

# November 21, 2022, LeeCARES Net Training: Lessons From a Road Trip

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Recently I was able to take a much-needed mini vacation with my brother. It was a 2,000-mile adventure with lots to see and do along the way. We had many opportunities to relive our youth and explore like kids...we were completely unsupervised.

While our trip was all about getting away from the rat race and having some good bonding time, there were some eye-opening moments. While I have taken a lot of pride in always having the right gear for my adventures... not to mention spending way too much money on said gear...I found many areas in which I was lacking in skill, preparation, gear selection, and most importantly, my expectations. I also realized that some of these lessons are very applicable to ARES.

As we go out on deployments, exercises, public service, or simply to meetings and HAM events, we should consider some of these lessons. Being prepared goes a lot farther than just having a working go-kit, our personal comfort and state of mind are also critical to our performance in critical times.

One of the big lessons I learned was that I overpacked. Whether it be too much gear or just extra stuff that we might need, it is very easy to take too much "just in case" stuff. Regular practice and use of our equipment during a variety of conditions will give us the experience to determine exactly what we should be carrying and using. One example of this was the excessive camera gear I carried and never used, mostly because I had not tested it to see if that gear would benefit me along the way.

Another struggle I had was loose personal items. We were in a rental car that was unfamiliar to us. We shared driving and navigating responsibilities. However, in moving between the different roles, items that were important to have at the ready tended to disappear in the shuffle. This would include maps, pens, phones, snacks, etc. I found that I need to have a system in place to keep track of those things and incorporate this into my normal life, so it becomes a normal thing and a habit. For ARES application, this would allow operators to know exactly where their needed items are at all times and to move with them as changing situations require. No one likes losing that favorite pen or those expensive sunglasses... Having a place for everything is helpful in maintaining your peace of mind during stressful times.

The next lesson learned was underestimating the weather. Thinking that I had more than adequate clothing and equipment for this adventure, I was not prepared for 28 degrees in the desert...with high wind...so taking Milky Way photos at night was out of the question. If we are called out to perform our duties for ARES, it is highly likely to be in adverse weather conditions. Again, practicing with our equipment and gear can help us better determine what we need. I did not have experience with desert weather, but I can practice preparing for local weather. This can be done by simply setting up our go kits outside in the wide variety of weather we have to see how it feels and what we need to do to be comfortable. Operating for the length of a weekly training net outside will tell you a lot about how your gear will perform and a lot about yourself and how you will perform. This is Texas... We can have all 4 seasons in one day...are you truly ready?

A couple of other comfort items that you consider, coffee and toilet paper. On my trip, we had to rely on getting our coffee from wherever we could find it...and usually that is less than spectacular swill. Having a way to make your favorite comfort beverage is very important in cold weather. Also having your favorite toilet paper on hand...and maybe some disinfecting wipes...can make those public restrooms and port-a-potties a bit more comfortable. We all know that any government facilities are going to have single ply...

All of these lessons learned are obviously very personal in nature. Everyone is going to have their own needs and set-ups. But without practicing and experiencing situations that are out of our normal comfort zones, we cannot be prepared for those adverse conditions we may need to operate in. We need to be able to thrive in all conditions and not have to struggle to operate during tough times. It is the simple little things that we often overlook in preparing for events, but these can be surprisingly comforting to have on hand to create a positive work environment.