

TL8AA & TL8ZZ ... “mola mia”

The meaning of this title, in a local Italian dialect, is a strong urge to never give up in the face of adversities. Why so?

Following our prior experience in 2017, at the beginning of 2022 we decided to return to the Central African Republic. Improved propagation and the lack of activity from TL in the last 5 years suggested the possibility of excellent results. Also, the logistics side was well prepared with the presence on site of Father Federico, of the Discalced Carmelites order, and Sister Assunta of the Benedictine order.



After receiving our license, we quickly got to work and on 22 March 2022 the whole team was checking-in at the Royal Air Maroc (RAM) counter of the Milano Malpensa airport. There a lady, who qualified herself as Head of the RAM office at Malpensa, welcomed us with a puzzling “*we were waiting for you*”. We produced the required passports with visas, negative results of Covid-19 molecular tests and yellow-fever vaccination certificates. To our surprise, we were requested to exhibit also a vaccination certificate against meningitis. We informed the RAM officer that this was not required for entering the country. She quoted an unspecified provision by her Government to this end. We requested in turn an official confirmation from the RAM Headquarters in Casablanca, getting straight into a stalemate.

While waiting (about one hour), we got in touch with the RAM office and the operator in charge confirmed that the requested vaccination was not necessary for entering that country. We reported back to the lady, but without success. She claimed that the disposition was displayed on her remote terminal unit, that it was our responsibility to get up-to-date information and implying that the RAM call-center was not current on the subject. Same argument about the RAM website, where no such disposition was reported. If anything, according to her only the websites of the relevant Embassies could provide legally-binding statements.

Fine. At this point we checked the official website of the Italian Ministry of Health: it reported that no mandatory vaccination against meningitis was required. Her answer: that website might not be up to date. Stalemate again. After a long time, she reported back to have been instructed by Casablanca: no certificate, no boarding. We left the airport, heading back home.



This dispute was far from clear. On 27 March we formally requested the Embassy of the Central African Republic in Paris to clarify this issue. On the following day, their amazing reply was that the claim by Royal Air Maroc was unwarranted. So, negating to board us was illegal.

Now, it is not for us to speculate at their (RAM's) reasons. But one might wonder if a serious case of overbooking was at play in this case. Even more surprising when considering that our Team, over the last few years, had purchased 240 air tickets (yes, 240!) from Royal Air Maroc for several African destinations.



We prefer to leave any conclusion to the readers.

Back home, after a few weeks of discouragement the “mola mia” attitude prevailed and we rescheduled our Dxpedition. Unfortunately, personal commitments for some of us, the imminent rainy season in central Africa and the absence of Father Federico led us to choose the period 12-26 November 2022. New visas, new airline tickets - this time with Air France -, new logistic arrangements and once again the Dxpedition plans took

shape.

This year we had two new entries: IK2RZP Gino as a CW operator, and IV3ZXQ Maurizio.

Gino spent one year in training to add CW to his skills as SSB and Digital operator. A tough goal, achieved with the help of a master as IK2CKR Angelo. Then Maurizio, well known contest operator at stations such as CN3A, I12S, IQ1RY as well as coordinator of I13WRTC. Skilled operator and, most important, a very nice person blending well with the whole IDT team.

Below his brief personal account and comments about this adventure:

After years spent as a member of the best Italian contest teams, I had the chance to join ID, an entirely new experience for me. At first, I was wondering about the difference between contest and Dxpedition modes. Now I can assert that the difference is huge. Many share the view that operating from home or from a contest mega-station is quite similar: this is not true. Above all, the ability to team with a close-knit group in which the human factor and mutual help dominate is the dominant factor in this case. No matter how experienced you are, the Team is the motor and tool to face any drawback, and I can assure you that anything can happen during a Dxpedition. Then comes the personal habit of operating a specific radio, or software or even a particular keyboard: in a Dxpedition anything can be different and anything can change, for good or worse.

On the personal side, I was gladly accepted by the Team and I could naturally blend in it like I was a long-time member, a key factor for personal ease and fast learning curve.

It is a tradition of IDT to have every newcomer to open transmissions in the



presence of all members, which was truly frightening to me. After just a few minutes of this baptism, however, I felt at ease and since that moment it all was pure adrenalin!

Of course, there are steps to take. You must live many days in contact with people whose personalities and habits are unfamiliar to you. Also, discovering that there are no frictions, jealousy or prima donnas intervene, but for lots of fun and full sharing of activities may be hard to believe! I feel enriched by this unique experience and I thank Silvano I2YSB for this opportunity. Also, I wish to thank all other IDT team members for their warm acceptance and sharing with me the extreme features of radio!



Now the Team composition: I2YSB Silvano, I2PJA Tony, IV3ZXQ Maurizio, IK2CKR Angelo, IK2HKT Stefano, IK2RZP Gino, I1FQH Franco e I1HJT Alfeo. Only Mac JA3USA was missing, because of family reasons.



We took off from Milano Linate on 11 November. After an overnight stopover in Paris we then landed in Bangui (the Capital City of CAR) on the following day. Finally, we got to the Monastery of Saint Assunta somewhat late, owing to a two-hour questioning by a lady, a zealous custom official.

At sunset we began an all-out effort to allow starting operations by the same evening.

The setting up of stations, a well-known procedure after years of experience, was the job of IK2HKT and I2PJA, while the others worked on setting up the first antennas for the low bands. At 20:59 UTC on 12 November TL8AA and TL8ZZ were on the air with their first CQ call. Early next morning, work on the remaining issues started again and by the evening all antennas were properly set up. We had 2 Spider Beams, 2 Xbeams, 2 Verticals for 40/80 mt, 1 vertical for 60m, 1 Delta Loop for 30m, 1 Vertical for 160m and 1 DHDL (RX-only) for the low bands. Later, we added a home-made 3-el Yagi for 50 MHz built with bamboo poles (see photo). We had 4 radio stations equipped with RTX Elecraft K3 + PA HAL 1200 Atlantic amplifiers, plus a fifth – partly used - backup station with Elecraft KX3 + KPA 500 amplifier.

Well before getting there, we were aware of power grid problems, but we could not imagine to what extent they could hit us. Power availability was intermittent, at unpredictable times and, most important, with a line voltage rarely above 180V (and even down to 150V, see photo). Given the situation we had to resort to the old generator powering the Monastery and the annexed Hospital. In spite of its 40 years of age, it still worked.

The problems then shifted to the fuel, in short supply across the whole country because of political-administrative reasons and available only at black-market and sky rocketing prices (2.40€/liter).

In addition, the generator had its own “bad moments”, giving up without warning and shutting off all



amplifiers under load without notice. As the saying goes “That’s Africa”.

Being used to face the unpredictable, and with a fancy of imagination, a wood stick was put in place to limit control of the throttle. Finally, this trick allowed a reasonable operation of the whole setup (generator and stations), but at a price tag which we leave up to you to compute. Our gasoline consumption was 55 liters/day!

In spite of all difficulties, we could enjoy some satisfactions: first and foremost, operating from a noise-free location on the higher bands, with our receivers at max gain which allowed us to work stations almost buried in the noise floor. Secondly, the possibility of switching operators at the stations without the need to modify the setups: all four stations were configured identical for max flexibility.

The lower bands did not perform as hoped, but our previous 2017 Expedition there had logged more than 2000 contacts on 160m and this time our focus was on the higher bands. We tried, of course, but this time the propagation did not cooperate

We had real – and pleasant – surprises during the night, with long-path openings to JA on 10, 12 and 15



meters at times of the day predicted to be almost impossible (around 23 UTC). USA stations were appearing from the first afternoon hours until deep in the night, from 10 to 30 meters. We worked unending streams of Europeans, irrespective of computed opening hours. On the other hand 40m, together with 60, 80 and 160m, suffered from scarce openings in few evenings, and bands were closes on others. Some QSOs were made on 80m SSB with EU, JA and USA, but scores were limited by band noise.

Of course, on FT8 the noise has lesser influence with respect to traditional modes. While operating often on FT8, we gave priority to CW and SSB, with a short RTTY stint during the last two days of activity. Nowadays, FT8 is certainly unavoidable, but in our opinion it must not be the main mode for any Dxpedition.

In the attached statistics the contacts are broken down by band and mode, plus some interesting data for JA and USA. Out of sheer parochialism, but understandably, we include also statistical data about Italians. We like to work them too!

The statistics report a limited activity on 6m. We spent hours calling, in vain, both on CW and FT8. We logged some EU stations, but all on FT8 and with negligible signals. We tried a few skeds on CW, but to no avail. We even built a 3-element Yagi replacing the 2-ele Xbeam but with null results. True enough, the 6m season was at its end, and this band was not really in our plans. And nothing beats a lack of propagation.

On the fourth day before the end I1FQH Franco left for home, leaving us to the task of beating our previous QSO record, achieved in Guinea in 2016 (3XY1T, in AF-051). At that moment we were short of



about 20,000 QSOs, making this goal still possible. When we closed operations, on 25 November at 11:39 UTC we made it, having amassed a grand total of 92,277 QSOs!

Operation: November 12, 2022 20:59 UTC - November 25, 2022 11:39 UTC, 13 days (303 hours total)
 Operators: I1FQH I1HJT I2PJA I2YSB (Team Leader) IK2CKR IK2HKT IK2RZP IV3ZXQ (8 operators)

QSOs:	Total QSOs	Uniques	Uniques %	QSOs/day	QSOs/hour
	92,277	21,682	23.5 %	7,317	305

per Band:	160m	80m	60m	40m	30m	20m	17m	15m	12m	10m	6m
	377	2,311	1,186	9,548	8,152	16,788	14,957	16,903	11,744	10,201	110

per Mode:	CW	Phone	Digital
	30,195	20,790	41,292

All in all, balancing the frustrations of March, the problems with the generator and the somewhat poor propagation of November (mostly during the second week) against satisfactions, we feel fulfilled.

The Team received a new boost with the “new one” Maurizio, a great operator. As usual, a flawless organization by Silvano. Stefano and Tony always perseverant in operating the two SSB stations, grinding through an impressive number of contacts (mainly during the first week). A great contribution by Angelo, Alfeo, Silvano and Gino who got back home with their ears still ringing from the CW pileups, and Franco who managed to control four (!) FT8 stations simultaneously, plus working the pileup on CW! All Team members did their best.



Was this the happy end? No, of course.

We had problems also during the return journey, the first one thanks to attentions of the zealous customs officer (yes, the lady, again) checking every detail of our luggage. Then a technical problem with the plane and the ensuing delay, resulting in a missed connection to our last leg from Paris to Milano.

OK, is this enough? No.

On arrival we discovered that we had lost the ticket for the parking lot where our car was sitting.

Anyway, on 27 November around 20 UTC we were, finally, home.



**TL8AA
TL8ZZ**
Central African Republic 2022
CQ Zone 36 - ITU Zone 47 - Loc. 1194QJ
QTH: BANGUI



Credits. We want give credit to the following people who made this DX-Expedition a real success:

JH1FAJF - IY1QI - IY1JT - IZ2UL - DM2BK - N9PSE - ZP1T - JA8UY - K7KB - K06DX - OZ1KZK - W0PE - W8RS - NSAW - K3GS
 JH1RES - IW1ARB - IZ1LEG - PB5X - IK4MTX - IK2UEC - IJ2CEY - HB9RAS - IZ2XAF - IW2NKY - IZ4IRO - IZ1UJA - JE2HCJ - IK0AGU
 IW2FND - IK9PM - IK2UME - W6GX - IZ0I - IZ2WQ - IK2UWR - IZ2UBV - IZ2OPT - K1JX K6ZP - W57L - FM2D - 9K2GR - HB9AU
 CT1FCX - W5Z - VE4EA - IK2UME - DL4DW - JA6GPR - 8P1KZK - IY1DB - K5BLU - AC0W - IW1AZP - W2PP - K7PI - NSAD - OH3PPY
 E0CH - HB9EN - K0PYG - W7H - W7OSG - DK2JW - JA1CTB - IK3UTT - IJ1GNA - IY1QIF - IY1COS - K1TTC - K1BIB - JA1FOI
 TF3DC - KSAX - DH7TG - JG1JPE - NORB - IK9RC - JA6CBG - J07WXN - G3ZGC - WAUM - IY9BTY - JA8AZN - IK1UGX - F4GVO - K9GT
 KJ1TEA - EA8ZS

We are particularly grateful to: Father Federico Trinchero for his help.

Software developer:
IH9GPI

QSL via **I2YSB**

E-mail:
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Confirming our QSO / your report					
To Radio	Date	UTC	MHz	2-Way	RSTdb

TEAM:

I1HJT Alfeo
 I1FQH Franco
 I2PJA Tony
 I2YSB Silvano
 IK2CKR Angelo
 IK2HKT Stefano
 IK2RZP Gino
 IV3ZXQ Maurizio

Sezioni ARI: Sanremo, Fidenza, Vigevano, Busto Arsizio, Magenta, Vercelli, Lamezia Terme, Asti, Valle del Liri, Albino, Lodi, Bergamo, Belluno, Arona, Casalecchio di Reno, Merano, Peschiera Borromeo, Casale Monferrato, Gorizia, Milano, Cernusco S/N, Novara, Val Susa - Alpignano, Settimo Milanese, Valbormida, Cremona, Como.










Where to, next? We do not know yet, but be reassured, we shall go somewhere ...