

North Texas Amateur Radio Operators are Preparing the third ARBONET flight to reach the Edge of Space



The View From Above – A look down on Northeast Texas as captured by a camera aboard ARBONET-1 that was launched from the Clarksville – Red River County Airport last September. Photo Credit: ARBONET

Shortly after 9:00 AM on the morning of Saturday October 17, 2009, if the weather cooperates and all of the advanced planning falls into place, amateur radio operators from across north Texas will converge on the Clarksville - Red River County - JD Trissell Airport to participate in what has been termed “the poor man’s space program”.

This date was chosen to coincide with JOTA, or “Jamboree On The Air”. JOTA is an event involving Scouts all over the nation and even Internationally. This event is an opportunity to expose Scouts to Amateur Radio, whereas Ham Radio Operators provide communication capabilities to Scouts and troops to exchange hellos and information between one-another to gain radio operation exposure.

It is our intent that Scouts involved with JOTA will have the opportunity to listen to ARBONET 3 and be able to communicate through the cross band repeater aboard the flight.

The organization sponsoring the event is known as ARBONET (Amateur Radio Balloons Over North East Texas), and is one of approximately 25 groups from across the United States that conduct regular high altitude balloon flights carrying amateur radio experiments.

The public is invited to attend the launch and monitor the progress of the flight from the ARBONET mission control center that will be located at the Clarksville Airport. Directions and more information can be found at the ARBONET web site: www.arbonet.net.

Using low cost weather balloon technology these hobbyist will propel a specially built packages of electronic equipment aloft for a two and a half hour flight that can ascend to an altitude of over 95,000 ft over northeast Texas thus brushing the edge of outer space.

During the flight, equipment on board will collect data, relay radio signals and provide navigation information back to the ground for use by radio amateur operators in roughly a 7 state area.

Following a ascent of approximately 90 minutes or more, the payloads will start their return to earth. During the descent phase of the flight a team of chase specialists will track the package using Global Position Satellite technology and Radio Direction Finding skills to locate and recover the equipment once it returns to Earth.

Dubbed ARBONET-3, this will be the third such flight to be launched from Red River County in the past two years.

A large number of the volunteers reside in the Red River Valley thus making the Clarksville area a natural choice as the home of ARBONET activities. The Clarksville airport was selected as the launch site for the ARBONET missions due to its proximity away from busy congested major airports such as DFW as well as the major metropolitan areas of the metroplex. Even being somewhat remote, dedicated ARBONET personnel are in direct contact with the FAA during the entire flight, since the ARBONET payloads pass through controlled airspace.

The ARBONET team is comprised of several dozen volunteers from across North Texas from as far away as Granbury, Ft. Worth, Richardson and McKinney as well as volunteers from Bonham, Paris and Clarksville. ARBONET is a totally non-profit self-funding amateur radio organization.

ARBONET-3 is one of a continued series of planned flights that the hobbyist hope will one day lead to an attempt to navigate a similar such balloon system around the world.



ARBONET volunteers prepare to release the ARBONET-1 experiment package for its brief encounter with outer space. Photo credit: Jody Lindsey, - ARBONET

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