

Contesting from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia — ET3AA

Over the past 2 years my job has taken me on a number of trips to Africa, in particular the central and eastern region. Air travel in Africa can be an experience, leaving those who have been there with some interesting stories. I got my first taste of it in 1984, when I was fresh out of school. In the summer of 2011 and with no other volunteers in our office, I was asked if I would be interested in going to Bangui, Central African Republic, in support of a project requested by the US ambassador. I figured, Why not? — although the situation in country had been in decline for some time. The US State Department classified it as a Danger Pay post. The extra money is nice, as long as you don't earn it the hard way. With that, I began to look at options for flying to Bangui.

One of biggest and most reliable air carriers in Africa is Ethiopian Airlines. They have a very extensive route network and modern flight, including four new Boeing 787s. In December 2011 Ethiopian Airlines joined the Star Alliance, making connections from United Airlines and Lufthansa even easier. While air travel is the primary reason for traveling through Addis Ababa, it did open up another opportunity that turned into a valued partnership and established friendships that will last a lifetime.

Sid

Sid May, ET3SID, the trustee of the

About Those US Call Signs...

The Ethiopian government will not issue licenses to the students. A license in Ethiopia is tied to a specific transceiver make/model/serial number. So, we provided three of the students with used radios, so they could make an application. The applications are still pending. K3LP's VE group administered the US license exams; the idea was for them to have an Amateur Radio license — and maybe it would help with their ET license applications. It's a shame that these enthusiastic students, and citizens, cannot obtain individual licenses from their own government, while foreign residents have had some success. — Ken Claerbout, K4ZW

Ethiopian Amateur Radio Society (EARS), was a driving force behind ET3AA and its establishment at the Addis Ababa University, Institute of Technology. What he did for Amateur Radio in Ethiopia, EARS, and the students involved in the club cannot be understated. To many of the students, he was like a second father. Most of my stops in Addis Ababa are overnight layovers, but on occasion, I've had two or three days over a weekend, while in transit between posts. Eventually I was able to hook up with Sid and pay the club a visit during one of my trips. The welcome could not have been more enthusiastic, and it was clear to see that these engineering students had a real interest in Amateur Radio. Sadly, Sid passed away in September 2012. But the students he mentored stepped right in to make sure his legacy continued.

Getting Contest Attitude

Somewhere along the line I suggested that we do a contest from ET3AA. I explained contesting to the club members,

and they immediately said, "Yes!" The idea of competing as a team on the radio was very appealing to them. A June business visit to Nouakchott, Mauritania, gave me an opportunity to take a side trip, personally funded, across the continent to Addis, so that we could discuss the contest and prepare for it the following month.

After rearranging the station so that it was more operator friendly, we installed *WriteLog* on the PC and configured the sound card to be used as a voice keyer. Each student was able to log into *WriteLog* and record their own SSB messages. Excitement was high, with prospective contester boldly proclaiming, "We will win!"

I loved the attitude, but I also had to set expectations, explaining that as a Headquarters station we would be competing against many multi-transmitter stations, some in more geographically advantageous locations. We were just one transmitter with a handful of novice contesters. I returned home, looking forward to coming back in a few weeks for the contest.



Ken, K4ZW, Getu, KB3WWU, and Temesgen, KB3WV, working on the Butternut HF-2V vertical [K4ZW photo]

The Fun Begins

The contest started on Saturday at 3 PM local. I arrived on Friday night, so we all met at the station Saturday morning. I brought along a Butternut HF-2V for 40 and 80 meters. The first order of business was to get that installed before sunset. Since the IARU is only 24 hours, we would

have only one crack at the low bands. We encountered problems tuning the vertical on 80 meters, so, finally, with one hour to go before the start of the contest, we went inside to fire up the rig and computer. The plan was that I would start the contest, so that they could get an idea of how this worked. After the first 30 minutes I turned

the operating chair over to one of the students and went back outside to work on the vertical. Eventually I was able to get things squared away.

I've found 15 meters to be one of the most productive bands when I operate during visits, and it was the same for the contest. Ten meters opened slightly, but the SWR on the beam was high, and the solid-state amp didn't like that, so we had to run barefoot on that band. After we got settled in, I sent one of the kids out for burgers, pizza, and drinks. After all what is a multi-operator contest without some contest food!

Around 7:30 PM we were told by the university guards that they were locking the doors, and we either had to leave or spend the evening. I would like to have stayed, especially to test out the Butternut vertical, but I was beat from the trip over the night before and all the outside prep work. So, I caved in and went back to the hotel, where I had my nice shower and comfortable bed.

Dagi, KB3WWY (see sidebar, "About Those US Call Signs..."), stopped by the hotel Sunday morning to pick me up in a taxi on her way to the university. The night crew did a good job staffing the station, but for some unknown reason, they did not make any QSOs on the low bands. Chalk it up to inexperience. The extra multipliers would have been nice. The high bands were off and running again, and even 10 meters was showing some signs of life. But, it was a big disadvantage not being able to use the amplifier. I did find out later the beam is fed with 75 Ω coax, which also appeared to be contaminated. That would have to be replaced. All of students who showed up over the weekend had a chance to operate at least once. They all



Antennas at ET3AA, featuring the large log periodic beam [K4ZW photo]



(L-R) Haile, AB3OX; Tsegaye, KB3WWJ; Adula, KB3WXC, and Ken, K4ZW [K4ZW photo]

ET3AA IARU HQ Score Summary

Call: ET3AA
 Operator(s): K4ZW, KB3WWU,
 KB3WVV, KB3WWY, KB3WWJ, AB3OX,
 KB3WXC
 Station: ET3AA
 Class: Headquarters HP
 QTH: ETHIOPIA
 Operating Time (hrs): 24

Band	CW	SSB	Zones	HQ Mults
160	0	0	0	0
80	0	0	0	0
40	0	0	0	0
20	0	154	20	29
15	0	585	30	26
10	0	10	4	6
Totals	0	749	54	61

Score = 383,985



Dagi, KB3WWY, at the mic, and Temesgen, KB3WVV [K4ZW photo]

did a very nice job, some a little more comfortable operating than others. I stressed the importance of getting the call sign and report correct and making sure it was properly logged. Thankfully the pileups were manageable for the most part, and those

calling understood these were operators with limited experience.

Contest Proud

When the final bell sounded, the group had logged 749 contacts for a final score of 383,985. While that may not seem very big, that is likely the most QSOs this group has ever made in a 24 hour period. They were rightfully proud of their effort and proud to represent the Ethiopian Amateur Radio Society in the IARU contest.

Knowing that I would not be in Addis Ababa for the CQ World Wide DX phone contest in October, I encouraged the students to put together a team for the biggest SSB DX event of the year. They would be a great double multiplier for many contesters (ET and zone 37). In the weeks leading up to CQ WW, the students replaced the bad coax to the beam, but they encountered a problem that left the antenna unusable. I didn't hear anything further and was afraid they would not be on the air for the contest. Sunday during the CQ WW SSB, I received an e-mail from Getu, KB3WWU, which made my day.

Hi Ken, How is your contest going? We are back to operation after completing things about replacing the antenna coax.

And we are participating from zone 37 and Africa.

They did a really nice job of diagnosing the problem and correcting it. Just the skills a young aspiring engineer needs.

Sid's Legacy

We have all experienced the thrills associated with Amateur Radio. I've had the good fortune to do well in major contests, to work rare DX on some difficult bands, and to be a part of other memorable moments. Working with this fine bunch of students and seeing their enthusiasm ranks right up there with anything I've done. I know they appreciate the support, but as I told them, they are also an inspiration to me, and I get just as much out of the relationship as they do.

The club will certainly face challenges as students come and go. But, Sid left a great legacy that we will do our best to carry on. Last, I would be remiss if I didn't thank the individuals, organizations, and equipment manufacturers that have supported this effort or pledged support as we try to get individual licenses for the students. The hope is that someday they will be able to have a station of their own. It's still a work in progress.