

Tech corner – Field Day 2024 highlights

Hi, my name is Sylvia, and I had a very unique experience at Field Day this last year, part technical and part operational, but all of it fun. It was my first year attending. Despite having to overcome some unique challenges, I found ways to enjoy and make it the best experience ever!

We set up and camped out at beautiful Payson Lakes, Utah. Once we got set up, a fellow ham friend offered to take me for a walk around to familiarize me to where things were, such as the restrooms and the various operating stations. It was a nice campsite; however, navigating my way around as a blind person made for some challenges. The grounds were very rocky and uneven; lots of tall grass, gullies, steep hills, and shrubs. Using my white cane to detect the edge of the road, and follow the grass to locate the restrooms from my tent, I did manage to find my way around. I also used the caution tape and certain cords and cables as landmarks that were sticking out of the ground to locate the different tents where the stations were set up.

We also enjoyed good food, which was delicious! One of our favorites was the Jell-o salad with cottage cheese and whipped cream. A few of us had several helpings of that. We were also served burgers and hot dogs, along with various side dishes. There was something for everyone to enjoy at the dinner for sure!

Because it was my very first time attending Field Day, I wanted to observe and hear all the tips and tricks from more experienced operators, so that's just what I did. For the first couple of hours I sat and listened to each operator making the initial contacts with another operator logging in those contacts into the computer. I had heard prior to coming that the computer software was not accessible to the blind and therefore, I would not be able to help with the logging.

Knowing this, I still took on the challenge of logging anyway. In fact I paired up with another long-time fellow ham operator Linda Reeder N7HVF who had attended Field Day for many years. Linda started out by making the initial contact using voice, then repeat the call sign to me as I logged it into the computer. Even though the computer did not vocalize what I was typing, I knew the layout of the keyboard enough that it was just a matter of memorizing the method of how to log the contact. First type in the call sign, press Enter, then type in the designator, press Enter, and done! Onto the next contact!

Where it got challenging is when a contact had been previously worked on another band, the computer would make an audible noise (ding), which indicated it was a duplicate to which it would then autofill on the screen. If you could not see the screen, you would not know that popup message was displaying on the screen and you would go on assuming you were just entering more contacts. All it took was an occasional sighted individual to poke their head in to inform me of the message, to help me know to press Escape and continue to enter in the next contact.



Sylvia Bernert K7KQY



Linda Reeder N7HVF

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I spent eighteen to twenty hours observing, making initial contacts, and/or logging contacts. I spent several hours teamed up with a fellow ham working in the 20-meter band tent logging contacts. My final hours at Field Day were spent making initial contacts and logging in those contacts into the computer simultaneously as there was no one else available to assist me at the time.

I enjoyed the camaraderie between all the other ham operators at Field Day. I made new friends, I learned a lot, and most of all, made it a worthwhile experience despite the challenges. I also think that having our Field Day coordinator along with some of our club board members seeing the blind in action, experiencing the accessibility challenges we were facing firsthand were educational to them. Seeing the desire we have of conquering these challenges, it's my understanding that there have since been some discussion about resolving those issues going forward.

I've been a ham operator since 1995, but only obtained my General Class license in May of 2023 and looking forward to many more years of Field Day fun. This is Sylvia, K7KQY saying 73, and encouraging everyone to stay radioactive!!



Sylvia Bernert K7KQY

