

DXing in South Sinai

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Sometimes in October I appreciated that my wife had decided, browsing through a catalogue of a travel agency, that we could spend our holidays in Egypt again, however, now in another destination, Sharm El-Sheikh on the Sinai peninsula.

This holiday resort is situated almost on the top of the peninsula, between the Suez and Aqaba gulfs. I was interested, above all, in reception on medium waves, more precisely, I hoped to catch broadcasting from some emirates such as Ras Al Khaimah, Sharjah, Umm Al Quwain and other attractive locations that cannot be available in Central Europe. Thus I took with me my "Globetrotters" Sony ICF-2010 and about 15 meters of a thin wire as an external antenna if there would be a chance to install it.

Against to my expectations, the DX adventure began already on the Prague airport. This receiver, due to its size and design, is rather unusual in a luggage of any holidaymaker who travels to enjoy sun and warm sea. Therefore the officer, operating the X-ray device, demurred at the contents of my luggage. "What is it?" asked me. "Radio receiver" I replied. "Rather unusual receiver, I know, but only receiver. Nothing more, nothing less" I explained. I had to take the receiver out of the luggage and he obviously saw such sophisticated type with many buttons for the first time. Then I had to explain him why I took just such receiver with me and give him a very brief lecture on DXing. He stared at me like at an apparition and then he only noted resignedly: "If you were not Czech..."

On the site itself it was possible to stretch the antenna from a small tree and across the terrace, some 5 meters only. Naturally, it was unusable on the FM range, apropos, this band disappointed me at this time. I could only hear some 6 Arabic speaking stations on 10 frequencies, no doubts broadcasting from Egypt or Saudi Arabia which could be seen across the Aqaba Gulf, I guess in a distance of about 20 kilometres. I did not even try to find which stations they were. The direction towards Israel was blocked by high mountains spreading along the whole coast so that I only concentrated on medium waves and marginally to the 60-meter band.

On short waves I could hear, besides strong signals from Sudan on 7200, also Indian and African stations in the 60 mb and strong stations on 4648.2 and 4024.5 reporting groups of 5 letters, very probably Israeli Mossad. On long waves I tried to catch some NDB's, however, I heard only one, "AQ" on 405 kHz.

On the contrary, listening on medium waves was a big adventure. Ten days were too little to explore this band thoroughly. Moreover, I decided to leave my antenna preselector at home (who knows how it would pass the check on the airport). Because such device is vitally important for such receiver, in many cases the external antenna showed to be detrimental to the listening and the built-in ferrite antenna was giving better results. I have also verified how the reception conditions vary in such latitude, where changes were much faster and thoroughly than in our regions. Reception conditions varied not only from hour to hour, but also from minute to minute, especially during sunrise (0540-0610) and sunset (1645-1705 local time) periods.

In general, the MW band was crowded with Arabic speaking stations from Near & Middle East – almost all frequencies from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan and Israel. As for European stations, I heard Cyprus on more frequencies, Albania (1395), Italy, Vatican (1611) and Rhodos (1494).

I was very pleased to listen to good signals of Radio Lebanon (837) and Voice of Lebanon (873), Ras Al Khaimah (1152) and R. Farhang and R. Sarasaye from Iran. Also very strong signals of Galei Zahal on all its frequencies, but also unbeatable quality

signals of Radio Sawa on 1548 from Kuwait and 1260 from Rhodos with different programmes (more English pop music on 1260 than on 1548). In certain times (news on hour) both programmes were the same, however, the signal on 1260 was few tenths of second delayed.

I laid vain traps for R. Sharjah on 1575, where I heard only a weak signal of a mystery station from Russia. After few days I disclosed the mystery – it was a multilingual programme REQA for immigrants of Israeli Radio. On some frequencies I recorded comic situation that I could not experience at home. For example, when I wanted to listen to R. Lebanon on 837, I had to note: "Oh, damned Asmara again." This frequency was also occupied by Radio Asmara from Ethiopia that often pushed out Radio Lebanon and dominated on this frequency and became ordinary everyday station. Another morning I recorded: "Damn, what happened? Radio Lebanon goes 55555!"

But one mystery station on 873 remained undisclosed. I heard it quite often, sometimes with poor signal, sometimes 45544. In my opinion it was Radio Damascus although it is not mentioned on this frequency, because I could hear several times its clear identification "This is Damascus, Radio Damascus" in English or Arabic sounding like "Idha'atu sabah min dimashq" that did not give any other explanation.

On 1566 I tried many times reception of AIR Nagpur that I could hear in quite good quality three years ago in Hurghada, but I heard only a transmitter from Iran. I had bad luck when I heard quite well Azerbaijan on 1539 on the first day. "OK," I thought, "I would make a good reception report some day later to get a QSL for new verified radio country". My mistake, I have never heard it since...

Therefore my best catch was a station on 1575, where after several days of my obstinate waiting for R. Sharjah I found that if I turned the built-in ferrite antenna into a certain direction, besides the above mentioned Israeli REQA I could hear also something different, probably from SE Asia, according to the heard programme. Finally I discovered that it was Ayutthaya from Thailand with its 1000 kW.

I regretted that I left the antenna preselector at home, it would have been very helpful to get from the outdoor antenna much better results. But on the other hand, it would have not been any family holiday but regular DX expedition. So perhaps some other time and somewhere else.