

# Mountains of Fun!

## VHF-UHF Summer Field Day 2007

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**The 2007 Summer VHF-UHF Field Day Contest took place on the 13th and 14th of January, and a group of amateurs, mainly employees of CEA Technologies in Canberra, took to the hills to compete using the callsign VK1CEA.**

There is growing interest in the VK1 area in operating portable for field day contests, which is great for the hobby, but it means there is fierce competition for the best locations from which to operate! Greg VK1AI, and Ted VK1BL, operated from Mount Coree, west of Canberra in the 2006 Spring Field Day (see Greg's article in the December issue of AR), and they were happy to let us have a turn at operating from this spot for the summer contest.

Mount Coree is located about 25 km west of Canberra and is 1420 m above sea level. It's not the highest peak in the ACT but it is a fantastic site for radio, as it has an unobstructed view in all directions and is completely bare of trees, which can be very lossy on the UHF and microwave bands. Another important factor is the absence of any high power transmitters or repeaters on the mountain which can wreak havoc by causing interference or desensitising receivers.

After loading up all the gear on Saturday morning, we headed for the hills and made our way up the rough 4WD track to the summit, where we were greeted by a friendly fellow who was manning the fire tower (I want his job!). The area was severely burnt in the 2003 bush fires and is showing signs of recovery, but is still extremely dry.

After setting up the antennas and some shelter from the sun, we made our first round of contacts with the Canberra locals and the other portable stations in the region. All had needle-bending signal strengths! Later in the afternoon it was time to setup for a "sched" with some locals on the microwave bands. We had only very basic equipment (literally micro-watts of power), but the extra

points to be gained from contacts at higher frequencies made it very attractive. By this time the easterly wind had whipped up and it made holding a dish antenna steady quite an act of strength and endurance! After more than an hour of tweaking the equipment, we finally made CW and then SSB contact with VK1DOH and VK1BLM, 33 km away, on 2.4 GHz and 3.4 GHz. Attempts at contacts on 5.7 GHz and 10 GHz were unsuccessful. Next time we hope to have a bit more power and antenna gain.

By evening, the strong easterly breeze had brought in moist air from the coast and we found ourselves enveloped in cloud. The temperature dropped to about 7° C and everything was dripping wet! Some medicinal beverages helped to ease the shivering, and we took advantage of the improving propagation conditions to work some more distant stations in VK3 and on the central coast of NSW. By about midnight we decided it was time to climb into our swags and get some sleep.

We woke at dawn to see the sun emerging from a sea of cloud a few hundred feet below us, and not a breath of wind. We spent quite a while soaking up the view and taking photographs before we even thought about boiling the billy or turning on the radios. I think we were all mesmerised by the sheer beauty and tranquillity.

Most of the other portable stations were up early too and provided plenty of activity for us as we ate our breakfast. As more stations began to appear at increasing signal strengths, it became clear that some tropospheric enhancement was brewing - you can clearly see the duct caused by a temperature inversion in Photo 3. As the morning progressed we

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## Mountains of Fun continued



Photo 1 The view to the west at sunset



Photo 2 The campsite enveloped in cloud



Photo 3 Sunday morning



Photo 4 Sunrise

made some pretty remarkable contacts, including to VK2DVZ in Taree on 23 cm (518 km), VK2KWM and VK2IF in far northern NSW on 2 m and 70 cm (nearly 600 km), and to far north Queensland on 6 m (over 2000 km). The 6 m propagation was probably sporadic E.

To top it all off, after the contest finished we had a half hour rag-chew on 1296 MHz with the VK3UHF guys 515 km away! Who says you can only rag-chew on 80 m!

There's heaps of fun to be had by getting out into the field and joining in one of the field day contests. You don't need lots of fancy equipment, in fact most modern multi-band transceivers are all you need for operating 6 m, 2 m and 70 cm,

along with some simple antennas. Just find a bit of high ground and give it a go! If you can't get out into the field then get on the air from the home QTH and give the portable stations a few points. Remember, our VHF and UHF bands are valuable bits of spectrum; so "use them or lose them"!

**ar**



Photo 5 The campsite and antennas