

A25-2010 DXpedition A Texan and Italian trip to Botswana *

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October 21st through November 3rd were the official dates for five Texans and 3 Italians to join together for a DXpedition to Botswana. The group was led by Frosty, K5LBU (A25CF) and Lor, IK5MDB (A25DF) and joined by the other principal operators Gianfranco, I0ZY (A25ZY), Pier, IZ5MMB (A25MB), Bob, K5ZOL (A25BI), Matt, KD5TAN (A25AN), Jay, W5SL (A25SL), and Bob, W5UQ (A25UQ). Jay's wife Dee and Bob's (W5UQ) wife Elva also joined us for the trip.

Frosty, Jay, and Dee travelled from Texas about a week early to begin gathering equipment. Meeting at the Washington Dulles Airport we endured the nearly 18-hour South African Airways flight to Johannesburg, South Africa, including a one-hour refueling stop in Dakar, Senegal. We stopped in Pretoria for a couple of days and stayed in a nice lodge (Ndlovu Lodge...Zulu word meaning Elephant) while we visited with Hal, ZS6WB with whom we did some sightseeing and shopping for last minute needs for the DXpedition. Also, while we shipped ahead what we could, Hal had been collecting and borrowing rotators and some aluminum poles, coax cables, and antenna parts and supports for us so we

didn't have to ship everything to Botswana, thus saving some expensive shipping fees.

We rented a van in South Africa to carry our supplies. On Sunday the 17th of October we set out in the van for a 4-hour trip to Gabarone where we met with Linda Armstrong, who with her husband Neal are the owners of the game reserve that we used for the radio operations. We had shipped some antennas and radios to them and we picked that up there. She arranged for us to stay in a nice B&B and treated us to a fine restaurant meal. They had also been very helpful in doing the legwork to get our licenses thus enabling us to pick them up after our arrival with minimum difficulty.

Gabarone, a modern city of some 200,000 population, is the capital of Botswana, a country with a 46% urban population of just less than 1.8 million. Named Bechuanaland prior to its independence granted by the British Commonwealth in 1965 it is a land-locked country in sub-Saharan Africa just north of South Africa and bordered also by Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. The official language is English, although a significant number speak the

native language Setswana. There is only one native tribe in Botswana giving it a remarkably stable government as compared to some other African nations. Religion is over 50% Christian with a small percentage of Islam and Hindu. Botswana is bisected by the Tropic of Capricorn at 28.5 degrees south meaning it is about as far south of the equator as central Mexico is north. The time zone is SAT, 2 hours ahead of UTC.

Frosty and Jay proceeded to the Stevensford Game Reserve located on the Limpopo river, on the border with South Africa, about 4 hours northwest of Gabarone in an area known as the Tuli Block. Arriving there on the 19th, we started putting antennas together. Jay was able to do some CW operating before the actual DXpedition started firing up the K3 at 100 watts and using an R7 multiband vertical mounted on a fence post. Even with this minimum setup, pileups were at times quite exciting and challenging.



The facilities at the game reserve, sometimes described as only a few steps above camping, were comfortable. The huts had thatch roofs, comfortable beds with mosquito nets, a necessity, and indoor plumbing, but no heating or air conditioning. Meals were served buffet style and were quite adequate and were carefully prepared by an accomplished cook, who along with her fiancé also managed the lodge. The management of the lodge made many efforts to help us set up our equipment and antennas and that was very much a help to us.

The remainder of the operators flew into Gabarone where Frosty picked them up a couple days later. The

only problem encountered in the travelling to Botswana was that Lor's luggage didn't arrive in Gabarone. A side trip became necessary to visit a nearby village for a few articles of clothing and necessities. Eventually he caught a ride back to Gabarone after the luggage did arrive. He was able to return in a small rental car that was used later by the Italians for a side trip to Victoria Falls.

With the full team working we installed a 3-element tribander, a TET HB433DX, at about 30 feet in the air and a Tennyne T6 Log Periodic at about 35 feet. Both were on rotators and mounted on the ground using 6-foot roof towers anchored with sandbags. An old Butternut HF2V was erected for those bands along with the R7 previously mounted. We planned but didn't use a 160 meter vertical since it didn't arrive because of a snafu at the airport in Italy.

Friday the 22nd Frosty, Bob, Matt, and Bob along with his wife Elva loaded up in the van for a 4 night trip to the north part of Botswana which was an 8 hr drive. Staying in Kasana, they visited Victoria Falls and Chobe game Park and reported that they had a great visit. They went on a river cruise looking at the game along with 2 game drives into the park each day. There was a full day guided trip over to Victoria Falls. Frosty said that this was the first time he had been back there since 1991 when he lived in Lusaka, Zambia. He said it still looks the same except now the US Dollar is the currency that they use.



As mentioned before, the three Italian operators also took a two-day trip to Victoria Falls after the first group returned, giving much the same report of having a great visit there.

We kept 3 HF stations on the air most of the time. One of the two main stations used a Yaesu FT450AT driving a new SPE Expert 1K-FA amplifier connected to the tribander. This station was used in the contest.

The second main station consisted of a mix of rigs with an Icom 746PRO driving the second 1K-FA amplifier using the Tennadyne LP with the exception that when A25SL was on CW he used a K3 driving the same amp and antenna. For both these stations the amps worked flawlessly and being totally automatic, seemed like part of the rigs. The third station initially used a Kenwood TS570 and was later replaced with a Yeasu FT450AT. This station was

used barefoot for RTTY and PSK31. All rigs, amps, and antennas performed flawlessly for the duration of the expedition. On HF, total contacts made were 22,206 not counting the contest we entered which was 2,575 more netting a grand total of 24,781 QSOs. Mainly during the contest we had some "forced" off times because of thunderstorms and other strong weather.

QSOs for A25-2010 including contest

BAND	PHONE	CW	PSK	RTTY	TOTAL
80	8	0	0	0	8
40	922	0	0	0	922
20	2,171	843	37	225	3,276
17	1,443	1,605	18	333	3,399
15	6,347	1,521	2	385	8,255
12	1,223	2,567	0	274	4,064
10	3,970	526	0	361	4,857
TOTAL	16,084	7,062	57	1,578	24,781

DXCC Totals

Mixed	167
Phone	158
CW	106
Digital	38

HF QSO By Continent

Africa	549
Asia	1,116
Europe	15,918
North America	5,512
Oceania	115
South America	499

Propagation was interesting on the high bands; especially comparing to a trip Frosty and Jay participated in at the same location in 2007. At that time we accomplished maybe around a hundred QSOs on 12 meters and almost none on 10 meters. This time, Jay, alone, did some 2,567 CW contacts on 12 meters and over 500 on 10 meters. Totals for all operators on these bands were 4,067 on 12 meters and 4,857 on 10 meters. These numbers, of course, reflect the difference between the two years for sunspot numbers and solar flux. We didn't accomplish many contacts on 80 meters because of the QRN levels, which were likely due to the start of the thunderstorm season in this part of the world. It was late spring in the southern hemisphere and we did indeed have some spectacular lightning displays at times, not to mention power outages. Forty meters met with some

of the same problems with band noise. Otherwise this was a very quiet location with almost no QRN of the higher frequencies most of the time. That really helped when signal fading occurred, as very weak stations could be heard and worked with relative ease.

We did operate the CQ WW Phone contest, entering as a one transmitter, multi-operator station. We made 2,575 contacts netting a claimed score of 2,452,562. We lost about 8-9 hours out of the allowable 48 because of thunderstorms and related power outages, one of which was for about 4.5 hours. We apparently were the only station in Zone 38, much less A25, meaning a double multiplier in the contest for the zone and the country, so the pileups did develop when propagation allowed. Some operators have commented that one problem with doing a contest

from that far south is that most of the time the contesters in US and EU point their antennas east or west for the most contacts and therefore sometimes don't hear the southern hemisphere as well as they might otherwise.



On the 22nd Hal, ZS6WB (A25HL) and Hannes, ZS6JDE (A25JD) joined us with the goals of making 2 meter and 6 meter EME QSOs, to give some South African operators a chance to work A25 on 2 and 6 meter meteor scatter and tropo, and to activate some rare grid squares via satellite for the ZS WAGS Award.

EME conditions on 2m were poor during the two nights that they operated and only about 20 2m contacts were completed with their small station, three of those being JAs. On 2m they used a Yaesu FT-857 driving a TE Systems solid state linear to about 300 watts output. The antenna system used two M-Square 2M9SSB Yagis manually aimed at the moon.

The 50 MHz EME/MS system used the Yaesu FT-857 driving a 3CX800A7 amplifier to about 400 watts output. The antenna was a fixed elevation M-Square 6M5X 5 element Yagi and the EME contact with Lance, W7GJ, making him very happy, was completed near the moonset at about 15° elevation.

Hannes, ZS6JDE did all the EME operating on this trip and he has previously operated small portable EME stations in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. All of the EME and meteor scatter contacts were made using the popular K1JT WSJT software.

So, in summary, if you consider one of the main goals of going on a DXpedition is to have fun, then that goal was certainly accomplished. Everyone seemed to enjoy each other's company and the camaraderie was great. Our team consisted of some relatively newly licensed hams with two holding licenses less than a decade. Five of the group had no particular experience operating on a DXpedition but in spite of that, considering their level of experience, they all jumped right in and did an incredible job of working the pileups and making contacts. The main accomplishment though was that all had a great time doing it. We will all hold fond memories of making some new friends and enjoying our wonderful hobby.

We would like to thank all the stations that worked us, it was a pleasure to give many a new country on a new band. Special thanks go to all the sponsors that helped to make this DXpedition happen. SPE with the 1K-FA amplifiers, Tennadyne for the LogP beam, Gold Print for the QSL cards, Texas DX Society, Brazos Valley ARC, Fannin Radio Club, MDXC,GDXF, Clipperton DX Club, EUDXF, Nippon DX. DX Coffee, Ham Radio Shop, Magh Elettronica, Hobby Radio, Diet & fitness. There were many hams that also helped out. All of which was used for shipping.

Frosty enjoys making such trips to Africa and will undoubtedly make others over time. If you are interested, you might want to contact him and join him on one in the future.

Or if you would like to do your own thing you can contact Linda Armstrong direct at linda@neillarmstrong.com. We left the Tennadyne T6 LogP antenna along with a HF2V for 80 and 40 there. There is coax for both antennas and rotor cable. Frosty will need to go back and install a rotor in the tower so that the beam can be turned. All you would need to take with you is your rig, amp and laptop.

The web page for Stevensford Game Reserve is: www.stevensfordgamereserve.com

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(Bearbeitet durch Dr. Lutz D. Schmadel, DK8UH)**