A91HI Hawar Islands AS-202 April 2016

Info von MM0NDX

Hawar Island AS-202 NEW was one of the 11 new IOTA groups that were added to the IOTA directory in July 2014 at IOTA's 50th Anniversary in Windsor.

Although administered from Bahrain, this archipelago of desert islands is situated just 2 kms off the west coast of Qatar in the Gulf of Bahrain of the Persian Gulf.

Now, right from the start, 2 different groups had plans to operate from here. A European team and local hams from the GCC area both had similar intentions and within the same time period. Therefore, in the interest of the IOTA / DX community, it was thought advisable for both groups to merge and to conduct a unified operation. It was decided that from 27th April to 1st May 2016, members from BARG (Bahrain Amateur Radio Group) would ascend on Hawar Island for this 1st IOTA activation.

Getting this far was a long and arduous process however. There is a lot of different levels of admin required to operate Amateur Radio from Bahrain. One just can't 'arrive' with radio equipment with the hopes of obtaining a license. No Sir! Infact, non GCC hams would almost certainly come to a stand still in obtaining a license.
No fewer than 6 different departments were involved in getting the required clearance for this operation. Customs clearance was required to import all equipment. Equipment coming from Europe needed to be bought and shipped in advance. Each Non-National needed security clearance by the Military.

As there is a curfew in the waterways around Bahrain, permission needed to be issued by the coastguard. The License was administered from the Directorate of Wireless Licensing, Frequencies and Monitoring Department. Approval is basically based on a 'tiered system' therefore each individual step progressed our application up to the next level and eventually landed at the desk of the Minister of Interior. This is where we would learn if we got the license or not. Thankfully we did! Our requested callsign A91HI (Hawar Island) was issued. Months of planning and preparations went into this project. After all, we had the time! The whole process in obtaining all the necessary permissions took over 4 months.

We would like to thank the generosity of our sponsors at this point. Without your support this operation would not have happened. Thanks also to the dealers who gave us generous discounts on our purchases. To help us along with our tight budget, we offered a Free QSL to those who donated a minimum of €5 or more in advance. These kind folk will get their QSL sent directly to them - for free!

We had a 9 man team; 7Z1OO, A41OO, A61DJ, A92AA, A93LT, EI5GM, EI9FBB, MM0NDX & RA0LQ. As there is little else to do on Hawar Island, we agreed on 5 stations. This would surely keep the pile ups satisfied and give ample operating time to each team member. After all, we were to have 2 stations on CW, 2 on SSB and a dedicated RTTY station.
All stations were high power and were QRV as propagation dictated. Huge pile-ups were expected and remarkably, pile up behaviour was excellent. We noticed very little (if any) DQRM and everyone seemed to respect our requests when calling for JA / NA / SA etc.....

From past experiences and success, it was decided to use a combination of VDA antennas and SP7IDX Technology Hexbeams. We had secured an ideal location on the north side of the island, thus giving a sea view to Europe and North America. Infact, the highest part of the island is only 8m ASL so we pretty much had an unobscured view into all geographical areas. For optimum performance from the VDAs, we needed to place these as close to the water's edge as possible; at high tide, these antenna bases were underwater!
As we also wanted to be able to operate 2 stations on the same band, we placed our Hexbeams further inland on 30' masts. These would be our directional antennas. This also increases separation and therefore reduces inter station interference. Naturally, band pass filters were used at each station.

As with all IOTA activations.....the idea is to make as many unique QSOs as possible - give the new island to as many individual chasers. We always try to discourage those on an ego trip and who must be top of the leaderboards! Please remember this when working the next new or rare one! Fawaz, A92AA had organised for us to have an internet connection on the island. By having this luxury, we were now in a position to send our logs to our QSL manager Charles, M0OXO, who in turn would upload to both Clublog and LoTW daily.

The pile-ups continued and propagation was thankfully on our side. In fact, 20m for example was open 24 hours continuous. In less than 2 hours, the necessary 1,000 QSOs into 5 different continents was achieved. Our target of 15,000 QSOs looked promising. Imagine our amazement when on our 3rd log upload, WinTest told us that we had already slashed the 15,000 QSO mark and were heading for 17,000! Naturally a new revised target of 20,000 QSOs was set. On the 4th log upload, again this measly 20,000 target had been surpassed! We were heading into our last day of operation at this stage and so already delighted with this QSO count, agreed to start disassembling the LF antennas and to prepare for our teardown/departure. 4 stations remained throughout the final night and soon after sunrise, the LF antennas were removed and packed away. 15m remained until the very last moment and only went QRT just 1 hour before our departure. We finished with over 23,000 QSOs and 9,516 Uniques.

Over 1 tonne of equipment was loaded onto the truck to be brought for shipping back to the mainland. We were saying farewell to this 42 degrees of heat and to our air conditioned bungalows.

Special thanks to Cezar VE3LYC and the IOTA committee who approved and validated this operation. Kudos to Charles M0OXO who did a remarkable turnaround on the QSLing just 3 weeks after going QRT!

AS-202 is now well and truly activated.

Edited for GDXF Prof. Dr. Uwe Jaeger, DJ9HX