

OH2BH Looks Back at 60 Years in DXing

As a new ham at the age of 15, I admired contest heroes and leading DXpeditioners and desperately wanted to become one of them. Hungry to experience the world, I eventually qualified for world citizenship — along with my entire family. Now, at the age of 75, it's time for me to settle down and reminisce about my passion for amateur radio, which has spanned 60 years and turned into a true way of life.



Martti J. Laine, OH2BH/AH3D

With my fresh amateur radio license in hand, the possibilities seemed endless. I was fortunate to become part of a group of like-minded youngsters, the OH2AM team, who were keen to try out radiosport, which obviously involved being competitive, understanding and building large multi-operator station machinery. All of us progressed so fast, that before the age of 20, the OH2AM team of Kari Leino, OH2BC; Martti Laine, OH2BH; Arto Blomberg, OH2BQ; Markku Heinonen, OH2BS; Erkki Koskinen, OH2BW; Olli Rissanen, OH2BBM; Olavi Lehti, OH2BBR; Osmo Koskenniemi, OH2KH; Anssi Pekkanen, OH2QV, and Leif Eriksson, OH2SB, was ready to win world titles. Because of our desire for maximum learning and results, the original group has remained close to this day on all fronts of life.

Another long-term goal of mine was to work all 340 DXCC countries. It took 17 years, and though I was happy for the increased geographical and political knowledge that working DX can bring, I yearned for some type of renewal of my passion for the hobby.

Early Adventures in Being the DX

I turned my focus to becoming the provider of the DX. With this new approach, my target countries became increasingly rare and further off the beaten track. New cultures and challenges changed my original value set and became a guiding light toward becoming a citizen of the world and feeling at home wherever I hang my hat.

My first real adventure, in 1971, was to Annobon Island (3CØ) out in the Atlantic, with my lifelong friend Ville, OH2MM. We landed in a dense hay field in a small Cessna four-seater, greeted by 1,200 people who had never seen anyone that looked like us. They were soon clearing the field so we would be able to take off and get back to the mainland. The president of Equatorial Guinea, who had signed our operating permission for Annobon, had just sacrificed two missionary workers in

South Sandwich Islands, VP8SSI, March 1992. When spending a week in this type of extreme environment, the experience brings people together as they share something very unique indeed — including their thousands of new penguin friends. Standing: John, W7KNT. Kneeling, from left to right: Dave, KJ9I; Martti, OH2BH, and Ralph, KØIR.

the midst of celebrating their new independence. The experience was horrific, yet eye-opening.

Soon after that, the mysterious dictatorship in Albania (ZA) was on everyone's lips, and the trio of Eric, OH2BW; Ville, OH2MM, and I arrived as some of the first westerners there. We got on the air as OH2BH/ZA with what turned out to be a very special permit, given privately by the Ministry of Communication. Our "guide" was the daughter of the Vice-Minister. Her burning interest in the west, from the perspective of a then-isolated country, made her father bless our advanced operations. The world is small indeed as today, decades later, that then young lady, Liliana Verdha, is the current Consul General of Albania to my country, Finland.

Establishing amateur radio in Albania with the ZA1A activity was followed by an extensive training program at the Technical University of Tirana, in Albania's capital. The fact that amateur radio has set up a presence in Albania is a testament to those early experiences and established relationships.

Goodwill Pays Off

Following these early adventures, the ultimate payback was when the well-known DXpeditioner Lloyd Colvin, W6KG (SK), approached me in 1975 and invited me onto the Yasme Foundation board. The Foundation (yasme.org) takes a broader look at amateur radio and its future in the international context, and helps when financial or expert support is needed.

Another interesting 10-year journey (2008-2018) is the story of how the Republic of Kosovo entered the amateur radio scene with their own IARU society (Z60A) and DXCC status, resulting in the current DXCC total of 340 entities. Many Albanians live in Kosovo, and it so happened that the key telecom person from our ZA1A project in Albania, Frederick Kote, headed Kosovo's telecom agency and guided us to another successful project in Kosovo as well.



The OH2AM group was a powerhouse in the 1960s after winning the world title in CQ World Wide. Standing, from left to right: Martti, OH2BH; Olli Rissanen, OH2BBM; Olavi Lehti, OH2BBR (SK); Anssi Pekkanen, OH2QV, and Markku Heinonen, OH2BS. Center: Arto Blomberg, OH2BQ (SK). Front row from left to right: Leif Eriksson, OH2SB (SK); Kari Leino, OH2BC; Osmo Koskeniemi, OH2KH. Missing from the photo is Erkki Koskinen, OH2BW.

With these and other adventures the world became smaller, providing many interesting opportunities in both professional life and amateur radio. Soon, I started feeling more at home on the narrowest of roads. My entire family lived life this way, happy out in the big, wide world. Our homes have been on several continents over the years, in California, Hong Kong, Macau, Beijing, the Madeira Islands, Canary Islands, the Azores, and indeed today in Albania as well. Many of them happen to also be interesting radio locations.



Members of the Amateur Radio Society of Kosovo, Z60A, ready for the IARU Radiosport Championship, together with newly licensed amateurs as well as instructors from overseas.

DX “Missionaries” on Temotu

In California, I had the pleasure to get to know many leading figures in amateur radio, including Jim Maxwell, W6CF (SK). I spent hours in his DX library in the mountains above Santa Cruz. Jim taught me that DXCC countries are constantly moving targets. The world is subject to conflicts and change — even the solid DXCC criteria required distances may change due to the shifting of tectonic plates.

I often spent my time in the Fresno State University Library map room measuring the distance between islands and land masses, desperately looking for the treasure that W6CF suggested I search for — a new DXCC entity. And how sad it was, for example, that the distance between the Solomon Islands main group (H44) and the Temotu Province (H40) was only 4 miles short of qualifying as another DXCC entity. So near, yet so far!

But as Jim had suggested everything can be challenged — maybe even the World War II sea charts. Soon we were on the lookout with Kan-san, JA1BK, for a Japanese satellite to measure the actual distance to Temotu. We found one, and bingo! Temotu easily met the distance rule, and the sea charts were proven wrong.

In no time at all we were out on the Solomon Islands negotiating the license and arranging for transport to Temotu. It was harsh on Temotu, with a lot of malaria, few facilities, and limited hours of electricity serving only the main village of Lata. The islanders were very hospitable and friendly, but we seemed to be running their village dry on supplies. We felt we could not leave them like that.

One of our stations on Temotu was operating from the house of a New Zealand missionary, Dr. Ashley Wilson. We decided to offer a special QSL option, postmarked and mailed from Lata by Dr. Wilson, in exchange for donations toward basic necessities for this remote island, as payback for their hospitality. We also volunteered to donate all surplus funds received with QSL cards.

The donations from the special QSL option included a large check of 20,000 USD, which had us all in tears! It was a personal donation from Lee Shaklee, W6BH (SK), of Los Angeles. On my next visit to LA, I visited Lee to thank him for his support for the Temotu people. I also learned more about the reasons for his generosity.



This large, happy family welcomed Martti, OH2BH, and Leena, OH2BE, into their home along the main street in the village of Lata in Temotu.

As a fighter pilot in World War II, Lee had been shot down over the Temotu jungles and crash-landed there. He had been in the hands of the Temotu locals for a long time. His donation was his personal way of giving back to those caring and hospitable people. The donations for the people of Temotu were used to set up a radio network for the teachers who travel by canoe to fulfill their teaching duties on various islands. The funds also purchased a solid sun cover for the market of Lata, and even brought the first bicycles to the island. This was “DX missionary work” at its best!

A Hop to Asian Adventures

While I was working from Hong Kong and Beijing, several equally exciting discoveries and new DXCC activations, such as Scarborough Reef (BS7) and



Martti, OH2BH, and Ville, OH2MM, endured scorching sun and extreme heat putting South Sudan on the air as ST2FF/ST0 in 1980 — the first time the entity was counted for DXCC. It counted again in 2013, when Z81X went on the air.



Activating 12 never-before-heard entities takes a lifetime of effort. In this case, that effort spanned 50 years, from 1969 to 2019. Claiming DXCC status for a new entity often takes a complicated, challenging effort, while organizing an efficient first activation requires an international approach.

A World of Thanks

Making and activating 12 new DXCC entities requires support and encouragement from many lifelong partners, so I must extend thanks to my family — my wife Leena, OH2BE; my son Petri, OH2NB, and my daughter Petrita.

Thanks also to fellow DXers and travel companions such as Perti, OG2M; Juha, OH8NC; Kan JA1BK; Chip, K7JA; Tim, N4GN; Wayne, N7NG, and Bernie, W3UR.

Pratas Island (BV9) were organized to these militarily sensitive islands in the South China Sea. Dealing with the military and flying into targeted destinations on their C-130s is typically the best and safest way to make these trips of a lifetime. Even mysterious North Korea (P5) was brought into DXCC with multiple visits and small-scale operations.

All in all, these efforts have included 12 new DXCC country activations, as well as activating 207 radio call signs from 107 DXCC countries — and lots of excitement at both ends of the radio circuit. You can read some of these stories in my book *Where Do We Go Next?* Which is downloadable for free at www.ncdxf.org/pages/oh2bh.html.

During these years in Asia, my wife Leena, OH2BE, often accompanied me on my travels. She shared her thoughts on how one could simply keep travelling and producing one radio performance after another, using the same script and always generating lots of smiles. Though that practice became my way of life, I believe producing rare and exciting radio contacts is much more than a performance. Radio is all two-way, when you talk to each and every person in the “audience,” and hear their excitement.

Continuous Evolution — People and Radio

More recently, amateur radio is going through changes due to evolution and new technologies. The two-way wireless radio is part of everyone’s life. It was a magical day for me when I discovered that learning from the next generation of hams was my doorway into the future. Learning from the youth required listening —

the very same thing I was taught to do patiently when I began DXing 60 years earlier.

So, supporting young talent became my latest endeavor. Along with many initiatives, the formation of a youth-led group and talent that put me on a new journey, in the form of Radio Arcala, (OH8X/CR2X), out of Finland and the Azores. Radio Arcala has invented a variety of advanced concepts out of the latest technology and made them work for amateur radio and society at large. Just like in the 1960s, we have used competitive amateur radio as the spearhead for connecting people and technology.

Turning traditional transmissions into the latest digital ones, such as FT8, has been mind-boggling. These ongoing technological advances can give us all a new beginning and extended continuity if we embrace them, instead of being stuck on just one concept or activity. Ham radio requires passion and dedication, and it also has certain kind of magical flame that’s needed to burn strong through the ages in a changing and evolving world. What a fun journey it has been for me to keep that flame alive for 60 years.

Martti Laine, OH2BH, is a retired telecom executive who was part of the global digital mobile telephony rollout in many countries on multiple continents. In that position he was able to unlock doors for Amateur Radio in many rare entities. Now at the age of 75 he is back home from the world’s hotspots and has become just another signal stream on your radio’s waterfall.

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