



NCDXF newsletter

www.ncdxf.org

Spring 2017

S9BT & S9WL CQ from the center of the Earth

Núria Font, EA3WL

2016 WAS GOING TO BE A VERY SPECIAL year for Josep Gibert, EA3BT and me as it marked the 20th anniversary of our first international DXpedition that took place in 1996 as 8Q7BT & 8Q7WL, which became our international baptism.

Over the last 20 years we have done 10 international DXpeditions, some of them quite interesting, such as Comoros in 2001 (D68BT & D68WL) or the Republic of Congo in 2002 (TN3B & TN3W). Although we weren't very active over the last few years — our last operation was from Mauritius in 2011 (not counting our mini-activity operating A62A, the official station of the EARS in Dubai in August 2015) — we thought that 20 years deserved something special.

Traveling light

Our DXpedition style — just two

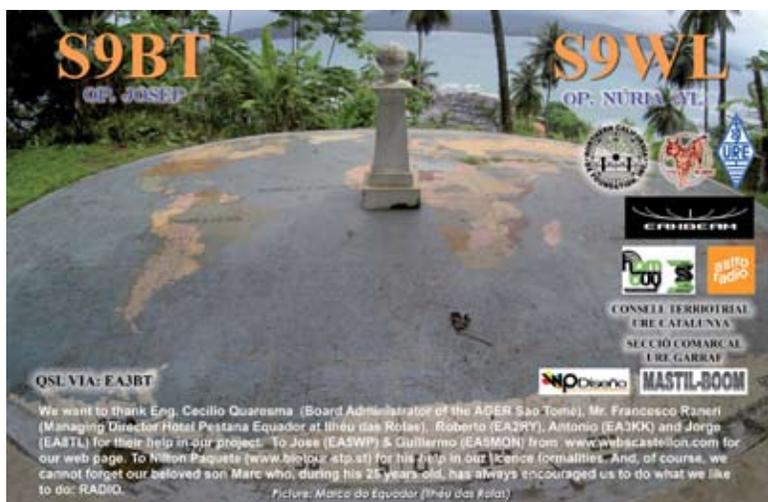


Josep and Núria at Ilhéu das Rolas.

people carrying about 100kgs if we take one station, or 150kgs if taking two stations — is not very interesting for the radio community, as we travel around the world as two simple tourists with normal luggage, mainly visiting Asia. Of course, when we were there, sometimes we imagined the pileups that we could have had if we had taken our antennas and equipment with us, as the radio feeling always goes with us.

During Christmas 2014 we visited Myanmar and, of course, tried to get a license as we wanted to put this wanted country on the air, but it was an impossible mission and the authorities didn't give it to us.

At Christmastime 2015 we decided to visit Sri Lanka, touring the island and spending the first days of 2016 on the beach, and found it a perfect place for making radio. After completing all the paperwork, we got our license as 4S7JTG and 4S7NTG, and also got a permit from the Port Authority for activating Berberyn Island (AS-171), most wanted for the IOTA program.



Unfortunately, the propagation conditions during those days were terrible and after putting AS-171 on the air with a lot of difficulties (this is another story) we decided to cancel the radio operation from 4S. We tried our best,

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From the President's desk

AS I PEN THIS FIRST LETTER AS PRESIDENT OF NCDXF, I'd like to pay homage to my predecessor in this role, the indefatigable Tom Berson, ND2T. If you've met Tom, you've already become a better person; if not, you have a great experience to look forward to. I'm grateful for Tom's stewardship of NCDXF over the last three years and his decision to remain on the Board as a Director.



We've come a long way since that founding meeting in October 1972, when four avid DXers met in San Francisco's Chinatown to formalize the creation of a new charitable organization known as the Northern California DX Foundation. Their stated purpose: financially support DX activity and foster goodwill internationally within the Amateur Radio community. Back then, most DXpeditions were self-funded by the operators, but enclosing a few \$\$ with your QSL card was always appreciated.

Today, it's a whole different era. Getting permission to operate from a rare one is the main challenge. "It's too physically, politically, financially or operationally remote." There is not much NCDXF can do to alter political structures, but by aggregating many relatively small contributions and investing our own funds, NCDXF can help fund well-organized DXpeditions to rare, expensive and challenging DXCC entities.

During the last 45 years, NCDXF has granted over \$1 million to hundreds of DXpeditions — helping to put an "all-time-new-one" (ATNO) in the log and make DX happen for thousands of DXers worldwide. In 2016, NCDXF-sponsored DXpeditions activated five of the 10 most-needed entities. These DXpeditions put 457,000 QSOs (and quite a few ATNOs) into DXers' logs. That year we spent \$156,000 to fund these and other DXpeditions. We also provided significant support to WRTC 2018 because the world's best DXpeditioners will be there to compete, referee, support and plan DXpeditions.

Thanks to the generosity of contributors like you and the careful financial management from Treasurer Don Greenbaum (N1DG), our financial situation is steady. While contributions are down a bit due to the lack of sunspots (normal behavior by DXers), the number of announced DXpeditions is also down. However, the ever increasing cost of Southern Ocean DXpeditions, like the recently announced 3YØZ DXpedition to Bouvet Island, require ever bigger grants. Bouvet is likely to be one of the most expensive DXpeditions ever attempted, estimated at over \$650,000.

At the 2017 International DX Convention in Visalia, CA, keynote speaker Bob Schmieder, KK6EK, painted a provocative picture of future DXpeditions. In his "The Future of DX" presentation, Bob predicts we will likely rely heavily on the integration of real-time technology tools, social media and non-traditional funding sources to plan and conduct a successful high-cost DXpedition. His overarching message: DXpeditions will always be there, but will likely morph into strong partnerships between Amateur Radio and non-Amateur Radio resources to better fund and reach those rare locations.

Regardless of the form a future DXpedition takes, I believe NCDXF will have what it takes to help them be successful, assuming our contribution rate holds up. Looking farther ahead to Cycle 25, we'll continue to work toward a total endowment of \$2 million well before the Cycle 25 peak. We can get there through a combination of your contributions, estate giving and tax planned gifts. Board member Craig Thompson, K9CT, serves as the lead for the *Cycle 25* campaign. Expect to hear more from him.

On a personal note, I want to thank each of our contributors for your continued support. You are the backbone of NCDXF. We could not do what we do without you.

73 and good DXing!

John K6MM

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Josep at the Barcelona Airport with the luggage.

fantastic hotel, the Pestana Equador situated on Ilhéu das Rolas, a small island of 3 square kms, south of the main island of São Tomé. It didn't have a special IOTA interest as it has the same reference as the main island, AF-023, but the place was a paradise, and also special as the equator crossed the island, so we were going to

but propagation didn't help us so we went home with a bit of bad feelings.

During our return flight I couldn't stop thinking about it, then a light went off! I would celebrate my 50th birthday in 2016, and that was a perfect excuse to organize another trip during April to celebrate it and, why not? It was a perfect excuse to try to make radio from an interesting place. When I told Josep, he looked at me with resignation, but he couldn't deny it!

So I started to work on the new project. It had to be a special place, exotic, DX interesting and, of course, have a beach. I couldn't be very far from home, as we only had a free week out of work at the end of April, so our wished trip to the Pacific should wait. The number of options were narrowed down and we decided on São Tomé & Príncipe, the second smallest country in Africa. It is situated relatively close by plane (seven hours), and close to EU and NA, which could become an interesting operation if propagation was good.

A new destination

To make it better, at least for me — not the best option though for radio because it was hard to reach — I found a

operate from the center of the Earth.

With the QTH chosen and I just had to confirm that we could get the licenses. We didn't know if there were any Amateur Radio stations in São Tomé, so I contacted AGER (Autoridade Geral de Regulação) and was lucky to connect with Mr. Cecilio Quaresma, Telecommunications Engineer, who was very kind and answered all my phone calls and emails, which I must say were a few, and he granted us both licenses.

We secured our air tickets, the hotel was going to allow us to install antennas in the garden and our licenses were in process — then at the end of February, Josep underwent emergency surgery and was hospitalized for a month. Everything went well, but it was hard and we decided to postpone our trip, rescheduling for September.

A change in plans

We changed the tickets and the hotel reservation, and applied for new licenses as all the paperwork was done. Having more time, we could also rethink the

project, and finally decided that as we were going to be on the air 5½ days, it was better to have two full stations, as in the old days, so we could be on air as much as possible. Goodbye to my relaxing spare time on the beach! This turned out to be a good decision as the pileups were huge... but I'm getting ahead of myself.

We had two small pieces of equipment — IC-7000 and IC-7300 — so we just had to choose the beams, which needed to be light because of luggage limitations. I always have a special love for my MA5B Cushcraft antenna, which always had accompanied me on our other operations. Josep was thinking about the new EAXbeam antennas built by Israel, EA1HVY, and he kindly lent us two antennas. I was not sure of this decision, and continually asked Josep to take our MA5B as we knew how it worked and sometimes it's better not to experiment with new things. Josep insisted, and we took both EAXbeams, and I must admit that it was a good decision as the beams had a fantastic performance.

Finally the day of departure arrived. On Sunday, 25 September we departed



Núria & Josep on the equator line where it crosses through Ilhéu das Rolas.



*Núria & Josep
in front of
the EAXbeam
antennas.*

Barcelona for our flight to Lisbon and on to São Tomé. We landed at 17:15 UTC, which was also local time, and waited to see if our 130kg of luggage arrived with us. The plane was quite full but our suitcases came out and 30 minutes later, the two antennas appeared wrapped with their green ski bags, but the other two suitcases where the linear amplifiers and other parts were kept didn't appear. After a long wait and with much patience — a necessity in such countries — the suitcases appeared. Hurray, we had all our luggage!

A final hurdle

Now we only had one step left: Customs. We stayed in the “Nothing to declare” queue, but we weren't lucky at all. After a while, a Customs keeper asked what we were transporting in the long green bags and we tried to explain to him that we were Amateur Radio operators and these were our antennas. Obviously, he had no idea what we

were talking about, as they didn't speak Spanish or English, and we didn't speak Portuguese fluently.

We showed him the copy of our licenses, but that didn't help. Soon there were three or four Customs agents because we had caused a lot of commotion and everybody wanted to know what was happening and they were insisting that we had to pay import tax.

As we couldn't understand each other, I asked them to allow me to go and find my interpreter, Nilton, who was supposed to be waiting for us

outside with the original licenses. Bruno, HB9BEI, who visited the country a few months before us, suggested that I contact him and it was a good idea, as he could help us with all the license paperwork and payment. And, as I figured we would have problems in Customs with our luggage, I had asked him to come to the airport in case we needed him. I went out, and there he was.

I explained the problem and Nilton tried to

*Josep operating
as S9BT.*

explain to the Custom agents what we were going to do with all that material. I don't know if he convinced them, but finally they allowed us to get all the stuff in the country without paying any tax as they decided that it was a temporary importation of material.

After passing all the controls we were officially in S9. We thanked Nilton for his valuable help, who gave us the original licenses, and we arranged to meet him again a week later so he could show us the island before our return flight, as he is also a tour guide with his own small travel agency (www.biotour-stp.st).

So close

By then, it was completely dark, so we spent the night in the capital. The following morning we loaded our luggage into a van for our transfer to the south, where we would take a boat to our final destination: Ilhéu das Rolas. Together with a group of Portuguese tourists who were also going to the island, we drove the 50km in 2½ hours, stopping briefly to admire Pico Cão Grande, a 668-meter-high geological curiosity that is a needle-shaped volcanic plug.

We arrived at the pier around 10:30 and after a 3km boat ride that took another hour, we reached the island — and waited for our luggage to come on the next boat.

It was nearly noon when two locals loaded with our luggage showed us





Núria operating as S9WL.

to our bungalow — an idyllic place with fantastic views of the blue sea. We inspected the surroundings trying to find the perfect place to install the antennas, as we needed a free-tree place so as to lift them up. The situation was not as good as we would have preferred, as there were not many options, but we started to build the first EAXbeam under the watchful eyes of the two local workers who brought our luggage. They helped us as much as possible, and brought all what we asked them. After an hour, the first antenna was in its place, and after two hours both antennas were ready. Being after 2 p.m., we decided to stop work and have lunch — arriving just as they were closing. After some pleading, we were allowed to have lunch.

Finally, on the air

After a good meal, we continued

with the station set up, and finally at 16:46 Josep sent his first CQ as S9BT on 20M. After the first chat with EA1HVV and EA8TL, he got his first good pileup and the QSOs started to increase in his log. Simultaneously, S9WL was on the air on 17 Meters and got another pileup. Both stations were on the air, without changing

frequency, till 21:15 UTC when we made another QRT break for dinner, before the restaurant closed. During the first five hours of operations we logged more than 1,200 QSOs. Things looked great.

The next morning, we went again on the air and the pileup was immediate. It hadn't been a mirage. We were amazed with the demand of the country, as in the official rankings S9 was in 120th-130th place, so we didn't expect to have splits of 5 to 20 kHz. It was a very pleasant surprise.

And this was how we spent the next five days, just making radio and more radio. The EAXbeam worked very well from 10 to 20 Meters, and for 30 and 40 Meters we had a wire dipole that also performed well.

We had no problems at all, unlike some of our other operations. The only strange thing that happened was after

the first night we couldn't operate on 30 and 40 Meters, as the antenna didn't work at all. As it was completely dark and there was no propagation on the other bands, we went to sleep and would repair the dipole the next day in daylight. We were surprised to see that an animal had bitten the coaxial wire into several pieces! We raised all the coaxial from the ground to prevent future attacks and replaced the damaged coaxial and it worked without problem.

The QSOs increased in our logs. Both stations were on the air as much as possible, but we had some problems with interference despite the monoband filters. We tried to find a new location for one of the antennas but that was not possible. We left them in place and solved the problem by not using continuous bands (i.e., 10 and 15, or 12 and 17).

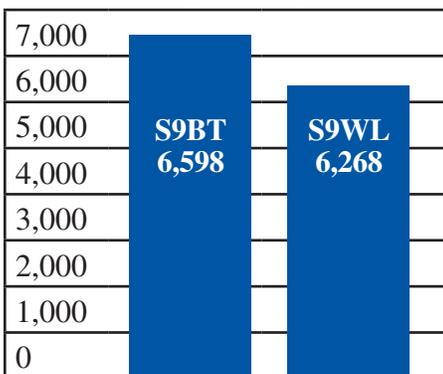
Unfortunately for me, the weather was not as good as I would have liked and rain was usually with us, so I stayed on the radio all the time, just looking at a wood wall since we only had a window in the bungalow.

Successful operation

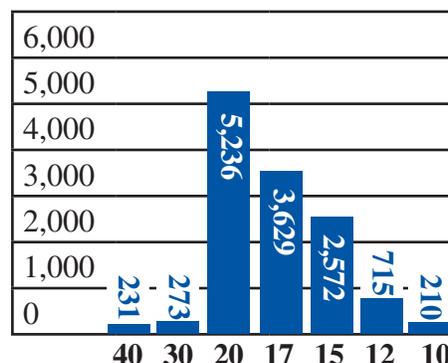
In summary, we spent five days on the air, operating 18 hours a day, with breaks for lunch and dinner. S9BT always operated in SSB, while S9WL operated in SSB, CW and RTTY.

We were leaving the island on Sunday, 2 October at 10:30 UTC, so we began to dismantle one station on Saturday afternoon before dark, and kept the second station on the air during night, dismantling it early the next morning. While I was on the air,

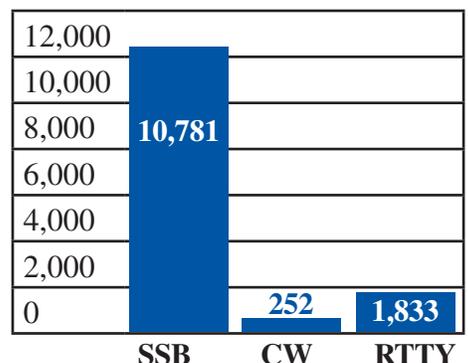
**S9BT and S9WL
Total QSOs: 12,866**



Total QSO/Band



Total QSO/Mode



Josep dismantled the first antenna with help from our local helpers. We were on the air until 00:20 UTC when propagation disappeared and S9BT and S9WL went QRT.

We woke up before sunrise and dismantled the second station and by the time our local friends arrived to help, everything was done. We packed everything and we were ready for our return trip.

At 10:30 UTC, we left Ilhéu das Rolas, where we had spent six pleasant days, satisfied that we had done a good job. There were 12,866 QSOs in our computer logs, exceeding our initial expectations.

A little sightseeing

When we arrived at the main island, Nilton was waiting for us ready to show us a bit of his country. It was a pity that

the weather didn't help, as it rained nearly all day. Despite that, we could admire the beauty of the island and the kindness of the people. The beaches were wonderful and unspoiled, and the country is still authentic as it is off the touristic routes. After a nice lunch at Pousada Roça São Joao en São Joao dos Angolares, we headed to the capital and began our journey home.

We were already thinking that we would be on the air again soon, as during our stay in São Tomé we had received an email with the confirmation of the licenses for our new destination: H74B & H74W from Big Corn Island (NA-013)!

Special thanks

We thank all those organizations and enterprises that supported us. Northern California DX Foundation, Lynx DX

Group, Unión de Radioaficionados Españoles (URE), Consejo Territorial URE de Catalunya, Sección Comarcal URE del Garraf, EAxbeam, Hambuy, Astroradio and Mastil-Boom.

In addition, we thank Roberto, EA2RY, for the logo design; Jorge, EA8TL, for being our pilot; Antonio, EA3KK, for his help before our departure; Jose, EA5WP, and Guillermo, EA5MON, for designing our web page; Eng. Cecilio Quaresma, Board Administrator of AGER São Tomé for providing us with the licenses; Mr. Nilton Paquete for his help during the license process, and Mr. Francesco Raneri, director of Hotel Pestana Equador for allowing the installation of the antennas, and also to all the staff of the hotel for such a pleasant stay.

To view our logs, visit www.ea3bt.com 



2017 CQ DX Hall of Fame inductee Jerry Rosalius, WB9Z (middle) with Bob Schenck, N2OO (left) and Ralph Fedor, KØIR. Photo: KC8RP

BLAST FROM THE PAST

WEST COAST DX BULLETIN

September 21, 1971

This classic West Coast DX Bulletin fable from 46 years ago is a sobering reminder about a "rare" location.



"One of our more confused QRPers ran into an Old Timer last weekend. 'Say,' said the QRPPer as an opener, 'I heard this Big Gun DXer on 20 the other night working the WA1/KS4 on Swan Island for a new country. How come a fellow with 320 countries worked needs something common like Swan?' 'Son,' said the O/T, 'one must learn the simple truths as one goes through life. And one basic DX truth is that any country is rare DX until you have worked it.' Son of a gun, how's that for a bit of transcendental meditation mixed in with your DX?"

CONTRIBUTIONS NCDXF relies heavily upon the generosity of its contributors to fund various projects. We ask you to consider making an annual contribution of US\$50 or its equivalent in foreign currency. However, we do not wish to exclude anyone from the **FOUNDATION** for financial reasons. If \$50 is not within your budget, then please give what other amount you can. Naturally, we welcome contributions in excess of \$50! NCDXF is an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and all contributions are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law for U.S. taxpayers. Send your contribution to: NCDXF, P.O. Box 2012, Cupertino, CA 95015-2012, USA. You may also contribute and order supplies online via our secure server, visit www.ncdxf.org/donate.

XX9D

45,000 QSOs FROM MACAU

Werner Hasemann, DJ9KH

AS OUR TEAM SAT TOGETHER AT A POOL in Sri Lanka last year, we tried to find an answer to the question foremost in every DXpedition planner's mind: "Where do we go next?"

In the past, our team members preferred Pacific destinations, but we had to accept that propagation on shortwave will slow down over the next five to seven years and then a successful DXpedition with a moderate number of QSOs could only be made from locations closer to the radio Amateur hot spots of Europe, Japan and North America.

At last, we settled on Macau for February 2017, being as it was on several Most Wanted Lists and offered the chance to have around-the-clock pileups. Preparations began as the team collected information and answered questions, such as "When was the last DXpedition to Macau?", "Who could be helpful for us in Macau?" and "What did we learn during our last activities on the Marshall Islands and Sri Lanka?"

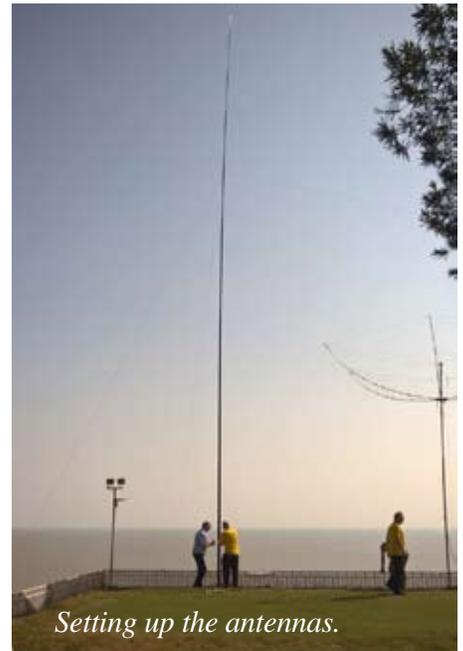
We found Juergen Sturhahn, DL8LE; Gerben A. Menting, PG5M; Andrea Vernice, IK7YTT, and Bom, XX8LT as our Macau-insiders with

actual experience of Macau. They supported us with information and connected us with the management of Grand Coloane Resort & Hotel, which responded in a very obliging manner. At an early stage, we made provisions with the hotel management for the specific circumstances and challenges we would face, including constructing specific devices to hold the bases of our five masts onto the balcony floor and booking an extra operating room on the top floor that could be equipped to our specifications.

Green light

After we got the green light from the telecommunication authorities in Macau, including the call sign XX9D, the real planning began. Our key considerations were running a 24/7 operation with 10 operators and three to four active stations, having four K3 transceivers plus 500W amplifiers, five antennas for 160M to 10M, two band filters for each band, a 1.5kW Triplexer, common mode and AC filters, low-loss cables... and all under the dictate of minimizing the luggage weight.

We had a very comfortable flight



Setting up the antennas.

from Frankfurt to Macau, via Beijing. Arriving in Macau, we found ourselves at the Customs gate having to decide whether or not to declare our equipment. We asked the friendly staff for an import declaration for our transceivers, though it took quite some time to assure them that we needed such a declaration. In the end, they confiscated the transceivers and asked us to pick them up the following day with the necessary papers.

Two hours later we arrived at the Grand Coloane — a real 5-star hotel. Unpacking was done in a short time and antenna mounting began. Thanks to the detailed advance information

The XX9D team (from left): Sid Blechschmidt, DM2AYO; Werner Hasemann, DJ9KH; Jürgen Topp, DL3HRH; Dietmar Lindner, DL2HWA; Georg Tretow, DL4SVA; Norbert Strauch, DL2RNS; Günter Gassler, DL2AWG; Bom Vong, XX9LT; Wolf Rebling, DM2AUJ, and Rolf Thieme, DL7VEE.





Antennas mounted on the rooftop.

regarding the hotel and the surrounding area, setting up the five masts with their antennas including the guying, matching and tuning took us only about six hours the next day. Once the transceivers and the licenses were picked up downtown, we were ready for the PTT inspection team. Three friendly officials were interested to see all the equipment and antennas we had put up and, after a few questions, we had a big OK for our operation.

Operations

The team around chief Rolf Thieme, DL7VEE, consisted of 10 expedition-proven operators from Germany plus Bom, XX9LT, from Macau, who visited us almost daily and was integrated into the operations plan. He was by far the youngest member of our crew, which had an average age of 67. The first shift began with Alexey V. Fedotov, RU4LM, as the first QSO on 17M CW. Day and night, 4- to 5-hour shifts with three to four active stations — 30/40/80/160M during the night, the higher bands, of course, during the daytime.

Conditions on 40M and 80M were much better than expected, while 160M with more than 1,000 QSOs gave us a lot of fun around sunrise, although we would have been able to have even more fun with a special receiving antenna on 160M as well as on 80M. We had vertical antennas for 30/40/80 and 160 Meters, delta loop antennas for 12 and 17 Meters and a hex beam for



Bom, XX9LT, our local operator.

10 to 20 Meters. All in all, the antennas performed well. Thanks to the double-filter strategy, we had no interaction between the active stations. Also we had no problems with noise from the hotel installations to speak of.

Unfortunately, some of the high-power filters failed, possibly leading to the failure of one of the K3s, which happened around the same time. A day later, one of our KPA 500 amplifiers gave up. Elecraft in California sent us the necessary spare parts and a few days later we were able to run full power with all four stations again.

The daily QSO rates led us to our first goal of 30,000 QSOs, which we easily exceeded in the end with around 45,000 QSOs — 65% were in CW, 18% in RTTY and 17% in SSB.

The part of the worldwide Amateur Radio community hardest to reach from Macau is North America. Nevertheless,



The Grand Coloane Resort & Hotel with our antennas on top (see left).

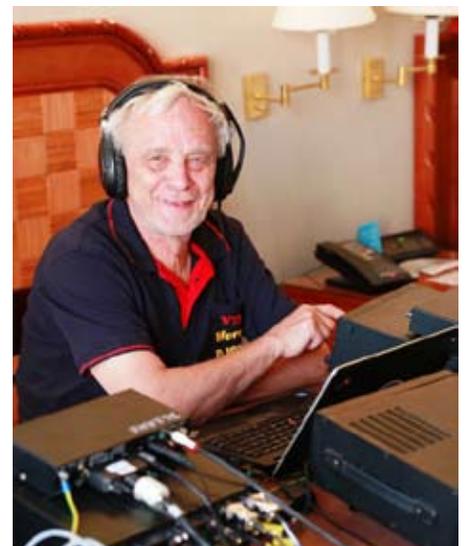
we were able to have more than 3,000 QSOs with North America, almost 1,000 on 160/80/40M.

Sadly, we read some comments in our guestbook with complaints about our working style, though I am very sure that we did our best under the circumstances with propagation far below what we used to have.

Thank heavens we were residing in a 5-star hotel that boasted a fantastic restaurant, a pool area and a very friendly and helpful staff. These were the best conditions for recreation after a strenuous shift or a (sometimes) frustrating night on the low bands.

All in all, we left Macau in a good mood and satisfied that we performed quite well, especially on the low bands. For more info, visit www.xx9d.mydx.de.

A big “Thank You” to all our sponsors worldwide. They really made this expedition affordable for the team members and we are sure we didn’t disappoint them. 



Werner Hasemann, DJ9KH.

H44GC and H4ØGC THROUGH THE ORGANIZER'S EYES

Stan Vatev, LZ1GC

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS AND THE Temotu Province are more than 14,000 kilometers away from my home in Bulgaria. After the completion of the T2GC DXpedition in 2015 it became my desire to activate these interesting entities for radio amateurs.

Planning stages

The Solomon Islands (H44) are a sovereign country consisting of six major islands and over 900 smaller islands lying east of Papua New Guinea, and covering a land area of 28,400 square kilometres. Honiara, its capital, is located on Guadalcanal. Temotu Province (H4Ø), located in the easternmost province of the Solomons, consists essentially of two parallel chains of islands that cover 895 square kilometres. The provincial capital is Lata, located on Nendo Island, the largest and most important of the Santa Cruz Islands.

Upon returning to Bulgaria following the T2GC DXpedition in October 2015, I began my research via the Internet for Solomon Islands and Temotu Province. I corresponded by e-mail with Sigi Presch, DL7DF and Frank Rutter, DL7UFR, knowing of their successful and well-implemented activations of these countries in 2013 (H44G and H4ØT) and they provided a lot of important information and tips. Their help and support was invaluable.

I knew in advance that planning a DXpedition to the Solomon Islands and Temotu Province would be difficult and take some time, but with my accumulated experience of organizing previous DXpeditions in the Pacific Ocean, I soon developed a route of travel, had accommodations and drafted a budget.

Though there were several travel options, I used a familiar route from previous DXpeditions. My flight path would take me from Sofia, Bulgaria, to the Solomon Islands via Frankfurt, Germany; Seoul, South Korea, and Fiji,

and then from the Solomon Islands to Lata, in the Santa Cruz Islands of the Temotu Province. The period of activation of H44 and H4Ø was determined and it was my intention to activate them sequentially, with H44 selected first.

In February 2016, I invited Emil Bergmann, DL8JJ, to participate in the DXpedition — his first to the Pacific Ocean. He would be part of the first stage — activating H44 — and we were able to travel there together.

The next stage was getting the licenses. For that task I enlisted the help of Olga Zakharieva, LZ1QG, who lives in Sydney, Australia with her family, because I was hampered by the large time difference between Bulgaria and the Solomon Islands and it was difficult to contact the Telecommunications Commission of the Solomon Islands (TCSI). After a phone conversation and several email exchanges with Mr. Aaron Hopa, TCSI manager and the person responsible for the issuance of Amateur Radio licenses, I completed the proper forms and submitted necessary documents to obtain the licenses, which I received in two months time.

While we waited for the licenses, Emil, DL8JJ, and I purchased the plane tickets.

Sponsors and equipment

Another important stage in the preparation of the DXpedition was finding sponsors. Without the great

support we received from Amateur clubs, associations, foundations and individual sponsors, our financial situation would be a disaster.

The months of July and August were spent preparing and testing technical equipment.

Emil, DL8JJ, contacted Spiderbeam, WiMo, Difona Communication and Kush Ltd. and also arranged for 150 meters of coaxial cable, fiberglass poles for 12M and 18M, a Flex 6300 transceiver, and a Hexbeam antenna provided by Se Hunt, G3TXQ.

I committed to obtain two amplifiers (Acom 1011 and Acom 600S) provided by Vasko Vassilev, LZ1JK, with Acom, Ltd. In addition, Val Mihailov, LZ1VB and Stan Lekov, LZ1IU, employees at Acom in Bulgaria, assisted with equipment testing and software setup.

Another task was to prepare a one-piece multiband GP antenna designed for 40M-10M, including the WARC bands, and a GP antenna for the 160M and 80M bands. In one year, more than 500 meters of wire passed through my hands, as I made wire antennas.



Emil, DL8JJ (left) and Stan, LZ1GC at the airport.



Antennas are up for H44GC.

Getting there

Finally, at the beginning of September, we started to pack, and on 19 September 2016, after a two-hour flight from Bulgaria, I was in Frankfurt to meet up with Emil. Two days later, Emil and I boarded a Korean Airlines flight bound for Seoul, South Korea, where we would meet my good friend Aves Kang, DS2AGH. Aves met us and was a gracious host during our seven-hour stay in Seoul, before we boarded our 11-hour flight to Fiji. After landing in Fiji, we checked in to a nearby hotel, as our onward flight wasn't until the following afternoon. We had time to rest, enjoy a local restaurant and take a walk around Nadi.

After morning coffee at a nearby café, we returned to the airport, arriving three hours before our flight to Honiara, Solomon Islands, and then learned there was a five-hour flight delay. The delay affected our plans for the time we had announced that we would be on the air from the Solomon Islands, but we were pleased that, although late in the evening, we would be in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

After a four-hour flight, we finally arrived to the Solomon Islands at 2100 local time. And there, we had a nasty surprise. Seeing our specific baggage

— two heavy boxes with amplifiers and three transceivers plus a two-meter-long case with fiberglass poles — the Customs officer said that we had to pay a US\$300 deposit guarantee. We were told that the money would be returned when we left, before our return flight. It was clear to us that this would not happen and we insisted they give us a receipt with an explanation of the “deposit.” After a heated argument, we were guaranteed the money would be returned before our departure.

And then, this next absurdity! We asked one of the Customs officers where we could get a taxi, and he took off his jacket and said, “I’m taxi and I will drive you.” And that’s what happened! The Customs officer, transformed into a taxi driver, drove us in his private car to the Guesthouse Honiara, our accommodations from 24 Sept to 3 Oct 2016. Guesthouse Honiara was located on the top of a hill, the highest point in Honiara, and it was from there we would operate.

The operation

After unloading our luggage from the “taxi,” we immediately began to install the Hexbeam antenna. We were aided by Peter, a fellow guesthouse occupant, who helped us put up the

antenna, as it was so dark outside. As soon as we were done with the antenna, we quickly installed the first station consisting of a Flex 6300 and ACOM 600S. At 1433 GMT, H44GC with operator Emil, DL8JJ, was on the air on RTTY in the CQ WW RTTY Contest. The first contact was with JE1LFX on 14.088 Mhz; unfortunately the propagation was very bad and bands from 20M to 10M were closed. It was for that reason that only 20 QSOs were made by morning. Later, around 20Z, 20M began to “awaken” and Emil, DL8JJ, started work on CW and caused a decent pileup.

At sunrise, I left Emil working on 14 MHz on CW and started preparing for lifting the multiband GP antenna designed for the 40M-10M bands (including the WARC bands). When the antenna was assembled and ready for lifting, I yelled for Emil and together we stood the mast in vertical position and fixed wires and elements with ropes provided for this purpose. The antenna was ready!

Emil continued to work 20M CW and I quickly prepared the second station consisting of a Kenwood TS-480 SAT and ACOM-1011. I checked the SWR of the multiband GP antenna and it was good with values from 1.0 to 1.4 for



Transportation to Nendo Island.

different bands. I began operating on 18.070 MHz CW and immediately got a big pileup. It was great!

At 2230Z on 24 September 2016, H44GC was on the air with two transmitters working CW on 20M and 17M. We worked for about two hours but all that time I was thinking I should stop and prepare to lift the antenna for 80M and 160M. So I did, leaving Emil to work CW on 17M where there was a good pileup.

Going outside during midday, I was met with a heat wave. It was very hot, over 45°C, and I had difficulties with

arranging the Spiderbeam fiberglass pole. It was so hot that the elements of the mast were too hot to touch, but, eventually, the antenna was ready. Peter, our local assistant, helped me to stand the 18-meter mast and make it operational. Once it was tuned and tested, we had excellent results: the SWR on 160M and 80M was 1.0!

Immediately, I began to work CW on 80M and my first contact was with ZL1TM at 0838 GMT on 25 September. Shortly thereafter a pileup began from JA and the rate was good: two QSOs per minute. At the same time, Emil worked Europe on 17M CW with a rate of three QSOs per a minute.

Between 24 September and 3 October, H44GC was constantly on the air on all Amateur Radio bands with two working places in CW, RTTY and SSB modes. For this period of time, although we had extremely poor propagation, we made 16,216 QSOs

Emil, DL8JJ (left) and Stan, LZ1GC working the bands.

on all HF bands (160M-10M).

I emphasize again that our H44GC activity was actually held in very poor propagation on all HF bands. We could beat insomnia, sleeping no more than two to three hours per day, but poor propagation, we were not able to overcome. The poor propagation is the main reason to work less time on SSB mode, but I think we got good activity from Solomon Islands on CW and RTTY, especially 160M and 80M on CW.

I will remember Solomon Islands with the friendly people, heavy traffic (congestion) on the road in the center of Honiara and, of course, with the big pileups on the air!

During our stay, we did encounter a small problem with stray dogs having an appetite for our wire antennas. They gnawed the coaxial cable and three wired active multiband elements. We also had a technical problem with the tuning device on the 160M and 80M antenna, but that, too, was correctable.

The locals were very friendly and helped us with whatever they could. They watched in amazement and curiosity as we raised our antennas and many asked what we were using them for. Throughout our stay, we had the full support of Mrs. Sarah and Mr. Peter, who were responsible for the management of Guesthouse Honiara. I will remember, too, meeting with Mr. Aaron Hopa, TCSI manager.

In the late afternoon of 3 October, Emil dismantled the Hexbeam antenna and later we dismantled the multiband GP antenna, and packed the luggage and equipment in preparation for our





On the air with two transmitters.

trip the following day. I would travel on to Lata, Nendo Island in the Temotu Province, and Emil headed for home to Frankfurt.

Thus was the end of the first stage of H44GC activity, realized by Emil, DL8JJ, and myself (Stan, LZ1GC).

H4ØGC

My flight from the Solomon Islands to Lata, Nendo Island was delayed for two hours, and I didn't arrive until 1530, and still the heat was indescribable. Once there, I gathered my luggage and took a taxi to the Lata Motel near the airport, where Jennifer, the owner's wife, greeted me. It was already 1600 local time and I had less than three hours before sunset to get the antenna up and get on the air as H4ØGC.

Antenna space was limited, but enough for the vertical on 160M and 80M, and Multiband GP for 40M-10M, including WARC bands. As I was unpacking, three boys offered to help — Lionel and Jennifer's sons — and they helped me a lot! While preparing the mast, guys and radials, I explained what I was doing and why. They listened with interest and even called a friend with a boat so we were able to quickly

locate two radials in the ocean. They did not hesitate to dive into not-so-calm waters to fix the radials to rocks. One of them climbed a 15-meter-tall palm with great ease.

By the time it was dark, the 160M and 80M antenna was ready. I then mounted the equipment and tested the antenna, which showed the best result: SWR on 160M and 80M was 1.0 and there wasn't any reflected power. I was pleased and very grateful to the guys and Jennifer for their help and support.

Despite my fatigue, I started to work on the air from Temotu Province, Nendo Island IOTA OC-100. After the first short CQ at 1614 Z on 4 October 2016 on 3507 Khz, JHØBBA called me. After this followed fast QSOs with WH7W, RK4FF, IZ8VYU and about 10 other QSOs for about 10 minutes.

Unfortunately, though, the need for a sleep prevailed and I had to stop. So at 1630 Z, I passed in forced QRT for a few hours, but at 1950 Z H4ØGC was again on the air. Already on 18.070 Mhz, CW even though with the antenna for 160M/80M, I was working USA and other NA stations. It was a big pileup, with 3-4 QSOs per minute, even 5-6 QSOs per minute, for hours.

I can recall when Temotu Province (H4Ø) was number 30 in the list of most needed countries of ClubLog! I continued work on different bands in nonstop mode into the next day. Pileups were everywhere so there was not time to stop and lift another antenna. On the third day, however, I decided to raise the other antenna, choosing a time when the propagation was the worst on all bands — even though it was the hottest part of the day. I made some tests with good results: the SWR was between 1.0 and 1.5 on seven different bands.

Over the next 10 days I continued without much interruption, working on all HF bands. The propagation was very bad, determined as "poor" on all bands, but even so I was making about 1,700-1,800 QSOs per day. I was diligent to work more on 160M/80M but I did not disregard the other bands, working through the bad propagation "windows" for NA, SA and EU, causing the QSOs on CW and RTTY by day to increase.

Definitely I am obliged to the SSB operators, because during this activity H4ØGC made only about 2,000 QSOs on SSB. The reason is not only that SSB mode is not my favorite kind of

H4ØGC Continent by Band

| Band | 160 | 80 | 40 | 30 | 20 | 17 | 15 | 12 | 10 | Total | Total % |
|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|---------------|---------|
| AF | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 11 | 7 | 8 | 1 | 0 | 37 | 0.2% |
| AN | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.0% |
| AS | 86 | 462 | 578 | 797 | 862 | 1,859 | 1,973 | 791 | 679 | 8,087 | 43.8% |
| EU | 40 | 169 | 312 | 322 | 1,958 | 841 | 759 | 146 | 14 | 4,561 | 24.7% |
| NA | 216 | 574 | 569 | 399 | 222 | 1,185 | 1,040 | 486 | 200 | 4,891 | 26.5% |
| OC | 15 | 50 | 33 | 45 | 58 | 106 | 145 | 48 | 19 | 519 | 2.8% |
| SA | 2 | 13 | 26 | 33 | 57 | 57 | 117 | 32 | 15 | 352 | 1.9% |
| Totals | 360 | 1,269 | 1,521 | 1,602 | 3,168 | 4,055 | 4,042 | 1,504 | 927 | 18,448 | |

Continent by Band — H44GC

| Band | 160 | 80 | 40 | 30 | 20 | 17 | 15 | 12 | 10 | Total | Total % |
|---------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|--------|---------|
| AF | 1 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 10 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 34 | 0.2% |
| AN | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.0% |
| AS | 384 | 687 | 684 | 1,005 | 1,510 | 2,465 | 1,720 | 747 | 556 | 9,758 | 53.3% |
| EU | 65 | 354 | 528 | 611 | 912 | 1,463 | 414 | 196 | 37 | 4,580 | 25.0% |
| NA | 146 | 265 | 186 | 434 | 305 | 781 | 904 | 188 | 39 | 3,248 | 17.7% |
| OC | 12 | 57 | 33 | 86 | 102 | 108 | 98 | 15 | 3 | 514 | 2.8% |
| SA | 2 | 3 | 3 | 26 | 56 | 36 | 40 | 5 | 1 | 172 | 0.9% |
| Totals | 610 | 1,368 | 1,437 | 2,169 | 2,895 | 4,862 | 3,178 | 1,151 | 636 | 18,306 | |

| Band | CW | RTTY | PH | Total | Total % |
|---------------|--------|-------|-------|--------|---------|
| 160 | 610 | 0 | 0 | 610 | 3.3% |
| 80 | 1,368 | 0 | 0 | 1,368 | 7.5% |
| 40 | 1,191 | 246 | 0 | 1,437 | 7.8% |
| 30 | 1,816 | 353 | 0 | 2,169 | 11.8% |
| 20 | 2,096 | 388 | 411 | 2,895 | 15.8% |
| 17 | 3,296 | 1,063 | 503 | 4,862 | 26.6% |
| 15 | 2,061 | 550 | 567 | 3,178 | 17.7% |
| 12 | 537 | 442 | 172 | 1,151 | 6.3% |
| 10 | 351 | 208 | 77 | 636 | 3.5% |
| Totals | 13,326 | 3,250 | 1,730 | 18,306 | |

work, but the propagation also was really bad. In this poor propagation, the SSB signals were very weak. Because of that I think I correctly chose my strategy to spend most of my time on CW and RTTY.

Many DXpeditions do not like work on 160M, even on 80M. They do not want to “lose” time on those bands and by that method, they make more QSOs, but they lose the pleasure that the operator feels when he works on those “MAGIC” bands! Except for the bad propagation and the loss of electricity for two days, I did not have any other problems working all HF bands. From 4-17 October, I made 18,448 QSOs on all bands.

On 17 October, at 1607 GMT, H4ØGC went QRT; the last QSO was with JA4ZA on 160M CW.

My flight to Honiara, Solomon Islands was scheduled that day at 1230 so I had six hours to take down two antennas and pack up the rest of my equipment. I bid a very kind farewell to Jennifer and her sons as Lionel took me to the airport. To my surprise, no

one was there! After checking with the agent of Solomon Airlines, I eventually learned that a flight would go out the following day — which it did.

H44GC, part 2

Because my flight to Fiji and beyond was not until 22 October, I decided to reactivate H44GC from 19-21 October

as a solo operation. After arriving from Nendo Island I was welcomed by Mathias and his wife, Vivian, friends of Lionel and Jennifer, who drove me to the Guesthouse Honiara, where I again raised antennas.

In that stage of H44GC activity, I worked more on SSB and RTTY on 17/15/12/10M by day and during the night on 30/18/160M CW. Fortunately, on the last three days of H44GC activity, the propagation on 160M was better and before the local sunrise, I had about 20 minutes to work Europe.

On 22 October at 2109 GMT, H44GC went QRT with a final result of 18,306 QSOs on all HF bands, on CW, SSB and RTTY modes. The last QSO of H44GC activity was with KB8VAO on 20M, CW at 2109 GMT on 21 October 2016.

I think it was a difficult but successful DXpedition! Although the propagation was extremely bad during the time of H44GC and H4ØGC activities, we were very happy to give a “new one” for many radio Amateurs!

My many thanks

Thank you to NCDXF for its confidence and much support. In addition, my thanks go to INDEXA, EUDXF and SDXF for their support. Thank you to all the individual sponsors for their support, and to all the other associations and foundations — GDXF, CDXC (The UK Foundation), The Carolina DX Assn., WVDXA, National Capitol DX Assn., Mile-Hi DX Assn., LSDXA, SWODXA, Great Southern DX Assn. and SADXA.

Thank you, too, for the support from the Club sponsors: LADX Group, GM DX Group, Clipperton DX Club, Lynx DX Group, Mediterraneo DX Club, KC5WXA-Jake McClain Driver Memorial A.R.C., Danish DX Group, Korean DX Club (KDXC), Western Washington DX Club.

Thanks to the support of ACOM Ltd, Spiderbeam, DXnews.com, CLUBLOG, and Gold Print Service. 



Stan, LZ1GC and Emil, DL8JJ, proudly sporting their NCDXF wear.



NCDXF President John Miller, K6MM (left) with Christian Janssen, DL1MGB, President of WRTC 2018. Christian presented John with a WRTC 2018 NCDXF Tent Sponsor certificate at the International DX Convention in Visalia, CA, on 22 April 2017. Photo: N6TV

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