

Our first HFoZ weekend was held at a picturesque campground near Cooperook on the NSW mid-north coast. Mark Gillette had chosen a great location and we were blessed with wonderful weather. In total, nine 4WDs arrived from near and far.

We began Saturday afternoon with a circle of members grouped under the trees. After a warm welcome from Doug Taylor and Mark Gillette, Doug explained the current features and benefits that HFoZ provided. These features really came to life when he demonstrated them on the radio and on the web. There's nothing like seeing something in action to understand it and most of us were amazed at how easy it was to use.

Doug also explained what HFoZ had in development. They're working on some brilliant features, several of which are quite groundbreaking. As members, we were welcomed and encouraged to contribute feedback and suggestions. As Doug highlighted, HFoZ was created to fulfil users' requests and enable us to utilise a wider range of features and capabilities of our HF radios. We were excited by HFoZ developments and some great suggestions emerged.

The afternoon soon disappeared as everyone chatted freely and compared notes. There's nothing like talking with fellow users to hear wonderful experiences and gain useful tips and advice.

As darkness fell and dinnertime arrived, we gathered around a group campfire. However we were unexpectedly entertained by a cooking duel between Monty, with his steel pig stove made from an old LPG bottle, and Doug with his traditional cast-iron cook pot heaped with coals by the fire.

Have you ever seen Iron Chef on SBS TV on Saturday night? Well, we had an HFoZ version in Cooperook. While Monty claimed first-cooked dinner, Doug's lamb roast smelled beautiful when it was finally ready around midnight (actually 9.30pm). Some say he fended off hungry onlookers with a fork but in reality we were envious of its beautiful aroma. Besides the cooking duel, we enjoyed chatting with each other and listen to some great stories and adventures.

The next morning we were awakened by laughing kookaburras who reminded us it was too nice to stay in bed. More great cooking aromas wafted around the camp as hearty country breakfasts were prepared. Another beautiful day emerged in our picturesque bush setting. Once more everyone resumed chatting, sharing experiences and wandering from vehicle to vehicle.

Doug generously continued to check member's radios to see that everything was functioning correctly while Mark spoke with everyone individually to answer questions and guide us through any unfamiliar radio procedures. We greatly appreciated their help and really felt welcome in this HFoZ group. I'm sure many of us departed with new-found confidence and skill in our HF radios.

The morning ended with group photos, firstly of our 4WDs with antennas facing the camera and then with a happy bunch of people, who by their smiles, had thoroughly enjoyed the weekend. Next time we'll bring a tripod so that Monty, our photographer, will be included in the group photo. Thanks Monty for the pics and to Doug and Mark for organising a great weekend.

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