0CP:

My first rig was a DX-40. I built a lot of Heathkits and so I had a DX-40 and my S-38E brought a general coverage receiver, which left a lot to be desired as a receiver, but I made do with it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And I'm assuming that you operated a lot. I remember operating as a novice. It was grueling and terrifying and no one had ever taught me how to actually adjust my straight keys so that it didn't feel like I had a glass arm by the time I was done with my QSO.

Walt W0CP:

Yeah. Well, we had a good ham club in my high school later as I got older. And we must have had 100 hams in my ham club in high school, if you can imagine that.

Eric 4Z1UG:

No, I can't imagine.

Walt W0CP:

Yeah, it was amazing. The learning went quickly later. Once I got into high school the learning curve was pretty dramatic. So yeah, I had a lot of fun.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Did ham radio play a part in the choices that you made for your career in education after high school?

Walt W0CP:

Well, I went to an interesting high school. It was Webster Groves High School in a suburb of St. Louis, and they happened to have an industrial arts program. And in that program they had a two-year electronics diploma that you could get. And it was pretty serious education. It was two hours a day for two years, so that would be the equivalent in hours of an associate's degree, maybe even a bachelor's degree in some curriculum. So I enrolled in that, much to the chagrin of my parents and my guidance counselor, who told me that if I wanted to go to college, I needed to be taking advanced placement math and science courses and language and so forth. And I just said, "Well, I want to take electronics." So I talked a few of my buddies into joining me, and we all ended up doing extremely well academically later in our lives.

But we graduated from high school with a two-year training in electronics, and that ended up being a very significant influencer in my life. I went on to a liberal arts college in Illinois called Knox in Galesburg, Illinois. I was in a 3-2 program, which meant that three years to give you liberal arts so that you weren't a geek when you went to engineering school and graduated from engineering school. So I was going to go to engineering school, three years first at liberal arts, so I was going to end up with two degrees. I thought that was a wonderful educational path for me. And so I went to Knox and I ended up getting married as a sophomore and staying at Knox with my wife. And my two years of electronics ended up landing me a job with an electronics distributor and parts house in Galesburg by the name of LaSalle Electronics.

And they gave me a job because I could sell parts to TV repairmen. I knew how to read color codes and I knew what a capacitor was and things like that, which they thought was great. So they gave me a job. And they then branched out into consumer electronics, which was just happening. We've jumped into the early 1970s now, or late sixties. And people were just coming back from Vietnam with stereo equipment and so forth. And so they started a consumer electronics department, a small one there. And that was my first exposure to consumer electronics that ended up being my career path.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And now this message from Icom America. Happy holidays from Icom. Spice up your ham shack this season with one of Icom's popular handhelds, mobiles or base stations. These radios are perfect for working your favorite bands while staying inside or venturing out this winter. It's the most wonderful time of the year to give a gift of Icom. The ICOM IC-705 is the perfect sidekick and QRP companion with base station features and functionality at the tip of your fingers in a portable package covering HF, six meters, two meters, and 70 centimeters.

This compact rig weighs in at just over two pounds, with RF direct sampling for most of the HF band and IF sampling for frequencies above 25 megahertz. It has become the go-to base-band rig for microwave operators. Its features include a 4.3 inch touchscreen display with a live band scope and waterfall, five watts with a BP2 72 battery pack and 10 watts with a 13.8 DC power supply. Single side band, CW, AM/FM as well as full D-STAR functions.

A micro USB connector, Bluetooth and wireless land. Integrated GPS with antenna and GPS logger. A micro SD card slot. The HM-243 microphone speaker is included and it supports QRP and QRPP operations. The perfect accessory for the ICOM 705 is the optional LC-192 backpack. The LC-192 includes a special compartment for your IC-705 and additional room for accessories. The ICOM ID-52A is a VHF/UHF dual band handheld portable transceiver with D-STAR and FM dual mode functions, and is the first handheld amateur radio with a full-color 2.3 inch waterfall display.

This portable supports conventional FM communications and D-STAR Simplex, repeater regional, worldwide calls over the D-STAR internet gateway. You can even send photos over D-STAR using your connected Android device. Other ID-52 features include a wide-band receiver with guaranteed range of 144 to 148 megahertz and 440 to 450 megahertz VV UU VU with dual DV mode, integrated GPS GLONASS receiver, including grid square location, micro SD card slot, micro USB for data transfer, programming and charging.

And of course, it is in an IPX7 waterproof case. The ID-52A is the perfect companion to the IC-705 as both use batteries, headsets, and the same Android app for D-STAR operation. Create your own band opening with the ICOM IC-9700. This transceiver brings direct sampling to the UHF/VHF weak signal world and is loaded with innovative features that are sure to keep you busy, including faster processors, higher input gain, higher display resolution, and a cleaner signal. More features include a 4.3 inch touchscreen color TFT

LCD with real-time high speed spectrum scope and waterfall display, smooth satellite operation with 99 satellite channels, dual watch operation, and full duplex operation in satellite mode. The ICOM IC-7300 is a high performance HF transceiver with a compact design that will far exceed everyone's expectations.

This transceiver digitizes RF before various receiver stages, reducing inherent noise in different IF stages. The IC-7300 changed the way entry level HF is designed. The ICOM IC-7300 features include RF direct sampling, 15 discrete band pass filters, large 4.3 inch color touchscreen, Real-Time Spectrum scope, and an SD memory card slot. This radio by far is the best HF rig that I have ever owned. I love it for its features and value. Now, I realize that this is a big list to give to Santa.

You can easily argue that all of these fine ICOM rigs complement each other and that you can't just have one without the others. Maybe Santa can even spread out the delivery of these great Icom rigs before the next holiday season. In any case, be sure to tell your Icom dealer that you heard about these amazing Icom radios on the QSO Today podcast. And now back to our guest. When we first started seeing big systems in America, returning servicemen who, what, stopped over in Japan?

Walt W0CP:

That's right, yes. Bringing back Sansui and Kenwood and Marantz and various pieces of equipment from Japan, yeah. Sansui was the big one. Pioneer.

Eric 4Z1UG:

They were just on the leading edge of that equipment just starting to wave into America, into American markets, right?

Walt W0CP:

That's right. They weren't really very well established in American markets yet. We had Sherwood and Fisher receivers in the United States. We had Heathkit equipment. Those were all point-to-point wiring products. The Sherwood and Fisher things were point-to-point wiring manufacturing techniques. And the Japanese had moved into circuit board technology and they had a manufacturing advantage with the Sansui and Pioneer. So when they hit the US, they had much better value for the dollar, much less labor cost.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I remember that period of time that we had 8-track tapes.

Walt W0CP:

We did, yeah.

Eric 4Z1UG:

That was a big deal. Now, there's a story that I understand that you were involved in, at least on the bleeding edge or the leading edge of the compact disc. Do you want to tell that story?

Walt W0CP:

Well, we're jumping ahead to 1982, a bit early eighties. So I mean, before that, after my stint at LaSalle, I decided to make a career in the consumer electronics industry and shopped around for a city. And ended up choosing Denver as the city and moved here with my wife and partner in 1972. I was 23 years old, started the business in Denver, and I started as a broadcast engineer and sound engineer.

Eric 4Z1UG:

For one of the local stations?

Walt W0CP:

No, I was an independent, I was a contractor. And my specialty was live remote broadcast.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Now, can I ask a personal question if you don't mind? It's just between us. The only reason I moved to Denver, Colorado was because I married a Denver girl. But when I think about Denver at the time, there was nothing there, in Denver. There was oil exploration, there was maybe some mining. It didn't seem to me that Denver had a lot of attraction. What was the attraction for you to take your consumer electronics business to Denver?

Walt W0CP:

Well, by this time, I had graduated with a degree in economics. And I had been a research assistant for a transportation economist, and I worked summers for him doing statistical analysis on cities to determine what their future transportation needs were going to be. So I did two things when I was shopping for a city. I did a projection on what their future growth prospects were. I did a demographic projection, what the age demographic and the educational demographic. And then I looked at the potential competition.

So the thing that you just mentioned was actually an advantage for me because I didn't have very much money, hardly any money. So I didn't want really strong competition to exist. And because Denver was kind of a cow town in 1972 when I moved there, it didn't have the kind of sophisticated consumer electronics retail ecosystem that Chicago had, places, major metropolitan areas. It certainly wasn't a major metropolitan area at that time. And I think Denver only had about 600,000 residents. So it was perfect. It had the right demographics, it had the right projections, and it had very little in the way of companies that were trying to do what we thought we wanted to do.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And this was before the rise of, say, UPS and FedEx. So you were on major rail lines, major trafficking, if we're talking truck hubs.

Walt W0CP:

Yes, absolutely. Yeah.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So it probably at the time was-

Walt W0CP:

Distribution center.

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:23:04]

Eric 4Z1UG:

Yeah. So it probably, at the time, was-

Walt W0CP:

Distribution center.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Distribution center, yeah.

Walt W0CP:

So I had a lot of fun doing the broadcasting. We basically built recording studios, we did remote broadcasting and then we had a shop that sold commercial sound equipment and home stereo equipment. The broadcast side turned out to be very, a heck of a lot of fun because we got hired by the regional rock promoter and we ended up doing 300 or so live recordings and broadcasts of anybody who was anybody in jazz and rock and roll in the '70s through the mid '80s.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So that was Barry?

Walt W0CP:

Barry Fey, yeah. I was the contract sound engineer for Barry Fey, Feyline concerts, one of the major concert promoters in the world. And so we ended up working with the likes of Bob Dylan and U2 and Journey and Santana, and it was an amazing experience for about 10 years. The radio stations that we did broadcasting for, they loved it because I told them, because I had the shop and because nobody knew about the shop, I said, well, why

don't you just promote me instead of paying me? And so they would give me about a thousand dollars of radio advertising every time I did a remote broadcast for them.

And I was doing three or four of those a week. So lo and behold, after about 10 years of that, sound by Listen Up was a catchphrase in the Denver market, and our company started taking off. Eventually, we had to focus on that business on the consumer electronic side and let go of the broadcasting and that portion of it, we just backed away from it. Barry went on to big things. But we did two concert venues with him, Ebbets Field and the Rainbow Music Hall. And both of those were stopping off points for major artists from around the world, and it was an exciting time.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Was Barry involved in developing Red Rocks too, or did that come after him?

Walt W0CP:

No. Barry had the concession from the City and County of Denver for concerts at Red Rocks. So Red Rocks is a park, a property of the City and County of Denver. And he saw the potential to develop Red Rocks.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Of turning that into a concert venue.

Walt W0CP:

Yeah, turn it into a concert venue. And now, it's one of the premier concert venues in the world. Anybody, when they reach a certain stature, they want to play Red Rocks. It's an amazing experience, both for the artist and for the audience.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Oh, that's good to know. I liked it. It was a beautiful place as well.

Walt W0CP:

Amazing place.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So what happened after that? So did Denver meet your expectations in terms of your original projections, what you thought it would be and what it has become?

Walt W0CP:

Absolutely. Denver was an amazing market. It was a market in which I was able to get going, get started with very little initial capital and build the business. So by the time the CD came out, we're jumping forward now to 1982, 10 years after the business started, the CD came out and at that time, I had... In 1979, I had started a trade association called the

Professional Audio Video Retailers Association, and it grew into about 300 companies, and I was the president of it for a number of years. And then I became the general advisor. And in 1982, they asked me to be the representative of PARA, to the Compact Disc Group. And the Compact Disc Group was a group of companies that had gotten together to launch digital audio in North America. And it consisted of Sony and Phillips. Those were the two primary partners on the Compact Disc.

And Polygram was Phillips. Sony had their own label and Polygram was the label of Phillips, and they were going to leverage these labels to project Compact Disc into the North American market. So I was invited to become a member of the Compact Disc Group. I met all the representatives from the consumer electronics industry that were going to be manufacturing these players and the companies that were going to be making the CDs. And they gave me the white papers to study. I studied these white papers and convinced myself that this was definitely going to work. And then I was invited to go to Japan. My partner and I went to Japan. And in Japan, we saw players and we saw working players, we saw stores in Tokyo that were already selling compact discs. And so we took the opportunity to buy suitcases and fill them up with compact discs and bring them back to the United States.

This was before the CD had even been launched in the US. But I had already reached deals with Polygram and Sony that Listen Up would be the first dealer of Compact Disc in the United States. Turned out that Sony would ultimately pick about 15 companies in North America to launch the Compact Disc. So I put my marketing hat on and went to town and became an evangelist for the CD. And it was an amazing, amazing time to be able to wave this magic disc in front of people. I had a number of public events that attracted over a thousand people. There were probably five events that attracted over a thousand people. There was a lot of press coverage, TV coverage. It was amazing.

I told everybody in the company, you only get one opportunity in life if you're lucky to usher in a totally new revolutionary technology. And that's what the transition from analog to digital was. It was a moment to usher in a brand new technology. And I remember one of my problems, Eric, was I spent these two years in studying electronics technology. They didn't teach me digital technology. It was all tubes and analog. And so I had to go to school to study digital and learn about it. And I became quite proficient at explaining digital technology to people, especially in layman's terms. I loved getting in front of the press and talking about.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I felt with the Compact Disc that for those of us that loved music in the car, who were tired of trying to pick the cassette tape out of the machine because it got wound up on the cap inside. And then you essentially lost all the music, that the Compact Disc was a game changer in terms of user experience of good sound. It didn't get noisy like a cassette tape would at a certain point because it got worn out. I thought it was one of those revolutions in music that seemed to change everything.

Walt W0CP:

Oh, it was. And I was a showman. One of my press conferences that I held was, I took a CD, smeared it with peanut butter and then dunked it in water, wiped the peanut butter off, took an Xacto knife and cut a scribe, let one of the press guys cut a scribe right across the CD with the Xacto knife. Then I popped it in the player and it played perfect.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Nobody could hear the popping?

Walt W0CP:

There was no popping. It played perfectly. So here we are today, we're streaming, digital audio is what it's all about. And it was fun being a pioneer in that technology. I really enjoyed.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And of course, CDs went on to also capture video.

Walt W0CP:

That's right.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I remember when that came out.

Walt W0CP:

DVDs, Blu-rays. So that prompted Listen Up to expand into video. The company now spans virtually all consumer electronics categories.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Are you still involved in the company?

Walt W0CP:

I am. I have stepped back. I have Listen Up as a president and an outside board of directors now, and I'm the Chair and I'm very involved in the company.

Eric 4Z1UG:

It's hard to take the company out of the guy if you've been doing it since you were 23 years old.

Walt W0CP:

Oh, I love the company. It's a wonderful company. But I'm not running it, I'm not running it but I'm still very involved in it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

It's my understanding that you were inducted into the Consumer Electronics Hall of Fame in 2009, could you talk a little bit about that experience and what milestone that is?

Walt W0CP:

Well, I was blindsided by it. First of all, I didn't expect it at all. The other people that were inducted into it, Irwin Jacobs, the founder of Qualcomm and Steve Jobs, that's company that I didn't expect to be associated with. And it also has a number of people in it that relate to my ham radio life. The people who founded Zenith were both hams. Edwin Armstrong is a hero of mine. He invented frequency modulation, and I credit him with popularizing the concept of high fidelity. One of the people who supported me when I was starting the company, Paul Klipsch, was pretty well-known engineer, sound engineer. He's in it. So a lot of my heroes were in the Consumer Electronics Hall of Fame. I had a big smile on my face that night. I really was very happy.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So you get this award, does this award give you the key to CES in Vegas every year? I mean, is there a long-term benefit other than that experience that came from this award?

Walt W0CP:

No, I think it's the latter. I think it's the experience. Now, I am very involved in CES, especially this year, which we might have time to talk about. No, I think it's a prestigious event in the industry. And whenever you get recognized by your industry peers, there's a warm feeling that goes along with that because you know that they're your greatest critics. They're the ones who know the things you've done right but they also know the things you've done, the mistakes that you've made. So when they decide that in total, that maybe you're okay, it's a good feeling.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I want to take a minute to tell you about my favorite podcast, the Ham Radio Workbench Podcast with George KJ6VU and now joined by Rod VA3ON, Mike VA3MW, Mark N6MTS, and Vince VE6LK. Every two weeks, George and company offer up a status report on the many amateur radio projects on their workbenches and explore projects on their guest workbenches. This group is project active and prolific covering many technical areas of amateur radio. So the next time you want a deep dive into ham radio electronic project building, or to learn about technology, tools, test equipment, construction techniques and the rest, listen to the Ham Radio Workbench Podcast available on every podcast player and channel.

Use the link in this week's show notes page to get to the Ham Radio Workbench Podcast directly. And now back to my QSO. We have to get to ham radio, and I'm sure everyone's saying, oh, Eric, when are we getting to ham radio? I'm sure they're not saying that but let's finish off on the professional stuff and then we'll move into ham radio. Before we started, you said that you're involved in the HS4A initiative, that's what it sounds like to me. Can you explain a little bit about what HS4A is and what your involvement is in it?

Walt WOCP:

Yes. HS4A stands for Human Security for All. HS4A is a concept that was developed by the United Nations and a decade or more ago. And it is a way of thinking about security that is a non-military way, a non nation state way. It's a way of thinking about security from the perspective of individuals and how they actually live. And it has seven pillars, things like economic security, food security, health security, environmental security. But it also includes things like political security, personal security and community security. And the United Nations decided a year or two ago that they needed a security paradigm that related better to individuals. They have these sustainable development goals that are very popular with nation states and NGOs and so forth. The Sustainable Development Goals were talked about a lot at COP27 over in Egypt just recently.

And that Biden was over there and there was a lot of talk about the Sustainable Development Goals, but there's 17 of those. They're technical and they don't really relate to the individual very well. So the UN decided that they wanted to popularize and publicize human security, the concept of human security. And they invited the World Academy of Art and Science, which is a global academy that was founded by Einstein, Oppenheimer, Bertrand Russell in the wake of World War II, to talk about and think about applied technology and how it affects people in both positive and negative ways. And so the World Academy was an ideal partner for the UN to reach out to, to take this concept and partner with the UN and actually implement it the way the UN wants it implemented. That is Publica. And so I got involved in this about a year ago, and I've been working on it.

The first event happens to be CES coming up in January of 2023. And the CES show this year will be themed Human Security for All. So if you Google CES 2023 Human Security, there will be tons of material that pops up about it. See, CTA, the Consumer Technology Association is interested in this because they understand that innovation, technological innovation can be a tremendous force for addressing some of the world's most pressing problem. So that's what I'm working on. I am a member of the World Academy of Art and Science, and I got involved when we were putting the proposal together for the UN. The UN approved the proposal in October, just a few months ago. And they are a formal partner with the World Academy in this Campaign. They call it a Campaign. And the Campaign will launch in January and will involve many, many large prestigious NGO organizations and nonprofits around the world over a period of years.

So there is a ham radio connection here. The IARU is a partner of Human Security for all campaign. The IARU is a perfect fit because the IARU is very interested in ham radio for emergency communications purposes. And that fits into the UN's concept of community

security. The UN's also very interested in preventative concepts, know they want it to be context specific, they want it to be integrated with other organizations, and they want it to be prevention oriented. And it turns out that ham radio is a good fit for all of that. So I'm very excited about the opportunity to reacquaint hams with the important role that they can play in creating community security.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And what is the Consumer Electronics angle on HS4A?

Walt W0CP:

Well, CTA is, as I said, all about innovation, technological innovation. And they feel that their member companies are becoming more and more aware of issues that can be addressed effectively by technology and particularly technological innovation. So these would be things like food security. John Deere is interested in how to make equipment that can be utilized in developing countries to help increase crop yields, water purification systems are important. Health security is a big one because in many underdeveloped countries especially, they only have an annual budget per capita of a couple of hundred dollars for healthcare. So these gaps in providing basic human security for people really need to be and can be filled by technological innovation. CTA's very aware of that. That's why they signed on to be a partner.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Let's kick over to ham radio now. During this whole time, once you moved to Denver, Colorado, were you involved in the amateur radio community at the same time that you were building your new business?

Walt W0CP:

I've never stopped being involved in ham radio. I have a deep passion and profound passion for ham radio. I love ham radio and have tried to acquaint myself and get into almost, well, lots of different aspects of it. I have a bias for CW, I have a bias for HF. But beyond that, if it has to do with HF, I've probably been involved in it on some level or another. So throughout all this period that we've been talking about, I've never stopped being involved in ham radio. And when I moved to Denver, the first thing I did was seek out the contest guys and the DX guys and get acquainted with them and join the clubs and immerse myself in the wonderful ham radio community that exists here in Colorado.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So it seems to me that you've done actually more than that, right? You were once the ARRL director in Colorado, is there two directors in every state or senators or one director?

Walt W0CP:

The director is for the Rocky Mountains region. I was responsible for Utah, New Mexico, Colorado and Wyoming. And there's one director, and we had about 15,000 hams in those four states.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So if you were going to make a case for someone, maybe a newer ham or someone who's been involved in ham radio for a while but is thinking of taking up some leadership position in amateur radio, would you recommend becoming an ARRL director? And if you do, actually having been one, and you've also gone on to the ARRL Foundation Board, so you're obviously a supporter of the ARRL, what case would you make for a person to become an ARRL director?

Walt W0CP:

Well, I'm going to turn that question around a little bit. And first, I'm going to make the case for being an ARRL supporter because I run into a lot of people who don't really understand the ARRL. They seem to think that it's some sort of business enterprise in which people have the same motivations that a commercial enterprise owned by shareholders might have, but that's certainly not true. ARRL is run by and for ham radio operators. It's governed by members who have no pecuniary interest whatsoever in their volunteer work that they do. And so there are lots of different ways to volunteer with the ARRL. There are many, many, many positions that the ARRL has available, makes available to hams that want to get involved. There's section manager rules. The director rule happens to be the one that carries the most responsibility. But there are everyday ARRL appointments that come from the section manager that are available to just about any ham that wants to support ARRL.

So I think that what I would tell people having spent 10 years involved in the ARRL is that it's not what you think it is. It's a lot more than you think it is and a lot less than you think it is. You think that it's some sort of commercial behemoth that's trying to dominate ham radio and make a lot of money. It's a lot less than that. And you underestimate the influence that ARRL has on the global stage, where ham radio policy is really fixed. People tend to think of the FCC as being the end all and be all of amateur radio rules and regulations. The FCC really looks to the International Telecommunications Union for the regulatory structure that they have to implement. And the ARRL is very, very, very deeply involved in the ITU.

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Walt W0CP:

ARRL is very, very, very deeply involved in the ITU as the international secretariat of the IARU, which is the association or union of all of the amateur radio organizations worldwide, ARRL just being one of them.

France has its own. England has RSGB and so forth. All of these organizations come together under the IRU. The ARRL is really the glue that holds IARU together.

So, ARRL is just involved in so much and has been responsible for so many wonderful things that have occurred in our hobby. I can't even imagine what ham radio would look like if ARRL didn't exist.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, just so that the listeners know, this wasn't a criticism of the ARRL at all. I have been a member of the ARRL since I was first licensed, except for perhaps the gap when I was raising a family.

I am still an ARRL member. I pay more to get my QST Magazine delivered in Israel. But I belong to the ARRL, even as a person living outside of the United States, because exactly what you're saying.

I don't think that there is a better organization for the support and safety of amateur radio than ARRL.

So, that's my editorial opinion, in terms of spectrum defense is my number one issue. I think there's nobody that does it better than the ARRL.

Walt W0CP:

ARRL does so much that hams aren't really that conscious of. A lot of hams judge it by QST or some tiny niche thing that only represents a small fraction of what ARRL is really involved in.

It's a wonderful organization, with an incredibly rich history we should be very proud of.

Eric 4Z1UG:

There's nobody getting rich over there.

Walt W0CP:

Absolutely not.

Eric 4Z1UG:

From what I understand. The question I have, Walt, is that, so you didn't just become the director. Did you work your way up through the Rocky Mountain Organization to become the director?

Walt W0CP:

I did. I started out as the Contest Advisory Committee chairman. We haven't talked about this, but I got involved in contesting in 1976, when the bicentennial contest started. There was a one-off competition called The Bicentennial Contest.

We got a special call sign, I was AB0IRJ, we could use for one year. It was a lot of fun. I got in that contest. I really enjoyed it. So, I decided I'm going to be a contester. Eventually, I became chairman of the Contest Advisory Committee.

That was my first introduction to the ARRL. Then I was invited by the director, to run for vice director, when there was an opening under him for vice director. I ran and was elected vice director.

That introduced me to Newington. I started going to Newington twice a year for a few years and then eventually became director.

Then I ran a number of committees. I was the chair of the industry advisory council, which was really exciting because I got to interact with all of the major manufacturers in the ham radio world.

Of course, being from the consumer electronics field, that was a natural for me. I really enjoyed it. I remember meeting people like Martin Jue and having dinner with them, of MFJ. I really like Martin. He's a great guy. Lots of other people, Dick Ehrhorn and so forth, a VTO Alpha. So, that was great.

When I became director, they decided with my business background, that they weren't going to let me be in DX, which I wanted to be or a contest, which I wanted to be. You're going to be in the administration and finance committee.

So, I became chairman of the A & F committee, which I really resented because I wanted to go to Newington to have fun and have an extension of my fun ham time. But it ended up, that was the place that I could do my best work for the ham radio community and for the ARRL. So, I accepted that role and tried to do my best.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Now you were on the board of the ARRL Foundation. Are you still on the board?

Walt W0CP:

I'm not, but I was on the board of the ARRL.

Eric 4Z1UG:

As a commercial for the ARRL, and again, I'm a big supporter, what is the ARRL Foundation, for people that may not know what it is?

Walt W0CP:

The primary purpose of the ARRL Foundation is to promote ham radio in youth. The principal way that it does that is by offering scholarships to young hams, to help them go to college.

So, it's just a wonderful charity function really. It's a tradition that the ARRL has had for many, many years. It's a wonderful tradition.

The foundation gives out a large number of scholarships of varying sizes every year. And if you watch QSD closely, you'll see an annual announcement with the pictures of the young hams that are getting support to go to college.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And some old hams, I noticed. In this last group of pictures, there are some older people. Looks like they're transitioning in their lives, to a new career. So, they're going back to college.

I saw that there were some scholarships for some older people as well. I think that's always a good thing. If people get more education and someone can help them, I think that's a great idea.

Walt W0CP:

Absolutely. Yeah.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Let me ask you a question then. What are we doing right in terms of attracting younger people into ham radio? Maybe, what could we do better in order to get more of them? I'm trying to put a positive spin on this question.

Walt W0CP:

Well, I have my opinions, but I'm certainly not an expert on this. I feel that ham radio, there's a lot of magic in ham radio. I think people today take magic for granted.

We live in a magical world. We really do. We live in a magical world, surrounded by magic every day.

When I was growing up, ham radio was the most magical thing that I've ever seen. I'm not sure that that people growing up today, if they're exposed to ham radio, would say it's the most magical thing in their lives or that they've ever seen, but I still think it is. I certainly think it is.

I think that the ability to bounce radio waves off the ionosphere is an incredibly exciting thing to do.

I think that we as hams need to be more welcoming of young people. Like I said earlier, we don't have a watering hole for people that are learning, where they can make mistakes.

I see older hams assuming that people should know more than they really should know or could know when they first get into the hobby. That creates the expectation that you've got to do it perfectly, which I think is a mistake. I think that ham radio ought to be a place where you can make a mess.

Let's face it. The FCC's set aside these slots of spectrum. They expect us to make a mess in there. We should be making more messes than we make. We certainly should be more

accepting of people who make messes, than we are, especially if they're young. So, I think that this problem of youth in ham radio is something of our own making.

I would note that in Europe, that it's really not that way. I was talking with Dave Sumner, a friend of mine, K1ZZ, earlier, recently. He was telling me that the center of the youth movement in ham radio was not in the United States. It's in Europe. We can learn a lot from Europe. Croatia has a wonderful youth-

Eric 4Z1UG:

Did he say why?

Walt W0CP:

I'm not sure we know why.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Oh, really?

Walt W0CP:

I don't know.

Eric 4Z1UG:

My listeners have probably heard me over the last few weeks say this. I told you earlier, I'm a radio merit badge counselor for an American-style Boy Scout troop that we've started here in Israel.

The first troop happens to be in a frat where I live. We've got 60 boys that are becoming Boy Scouts, following the manual in Israel.

For me, it's very exciting because I thought the scouting program in America was amazing.

Now, I had to go pitch my radio merit badge to the group of kids. I took a little Morserino with me. I took my UHF Handie-Talkie to talk to the repeater that I could see out the window. I had somebody there to answer because on a lot of repeaters you can go, "Hello. Anybody there?," and there's nobody there. So, I made sure that there was somebody there.

You know what? What was interesting to me is, is that the kids didn't understand or didn't realize that their cell phones and their WiFi is radio. There was just this light that went on.

They love the Morse code with the Morserino. They all wanted to play with that. But this idea that, is WiFi radio? I said, "Yes, we use radio all the time. My wireless earbuds, that's radio."

It's like you can kindle the magic if all of a sudden you say, "Hey, now the stuff that we're using all day long now is radio. We're using radio now more than we've ever used radio." What do you think about that?

Walt W0CP:

Well, I think that perhaps the greatest invention ever in the history of mankind is the discovery of electromagnetic waves. So, I completely agree with you. I think that we're not very good marketers.

I've become a marketer in my life. The HS4A campaign is a marketing campaign to change people's attitudes.

I don't think that hams have ever been very serious about marketing. There are a lot of incredibly exciting aspects to ham radio. We touch on them when we talk to people about our hobby, but we're not very good at selling these ideas to other people, particularly young people.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Is it still magic to you?

Walt W0CP:

Absolutely. I am sitting here literally looking at my SDR screen that's right in front of my face. While I'm talking to you, I have to admit, I've glanced up at it a few times. I can see literally 200 signals on the waterfall. On 10 Meters right now. The 10 Meter contest is going on.

10 Meters is open. It is incredibly exciting to see 10 Meters come alive like this. Absolutely amazing.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I have a 7300, so I have a little screen over here on my left, that I leave on 20 Meters all day long, 20 Meters CW. So, I'm watching who's there and I'm like, don't these people have a job? Don't these people work?

It's so amazing to actually, with a waterfall display, to see the activity in the band. Even if I'm supposed to be working, I can enjoy the electromagnetic spectrum at least in 20 Meters.

You have a blog. I'll put the link to that in the show notes page, but I was caught by the latest article that you have in there. It's the personal recollections of Marconi.

I'm not trying to pronounce his first name, but the first name is in there. It's written as a firsthand account of growing up with Marconi. Are you headed towards writing fiction, and what was the inspiration for that piece?

Walt W0CP:

The inspiration of the piece was from a woman that I know, who's a real author. Her name is Patricia Pfitsch. She contacted me because she writes children's books for teenager.

She wanted to have a character in her latest book... She's written a number of books, but she wanted to have a character in that book who was a ham. She needed expert guidance on how to talk about what he did.

So, I spent hours talking to her about what we do. She called me frequently, to ask questions. Would he do this? Would he do that? If he was on a boat, how would he communicate to shore? Would it be possible for him to talk to this person or that person?

It's a mystery novel. And after talking to her about it, I thought, I'm really interested in Marconi. I'm going to write something. I'm going to write a piece of fiction about Marconi.

Now, I love to write, but my articles typically are academic-style articles. I recently wrote an article about the economic sanctions in Ukraine. So, pretty far away from non-fiction. But I love writing, so that's why I wrote that.

I love Marconi. Marconi's story is really amazing. So, I encourage everybody to read this story that I wrote, if they can find it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

There will be a link in the show notes page for sure.

Walt W0CP:

His story is amazing. You know what? We may not realize this, people my age or my generation, but Marconi was a marketing genius. Marconi marketed ham radio or radio in general to my parents.

So, I believe that the reason that my parents bought me my first receiver and then subsequently bought me a Swan 350 when I was in high school, was because they knew the story of Marconi even though I didn't. Marconi, his greatest accomplishment occurred when he was 16, 17 years old.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Kind of like Art Collins.

Walt W0CP:

So here's this teenage kid ends up becoming a bigger personality in the world than Steve Jobs was. I mean, people don't know how big Marconi was. He was huge. He even got a Nobel Prize, and he never even graduated from college. So, the world just fell at his feet.

He got started doing his experiments. I call his experiments the distance game, in my article that I wrote about him, the distance game.

So he started playing the distance game, DX, in other words, when he was a teenager and proving, first that you could go a few hundred yards and then a few miles and then a few tens of miles and then a few hundreds of miles and eventually spanning the Atlantic Ocean.

Eric 4Z1UG:

He was doing that with spark, right, at the time?

Walt W0CP:

He was, yes.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Pretty broadband transmissions.

Walt W0CP:

Definitely. Definitely. I'm a lover of DX. I love DX. DX has taught me so much about the world. It has gotten me into countries I never would've visited before and certainly has enabled me to whet my appetite for pileups. So, I'm a big promoter and fan of DX.

Eric 4Z1UG:

When you said earlier that you like to operate contests, do you like all kinds of contests, like sweepstakes? Do you operate SO2R or something very high speed and to get lots of contacts over the contest weekend?

Walt W0CP:

I started out with sweepstakes. You can compete pretty well with sweepstakes here in Colorado. Then I graduated into CQ World Wide, ARRL DX and competed very aggressively in those contests.

But I quickly learned that from here in Colorado, right smack in the middle of the US, it's hard to win from Colorado. It's virtually impossible to win DX contests from Colorado.

So, I began to look. My eyes began wandering. First, I went to The Bahamas in 1981 and entered my first contest, the CQ World Wide and the ARRL 160 contest from The Bahamas.

I really thought that was a lot of fun. Went over there with my family. We had a great time. Then, somebody mentioned Belize to me.

Actually, I think I went to The Bahamas in '79. 1980 and '81, I went to Belize and learned the lay of the land there.

I decided I wanted to win the ARRL DX contest CW. So, I went there a few times to practice and figure out how I might win. Then, I went in 1983 and did win.

I've continued to go back to Belize. I'm not trying to win so much anymore. I just love being DX in a contest, in a DX contest. So, I've been going to Belize ever since.

Eric 4Z1UG:

We will return to our guest in just a moment. Nuts & Volts Magazine is a new sponsor. It's an amazing resource for new and old hams alike. Click on the banner to get your online or paper subscription of Nuts & Volts.

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If you were going to advise a ham, any ham, how to be successful in ham radio, do you have some simple advice?

This isn't the last question that I normally ask. It seems to me that hams that accomplish a lot... You brought this up with Belize. That you actually made a point of going for two years beforehand to get the lay of the land, to understand what the obstacles are, where the goalposts are, in order to be able to go the third year and win.

Do you create some kind of plan for success in ham radio, or do you set aside time on your calendar for ham radio?

You're obviously a very busy guy. Do you have an answer perhaps, that you could give, to lead to ham radio success?

Walt W0CP:

I think the most important thing is to turn on the radio every day and even if you just listen and look at the bands. The real key is to make a contact, make regular contacts. That's really been the key to my enjoyment of ham radio is just being active.

My ham shack is on the first floor of my house. It's not in the basement of my house. It's in my office or next to my office. It's accessible to me.

My wife has an office, a desk in here too. So, when I'm on the air or messing around with ham radio, I'm not away from my family.

So, I've woven it into my life in a seamless way, where it's not something separate from who I am and what I do. It's really an integral part of who I am and what I do.

Eric 4Z1UG:

It's my understanding that your family has also joined you in the hobby.

Walt W0CP:

Well, they certainly support me. My wife is K0ZV. She got her Extra at a time when you had to pass Morse Code test to get it. So she's, I think pretty serious and it really appreciates ham radio.

She doesn't get on the air like I do, but she's very supportive of it. And when we go to Belize, I get her on the air. She had a 200-hour on Side-band one time. They are DX phone contest. So, I think she's a pretty good operator.

Eric 4Z1UG:

You have children that are also ham radio operators?

Walt W0CP:

Yeah. My son is a ham. He's not active, but he is a ham and went to lots of swap meets with me and has done a lot of field days with me.

I also got my father into ham radio. After he retired, he went and got his license. We had a schedule every Saturday, for an hour and a half.

My wife joked that he talked more freely on the air via ham radio, to us, than he did over the phone. He never wanted to talk over the phone, but when he got on the air he was chatty.

He's a silent key now, but he was very supportive of me as I was coming up as a kid, as I mentioned earlier.

He was with IBM and had a technical sales job with IBM and certainly saw that ham radio might have a positive influence in my life. So, he jumped into it himself.

Eric 4Z1UG:

It's my understanding that you're also working the teeners, which are the over 11,000 feet in Colorado, as a SOTA operator. Is that right?

Walt W0CP:

SOTA's been a lot of fun for me. I get the same kind of thrill out of it as I get setting up for field day.

I've always enjoyed field day. I enjoyed DXpeditions. H1A was really a lot of fun for me.

Then I went to Christmas Island, T32 also. Belize is fairly common Caribbean country, but those were more exotic.

I just like packaging up things, putting stations together, then getting into the field and actually deploying them and working people. It's a lot of fun.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What is the SOTA Station? What are you taking with you into the field now?

Walt W0CP:

Well, I've got a number of things. I think the most amazing thing is this Mountain Topper MTR3, which is about the size of a wallet. It runs five watts. It's CW only.

End-Fed Halfwave antennas are kind of a hobby of mine, building them. Building the traps, building the transformers, just all of the little bits and pieces that go into making a great SOTA station are just a lot of fun.

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Walt W0CP:

... as they go into making a great soda station are just a lot of fun. From the batteries, to the key, having a small little paddle that you can actually use and sound good with in the field, having it be as light as possible. Here in Colorado, we got big mountains out here. Very, very big mountains. And so, the whole concept of weight becomes much more a factor out here than it does at lower elevations where you've got more oxygen and perhaps less elevation gain to accomplish your point total. You've got to work really hard out here to get points. And so, those challenges make the soda operators out here very, very, very excellent operators, and also very accomplished at deploying stations.

The weather changes so fast out here that I've been in blizzards where I had to deploy in a blizzard, make my four contacts, which is the minimum to get points from the summit and get down off the mountain. It's not a trivial matter. It's a real challenge. There's a great deal of satisfaction that goes along with that. Plus, just being fit, being a ham operator, sometimes we have this reputation of being couch potatoes sitting in our chair in front of a radio and never moving. But out here in Colorado, the soda operators are very, very athletic fit people, so it's just good for you. It's healthy.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What was your most challenging activation as a soda operator in Colorado?

Walt W0CP:

Winter activations in blizzards, when you get up. Snowshoe. I had snow shoed up one of them. It was an almost 13,000 foot mountain, and snow shoed up, and it was a sunny day, and I got up to the top and the wind was blowing like 60, 70 miles an hour. Even though it wasn't snowing, it was blizzard conditions because the wind was blowing the snow around. That was one of the most challenging. But any fourteener, 14,000-foot mountain, is a challenge for me just to get up to it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

It would be for most people. If they're flat landers, then 14,000 feet, they'd be gasping for air.

Walt W0CP:

Yeah, and so that's 3000 feet of elevation gain, that's a day. It takes you a day to get up there and get down pretty much. Those are really challenging, but also very, very exciting. But I like bushwhacking. I like doing 13,000-foot mountains where there are no trails, and I'm hiking through the woods using Gaia GPS to point my way to the summit. The idea, what I really like Eric is being out there by myself with my Gaia and route finding my way through dense forests to a treed summit, or maybe to a bald summit through trees and downed timber and that kind of thing.

And finally, getting up there, having a view, sitting down, being on the air for an hour. To me, that's heaven. That's heaven to be out in the wilderness like that, and then get on the

air and maybe worked some DX. I mean, I've worked New Zealand and Europe and Japan from the top of these summits with five watt radios, my KX3 or my MTR, and it's exciting. Very, very exciting. It's not unusual to work 60 people, 50 or 60 people either. There are a lot of great chasers out.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Do you carry any other safety equipment with you?

Walt W0CP:

I do.

Eric 4Z1UG:

For backup?

Walt W0CP:

Yeah. I carry a personal locator beacon, PLB, it's called, and I've got something on my blog about that. It's a four-and-a-half ounce thing that I carry in my backpack that I can deploy if I get injured. It's amazing. APRS has incredible coverage in Colorado, but you got to be in the clear for it. If you're in a gully or a ravine or something, it's more difficult. The PLB, I've never used the PLB, but I do take it, and I take plenty of water, I take extra clothes. I've got a whole list on my blog of the 10 essentials that you need to take if you're going to do soda in Colorado. I take all those things. I take it very seriously. It's dangerous on a certain level, at a certain level.

Eric 4Z1UG:

When you think about it also, even if you needed help up there, it would take a while for that help to get to you. At that elevation, it's not like a helicopter's going to come and take you off the summit.

Walt W0CP:

Yeah, one of my buddies, of my hand buddies is in Search and Rescue up in Buena Vista where I spend a lot of time, and he's always telling me stories about how long it took to get to somebody, and they had to stay overnight with them, and then they had to bring in a helicopter. Yeah, it can get pretty dicey.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Did you want to talk a little bit about January, February of 1993, where you actually went to Howland Island? You alluded to it just earlier, AH1A, where you actually created a documentary of that activation of Howland Island. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

Walt W0CP:

Every DXer's dream is eventually to be on the other side of a really rare country. I think that for most of us, it's just a fantasy. But I was invited to join that team, and there were three of us from Denver that were a part of that 10-person team, which was an international team. There were so many firsts in my life that came out of that experience. It was really amazing. It was the first time I'd ever been to sea. We chartered an 80-foot schooner called the Machias. We sailed out of Hawaii. It was a one-month commitment, so it took us, I don't know, almost a week at sea to get to Howland Island. Howland Island is a US possession, but it's governed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and it's a wildlife preserve, so it's very difficult to get landing permission. There are no inhabitants. There's no infrastructure.

Eric 4Z1UG:

It looks like an aircraft carrier, actually.

Walt W0CP:

There aren't even any trees. There aren't even trees. There are no trees. It's famous because that's where Amelia Earhart was headed when she was lost. There was actually an airfield there that the Navy had built in the wake of World War II or around that period in time. And so, it does look like an aircraft carrier, the island, it's desolate. It is a desert island. Many, many challenges there. We had two doctors with us and we needed them. There were a lot of injuries, a lot of near misses where people got injured, they could have died, got dragged over coral and swept out to sea, that kind of thing.

It was a real adventure. It definitely was an adventure. I think that you've got to build yourself up to something like that. You got to be able to handle a pile up at any rate. You can't be intimidated by the biggest possible pile up that you can imagine, and you've got to be fit, and you've got to have hopefully some other skills that are useful to the team. But wow, what an experience. Really amazing.

Eric 4Z1UG:

You actually created a documentary on this project. It's called the AH1 Saga: Pacific Expedition to Howland and Baker Island. I'll put that up. When I watched it, what was interesting to me was it appeared to me that the way that you guys got off the island was everybody was holding onto this raft or this inflatable boat where you were kind of waiting until the wave went down.

Walt W0CP:

Right.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Were you guys all in the water going back to the schooner in order to get off the island?

Walt W0CP:

Yes. Howland is surrounded by a reef, and so it's impossible to bring a boat up to the island. You had to go out into the ocean a distance, and then that way they would send Zodiacs out, which are the rubber inflatables, and then we would jump in those. You didn't want to be flipped. We were stranded on that island for a week. We had expected to leave on a certain date and we were stranded there for a week because we couldn't get off, because the surf came in and it was so large. These waves were so tremendous that they would swamp and flip the Zodiacs, and so we just had to stay there.

All kinds of things happened to the boat. It lost power, and it had to go out to sea to keep from coming up on the reef and being permanently damaged. And so, there were all kinds of adventures that occurred to get us off that island. We ran out of water. I've never been without water in my entire life. I tell you, if you really want to feel uncomfortable, the most uncomfortable I think I've ever been in my entire life is being without water for a day and a half or something like that. You really have to have water, especially when you're on a desert island. It was a real adventure, definitely.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I had one other question about that, and that is that in the documentary, there were some Fish and Wildlife government people there.

Walt W0CP:

Yes, scientists.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Now, were they also on the island?

Walt W0CP:

Yes, they were with us. They were part of our team.

Eric 4Z1UG:

They were part of the team, so they didn't have their own separate place?

Walt W0CP:

No, they were part of the team. They came with us. That was part of our deal with Fish and Wildlife was we would take... They don't get to go very often. It's very expensive to get there, and they don't have the budget to go very often. That's part of the deal, is that when a team goes, they take a couple of scientists there. The scientists do a lot of things. They measure the bird population. They do a survey of the ecosystem of the island. They were busy while we were operating.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What excites you most about what's happening in amateur radio now?

Walt W0CP:

Wow. What excites me most? You can tell I'm pretty excited all the time, so I don't know. I'm trying to think. Obviously, I think soda is super exciting, and I really enjoy it. It's just a good fit for Colorado and for what I'm interested in doing. But I don't know, I'm a member of FOC, the CW Club. I really enjoy that. A member of CW Ops. I think that I'm excited about the fact that people want to learn CW on their own without it being a licensing requirement. They get into the game and they maybe do FD8 and some other things, and then they see CW might be interesting, and they're moving in that direction.

I'm just excited by the technology as well. I think that we have incredible technology today. I think the amplifiers, when I go to Belize now, I take 1000 watt amplifier, Eric, and this amplifier weighs, and I'm not kidding, it's the 12-pound amplifier. It's made by JUMA, it uses LDMOS, and it is a marvel of technology. I'm taking a KX3 and this JUMA amplifier and running 1000 watts with an end fed half wave antenna, and it all fits into one carry-on that I can lift and put in the overhead bin.

Eric 4Z1UG:

But Walt, don't you think it's amazing that somebody, Elecraft in this case, can make a radio, an exciter that you can carry in the palm of your hand that is so clean that you can actually drive 1000 watt amplifier with it?

Walt W0CP:

I've owned a K3 and a KX3, and I've got to tell you that the KX3 rivals the K3. How did they do that? It really is a lot more than I expected it to be when I got it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

You always think that maybe this is from the old school and that is that a small radio wouldn't have the filtering and wouldn't have all of the other things that it should have in order to drive an amplifier. I think that's kind of amazing as well.

Walt W0CP:

Yeah, it's clean and it drives the amplifier. I love LDMOS because you can put out 1000 watts with three watts input. That's a marvel to me as well, having been used to needing 50 watts or sometimes 100 watts to get 1500 watts out of an amp, a two amp back in the day. To have three watts and get a kilowatt out, that's pretty amazing to me. I love it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Do you carry the spectral display that goes with the KX3?

Walt W0CP:

I don't, no. I'm going lightweight.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Lightweight. You're going to earn this one. You won't have the spectrum display to lean on to see where everything is.

Walt W0CP:

I've got to tell you, I love the spectrum display. I'm sitting right talking to you, I've got three monitors in front of me, three about 30-inch monitors, two up top next to one another and one down low. That excites me a lot to have all that information, that data, to be able to look at the spectrum, and the call signs are popping up in on the spectrum display and on top of the signals. That's exciting. The ham radio is progressing technologically. It's not standing still. We have some great tools, exciting tools.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And what's the current rig? What are you using right now?

Walt W0CP:

I have a number of rigs. My rig of choice at the moment is a SunSDR. It's a really interesting radio, and I've got a KPA1500 amplifier in the shack by Elecraft. The SunSDR is made by Expert Electronics, and they are a really interesting company. They are in Russia. Russia is making some interesting products. They make TX500, a little competitor to the KX3, which is a very high-tech product. That comes out of Russia, and so does the Sun.

Eric 4Z1UG:

That's the one that's in the milled aluminum case, right?

Walt W0CP:

That's right.

Eric 4Z1UG:

They've hollowed out a block of aluminum and they put the radio in it.

Walt W0CP:

Yeah, so I've got one of those and the amplifier that comes out of Germany that matches up with it. It's just exciting tech. I'm a tech geek. I'm a hardware guy. I love really well-executed hardware. We really are in a heyday right now, especially when you look at compact rigs like the KX3, KX2, the MTR, this 599, 599, TX500 milled aluminum thing is amazing. Unfortunately, they're in Russia, and so I'm sure they're being affected by the Ukraine War, certainly not as much as the Ukrainians are being affected. But SunSDR is very close to Ukraine. They're only a hundred miles away.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well RigExpert is in Ukraine, although I've heard that they've moved their operation out of the Ukraine proper, at least at this point, in order to continue to manufacture.

Walt W0CP:

With this human security for all, I've been traveling a lot to Eastern Europe. I was in Baku, Azerbaijan in June, and then I was in Bucharest in October, right on the border with Ukraine. I spent half a day one-on-one with the former First Lady of Ukraine. I'm praying, I have a real investment, personal investment in the situation over there, and really am praying for a diplomatic solution quickly to that problem. It's very unfortunate and it really needs to be resolved.

Eric 4Z1UG:

For those of us that live outside of the United States, we always pray for a diplomatic resolution to problems.

Walt W0CP:

Absolutely we do.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Because the world is a dangerous place otherwise.

Walt W0CP:

That's right.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What advice would you give to new or returning hams?

Walt W0CP:

I would say, find an Elmer, go to clubs. Find an Elmer. I am an Elmer. I really enjoy it, and I've seen how much it's been beneficial to the people that I've Elmered, and how appreciative they are of it, and how much more quickly they can advance. I just think the way I did it as a teenager when I didn't have an Elmer was, there's so many stupid things that I did like spreading rock salt in my yard to make my radios work better, and killing my grass, much to the chagrin of my mom, almost electrocuting myself a couple of times. Those were all avoidable problems if I had had an Elmer. I think having an Elmer's really good. And now with YouTube and all that, you can immerse yourself in all these wonderful YouTube channels, and they're very, very, very educational and helpful. Take advantage of the great tools we have out there and get on the air. Do not fear. Put fear aside and get on the air.

Eric 4Z1UG:

We've gone way over what I normally do, but you know what? I've kind of decided in my life that when I'm talking to someone very interesting that I don't have to impose. It's a podcast after all. I don't have to impose an artificial stop point unless the guest decides he wants to bail out. I want to thank you so much for joining me on the QSO Today podcast. I've really have come away with some new appreciations thanks to you, and I want to wish you 73, and thank you so much.

Walt W0CP:

You're welcome, Eric. It's been a pleasure talking to you. 73 from Denver.

Eric 4Z1UG:

That concludes this episode of QSO Today. I hope that you enjoyed this QSO with Walt. Please be sure to check out the show notes that include links and information about the topics that we discussed. Go to www.qsotoday.com and put in W0CP in the search box at the top of the page. My thanks to Icom America for their continued support of the QSO Today podcast. Please show your support of this fine sponsor by clicking on their link in the show notes pages. You may notice that some of the episodes are transcribed into written text. If you'd like to sponsor this or any of the other episodes into written texts, click on the transcribe button at the top of the show notes page. Support the QSO Today podcast by first joining the QSO Today email list by pressing the subscribe buttons on the show notes pages.

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