

# 9L5A Sierra Leone 2024 DXpedition



F6KOP radioclub of Provins (France) had already organized a DXpedition to Sierra Leone (Banana Island) in 2019 with the callsign 9LY1JM.

With limited human and material resources, we made 50.000 QSOs.

No big expedition have taken place in Sierra Leone for 5 years and the DXCC country is at the 77th place on Club Log most wanted list.

So we decide to go back there.

The team is composed of 15 operators, most of whom are regulars. However we wanted to give a chance this year to a few new operators who had never left with F6KOP or who had never done a group expedition. 9L5A team is composed as follows: F2DX (CW and leader), HB9GWJ (SSB and leader), F1ULQ (SSB), F1DHX (SSB/RTTY), F4AZF (SSB), F4FET (SSB/RTTY), F4HAU (SSB), F4HHL (SSB), F4HRG (SSB/RTTY), F5AGB (CW), F5NTZ (CW), F8AAN (CW), F8EFU (CW), F8GGV (CW) and ON7RN (CW).



Our equipment is prepared, tested and weighed at F6KOP over several weeks.

This work of major importance is managed by operators but also by a few members of the radioclub who don't even go on expedition but who undoubtedly contribute to the success of our expedition.



Each participant receives a document of around thirty pages constantly updated by F2DX. Everyone therefore has the same information down to the smallest details and also commits by signing a convention.

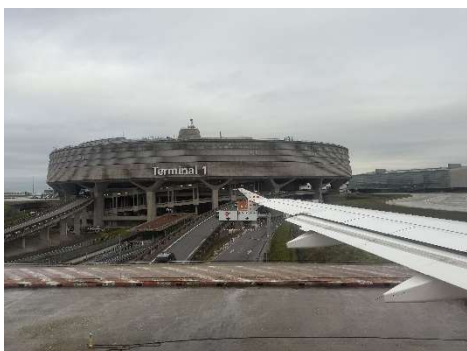
On the evening of November 26, 2024 we all meet in a hotel in Roissy as departure takes place early the next morning. This is the opportunity to know each other for some and to have a nice evening together. We are already in the mindset of the expedition.



On November 27 before sunrise we all are at Charles-de-Gaulle airport (Paris) where F5PBM and F5GSJ join us to bring the expedition equipments. Everything has been prepared for a long time and everyone knows exactly what luggage he has to take during the outward and return journeys. We take 30 checked luggages including 4 oversized bags for the masts and antennas. The transceivers, ACOM 500s amps and PC are with us in the cabin.



This is the first time we are traveling with Brussels Airline but we will not keep good memories of it. The check-in is very long and poorly organized. Some additional baggages are not listed on their documents (even though they have been paid) and we have to pay again.



On the top of that some baggages are simply refused for a excess weight of 1 kg (while others weight significantly less than the regulatory 23 kg). We have the feeling that even for a group of 15 people having paid a nice bill everything is done to charge us supplements.

It should also be noted that cabin baggage is limited to 8 kg (instead of the usual 12 kg) which forced us to review the packaging of sensitive equipments.

On November 27 at 8:15 PM we landed at Freetown airport after having transited via Brussels and Conakry (Guinea). Baggage claim is slow and we get out from the airport only 2 hours later. Fortunately everything was planned and organized by our host "Zuzu" and our police escort awaits us patiently.

However, as our flight was delayed by 2 hours by Brussels Airline, it is impossible to take the last ferry which would have saved us long hours of driving and we have to take the longest route by night.



With our 45 luggages and around twenty people, our bus is full to bursting. The atmosphere is good, especially as "Zuzu" and the escort sing very lively welcome songs.

We look forward to joining our hotel but that's without counting on an aging clutch which decides die in the middle of nowhere. Local people are magicians; they achieve to repair with nothing and an hour and a half later we resumed the road.



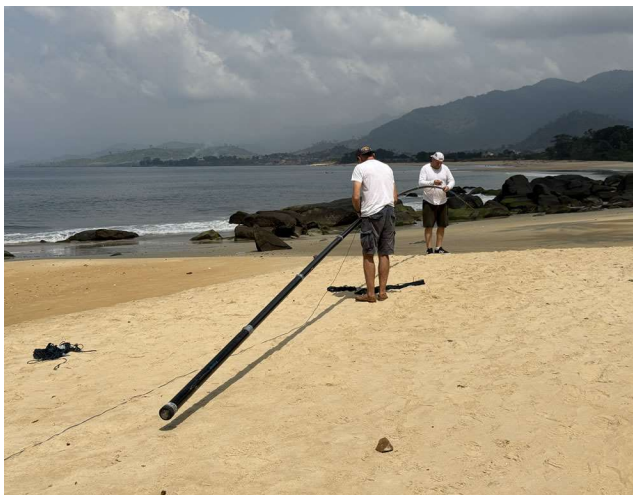
We arrive at our hotel at 04:00. Lumthubul Gardens staff is still up to serve us a hearty meal. We will even push the vice so far as to do the briefing which was initially planned the next day and we go to bed at 05:00.



Despite a very short night we planned to install everything during the day of November 28 starting with our 10.5 kVA diesel generator for which we first drain and change the filters, before pulling 2 large-gauge power lines to the stations.



The hotel is flooded in the vegetation and the tide is important which limits a bit the installation of our antennas. At 9:00 PM the equipments are operational except for a few antennas (which will be mounted the next day) and we begin to operate. We have 6 stations all equipped with ACOM 1010 or 500s amplifiers (kindly loaned by ACOM and the French company PROSIC). The pile-ups are huge and quickly make us forget about fatigue.



We have planned to balance the traffic and prioritize as much as possible the "human" modes even if it means making fewer QSOs. It is in fact inconceivable to have such an amount of operators and let our stations run automatic FT8 while we would enjoy the beach and long nights of sleep. We are here to please ourselves but also to satisfy as many people as possible especially in classic modes such as CW, SSB and RTTY.

One of our 6 stations is reserved for 6m during the day and 60m at night. These two bands will appear particularly productive since we will make 3836 QSOs over 6m and 6678 over 60m. A QO-100 station is also installed to satisfy satellite enthusiasts.





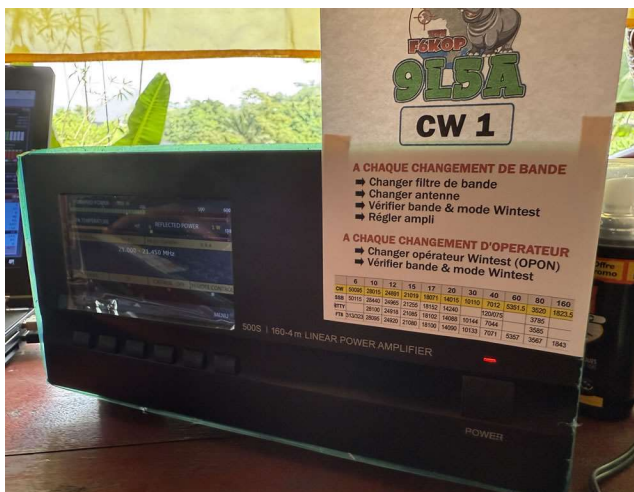
The days follow one another and are similar: Filling up and drain of the generator, sun, heat, humidity, excellent atmosphere and good meals prepared by our Lumthubul Gardens hotel where we occupy all the bungalows and where the staff takes great care of us. The pile-ups are often very intense and even complicated due to good propagation and discipline which is difficult to enforce. We don't go out much. The only escapades take place in the Bureh village where we deliver to the school some supplies which are in short supply there. The inhabitants we meet are very kind and welcoming. We will however award a red card to the village mayor who did not seek to meet us but sent us a battalion of police to rough control instead. Our license being in order the story is fortunately well finished after a few hours necessary for verifications.



With an average of 13.000 QSOs per day we are reaching the symbolic milestone of 100.000 QSOs after 8 days to finish with almost 115.000 contacts (including 53% in CW and SSB) in 9 days of traffic.

In conclusion it is rather sad to say for the inhabitants who suffer this lack of comfort, but the fact that the village is not connected to the grid has considerably limited the QRM. We have not deplored any failure except bad contacts on a transceiver and some bandfilters out of order. The small ACOM 500s amplifiers that we had never used before were are very reliable without heating. In addition their featherweight (7 kg) permitted them to travel in the cabin.









We would like to particularly thank:

- NatCA (National Communications Authority) who listened to us for granting our 9L5A license,
- Christine, the owner of the Lumthubul Gardens hotel who made things much easier in all areas,
- The hotel staff were very kind,
- Our "Zuzu" who was really the man for the job by facilitating all the checks and remained with us throughout the stay in particular to guarantee our safety,
- Our sponsors who have been particularly generous and without whom we would certainly never have been able to leave in such numbers,
- The numerous individual donors listed on our site,
- ACOM and PROSIC for the loan of the 3 ACOM 500s amplifiers,
- The members of F6KOP who prepared the equipment and the administrators who kept our accountings up to date.

A video is in preparation. You can also find many details on our site: <https://9l5a.wordpress.com>

9L5A will be remembered as one of the best expeditions made by F6KOP. See you in 2025 for a new adventure...

