
VHF+ Roving

Part 1 – A Dual Perspective on How, Why, What, When, and Where?!

Operating as a Rover on the VHF+ ham bands is not as simple as it may seem. One aspect of operating has to do with the various techniques used in different geographic areas of the U.S. Here ND2X and N4FLM discuss these techniques.

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Rovers have become an important part of the VHF contesting scene. They provide contacts for many fixed stations, as well as other rovers, from grids that otherwise would be barren of activity. While an invaluable asset to the serious contesteer, there has often been controversy of one kind or another surrounding mobile operation or roving during contests.

ND2X's first roving experience was in the early 1980s, when the rule was to sign "mobile" from vehicle-mounted stations. This first roving station was comprised of a Cushcraft Squalo antenna and an IC-551D (75 watts) on 6 meters; an IC-251A and KLM 160-watt brick, through a splitter to two quarter-wavelength mag mounts, one on either *side* of the Suburban for horizontal polarization; and 25 watts of 440 FM to a two-section collinear vertical whip. This was the family vehicle, complete with family. The second harmonic, NEØM (see March 1984 *QST*, page 54), gave an additional contact to each station worked by ND2X/m.

There was great gnashing of teeth in some quarters over the fact that two contacts from two different callsigns originated from the same station, even though it was clearly in accordance with the "family station and equipment" aspect of the rules. The main concern of most of the complainants was probably generated because WBØDRL, with his superior antenna systems at the time, worked both

calls in so many more grids than anyone else as the trip progressed along I-70 eastbound, from Colorado to New Jersey.

Now there is grid circling, technically legal, but according to many, very questionable on the basis of integrity. There are also captive rovers who can only contact the big-gun station which provides them with the equipment that operates outside normal frequency ranges but within band limits, preventing many others from being able to work them. There are the rules changes or rule-change proposals which come up relatively consistently. There are, no doubt, other controversial issues, but these aspects of roving are beyond the scope of this treatise and will not be discussed. The purpose here is simply to compare and contrast the two main roving modes used in the continental United States.

Discussion

Based on lengthy exchanges/threads in the blogosphere of various amateur radio e-mail reflectors, and discussion with folks at hamfests and ham radio society conferences, it is obvious that many hams do not understand roving. ND2X was once accused by an East Coast ham on one reflector of being the only one in the country to use the run 'n' gun mode. This often-demonstrated lack of understanding is, apparently, because many are unaware of the various parameters that impact roving, of development of the equipment suites and antenna configurations used, and of operating techniques applicable to any given route or portion thereof. It is apparently a mystery to

many that roving routes and plans vary due to many external factors, and that these external factors determine which of two primary modes of roving are used. Using military parlance, one is labeled "shoot and scoot" and the other is termed "run and gun."

"Shoot and scoot" is a military term used to describe the operational situation in which an artillery unit sets up and fires from a position for awhile and then packs it all up and moves to a new location and fires from there. This also sums up the contesting rover ideology used in this comparison of the two main roving styles. The shoot 'n' scoot mode rover is a station moving amongst a series of advantageous terrain locations, stopping at each, raising one or more towers with directional high-gain antennas, and operating for a time before packing up and moving to the next point of terrain advantage, sort of like a series of mini Field Days. The emphasis in shoot 'n' scoot roving is to maximize the number of contacts achieved.

"Run and gun" is a term used by the military to describe firing one's weapon while moving, applicable to individual soldiers firing while running, and up echelon to weapon systems such as tanks firing while in motion. In like manner, the run 'n' gun mode rover is a station operating "mobile in motion" for all but an occasional few minutes here and there, *never* changing antenna configuration at any time during the contest from that used while in motion. The emphasis in run 'n' gun roving is to maximize the number of grids activated and therefore the number of unique grid combinations achieved.