

E4X Palestine 2010

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Shortly after we finished 9X0R, our expedition to Rwanda, I began to pay attention to the Tifariti Gang's next project. After speaking to Fabrizio, IN3ZNR on our possible targets, we agreed to try Palestine, which due to its complicated sociopolitical situation was very rare on the bands and stood high in the most needed countries list.

As we began our first steps at the end of 2008, we found that an Italian group had been working on an E4 project for a year already and was going to deploy an operation from Bethlehem at the beginning of 2009. We decided to postpone our plans until after this event. In September 2009 and with the help of Giorgio, IZ4AKS, I travelled to Italy to meet Mr. Shoby, a Palestinian who would support us within the West Bank and be the key man in the organisation of our plans. After the interview with Mr. Shoby our project really started.

Due to the difficult situation in that part of the world there were many problems to overcome. I decided to make a trip to Palestine and Israel in October 2009 to get the ham licence and to set up the necessary logistics and support. On the 19th of October I arrived in Tel Aviv. I soon became familiar with the Israeli checkpoints along the Palestinian border. Promptly on the first morning I proceeded to the Ministry of Telecommunications in Ramallah, the administrative capital of the Palestinian National Authority. Arriving at the Ministry, after passing the Palestinian security due to the proximity of the Prime Minister's residence, I was interviewed by the officer in charge of radio authorizations. He was very friendly and promised to help in everything he could. Once I had learnt the procedure to obtain the licence the following step was to find a good location to operate from, free of the heavy electrical noise that had been a pain for the last two operations from the West Bank. It took several days in Beit Jala and Bethlehem to locate what was going to be the site of our station, situated just five minutes walk from the Nativity Church in Bethlehem.

When all field work in Palestine had been concluded I travelled to Tel Aviv to meet 4Z4MU, 4Z4LA and 4X6HP. They gave me invaluable help, and an invitation to their weekly ham meeting, where we got the support for our project of the Israel Amateur Radio Club.

With E4X's papers in my pocket and the mission fulfilled, I returned to Spain, but not before having

the experience of boarding in Ben Gurion international airport. There I underwent two unexpected interrogations while waiting for check-in, followed by a third interview at the counter lasting one hour and forty five minutes, whilst all my personal belongings were passed through explosives and other scanners, as well as a comprehensive manual inspection. More than luckily I passed all the examinations, and my suitcase boarded I managed to carry on my two HF radios and a PSU as hand luggage.

In spite of nobody asking anything about the rigs, for months I had bad dreams about that Tel Aviv boarding, since it was by no means clear what would happen when boarding a group of ten people loaded with "sensitive stuff".

In Madrid, with the aid of EA4ATA and EC4JD of *Proyecto4*, we sorted and packed all the equipment, including the antennas. On May 26th the team members, comprising EA2RY, EA5FX, EA7AJR, EA7KW, F5CWU, F6ENO, F9IE, IN3ZNR and EA5RM gathered in Madrid and were briefed with travelling instructions and operating procedure.

One of our main targets was to work North America, and more specifically the West Coast, from where our pilots K6GNX and W6ENZ would advise us the best times of propagation to our area, as well as any unexpected openings. Another priority was the 6 meter band, which previously had seen almost no activity from Palestine. We hoped that with the help of band specialist EA7KW we would make many contacts. We had chosen operating dates as a compromise to fit inside the best of the Sporadic E season and to exploit our chances on the low bands.

At dusk on May 27th we arrived in Tel Aviv. 4Z5LA and 4X6HP were at the airport waiting for us. After greeting our Israeli friends and checking that our entire luggage had arrived safely, we headed for Bethlehem, passing through one of the main checkpoints. Foreigners are not now allowed to enter the West Bank through secondary checkpoints:- "Rules have changed, they do every week!" shouted our Palestinian driver. These changes produced some problems for us a few days later.

When we reached our hotel, Pilgrim Residence, we split into two working groups, one to set up the stations, and the other to work on the roof building the 30m vertical with elevated radials and

assembling the three HF beams. The antenna work was in the dark with strong winds. At 20:00 hours UTC on the 27th F9IE sent the first "CQ de E4X". At last, our nine month's work was paying off! The first night F9IE, F6ENO and EA5FX kept the 30m station running until dawn. The next morning all the crew except the 30m operator raised, in record time, the three HF Yagis (Spiderbeam, HexBeam and BBHexBeam), the vertical for 40m and the seven element 6m Yagi. A little later we hung the 80m and 160m dipoles.

When the antennas were set we organised the operating shifts. Two hours in daylight and three hours at night. Immediately things started and everything ran like clockwork. Whilst EA7KW was in charge of the 6m band, if the magic band was dead he would relieve the HF ops. , EA5FX, EA7AJR, F6ENO and F9IE kept the CW pileups busy, while EA2RY filled the gaps in the RTTY segments and F5CWU, IN3ZNR and I worked SSB. The shack was installed in one of the hotel rooms, strategically located to minimise annoyance to the other guests, and to minimise the length of the cables feeding our antennas. Inside the shack we set four stations with linear amplifiers. One was for CW, another SSB, the third for RTTY and the fourth was the 6m station. We also set up a fifth station, running 100 watts with an Elecraft K3. This radio impressed us all with its high yield and performance, making us think about using it in the future to replace the Icom IC-7000, which had previously given us some headaches. Another happy surprise was to find very little interaction between stations, notwithstanding all the antennas were very close to each other.

During the first days of the operation HF propagation was only fair, in fact we did not have any openings to the West Coast of the United States until the third dawn, when our pilots phoned me, excited because our signal was starting to pop up in Nevada and California. Right away F9IE at the CW station started to call "West Coast only" and shortly after we had the first W6s and W7s logged. Every morning after this we were happy to log more "Far West" stations on all modes.

Due to the time of year the low bands were only as would be expected. On the other hand, 6m was outstanding. We posted on our website that a beacon would be running on 50.103KHz whenever the band was silent or the operator was busy, also a cell phone number to text us with signal report and the station's grid locator. This system turned out to be very effective, especially to know when our 6m signal was audible in Japan or the most difficult parts of Europe. We had a few of such openings to Asia and in most of them we suffered from a pulse noise covering the whole band, always from the same direction. In the evening of the 31st a US station came in, out of the blue, mixed with the 50MHz EU pileup. Jose Ramon jumped out of his

chair, but doubted it was genuine. But quickly a massive pileup of North American stations was packing the DX segment. 72 stations from the East Coast added a "new one" on six. A 4X operator said: "I've been for fifteen years on SIX awaiting for an US run, you arrive here and do it!" Openings with different parts of Europe were however on a daily basis, and very strong, making it possible to establish a world record of QSOs for a DXpedition on 50 MHz, a total of 6545 contacts. As the days passed our goals were reached, in spite of the increasing indiscipline of the Southern Europe stations, which created unnecessary QRM for us at any time of the day, even when we called "only JA" or "only NA". Since all the E4X operators had very explicit instructions to not work a single station in Europe whilst looking outside of it, not one of those stations calling out of turn was ever logged. Sincerely, I believe that there must be something that we can do to solve this problem. After ten years going on expeditions all over the world, I can say that the problem has increased during the last few years, and is making some DX stations change their usual operating technique. As we feared this situation, instructions given to the operators in Madrid before our departure to the Holy Land reduced the consequences of this bad practice. But undoubtedly the QSO rate we were able to reach would have been greater if we hadn't had the continuous stress and loss of time repeating "only North America" or "outside of Europe please" after every QSO and fighting constantly against the deliberate QRM. At last, after ten days that we will never forget, at dawn on June 7th the last QSO of the 80,267 was made.

	CW	SSB	RTTY	BAND
6M	3.408	2.882	255	6.545
10M	2.608	3.255	478	6.341
12M	3.354	2.686	499	6.539
15M	4.105	4.547	2.145	10.797
17M	7.838	4.979	1.921	14.738
20M	7.913	7.607	2.853	18.373
30M	7.296		1.482	8.778
40M	3.564	1.629	535	5.728
80M	1.562	690	0	2.252
160M	176	0	0	176
TOTAL	41.824	28.275	10.168	80.267

Once all the stations had been torn down we began our journey back to Spain. Straightaway we faced our first checkpoint, in Bethlehem. After almost two hours of inspections and conversation we were allowed into Israeli territory to head to the airport.

We arrived at Ben Gurion three hours in advance of our flight, time enough to pass customs clearances and check in. Inside the airport facility

Israeli security picked me out of the group, as team leader, to proceed with the well known interrogation. Twenty minutes of questions and answers followed, then a close inspection of our luggage and all the radio stuff. They denied the boarding of two HF transceivers and our four amps. We left about \$20,000 worth of gear behind - not before a long discussion with the security supervisor. We finally boarded with only a paper bar code sticker for each piece of gear held.

Fortunately, a few days later we recovered everything, without any damage. This episode ended the E4X story.

We've been ramping up our efforts this year, and it wouldn't have been possible without the help of all the volunteers, individuals, clubs and associations

who had confidence in us and supported our mission. The E4X operators would like to thank all of them, especially EB5BBM, EA5BZ, EA5RD, EA4TD, EA4ATA, EC4JD, EA7EU, EA7MK, IZ4AKS, 4Z5MU, 4Z5LA, 4X6HP, K6GNX, W6ENZ, NCDXF, INDEXA, URE, Carolina Dx Association, SWODXA, Proyecto4, UKSMG, Clipperton DXC, GDXF, TCDXA, Eurotours Trips, URE Benidorm, Lynx DX Group, Spiderbeam, Chiltern DXC, Dxcffee, UFT, LZ3HY QSL print, Western Washington DXC, GM DX Group, Tecatel, URE Manises, URE San Vicente of the Raspeig, Northeast Wisconsin DXA, Tokyo 610 DXG, Greater Milwaukee DXA, Mile - Hi DXA, URE Burriana, Tango Delta, Nippon DXA., BARTG, GDGDXC and F6KOP.