

IOTA DXpedition to Solomon Islands and Temotu

By Cezar Trifu (VE3LYC)

Solomon Islands and its southernmost province of Temotu are separate DXCC entities, with the latter ranked #37 in Europe at Mixt, #45 in CW, and #25 in SSB, but higher in Western EU: #26, #29, and #24, respectively. Temotu was also ranked in Western EU #13 on 40 m, #15 on 30 m, #30 on 20 m, and #26 on 17m. These two entities include a total of 13 island groups for the Islands on the Air (IOTA) Programme. The rarest group in Solomon Islands is Russell (OC-168), in demand by 94% of the IOTA membership, while the rarest in Temotu is Duff (OC-179), wanted by 97% of island chasers. My operation focused on re-activating these two very rare IOTA references. Duff (OC-179) was #9 on the Most Wanted World-Wide IOTA List.



Approaching the landing dock in Yandina.

My destination in the Russell group was Yandina, on Mbanika Island, where I travelled along with Bernhard (DL2GAC, H44MS), who graciously provided me with ample logistical support. Once the site of the largest copra producer in the country, the island has lost its economic position following a complex socio-economic and political conflict, which resulted in its complete shut-down 15 years ago. There is currently no electricity, running water, on internet in the group.

I operated from Yandina between April 22 and 25. I started the on the air by using the Icom IC-7000, AL-500M amplifier, and a multi-band vertical wire antenna. Unfortunately, the amplifier failed after just a little over 200 QSOs. Subsequent tests, carried out after my return to North America, confirmed that it overheated. However, once it reached that state, I was never able to return it back to normal during the expedition.

A total of 3,352 QSOs were logged with 2,563 stations in 74 DXCCs on 6 continents. I initially expected that the 30 m band will provide some opening into western EU, but these were extremely short. Interestingly, however, the 17 m band remained opened much longer than forecasted. Almost 55% of all contacts were on 20 m,

while 36% on 17 m, 8% on 30 m, and 1% on 40 m. About 63% of the QSOs were in CW, while 37% in SSB. The continental distribution of QSOs was EU 46%, AS 31%, NA 20%, OC 2%, with the sum of SA and AF less than 1%. The top five DXCCs by number of QSOs were JA, K, UA, I, and DL, which totaled about 68% of the log. Table 1 shows the top EU DXCCs by the number of QSOs.



Antenna setup

Table 1. List of top DXCCs by number of QSOs in the H44R log.

Nr.	DXCC	QSOs	%
1	JA	814	27.3
2	K	610	18.2
3	UA	283	8.4
4	I	261	7.8
5	DL	193	5.8
6	SP	94	2.8
7	UR	85	2.5
8	UA0	83	2.5
9	F	73	2.2
10	SM	50	1.5



Aboard the boat leaving Mbanika

Upon the return to Honiara, I had a short window of opportunity, before my flight to Temotu, to possibly activate the Florida group. Luckily, we were able to find transportation to Tulagi Island, a small island within that group, right after our return from Mbanika, where we arrived well past the sunset. The operation lasted only a day and a half, on April 25 and 26.



Antenna setup at the Provincial Guesthouse

The log contains a total of 1,123 QSOs with 916 stations in 51 DXCCs on 6 continents. About 51% of all contacts were on 20 m, 25% on 17 m, 15% on 15 m, and 9% on 40 m. Almost 85% of the QSOs were in CW, with the rest in SSB. The continental distribution of QSOs was AS 41%, NA 31%, EU 23%, OC 4%, SA 1%, and only one contact with AF. The top five DXCCs by number of QSOs were JA, K, UA, VK, and DL, accounting for over 81% of the log. Table 2 lists the EU DXCCs which ranked highest, based on the QSOs in the log.

Table 2. List of top DXCCs by number of QSOs in the H44R/P log.

Nr.	DXCC	QSOs	%
1	JA	411	36.6
2	K	338	30.1
3	UA	91	8.1
4	VK	40	3.6
5	DL	33	2.9
6	UA0	30	2.7
7	I	25	2.5
8	UR	22	2.0
9	SM	13	1.2
10	F	12	1.1

I flew from Honiara to Lata, the capital of Temotu, on April 27. Each passenger's free of charge luggage allowance is limited to 21 kg, of which 16 kg in the cargo and 5 kg in the cabin. Despite storing the amplifier and some clothing in Honiara, my luggage still weighted 47 kg! Without regular transportation to Duff, the only option was to ride a 23 ft open motor canoe. Stanley was my boat driver, as we covered the 175 km in two stages: first evening from Lata to Pigeon Island, where I spent the night, and next day from there to Duff.



Arrival at Tahua Island

The voyage from Pigeon Island to Tahua Island, in the Duff group took four hours. Chief Abros Miki and many locals welcomed us warmly. The island, which is only 140 x 100 m, is the largest of several man-made islands on the coral reef surrounding Taumako, the largest, volcanic island in the group. All these islands were in place by the time the first Europeans visited the islands a little over 400 years ago.



Antenna setup

Since we arrived in the evening, I setup the antenna as quickly as I could, to have it in place before nightfall. The radio operation was carried out between April 28 and May 3 (local hours), using the Icom IC-7000 powered provided by 100 Ah deep cycle batteries, which we charged by a 3.3 kW generator rented from Pigeon Island.

The log includes 3,454 QSOs with 2,383 stations in 76 DXCCs on 6 continents. The propagation conditions were different compared to those witnessed from the previous islands. It was more difficult to log western EU stations, despite changing the bands very frequently to check propagation. Over 40% of all contacts were on 17 m, with 35% on 20 m, 13% on 30 m, 7% on 40 m, and 5% on 15 m. Almost 79% of the QSOs were in CW, with the rest in SSB. The continental distribution of QSOs was AS 42%, EU 37%, NA 16%, OC 4%, with the sum of SA and AF close to 1%. The top five DXCCs

by number of QSOs were JA, K, UA, DL, and I, accounting for almost 72% of the log. Table 3 lists the top 10 EU DXCCs based on the number of QSOs in the log.

Table 3. List of top DXCCs by number of QSOs in the H40D log.

Nr.	DXCC	QSOs	%
1	JA	1310	37.9
2	K	513	14.9
3	UA	329	9.5
4	DL	164	4.7
5	I	157	4.5
6	UA0	101	2.9
7	UR	96	2.8
8	VK	82	2.4
9	SP	62	1.8
10	SM	61	1.8



CQ de H40D

We returned from Tahua to Pigeon on a heavy rainfall, which continued - with short breaks - all night. The flight back to Honiara was rescheduled by the airline a day later, since the airstrip had been completely flooded. The boat ride to Lata was not far from absolute madness. It took twice as long to do it as the forward trip, in a rough ocean, with the motor canoe sliding at times down a big wave, engine first. While this unusual motion made me think of the boat potentially capsizing, Stanley would manage to bring it back on top of the wave by pacing it and accelerating at the right time.



With Stanley (driver, left) and Phillip (helper, right)

I remain indebted to Bernhard (DL2GAC, H44MS) for his extended logistical support. My thanks to Bill (K9RR) for providing the amplifier, George (VE3GHK) for technical support, Maury (IZ1CRR) for website assistance, and John Mairiri for his hospitality on Mbanika. I wish to acknowledge Ben Hepworth for his close cooperation to ensure the success of my trip to Temotu, and Stanley for his skilled driving. Chief Abros Miki is graciously thanked for facilitating this project and his warm hospitality on Tahua. I presented him upon arrival with a box of medical supplies, as well as other gifts for the local kids, offered on behalf of the amateur radio community.



Meeting Thomas Taisea on Taumako Island. He hosted Bernhard on Tahua, 25 years ago



Preparing the boat for the return to Pigeon Island

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