

DXpedition to Grayland and Cape Disappointment

June 10-16, 2005

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Receivers:

Winradio 303EP

Ten Tec HF-320

Motion 1400 Tablet Computer

Locations and Antennas:

June 10-11

Grayland Beach State Park
17'x65' Porta-KAZ

June 12

Grayland Motel
Various Beverages

June 13-16

Cape Disappointment State Park
17'x32' Porta-Flag

June is a wonderful month in America's Pacific Northwest. Until late in the month, local public schools are still in session and tourist season has yet to begin, the Northwest's famous rain has usually ceased for the summer months and the state parks and beaches of Washington and Oregon are both glorious and gloriously empty. My wife and I decided to take advantage of this happy circumstance and make a test run of our brand new mini-teardrop camping trailer and my new portable DXing rig. Now that our self-built second home is about complete out here, we have planned for over a year to begin traveling extensively throughout this beautiful area, largely camping at the wonderful state parks. Of course, I'll campaign for all of our trips to be to coastal sites!



Knowing that my room for DX equipment would be severely limited by our small trailer and car, I've spent the last year developing two portable single-turn loop antennas using 32-gage Teflon coated wire and flown from two masts created from inexpensive 20' telescoping fishing rods in PVC pipe holders. My favorite of the two is a 17' x 65' "Porta-KAZ" squashed delta loop, with the two fishing masts configured as an A frame and the KAZ antenna itself guying the A-frame from the front and back. Although the two antennas enclose the same area within the loop, early side-by-side tests in Oklahoma had shown the Porta-KAZ responded a bit better to low angle DX than did its cousin, the 17' x 32' Porta-Flag. As things turned out on this trip, I was able to fly the 17' x 65' Porta-KAZ at the extra-large campsite at Grayland Beach State Park, but the older, smaller campsites at Cape Disappointment restricted me to the 32'-long Porta-Flag. This eight-day shakedown cruise pretty well proved the value of these two antennas. I found that I could fly either one in about 20 leisurely minutes, by myself, and take either down and pack it away in even less time. In the Oklahoma tests, both antennas stood wind gusts in excess of 60 mph. The two antennas and all stakes, transformers, hardware, etc, pack in a single soft-sided briefcase. The two masts, in their holders, collapse to about 4' long by 2.5" and are carried on the roof rack of our small Toyota Matrix. In quiet coastal conditions during this trip, both antennas benefited significantly from the 15 or 20 dB boost supplied by a good low-noise RF preamplifier. I was able to test the *un-amplified* Porta-KAZ against our justly famous 550-foot West Beverage at the Grayland Motel on June 12. The

Beverage was clearly superior, but the un-amplified Porta-KAZ was still “surprisingly good” on both MW and the Tropical SWBC bands. Due to an equipment failure, I wasn’t able to A/B test the Porta-KAZ while using an RF pre-amp. I’ll be doing that in late July and expect that the performance of the Porta-KAZ will approach, but not equal the Beverage in a beach environment.

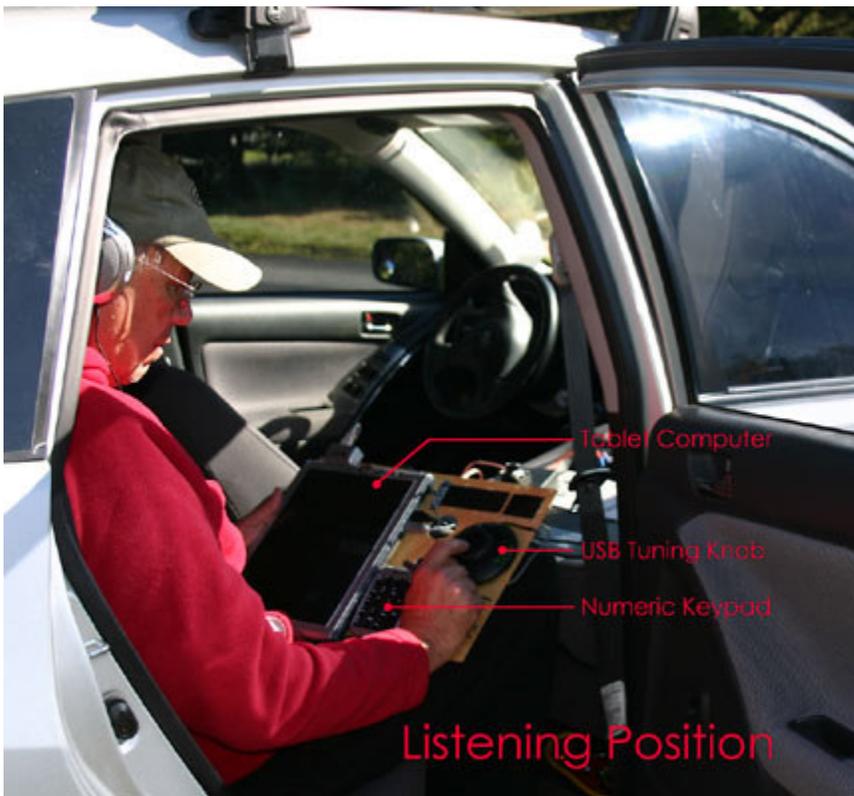


My receiver combination was also new for this shakedown cruise. Again, with an eye to minimizing physical dimensions, this Spring I’ve been working on briefcase-mounting my old #2 DXpedition receiver, a computer-controlled “black box” Ten Tec 320 along with a new WinRadio 303EP. The 303EP is WinRadio’s second-line receiver in a relatively new external, USB-connected package, with the “Professional” Demodulation software aboard. Inside the large, hard-sided briefcase, I was also able to mount a single two-port antenna splitter, a 12 VDC fuse panel, a variable-voltage regulator for one of the circuits, an outboard DSP audio filter and a 20 dB RF pre-amp. None of these 12-volt devices generate much appreciable heat, but as a precaution, I only use the rig with the lid of the briefcase wide-open. The two receivers are controlled by a Motion Computing M 1400 tablet computer running Microsoft’s Windows XP for Tablets software. Happily this middle-of-the-road portable computer had enough horsepower to run both receivers simultaneously, while also having Bruce Portzer’s incomparable PAL log open and taking hand-written notes on the tablet screen. The whole receiver lash-up worked pretty much as expected, though I lost the pre-amp to some sort of e-gremlin just before leaving home.

I hope to write a review of the WinRadio 303EP in the fairly near future. However, in the interim, I have to say that I cannot recommend the 303EP for DXing on MW or the more-crowded portions of shortwave. It’s an amazing, though some-what quirky, receiver and is probably more than adequate for many uses. However, MW

DXing, especially when trying to hear AND UNDERSTAND quite weak broadcast signals on 9 kHz. splits while in a 10 kHz. environment (or vice-versa), demands a receiver with excellent dynamic range; the WinRadio 303 has very pedestrian dynamic range figures. The conditions encountered in international medium wave DXing also put a premium on having an effective Notch Filter. Unfortunately, the 303 has none. I must say two other things, though:

1. The WinRadio 303EP came closer to meeting my needs for a portable high-performance radio, with minimum possible size, than any other receiver currently on the market and the lack of a Notch Filter can be partially compensated by using a DSP audio filter. It actually performed fairly well.
2. I eagerly await the introduction (rumored Summer 2005) of WinRadio's 313EP. The more expensive 313 receiver has been available as an internal model for some months and has proven to have much better dynamic range than the 303's. It also sports a very good Notch Filter that can be maneuvered graphically on the 313's active spectrum scope by using a mouse. I can hardly wait!



Finally, a word about the most uncontrollable element of any DXpedition: propagation conditions. Mid-June usually marks the beginning of our Northwest "Down-Under Season." When conditions are reasonably good, June DXpeditions in the past have yielded numerous Island, Kiwi and Aussie stations throughout our mutual darkness periods, with maximum dawn enhancement affording us a dial quite full of DUs, often focusing on Queensland for the last half-hour or so before band fade. Unfortunately, this 8-day DXpedition coincided with distinctly poor conditions for Trans-Pacific MW propagation. Although each night the reception was focused on a somewhat different Trans-Pacific area, almost all signals were similar to those heard at the last solar maximum.... mostly threshold levels, with a few stations randomly rising to intelligibility for five minutes or so

before sinking back into the muck. Signal identities "confirmed" by hearing parallel broadcasts simultaneously or hearing clear IDs of stations or even networks were lamentably rare. Indeed, conditions were so poor that I confined my listening most nights to the hour of maximum dawn enhancement.

All that taken into consideration, almost every morning provided at least one memorable logging. My two favorites were 675, 3YA in Christchurch, New Zealand, heard for the first time since my initial logging in 1990 and hearing 567, 4JK in fabled Julia Creek, Queensland for the very first time. All in all, I'd class this DXpedition as a success despite the modest loggings which follow; a success mostly as preparation for a blitz of DX/camping when the tourists once again disappear from the Northwest in the early Fall.

The Loggings

180 RUSSIA Radio Rossii, Yelizovo, FE , Jun 12 1155 - Heard here with RR talk at good level before TOH fade. Spotted first by Walt. (Bryant-WA~)

279 RUSSIA Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, FE , Jun 12 1205 - Presume local/regional programming on this channel, not // to R. Rossii on 180 kHz. Running Russian orchestral classics at good level. (Bryant-WA~)

558 FIJI Fiji B.C., Suva (pres.) , Jun 13 1229 - Probably this main FBC outlet running Polynesian ballads, uninterrupted. Fair level at max dawn. (Bryant-WA~)

567 AUSTRALIA 4JK, Julia Creek (pres.) , Jun 15 1231 - Heard this with a music show hosted by male announcer near max dawn. Assumed it was the usual 2YA, Wellington. Was surprised when the host mentioned Radio Australia several times. Presume that this was 4JK, as the other R.A. possibilities are HIGHLY unlikely. Will send recording and tentative report. (Bryant-WA~)

567 NEW ZEALAND 2YA, R. National, Wellington (pres.) , Jun 10 1210 - First noted at 1210, building to peak at 1230 max. dawn with pops/oldies show, including the Beach Boys'You Oughta See Me Now!' Presume this (is normally dominant here) rather than Aussie 4JK, due to propagation and mentions of New Zealand by male host. (Bryant-WA~)

612 AUSTRALIA 4QR, ABC MS, Brisbane (pres.) , Jun 10 1215 - Noted in passing as the only Aussie in audio on the 10th, with talk by Aussie-accented woman. Also noted at max. dawn on June 11. Heard well from Cape Disappointment on June 13 and 16. Indeed, 4QR was the most consistent TP signal throughout the eight-day DXpedition. (Bryant-WA~)

639 FIJI Fiji B.C., Lautoka , Jun 12 1205 - This heard with what seemed to be church services (late Sunday evening) in Polynesian language. Parallel to programming on 684, the FBC Labasa outlet. Both channels good at times. (Bryant-WA~)

648 AUSTRALIA 2NU, ABC RR, Tamworth (tent.) , Jun 13 1210 - Quiet ballads in EE noted here at poor level. Almost certainly this one. Not heard before by me. (Bryant-WA~)

675 NEW ZEALAND 3YA, National Radio, Christchurch , Jun 14 1228 - Program of quiet ballads and jazz vocals with proper time checks for New Zealand by an excellent male announcer. Good level. I think that this is only the second time that I have heard this far South Island station since my initial logging in 1990. Heard also on June 15. (Bryant-WA~)

684 FIJI Fiji B.C., Labasa , Jun 12 1207 - Noted here // 639 with probable church services in Fijian. Heard also on June 13 and 15 from Cape Disappointment in this time slot with the usual quite Polynesian ballads, uninterrupted. (Bryant-WA~)

702 AUSTRALIA 2BL ABC MS, Sydney , Jun 12 1045 - Noted here at poor level with Aussie talk by two men. Heard also at max dawn on June 13 and 15 from Cape Disappointment. (Bryant-WA~)

738 AUSTRALIA 2NR ABC RR, Grafton (pres.) , Jun 12 1130 - Presume this as the Aussie station heard here at fair level in place of Radio Tahiti. Heard also from Cape Disappointment on June 15. (Bryant-WA~)

738 TAHITI Radio Tahiti, Mahina , Jun 16 1212 - Pops show noted here at fair level. Hosted by male in FF. Noted also on June 12 from Grayland Motel, late in dawn enhancement at at band fade on June 16 from Cape Disappointment. (Bryant-WA~)

774 AUSTRALIA 3LO, ABC MS, Melbourne (pres.) , Jun 13 1154 - Threshold Aussie talk was all that was audible, but almost certainly this usually dominant Aussie. Heard at excellent level on June 15 from Cape Disappointment also. (Bryant-WA~)

774 JAPAN JOIB, NHK2, Sapporo , Jun 11 1109 - Noted here in passing at fair level with JJ talk by two men, building to excellent level by 1118. (Bryant-WA~)

783 NEW ZEALAND 2YB, Samoan Cap. Radio, Wellington (pres.), Jun 16 2326 - Presume this in apparent schedule change as program was clearly two men talking in Samoan. Good level at peaks. (Bryant-WA~)

828 AUSTRALIA 3GI ABC RR, Sale , Jun 11 1216 - Heard here with football coverage ('zero-zero at halftime.') Good level approaching max. dawn. Heard also at Cape Disappointment, June 16. (Bryant-WA~)

873 AUSTRALIA 2GB, Sydney , Jun 11 1218 - Noted in passing with their usual talk/phone-in program. Fair level. (Bryant-WA~)

891 AUSTRALIA 5AN Adelaide , Jun 11 1223 - Noted in passing with fair level. Aussie talk. This ABC station was rarely heard here in Washington in the 90s. Has been almost a pest for the past four or five years. ????. Heard also on June 15 and 16 at Cape Disappointment. (Bryant-WA~)

1008 NEW ZEALAND 1ZD, Radio Tauranga (pres.) , Jun 10 1123 - Presume this one here poorly with news/talk format in DU English. Propagation favored NZ strongly on June 10. (Bryant-WA~)

1098 NEW ZEALAND 3ZB Christchurch (tent.) , Jun 12 1220 - Tentative this with talk in EE at poor level during max dawn. (Bryant-WA~)

1116 AUSTRALIA 4BC, Brisbane , Jun 11 1155 - Aussies appeared suddenly at the beginning of dawn enhancement on this morning. 4BC, an 'old reliable' first noted at fair level, building to good by 1230. Also heard June 12 from Grayland Motel. (Bryant-WA~)

1125 NEW ZEALAND Radio Sport, Napier (pres.) , Jun 14 1247 - Presume this with DU talk about sports at poor level near band fade. Very tough copy. (Bryant-WA~)

1152 FIJI Fiji B.C., Rakiraki (presumed) , Jun 11 1159 - Presume this one (as it usually is) with continuous island pops music. No breaks, no TOH ID this late in their broadcast day. (Bryant-WA~)

1287 JAPAN JOHR, Sapporo , Jun 11 1117 - Noted with evening pops show at fair level. (Bryant-WA~)

1332 AUSTRALIA 4BU, Bundaberg (pres.) , Jun 11 1245 - Heard this last summer with the same Oldies format during this period. Station is directional to the North. 'My Girl' and a couple of other late Fifties favorites were heard as the band faded out just before TOH. Heard well, also at dawn from Grayland Motel on June 12. (Bryant-WA~)

1332 JAPAN JOSF, Tokai Radio, Nagoya , Jun 11 1122 - Heard here in JJ by male at just above threshold level. Very poor. (Bryant-WA~)

1386 NEW ZEALAND 1XOR, R. Tarana, Auckland , Jun 10 1228 - Threshold level talk by male, into much clearer Hindi music. Built to fair level. (Bryant-WA~)

1566 AUSTRALIA 3NE, Wangaratta , Jun 12 1258 - Clearly talk by Aussie male announcer at band fade. No sign of HLAZ. Will watch this closely in coming days. (Bryant-WA~)

1566 REP. OF (SOUTH) KOREA HLAZ, Cheju Isl. (pres.) , Jun 11 1135 - Presume this as is usual dominant. Noted at threshold level with East Asian language. (Bryant-WA~)