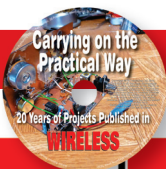


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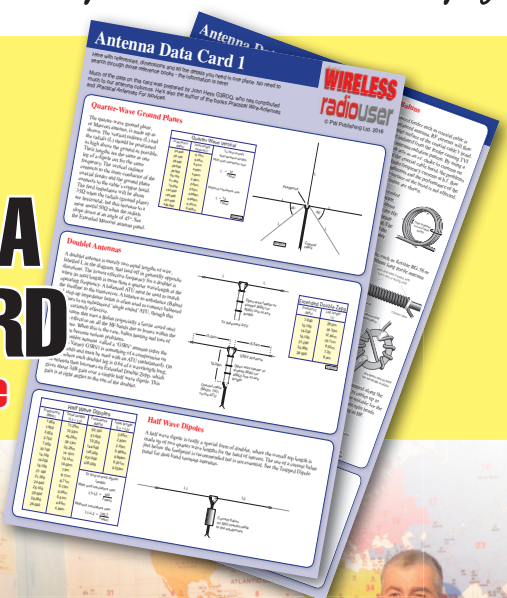
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# It's All Greek to Me

**Editor Don Field G3XTT travelled to Greece for the CQWW CW Contest at the end of November. He reports on the great time he had there and also presents an overview of amateur radio in Greece.**



The SZ1A QSL card.

**O**ne of the joys of the hobby is its international nature that seems, thankfully, to overcome divisions of class, colour, nationality or religion. In my travels with amateur radio, I have met and enjoyed the hospitality of amateurs in many different countries – our shared passion seems to overcome all obstacles. So it was that, by happenstance, I received an invitation to join the Radio Amateur Association of Western Greece (RAAG) contest team for the CQ Worldwide CW Contest at the end of November. The logistics were easy – a very reasonably priced flight to Athens where, I was told, I would be met at the airport by Vassilis SV1DPJ, who would drive me to the contest station. I didn't

need to bring any gear – everything they needed would be on site. What could be easier? It also gave me the opportunity to find out more about amateur radio in Greece, a country that is actually made up of four DXCC entities (just as England, Wales, Scotland and so on count separately for the DXCC awards).

## Amateur Radio in Greece

Greece has a population of 11 million and there are roughly 6,000 licensed amateurs, some 2,700 of whom belong to the Radio Amateur Association of Greece (RAAG), the national society. There are two classes of licence. The lower tier allows 10W output power, all VHF bands plus 10, 20 and 40m on HF, SSB only (although, as in the UK, there is no longer a Morse test). The higher class of licence allows 500W output, all bands. The two licence classes

use callsigns with the prefixes SY and SV respectively, although some logging programs still seem to associate the SY prefix with Mt Athos (of which more later). The number after the prefix indicates the geographic area. SV1, for example, covers Central Greece and a wide sweep to the west. SV2 is northern Greece. SV5 and SV9 are used for the Dodecanese islands (of which Rhodes is the largest) and Crete respectively. You will also come across special event and contest calls with other prefixes, such as J42, SZ1 (clubs only), SX9 and so on. SV8 stations are on the many Greek islands although be aware that not all of these islands count for the Islands on the Air (IOTA) awards. A licence costs €26 for ten years. There is a minimum age limit of 12.

RAAG membership is available in various categories. Full (voting) membership costs €50 per year. A more limited membership, but including use of the QSL bureau and receipt of the society magazine (published bi-monthly in electronic form) but with no voting rights is €40 a year. A third membership category is available for €25 a year (use of QSL bureau only).

There are various drivers for amateur radio in Greece. The many offshore islands, most with easy access, mean that IOTA is very popular. Emergency communications is also important, especially in those parts of the country that are subject to frequent earthquakes. In a number of areas, radio amateurs work closely with the municipal authorities with respect to emergency planning. The mountainous terrain in much of the country means that line-of-sight VHF operating is very restricted but, conversely, there are a number of mountaintop repeaters that allow more distant working by way of the VHF bands. To my surprise, CW operation remains popular, despite Morse no longer being a licence requirement. It was explained to me that this is because many Greeks speak only limited English whereas CW abbreviations are international in nature.

## Four DXCC Entities

I said earlier that Greece consists of four DXCC entities. The Dodecanese and Crete each count separately for historic reasons – they didn't become part of the Greece proper until after WWII (1947 in the case of the Dodecanese Islands). There are a number of active amateurs on both islands but, of course, both also attract many visiting amateurs, combining a pleasant holiday with an opportunity to be a moderately sought-after station on the bands. All three entities are covered by

Summary						
BAND	QSO	CQ	DXC	DUP	POINTS	AVG
160	448	15	72	5	540	1.21
80	1480	32	98	42	2139	1.45
40	2181	40	136	121	3884	1.78
20	1851	40	141	54	2999	1.62
15	1804	36	132	47	3327	1.84
10	554	29	110	3	800	1.44
TOTAL	8318	192	689	272	13689	1.65
FINAL SCORE: 12 060 009						

A screenshot of the Win-Test score window at the end of the contest.

the European common licensing (CEPT) system so no special arrangements are necessary to operate. I operated before the contest, for example, as SV1/G3XTT.

The fourth entity is rather different. Mt Athos is a mountainous peninsula on the east coast of Greece, accessible only by boat and home to a large number of orthodox monasteries. The religious community is self-governing and even Greek citizens require a passport to visit. The only regular amateur radio activity is by **Monk Apollo**, who uses the callsign SV2ASP/A and has been there for many years. There has been the occasional other amateur radio operation but the Holy Council became so overwhelmed with requests to operate from Mt Athos that nowadays it simply refuses every one of them. In any case, although the community welcomes visitors, it does so principally in order that they can withdraw from the world for purposes of meditation and religious observance.

### Operating from Greece

During the contest, I had the opportunity to experience the differences between radio propagation from the UK and that from Greece. The country's location at the southeast corner of Europe means that the path to Japan is much easier than we find from the UK but working the USA can be tough because almost everywhere else in Europe is closer. Greek amateurs do, though, experience some great trans-equatorial propagation (TEP) on the VHF bands. **SV1DH** has made extensive studies of this over the years, on both the 6m and 2m bands. The bands available to Greek amateurs are much the same as we have in the UK except that the 160m band extends up to just 1850kHz.

### The SZ1A Experience

The SZ1A (Red Forest) contest station is located high in the mountains of western Greece in an old village school. The school closed some years ago and five years ago the radio club was offered its use, free of charge, provided they maintain it in good order in the event that the local municipality might ever want to use it again. The municipality (which covers a number of villages in that area) also makes an office available to the club in the local



The 10 and 15m antennas.



The 40m antenna.

administrative centre. All in all, it's a pretty good deal.

The contest team have, in those five years, improved the building (repairing the fabric, generally putting things back into good order that had been allowed to deteriorate through lack of use), put up an effective antenna system and built a station capable of sustaining both single- and multi-operator efforts. Details appear on the SZ1A [qrz.com](http://qrz.com) page and on the SZ1A website (below) but what follows are the highlights.

[www.sz1a.org](http://www.sz1a.org)

### The Antennas

At the time of my visit, there were four towers installed, one each for the 40, 20, 15 and 10m bands. The 40m and 20m towers



Cook and Yagi constructor, Sotiris SV1BDO.

also carry inverted-vee dipoles for 160 and 80m respectively. The 40m antenna, at a height of about a half wavelength above ground, is the popular Cushcraft 40-2CD, a two-element Yagi with the elements having both inductive and capacitive loading to bring them to about two-thirds of full size. The remaining HF Yagis are all homebrew by one of the club members, **SV1BDO**, to the well-known YU7EF designs (see website below). In the case of SZ1A, these include 4-element Yagis for both 20 (the EF204ARC) and 15m (EF154A1) and a 6-element Yagi (EF106LX) for 10m. [yu7ef.com](http://yu7ef.com)

### In the Shack

As far as the shack is concerned, the main transceivers are an Icom 756 Pro, a



Yaesu FT-1000MkV Field and a Kenwood TS-950SDX. All are quite elderly now but perfectly adequate to the task. There is an Icom PW1 linear amplifier and club members loan other transceivers and amplifiers according to what is needed for a particular contest. To cater for multi-operator, multi-transmitter working, there is the usual collection of bandpass filters, coaxial stubs and switching capabilities. For lowband reception, five Beverage antennas, two of them some 300m long, run through the adjacent olive groves and can be used simultaneously on both the 80 and 160m bands. Obviously, this being the 21st century, logging is by PC (using Win-Test) and the PCs are also used for RTTY contesting, popular with several of the members. There is an internet link to ensure reception of Cluster spots and generally to remain in touch with the outside world (I can confirm that mobile reception is good, despite the location being some 25km away from Agrinio, the closest town).

### The Club

I find it encouraging and fascinating that a club can put together a project of this sort. Most contest groups in the UK are fairly ad hoc and there isn't usually much by way of club-owned facilities. It's more likely to be a case of one or two people making the station available and others acting as 'hired gun' operators. The station is some four hours drive from Athens but many of the regular operators are happy to make that journey for the major contests, at least. Much of the labour in building and maintaining the station is undertaken by members living in the Agrinio area. It doesn't hurt that the club president runs a restaurant in town, which has become a weekly meeting place where plans are made and tasks assigned.

The Red Forest contest station, SZ1A, has been built by generous donations from RAAWG members. It is an ongoing project and the station is available for use, free of charge, by members of the amateur radio community. Anyone wishing to help or to come to operate should contact [sz1a@qsl.net](mailto:sz1a@qsl.net)

### The Contest

Prior to the contest, I made 100 QSOs on 20m CW using my personal callsign, SV1/G3XTT. This was an opportunity to get a feel for propagation from south-eastern Europe. My hosts were busy sorting out last-minute issues with the antennas, radio gear and software – this always seems to happen before contests and especially so if gear is



Takis SVFVW and Don G3XTT in the shack.



Cliff SV1JG concentrating hard.

brought by members each time rather than being permanently wired up. We enjoyed a great meal of freshly prepared food, thanks to chef Sotiris SV1BDO and his helpers before **Stathis SV5BKL** announced the operating schedule and **Kostas SV1DPJ** led a discussion about strategy and the contest rules, to ensure that everyone was clear on what we were aiming to achieve and what the constraints were (we were entering the multi-two category, where two

transmitters are allowed and each can make up to eight band changes an hour). Everyone then moved to the shack for a refresher on the various equipment and the logging software – you don't want to be needing to ask questions in the middle of the night when the key players are catching some sleep before their next operating shift.

It was time now for those on the first shift to catch an hour or two's sleep before the start of the contest (midnight



**The operating team.**



**The kebabs are large than life at SZ1A.**

UTC but 2am local in Greece). I was scheduled for the second three-hour shift, starting at 5am local, so had the opportunity for a reasonable sleep. When I did get to operate, there was a major electrical storm in progress. The lightning was resulting in a noise level well over S9 on the low bands while the force of the rain on the shack roof made it hard to hear anything at all – thank goodness I'd brought my noise-cancelling headphones. Anyway, despite the challenges that nature was throwing at us, I enjoyed operating on 40 and 80m. The 40m Yagi in particular was obviously working well, not surprisingly given that the take-off to the west (Europe and the USA) was over ground that fell away quite rapidly, adding to the effective antenna height.

Our system was to have three operators on duty at any one time, two each on the so-called 'run' stations and one to be looking out for potential multipliers, noting when other bands

were starting to open up and generally ensuring that the two run stations were being used in the most effective way.

As with multi-operator contesting anywhere, the team soon fell into a routine of sleeping, operating and eating. The difference here compared with most other multi-op groups I have been with, was that eating probably took precedence over the other activities, with the 'kitchen staff' producing a constant supply of excellent food, quite apart from lots of pastries and similar that had been made by wives and mothers especially for the weekend. There was also constant banter, mostly (thank goodness) in the main meeting room rather than in the shack itself. It got even more raucous on the Sunday when a group of amateurs arrived unexpectedly from the Northern Greece (callsign J42T) Contest Team. They weren't doing the contest themselves but had decided to make the four-hour drive from Thessaloniki to SZ1A to see friends and generally to add to the

jollity. It has to be said that, apart from the food, copious quantities of tsipouro (a rather strong pomace brandy) and Greek wine helped the festivities along.

For the record, the operators were SV1DPJ, SV2FWV, G3XTT, SV1JG, SV5DKL, SV1ENG, SV1CQN, SV1CIB, SV1DPI and SV8GKE while the support team consisted of SV1BDO, SV1CQG, SV1HKH, SV1CQK, SV1UK, SV1SN and SV1HKZ.

## Results

Both the weather and propagation improved as the weekend went on and the score grew steadily, very much in line with the targets and predictions that SV5DKL had set out beforehand. The screenshot shows our final totals. As is always the case, we will lose points when the scores are cross-checked and the final results published but I believe all team members were happy with the outcome, which is certainly by far the highest score ever posted from Greece in a CQWW contest, whether Phone or CW. Spirits were high as the contest ended and, as should always be the case, talk quickly turned to how the team could do even better next time – operating tactics, equipment and antenna improvements and so on.

All in all, it was a great experience to be with such an enthusiastic and motivated team of radio amateurs. Their plan is to keep developing the station and to make it available to visiting amateurs too, as mentioned above, albeit the Greeks will want to operate all the major contests (but, as in my case, happy to have guest operators along). There are also thoughts about making the station available for remote control, for those club members who live some distance away and maybe don't have large home stations. For my part, I was also pleased to be drawn into discussions about how to bring young people into the hobby (every country seems to have this challenge), what it is like to go on DXpeditions (several of the guys I met are keen to do this, only a couple already had DXpedition experience) and other topics of mutual interest.

So, as I said at the outset, amateur radio really is an inclusive hobby, crossing borders of language, nationality and the like. I truly felt that I was part of the SZ1A team and wish them every success for the future. My thanks especially to Kostas SV1DPI and Vasilis SV1DPJ for making my visit possible but also to all the SZ1A team for their welcome and hospitality.