



5L3BI Baiyah Island AF-111NEW

With just a week since our return from Liberia, we are now able to share with you the difficulties we encountered during our 5L3BI attempt of activating AF-111 NEW.

After travelling from Europe via Amsterdam, the airplane touched down as planned in Monrovia, Liberia. This was the first meeting of the 5L3BI team. A few days earlier, Richmond, EL2BG had departed enroute to Greenville via a treacherous 4x4 road journey. Here he encountered 3' deep potholes, landslides, collapsed bridges and severe flooding. This journey usually takes around 6-7 hours however as this year's rainy season lasted much longer than usual, he allowed 4 days to make this journey. It was vital to our project for this road journey – it was the only way to get our equipment and local purchases to the south of the country.



The rest of the team had bought flight tickets via a Christian Airline (MAF) and were restricted by airline weights. Upon our arrival at Greenville, we were delighted to see Richmond for the 1st time...he had made the road trip and had arrived safely.



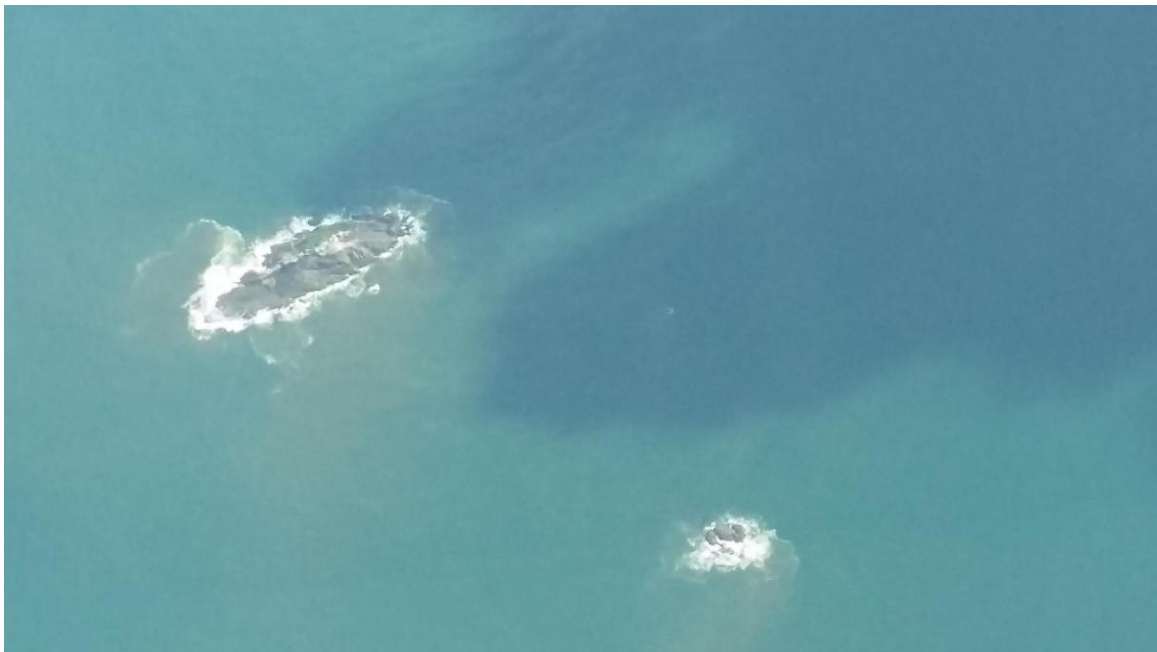
A lot the preparations and negotiations had been made during the previous recce trips. Local villagers and elders had been informed of our intentions and were awaiting our arrival. This region, Sinoe County, is basically jungle territory and therefore various native tribes needed to be paid off. Each payment progressed us a little further up the chain until we were introduced to the Mayor, Commissioner and Superintendent. There is no doubt that there is a different price according to skin colour – as soon as the white men appeared, any previous agreements were denied and nearly everything was costing \$1,500...each time!!



Of course we didn't pay these ridiculous demands – instead we negotiated with them and played the waiting game for them to reach their decision. Each meeting taking usually between 3 to 5 hours and eventually they would agree on \$500 instead. One wouldn't be long using up their budget when meeting these high demands and very soon, our funds were exhausted.

At this stage, members from the Tarsue Chiefdom allowed us to go out and visit the rock. They must have realised that there was no more money left and they got all that they could get from us. It was

early afternoon and after a heavy downpour of rain. Yes, there was a lot of swell around the rock and no, the landing wouldn't be easy, however, at this stage, we felt it was important to get close to the rock to identify our landing spot. The flat level side of the rock as seen in the photos is very deceiving. This area is constantly covered with the crashing waves, and is unusable as an operating position as it's constantly submerged in water. It's also surrounded by a near vertical 60' cliff face to the South West so is cut off from the rest of the rock. We did notice a ledge where we possibly could operate from, although it's about 7' above sea level, it just might be possible to manhandle the equipment, generator etc...to that point and just operate in the open air elements. This is the best we could hope for so we amended our stations and plans, and after a near capsizing of the canoe, we aborted for the day ready to return the following morning.



We were self-contained – we had our own equipment, 4x4 vehicle, food, shelter, generator, fuel etc...and so during the hours of darkness, most of the team operated using their own personal EL callsigns. ALL of these QSOs were made from mainland Liberia. This was the only way to communicate with the outside world from this cut off, remote part of the country. At 1st light, we would begin the planning and preparations again for another attempt at landing. This day however, it felt different.

It was Wednesday 1st November 2017 and after 2 days of negotiations with one failed landing, we loaded the canoes with all our equipment to take to the rock. At this stage we were hopeful of making a successful landing and surely making the necessary 1,000 QSOs into 5 Continents as per IOTA requirements. Anything extra would be a bonus. Band conditions were good in fact, and the higher bands seemed in good shape too.

Upon loading the canoes, we noticed some different faces amongst us. People we hadn't seen before. The Mayor who brought us to the Superintendent and Commissioner was no longer with us. He had gone, most likely to spend all the money we had paid him. His job was done. The Commissioner and Superintendent were still there though, and although we couldn't quite understand what exactly was going on...we could tell by raised voices and hand gestures that things

weren't quite as friendly as we would have liked. At times, these new faces were quite threatening and showed signs of aggression towards the white man!



Eventually, we learned that these new faces were a neighbouring tribe who forbid anyone from visiting the rock. No one has ever landed on the rock. It is completely against their belief and is strictly forbidden. This is a sacrificial rock and place of worship, or so we were led to believe. Now it seems that it is the actual rock that is sacred! We do know for sure that no local has ever been on it due to their superstitions and beliefs. The word Baiyah, means 'BIG PAPA'. On one hand we have the Commissioner giving us permission to land on the rock and now on the other hand, we are feeling threatened by this opposing tribe, so much so, that they start performing acts of black magic and casting some sort of spells of witchcraft on us to prevent us from landing. It is a known fact that humans have been sacrificed in this region in the past, amongst a repeated history of cannibalism.

From all of our previous successful operations and IOTA activities, this is our 1st time ever being faced with this situation. It is their beliefs, and we must respect that however ridiculous it may seem to us. What we couldn't ignore were the threats, the hostile environment, the risk of harm.

Even with all this craziness going on, and feeling rather vulnerable at this stage, the Commissioner offered us one last chance to go to the rock. Honestly, none of us wanted to be in that awful place anymore so we agreed. After all, the canoe was already loaded with our equipment. Baiyah rock is about 2kms off shore from this plantation and now we had a rite of passage from the Commissioner himself.



Within just a few meters from the rock we were approached by a smaller canoe with locals on-board. Again, we had spells cast on us, and while they were performing other outcries of witchcraft, another canoe approached in the vicinity. We could see quite a crowd now gathering back on the mainland, some 50 people at a guess but mostly we were drawn to the shouting and rioting that was breaking out back onshore. Had the Commissioner offered this rite of passage to get us out the immediate danger?

We learned that the 2 tribes were now fighting, all because of our visit. One tribe felt they were 'hoodwinked' by the other tribe and were conned out of their share of the money we paid. We could not stay there for one minute more. We could not just stand by and watch 3 animals be slaughtered in front of our eyes. A cow, a sheep and a goat were all to be slaughtered as part of a ritual for us to land! Not only that, but we would need to consume all the flesh too. A poor chimpanzee had a rope tied around his neck and was being tortured and hit with bamboo sticks. I can still hear his screams!



Forgive us, but at this point we all had enough and made the sensible decision to abort this whole project and to leave immediately. To us Westerners, this is inhumane and something we are not used to.

The canoe brought us straight to where Richmond's 4x4 was parked where we immediately offloaded all our equipment and within minutes, were heading back towards Greenville in the hopes of finding accommodation. We still had 2 days to go before our return flight back to Monrovia, back to civilisation of some kind. Here we just found alternative accommodation and operated using our EL callsigns...(EI5GM – EL2GM), (EI9FBB – EL2BB), (MM0NDX – EL2EL), EL2BG & EL2DT.



Richmond stayed with the group until the return MAF flight back to Monrovia departed where he would then attempt the return 4x4 road journey all over again. We did meet with him again briefly back in Monrovia and are thankful that he made the return trip safely.

Just a few hours later and after a farewell with Dickson EL2DT, the European trio had to depart for their flights back to Edinburgh, via Amsterdam.

- Had we failed? Yes.
- Had we escaped without any injuries or harm? Yes.
- Did we make the right decision? Yes.
- Will we attempt it again in the future? No.

Each team member has already invested a lot of time and money into this project. This money is lost and will never be recovered. After experiencing and witnessing so much of local customs, none of the team are prepared to put themselves into this situation again. We will gladly assist and help any other group who wish to take on this project themselves but honestly, we would advise against further attempts in the foreseeable future.

We are ever so thankful to those DX Groups, Foundations and individuals who have already requested for us to keep their donations and to use towards the expense of this project.

We also invite anyone who has made a donation and would like it returned to please contact us in the first instance so we can make arrangements to repay it as soon as possible- (dxer59@gmail.com)

Thanks for your understanding.

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