



These hams summited Cinnamon Butte for a YL-only SOTA activation on July 23, 2023: (back row, from left to right) Amy Haptonstall, AG7GP; Renee Dolphin, KF7TED; Kim Flannagan, K7IMA; Kathy Lew-Eells, K2THY; (front row, from left to right) Aliah Eells, KK7NRS; Randi Johannsen, N7OLE; Amy Boyle, KC7JNU, and Katherine Maack, KK7IUD. Mount Thielsen can be seen in the background.

Building a Sisterhood through SOTA

An annual Summits on the Air campout in Oregon's Cascade Range provided an opportunity for a women's activation.

Amy Haptonstall, AG7GP

Mount Thielsen emerges from the High Cascades in Oregon like a jagged tooth piercing the checkerboarded plains of the deep-green and charred-gray forest. Amidst the massive expanse of volcanic terrain, this peak (at 9,184 feet) became the focal point from sunrise to sundown for hams activating the summit as part of the Second Annual W7O (Oregon) Pacific Northwest (PNW) Summits on the Air (SOTA) Campout in July 2023.

The first PNW SOTA Campout occurred in 2022, and invited operators from across the US to gather at a campground in Oregon and activate numerous summits for SOTA all weekend. The 2023 event was special because we were joined by 10 female operators (YLs), some of whom had just earned their license prior to the event.

The impressive turnout of YL operators at the PNW SOTA Campout was a rarity for a SOTA



SOTA Operators Chase the Queens

Following the Cinnamon Butte activation in 2023, Paula Uscian, K9IR, and I developed the YL-only special event, Annual Queens of the Mountains. Queens of the Mountains was created with the intention of bringing YLs together to foster camaraderie, inspire women to try SOTA, and shine light on how supportive and welcoming ham radio, particularly SOTA, is to women.

During the inaugural event in June 2024, 1×1 special event calls (W#Q) were used in each US region, and the hashtags #QOM and #YLSOTA were used on social media. Several women made their first SOTA activation, and some were using a 1×1 call for the first time. We incorporated an achievement award in memoriam of Liz Burns, K1LIZ (SK) — a blind ham who was an avid SOTA activator and chaser — for any YL who accomplished a joint YL activation and YL-to-YL summit-to-summit contacts, among other achievements. Lorene Samoska, W6LOR, was the 2024 winner. Despite some challenges (near-radio-blackout conditions, heavy rain in some areas, some vehicular breakdowns, hiking challenges, and more), everyone had a lot of fun.

Due to the success of the first event (which spread as far as South Africa), we plan to make this an annual occurrence. The Second Annual Queens of the Mountains will take place June 7 0000Z to June 8 2359Z. More information is to come on the SOTA reflector at <https://reflector.sota.org.uk>.

event, or any radio event. I took advantage of this opportunity and arranged a YL-only SOTA activation for the third evening, after we returned from our daytime climbs. I chose Cinnamon Butte, an easier drive-up summit with a fire lookout tower. We announced the plan on our campout whiteboard and on 146.58 MHz, inviting interested YLs to join. At about 6:00 PM, eight YLs headed to the summit. Although it was a short drive, it provided an opportunity for people to meet one another prior to the activation.

A YL-Only Activation

Once we arrived on Cinnamon Butte, we were greeted by Angela, who was staffing the summit's fire lookout tower. "I've been waiting all day for you!" she said. "The men have been telling me for 2 days that a group of women were going to be

coming my way."

Angela gave us a tour of the tower, offered a summary of her job (with an update on the current wildfires), and introduced us to her dog.

Angela "wo-manning" the lookout was quite fitting, making our evening that much more special. From the top of the lookout tower, we took in the amazing view of this volcanic region where the great Mount Mazama once stood at approximately 12,000 feet before its eruption 7,700 years ago, formerly dwarfing the existing mountains. Now, the beautiful Crater Lake partially fills its craggy-rimmed *caldera* (a volcanic crater with a diameter many times the size of the central part of a volcano, often caused by volcanic explosions). This unique wonderland of timber- and rock-covered mountains and cliffs, rolling pumice plains, and, of course, the deepest



Randi Johannsen, N7OLE, sat with Kim Flannagan, K7IMA, as she took her turn activating Cinnamon Butte.



Renee Dolphin, KF7TED, successfully made her four SOTA contacts required to activate Cinnamon Butte.

and bluest lake in the US provided us with lots of opportunities for SOTA activations.

After Angela left, we prepared for our activation using our handheld transceivers. We needed to figure out how eight YLs could harmonize a SOTA activation while they were all on the same mountain — without causing confusion and interference with each other. We decided to take turns making four contacts (the minimum required for a SOTA activation). The men back at camp were our main chasers, most of whom were socializing and resting after a long day of activations (as were we, which was one reason that we chose a summit we could drive to).

Typically, making 2-meter contacts in this area would be very challenging, but with such a large crowd back at the campground, the real challenge was organizing airtime. One family coordinated their evening to make summit-to-summit contacts. Jarod Eells, NE7ET, waited on Garwood Butte with his son, Byron Eells, K7HY, to contact his wife, Kathy Lew-Eells, K2THY, and daughter, Aliah Eells, KK7NRS (who earned her license that week). Amy Boyle, KC7JNU, proudly called CQ using what once was her grandmother's call sign. We took turns until everyone "got their four" and successfully activated Cinnamon Butte (W7O/CS-055) together.

As we wrapped up, we had a small huddle, reflecting on how special this short and sweet event was. We joked that this was a YL SOTA world record — eight YLs on one mountain! Many of us had never met prior to the event, and one of us had just gotten licensed, but we traveled to an unknown mountain together and drove back to camp with newfound friendships. I was inspired by every one of these ladies at Cinnamon Butte.



Aliah Eells, KK7NRS (on the left), and her mom Kathy Lew-Eells, K2THY (on the right), were chased by family members Jarod Eells, NE7ET, and Byron Eells, K7HY, from Garwood Butte.



Katherine Maack, KK7IUD, operated her handheld transceiver from the base of Cinnamon Butte's fire lookout tower.



Amy Haptonstall, AG7GP, helped new ham Aliah Eells, KK7NRS, make SOTA contacts while the others patiently awaited their turn.

Ham radio is a team sport, and this is especially apparent with SOTA. Sometimes you need a coach, sometimes you are a coach, sometimes you're a cheerleader, sometimes you need a little cheering on (or even a physical boost!) to finish that last ascent, or you might be the one driving the team bus — all of which are valuable roles. If you've offered your help and support, kudos to you! Your assistance is extremely valuable, no matter how small it may be.

Success Beyond Measure

The 2023 PNW SOTA Campout was an amazingly successful and welcoming event with close to 60 operators participating, and it was full of diversity. Many got to meet for the first time in person, some heard team members' voices for the first time (even though their calls were heard in Morse code dozens of times), and some finally got to meet the person(s) who had mentored or inspired them from afar. It felt like a family reunion (or "hamily" reunion, as I like to call it).

I don't know how many mountains or activations were made (maybe more than 300?), contacts made (possibly several thousand?), feet climbed, miles hiked, or summit-to-summit contacts made, but I can tell you that we all had a lot of fun with such a diverse group of operators.

All photos provided by the author.

Amy Haptonstall, AG7GP, earned her license in 2017 with her husband Robin Haptonstall, N7HAP, seeking better off-grid communications. Soon after, she fell in love with HF portable operations. SOTA quickly became Amy's passion, and she achieved Mountain Goat status in 2022 (making her the first YL in Oregon to achieve that status) and Double Goat in 2024. Amy continues to activate mountaintops on a regular basis, enjoying every view and taking lots of pictures. She also enjoys expedition contesting, organizing and attending W7O campouts, and being part of her local clubs. Amy can be reached at ag7gp.amy@gmail.com.

For updates to this article, see the [QST Feedback page](http://www.arrl.org/feedback) at www.arrl.org/feedback.



View a photo slideshow of the 2024 PNW SOTA Campout and the inaugural Queens of the Mountains event in the digital edition of QST (www.arrl.org/qst).