



It Seems to Us

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DXing: Fun or Frustration?

“DXing is one of the most alluring aspects of Amateur Radio. It is challenging, educational, and fun. But it can lead to frustration, even for non-participants.”

DXing, the quest to contact distant stations, is as old as Amateur Radio itself. In the late 1920s, the measure of a station and its operator was whether Worked All Continents had been achieved. In 1937 the ARRL introduced the DX Century Club, which has evolved greatly and remains by far the most popular yardstick for personal achievement in Amateur Radio. Currently there are 340 entities, mostly independent countries or geographically separate islands, on the DXCC List. Some of them are rarely on the air, so when they are — especially if the activation is by a DXpedition that may not be repeated for several years — it attracts a lot of attention on the HF bands. At times literally thousands of stations will be competing for the attention of one operator to get their call signs into the log. It's easy to see why the result is called a “pileup.”

In any big pileup there will be lots of beginning DXers and those with small stations who just want one QSO for an “all-time new one.” These days, though, one contact is not enough to satisfy a serious DXer. Standings in the DXCC Challenge are determined by adding up the number of current entities confirmed on 10 bands, 160 through 6 meters (60 meters excepted); there are also separate awards for each band and for phone, CW, and digital modes. Nor is the fact that they already have an entity confirmed on that band and mode enough reason to keep many DXers from joining a pileup, simply to enjoy the chase. Some DXpeditioners enjoy running up their QSO totals by encouraging everyone to work them on all available modes on every band — perhaps two dozen times.

Most of the time this is all good fun, particularly when the entity being chased isn't that rare and the stakes therefore are not too high. However, if the DXpedition is to a place that's difficult to get to or where operating permission is hard to come by the result can be intensely frustrating, not only for the operators who can't get through the pileup, but also for others whose normal operating is disrupted. Unfortunately, there are those among us who don't cope with frustration very well.

The recent FT4TA DXpedition to Tromelin Island in the Indian Ocean is a case in point. Tromelin had not been on the air in 14 years, so demand was high. The propagation paths from there to Europe, Japan, and North America are not particularly difficult and conditions were good. The resulting pileups were incredible; it's hard to imagine what the walls of noise must have sounded like at the other end. They had hardly abated even after 70,000 QSOs were in the FT4TA log.

Under these conditions it's essential for the DX station to transmit on one frequency and for those calling to keep that frequency clear and follow instructions, usually to transmit “up” the band a bit: so-called “split” operation. Sometimes the callers spread over a goodly chunk of our narrower bands, such as 17 and 12 meters. The vastly outnumbered operators on Tromelin worked hard to meet the demand and performed well under difficult cir-

cumstances. Regrettably, the same cannot be said of everyone in the audience.

It is in everyone's interest (including those who aren't interested in the DXpedition) that QSOs be made as quickly as possible. Efficiency requires discipline. Discipline means listening to the instructions of the DX operator and not transmitting except when invited. It means not ever making an unidentified transmission on the DXpedition frequency. It means not responding on the air when someone else does something stupid, deliberately or otherwise. There are a few among us who seem to delight in provoking negative reactions; don't reward them.

While some of the behavior during the FT4TA operation was pretty bad, that it occurred is far from unique and certainly not new. The reason for raising the subject now is that a DXpedition to an even rarer entity, Navassa Island in the Caribbean, is planned for the latter part of January. When Navassa was last on the air, the DXCC Challenge didn't exist, so demand for QSOs on all bands from all parts of the world will be extremely high.

Americans should be able to work Navassa with relative ease. Amateurs in other parts of the world will have a more difficult time. The Navassa operators will be looking for band openings to other areas and will need our cooperation, especially when they're listening specifically for stations outside the Americas. The fewer out-of-turn callers they have to cope with, the faster they can make contacts. Let's also exercise some restraint: if you don't need a contact on a particular band or mode, don't call.

Finally, a word to those who don't chase DX and may think all the commotion is a bit silly. Even the biggest, most sought-after DXpedition occupies just a small fraction of our spectrum resources for a limited time. Mounting a major DXpedition is an enormous undertaking involving months or years of preparation and backbreaking, potentially dangerous work on site. Simply getting to the location can be an adventure in itself. Tens of thousands of amateurs share in the adventure vicariously.

You benefit even if you don't participate. Continuing advances in equipment performance, antenna design, and our understanding of propagation are directly attributable to the quest for DX.

Competition at times may be fierce, but ultimately the shared experience strengthens the bonds within our global Amateur Radio community.

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