The term “boondock,” for ham radio RVers and tent-campers, means no water, no power, no waste facilities, just camaraderie for this annual ARRL Specialty Convention, now in its 23rd year at Quartzsite, Arizona. I won’t mention names, ‘cept for one or two, as the 1,000+ hams attending this event all pitched in to make this a hot, and some mornings, cold, success! Quartzfest organizer Kris Weed, KR1SS, offers all hamfest organizers lots of tips on “what worked” on the desert floor! Read on, ham show organizers.

Weather
Lots of different kinds of weather this year, including early rain on the seminar tents setup day, 40 mile-per-hour winds for two straight days, and nighttime temps in the low 30s. But tent campers (Photo A) all had their own central camping area, and stayed warm! Yes, porta-potties were provided for the tenters and car sleeper hams. Planning for weather is essential.

Who’s Here?
The Q’Fest registration tent opened each day with computer registration. All call districts made it this year, plus ham campers from eight other countries. Go to <www.quartzfest.org> to see the specs that Tracy, Jodi, and Tesla compiled, as they do each year.

Info Line
Each morning at sunup, the 146.550 simplex net covered the day’s planned activities. A noon net for small sked changes, and a 3:45 p.m. “all hams” gathering around the main fire ring for added goings-on. Everyone can easily tune in with their mobile rig or HT and hear the news, or call net control for talk-in.

Kids and Hams
The opening fire ring ceremony involved kids with ham tickets and their robots, for live action show-and-tell. We need more kids in ham radio. The kids were delighted with the ham atten-

* c/o CQ magazine
fun, games, puzzles, and photography (Photo B), while the OMs worked the W7Q special event station for hundreds of daily contacts (Photo C). But the OMs were squarely beaten by YLs who came up to the W7Q station tent, donned the headset, and had hours of pileups, as the guys watched or logged. The single 100-amp hour BioennoPower LiFePO4 battery kept the 2-rig, 100-watt station going strong (Photo D), with charging from the companion Bioenno solar panel at sun up!

Audio, Audio
You needed quiet generators, and self-contained power-amped stage speakers on tripods to let each of the three seminar tent areas allow amplified technical presenters to be heard, as well as computer projections to be seen. Even a giant movie screen and new bright LED projection system for movie night. But ... for all this great audio and visual, you need that one ham (Gary) who sets it up daily and keeps it running.

Seminars Daily in the Four Areas
From Don’s ARDEN Mesh networking with live connections to the Pacific, to RV fridge troubleshooting, DMR demos, and WinSystem IRLP demos (plus free coffee each morning), seminar sites this year were on overflow. Same with “remote” seminars on gold panning (Photo E), prospecting, and the 1-mile solar and antenna walk-abouts to check out who has great setups. Walk-about leaders used a low-power HT mic/headsets on simplex where the 100 or so hams following along used their own HTs on receive to clearly hear the guides.

Get Out!
On one morning, 57 vehicles of all sizes took to the hard packed (most of the time!) desert sand and hear our local lead vehicle expert (Frank on VHF simplex) describe old mining caves, petroglyphs, Quartz gem piles, and all the remote desert secrets not found in town. Yes, also a morning for all Q’ers in town for the huge RV show and mineral show. Hams must have lots of RV or tent “stuff” for the week long Quartzfest, on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land, 5 miles out of town.

Wheelin’ in Sand?
Yup, several attendees in wheelchairs did just fine all over the site’s hard packed sand, and scooters did marvelous. Sure, bring your sand buggy for exploring the hills all around, too.

Gotta Eat!
A fun potluck one night let the hams share stories around the campfire, with an overflow of food of every kind. On other nights, most campers and tenters built their own small fire rings next to their rigs (RVs, that is; not ham rigs) for any and all to come up and join in. For RV radio or antenna inspection invitations, RVers might just leave their side doors open as a sign to knock and say hi.

Woof/Meow Parade
A fun one-hour sundown parade and judging of the best four-legged entrant. We love our pets like kids. The audience members were the judges. All pets on leashes at Q were welcome. Bring that green bag to clean up.

CQ DX
The CQ magazine-supported Northern Arizona DX Association’s two-day best CW/SBB DX contact competition was fun for all (Photo F), with 9,000 miles at 100 watts winning. Of course, everyone else was having their own fun on FT8 and other digital modes, too, with their own rig’s setup.

Music Night
Banjos, guitars, flutes, gut buckets, tambourines, a zither musician, the pro-singer duet, and professional mixer and
audio gear really get the ham audience singing and clapping. Good way to stay warm on that chilly night around the fire ring. Thanks Russ! We even had a Moog Synthesizer demo from W6FOG!

Lost ... Found It!
At the welcome tent, a lost-and-found station turned up hundreds of dollars' worth of HTs, watches, and jackets. You lost it, hams would find it on the desert floor, and dutifully take it in to be claimed.

Got Cellular?
We found that cell coverage was OK, if you worked at it. In town 5 miles away, thousands of snowbirds were taking up the cell site too. T-Mobile seemed to do best, with Verizon a long wait during the day, but fine in the mornings. Good time to explore RMS Express seminars,

Don's Winmore and Winlink ham live gear demos, all as (no-business allowed) options during our show.

Experts
Every ham has his or her own expertise, with seminar leaders inviting attendees to top the program with their way of doing up a connection. Next year, the organizers will try to increase the size for the seminars, and get more ham experts booked ahead of time.

Stationary Rig Antennas
Some of the best signals were from monster rig (RV) tower-mounted antennas (Photo G). But some of the great signals were also from mobile-style antennas for HF and VHF/UHF bands, all available for inspection by the proud rig owners.

Park It!
There were no assigned parking spots at Quartzfest, except for the central welcome tent, seminar tents, special event station tent (thanks, Tom!), projector tent area, and the main fire ring. Just find any place you want to set up your rig, and park it. Groups like Good Sam Hams and others stayed all around their own central fire rings, with "Welcome! Come on in!" signs to feature their club's mission, and see what that group is all about.

Ham Exams
Both W5YI and ARRL exams were offered, with 33 new hams joining our hobby and service, and just about this many successful upgrades. Ham exams are important for any large hamfest.

ARRL Brass
League officials fresh off the airplane from Newington, Connecticut, presented the news and activities of the past week's board meeting. Hundreds of hams attended this seminar.

No One Was Here For a Week?
On the last day's move out (Photo H), while some folks stayed longer on their free BLM 14-day pass, all hams cleaned their areas and left the desert floor spotless. What came in, went back out. In-town trash bins aplenty, plus pump outs galore in the great town of Quartzsite, Arizona. The Road Runner site was left cleaner than when we arrived.

And the Winner Is...
At every afternoon campfire, hams and soon-to-be hams each got a free ticket
to win a prize — hundreds of prizes total. Grand prizes on the final Saturday send-off, a multi-thousand-dollar new rig, APRS handheld, SWR analyzer, and more. There were free tickets for all who registered.

**Swap Swap**
You gotta have a swap meet at a hamfest, so get up early on the final Saturday and join in.

**Obey the Rules**
There weren’t many, but it was expected that they’d be observed. Examples: No generators after 10 p.m., no flashing strobes, no million-candlepower porch lights — and for those who do need air conditioning to run sleeping gear masks, fine, with lots of more-remote areas nearby where a quiet generator can run all night to keep you breathing.

**Advance Planning a Must**
Most importantly, for any large hamfest with this many activities, is to work up, *before the event*, a list of key leaders to handle specific aspects of the hamfest — such as the safety officer who will assign safety position ham operators for each day, daily seminar leaders for each seminar tent for every seminar, daily morning and evening fire starter, special event station mentor for each day the station is running, new ham area coordinator for HT programming with rotating rig days — no one person at the top of any event can handle all these positions at once without a firm schedule of who is in charge of each specific aspect of the ham show. *Pre-planning months in advance is a must!* These planning and assignment tasks cannot be worked up easily on scene! With proper pre-programming of assignments to a daily operator, *constantly* listening on his or her HT, the week-plus event like Quartzfest can be accomplished in grand style for all hams and soon-to-be-new-hams to say, “what a great Quartzfest show we attended on the desert floor!”

Photo G. ICOM’s Ray Novak, N7JA, was there with his personal RV coach. Big antennas like Ray’s did well in the 38-mile-per-hour winds!

Photo H. Drone’s-eye view of participants at the closing of Quartzfest 2019. (Photo courtesy Kristyn Weed, KR1SS)