

## **DXing in Gambia**

At the very beginning of this year, more precisely on January 10, I visited this one of the poorest (West) African country for 11 days to spend there my holidays. My QTH was about 15 km from Banjul (former name Bathurst), in the Palm Beach Hotel. Naturally, I did not forget to take my Sony ICF-2010 with me, together with 15 meters of a thin wire as an outdoor antenna and photocopies of selected pages of WRTH 2003.

The sunrise was coming shortly before 0700 (local time = UTC) and the sunset 12 hours later. I had no chance to use my outdoor antenna due to strong local interference probably coming from many energy saving lamps in the hotel garden. Therefore I had to be satisfied with the built-in ferrite and telescopic rod only.

As verified by many observations in similar latitudes, medium waves return to life shortly after the sunset. During daylight I could listen only to local Gambian Radio (GRTS) on 648 kHz (//98.6 MHz), the transmitter on 747 kHz was not heard at the coast. Radio Syd is off air for a long time due to heavy damages on the station building, of which part fell down together with a part of the sea coast after a strong storm (it was built too close to the sea). After 1900 there appeared more and more stations on MW and at about 2200 I could heard almost all "Spanish" frequencies (25!) including stations from Canary Islands (720, 1269), also stations from the neighbouring Mauretania (783), Northern Africa (TUN 630, MRC 612 & 711, LBY 1251, ALG 891 & 1550 and Middle East (ARS 1512 & 1521). I was pleased to catch also other European stations (MKD 810, I 1332, DLF 1422, LUX 1440, CVA 1530 and F 1377, 1467, and 1557. To my disappointment, I have not heard any station from North America.

I explored short waves in the 120-90-60 & 49 mb only, however, the results were very interesting. I considered quite fair reception of some African countries (MTN 4845, MLI 4783.5//4835//5995, UGA 4915, BEN 5025 or GUI 7125) as expected. The biggest pleasure I had when I could receive good signals of R. UNAMSIL on 6139.1 kHz. After 2200 the 60 mb was occupied by many frequencies of Brazilian stations every day. As the indicator of coming reception conditions towards Brazil there was R. Clube do Pará on 4885, shortly after this station I could count minimum 10 other Brazilian stations on various frequencies in this band. Interesting was that I have not heard any station from any other Central & South American country except RHC (6030). Two stations were heard in the 120 mb (NIG 3326, GHA 3366) and one in the 90 mb (F 3965).

FM reception was also very interesting. Except the above mentioned GRTS (98.6) I could receive some other Gambian stations such as RFI Afrique (89.0), Sud R. (92.1), City Limits Radio (93.6), West Coast radio (95.3) and R. 1 FM (102.1). I have also recorded many stations from Senegal (transmitters in Ziguinchor, Kaolack and even in Dakar). The total number of occupied frequencies stopped on 24.

One day I took a very cheap taxi to visit GRTS in Serrekunda, on half way to Banjul. It was rather an adventure to find the premises, though WRTH gives

quite detailed location Kairaba Avenue, which is the main street. When I showed the GRTS address on a photocopied WRTH page to the taxi driver, he took me to a small dirty and dusty yard, which was full of old damaged cars. Although there was a small information panel at the entrance saying that there is Gambia Radio and Television Service inside, I still did not see anything looking like RTV object except an approximately 60 m high mast with vertical dipoles. There was only a two-storey building with a terrible car repair shop. The porter told me that in the first floor I could find rooms of Gambia Television. Indeed! I entered an old and very dirty corridor with many not less dirty doors on both sides and knocked the first one. I had good luck because it was an office of Mr. Sheikh Edrisa Bahoum, the GRTS Senior Engineer, who was very friendly and willing to show me all rooms and equipment of the state television. I could sit down to the chair of the news speaker and see with my own eyes all the coulisses, which I could see every evening on the TV set in our hotel room. He said that there are completely new studios in Banjul, however, these are not fully equipped yet because of continuing lack of money and nobody knows when the TV staff can move to these new premises.

After this rather shocking experience I asked the taxi driver to go to the radio studios, which were situated somewhere in Banjul (Mr. Bahoum told me that it is "7 Mile Studios", somewhere on the periphery of Banjul). The poor taxi driver had to ask many people to show him the way and finally, after many kilometres on dusty roads in the bushland we found a large clearing with a low building and a small mast with some antennas. The soldier in the entrance booth let us go inside without any problems and I had good luck again, the first door where I knocked were an office of Mr. Famara Dampha, Radio Engineer. I explained him in short what is DXing, my hobby and he allowed me to see their simple equipment. The same experience as in the TV studio - an incredible mess in all rooms, it's a miracle that the people there are able to produce radio programmes...

The pity is that GRTS does not transmit on short waves and all that are interested to receive a QSL from Gambia must go this part of Africa personally as there is no other chance to catch any broadcasting from this country.

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