

D60AE

DXpedition to Comoros Islands by F6KOP team

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After the successful DXpedition to Sierra Leone (9LY1JM) in 2019, the F6KOP team discussed the usual question „where do we go next ?“. The Comoros Islands were the answer and the preparations began. Plans were made and contacts to locals were established. But then, our MDXC friends announced their plans to activate the country. They ran over 62k QSOs as D68CCC in October 2019. The F6KOP team canceled the Comoros and redirected their plans to Palestine. We made some 51k QSOs as E44CC in February 2020. A few days after our return, the spreading Covid virus started causing severe travel restrictions worldwide. The F6KOP team made plans for another DXpedition to western Africa in 2021, but it had to be canceled because the restrictions were still in place. Postponing the trip to 2022 was no longer an option as the safety situation in that country got worse. So the focus went back to eastern Africa and the plans for the Comoros were revived. The expedition was scheduled for January 2022. However, the virus situation made things too complicated and the trip had to be postponed again.



We all witnessed that the world kept changing. The war in Ukraine caused drastic price increases on fuel, so our flight carrier Ethiopian had to raise ticket prices. Later, a stopover in Tanzania was added to the flights from Addis Abeba to Moroni. We were also concerned to hear about military combat in northern Ethiopia, but eventually this had no impact on our trip. Two team members had to cancel their participation, two friends from Ireland joined the team instead. And things looked good this time. The F6KOP team spent countless hours to get all equipment ready in time, so we were ready to go in the first half of October 2022.

On October 5, the majority of the team met at Charles de Gaulle airport Paris. An overnight flight took us to Addis Abeba, where our fellows from Ireland joined us. The next flight took us to Dar Es Salaam and finally on to Moroni on Grand Comore Island, the country's capital. Unfortunately, we had to learn that only one of four suitcases had arrived from Ireland, while the entire baggage from Paris was present. It took several days until the missing bags finally arrived. Our local supporters were waiting with a mini bus and several cars to take us and our bags to the QTH. After a one hour ride, the



Retaj Moroni Hotel gave us a warm welcome. There was not much time left to erect antennas and stations in daylight. But mobile phone torch lights helped to finish some simple ground plane antennas for the bands from 40 to 15 meters. One station in CW and one in SSB started operations just after 19:00 UTC.

The two stations didn't run all night, the ops were just too exhausted and tired. After a joint breakfast, we started installing all antennas and stations. The hotel is located directly at the Indian ocean and offers plenty of space. We installed verticals for the remaining bands, two hex beams, a multi-band vertical and two beverage on ground (BOG) antennas. Patrick, F2DX, documented the progress by photo and video, partly with his drone. One station after the other hit the bands and filled the log. Propagation was good and allowed QSOs to the US west coast even on ten meters. The pileups were tremendous. On the other hand, working 160m turned out to be very difficult. First, the BOG for Europe and North America was dead. We located a defective PL connector and repaired it, but both BOG antennas were still not very helpful. For most QSOs, we were listening on the ground plane. We added radials to the ends of the BOGs to compensate the poor grounding. This improved performance on 80m, but 160m remained very difficult until the end. We were not satisfied with the final QSO count on this band. Olivier, HB9GWJ, finished his setup for QO-100 on Saturday and started running QSOs. During the next days, most ops took the opportunity for some QSOs in SSB or CW. For many of us, these were the first satellite QSOs ever. We were also trying 6m when the conditions seemed to be promising. Openings didn't occur every day, but we could reach southern Europe, the Near East and even the Caribbean. However, we also noticed pirate activity in FT8 on 6m.

The Comoros are a group of islands located between eastern Africa and Madagascar, IOTA reference AF-007. After more than a century as a french protectorate and french overseas entity, the islands (except Mayotte) became an independent country in 1975. This changed their DXCC status from FH, FB8 to D6. The islands are the result of volcanic activity. Grand Comore has a volcano in the center and our QTH is located to its west. Almost every morning, a huge cloud built over the volcano which lead to rain or mild thunderstorms after lunchtime. This kept the sun away and temperatures bearable, but also caused high humidity. Like all hotel rooms, our shack was equipped with air condition and we needed it



during the hottest hours of the day to avoid excessive heat. The shore at the hotel consists of jagged volcanic rocks. It was not very inviting for swimmers, but some of us tried anyway. The pool was a safer place to chill, it was often busy with other hotel guests. The Comoros are an Islamic federal republic, so we didn't dare to bring alcoholic beverages. We were afraid that this activity might be the first F6KOP DXpedition without Pastis. However, it was not at all impossible to get alcoholic beverages and even Pastis was available, so we were happy to keep this tradition alive.

In 2001, the Comoros were “home” of D68C, the first mega DXpedition that exceeded the 100k QSO limit (168k). Recently in 2021, two ops from Poland made 35k QSOs from the Comoros. For us, the busiest band was certainly ten meters. With over 16k QSOs, it contributed more than 22% to our final QSO count. The key for this result was probably the high worldwide demand for band slots on ten meters, but also the fact that we were often able to work two modes simultaneously (SSB and CW or FT8). On our last day, the SSB ops even switched to FM for a few hundred QSOs. The positive effect of increased solar activity on the ionosphere's F layers promoted many QSOs on

the high bands. But the same activity also caused a strong D layer during some nights, making QSOs on the low bands rather difficult. We uploaded our log to Clublog daily, more statistics and info is available there.

Of course, we were affected by the dark side of DXpedition operation. QRM on our transmit frequencies, deliberate or just by carelessness, continuous calling out of turn, lengthy final transmissions (mostly in CW) – our inevitable companions. These bad habits haunted us and sometimes slowed down our operation. Apparently, this type of bad behavior is hard to eliminate, most of all in Europe. If we hear the DX station work someone with a callsign that is not ours, why send our callsign again instead of keeping quiet for a few seconds? If we can program our memory keyer or function key with “RR QSL 5NN TNX 73 GL TU dit dit”, why can't we program another key with “5NN TU” ? Many of us do so and practice exemplary operating style. They should be the role model for all of us.

We experienced power outages almost every day. The hotel's diesel generator kicked in after a few seconds. Another short outage marked the return of grid power. Each time, this cost us some on-air time because the amplifiers insisted on their warm-up period. However, the off-air times would have been much much longer without that generator... October 12, Jean-Luc, F1ULQ, had sked with F6KFT/p, located at a school in Saarlbe, France. During the final weekend, we didn't actively participate in the WAG contest, but we handed out the D6 multiplier. Our friends from Ireland had to return home on Saturday. The remaining team stopped operations on Monday morning and started dismantling all antennas and stations. Uneventful flights took us and all our equipment back to Paris where a general strike slowed us down somewhat. But the TGV trains went on schedule and took us home.

The operator team consisted of (rear, left to right) Dave, EI9FBB; Jeremy, EI5GM; Bruno, F5AGB; Julien, F8AVK; Olivier, HB9GWJ; Eric, ON7RN; Frank, F4AJQ; Xavier, F5NTZ; Patrick, F2DX; (front, left to right) Andreas, DL3GA; Misho, F8GGV; Jean-Luc, F1ULQ; Damien, F4AZF; Philippe, F8EFU; Kenneth, OZ1IKY.



Thanks to the F6KOP team, our sponsors (including GDXF) and supporters. Expeditions of this magnitude would hardly be possible without them. Please visit the F6KOP website for more details about this and past activities, and don't miss F2DX's great expedition video on youtube. And of course: Where do we go next? Stay tuned...