

HD2RRC & HD2RRC/4 May 2017

Puna & Salango Islands IOTA expedition

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Part II

Salango

The island is less than a mile off shore and can be clearly seen from the *Ruta de Espondilus* Highway. Yet, I had never been there. Unlike Puna, Salango was to me a terra incognita. A few times on my way to Portoviejo or Canoa I had driven by it, would even make a spot and ponder what a nice spot it would be to operate from. Yet, it had never gone further than that. Now having had a dedicated team gathered, it would be a new IOTA in our Russian Robinson collection,



Salango Island from a high ground

Before the expedition I placed several phone calls to the local tourist agencies trying to collect some crucial intel but frankly I didn't manage to find out much beside a dry affirmation that we could land on Salango. Instead I was offered to have a boat ride to watch whales and

take scuba diving lessons. That was not what I was looking for. So, pretty much our forthcoming voyage would have to be deal-on-the-spot affair. My teammates, however, felt enthusiastic and were little worried about the outcome. Whatever way it would turn out would be fine with my Russian brethren.

To start with, there was a serious problem to be dealt before going – a generator. There is no electricity on Salango and a generator or batteries is a must. I had arranged two options. One of them failed unexpectedly and I switched to plan B, which was to borrow a generator from Salinas Fire Department through Victor, HC2DR. So, as soon as we reached Placido's place returning from Puna, I began calling Victor to find whether the generator was still available. (I know it must have been done earlier but I forgot my cell phone at Placido's when we took off to Puna. Shame on me!) To our luck, Victor, HC2DR responded and confirmed that the generator was available and we could pick it up at any time. Great news! We jumped in a taxi and drove to Salinas, about 3 miles away from La Libertad where Placido lives. At the Fire Department, folks handed us a robust and somewhat bulky 2800V generator without asking much. We asked them to test fire the device just to make sure it was working. They tried and failed. It seemed that the entire FD tried to pull that poor cord. But all in vain. It was a dramatic moment; the journey to Salango was in jeopardy. We did some quick thinking and decided to take it to a mechanic in case it was a fast fix. As I mentioned before it was holiday and there was little hope that the mechanic shop was open. Lucky again – it was! It took the mechanic a few minutes to find and fix the problem. What a relief! Now with the generator starting up like a clock and our hearts filled with joy, without any further delay we set off to Salango.



The beach in the town of Salango

It is about 2 hour driving from La Libertad where we were to the town of Salango along the picturesque Ruta de Espondilus highway, a newly built and well-maintained highway that goes alongside the Pacific coast. The road goes alongside the Pacific Ocean and crosses three distinct microclimate zones – desert , savanna, and a rainforest. Some views are absolutely mesmerizing, especially in the Cordillera around Cinco Ceros. The sightseeing kept my Russian guests entertained, besides we were talking, so the time flew by rapidly.

We reached Salango almost at sunset and looked for a place to stay. We found a small, inexpensive hostel La Bocana and moved in. The owners, a young couple, Guillermo and Patricia, were thoroughly interrogated on the subject of the island and we extracted pieces of valuable information from them. (Remark. I'm being sarcastic. People were NOT interrogated but asked politely and friendly and shared what they knew on their own accord. No special interrogation techniques were applied. Just in case, For the record) From our hosts we learnt that the island was long a point of friction between three institutions, namely the Salango Township, the *Parque Nacional*, and the NAVY that according to the constitution was the main owner/custodian of Ecuadorian coastline and islands. Guillermo and his wife were a bit puzzled when we inquired about a possibility of staying on the island over night even perhaps a few nights. To them there is nothing interesting at night there and our intentions caused suspicion, We suggested to talk to authorities, which seated in a nearby town called Puerto Lopez.

It was already too late to do so on that day and we put in our must-do list for the following day. In the mean time we ventured to explore the town of Salango.

Salango is a small, dusty, laid back place with mostly unpaved streets and a cannery as the main business. The beach is packed with fishing boat of all types and sizes and looks busy at any time. There is a museum which we didn't go to and therefore can not offer an educated opinion about it. Another attraction is a covered, multipurpose sport field, cancha, where some locals were observed playing basketball while other locals were observed observing the players while rocking hammocks hung all around the place. The other, kind of obvious, attraction is the island of Salango, to where tourists are taken on a day snorkeling tours. What was somewhat cheering is that Salango wasn't as squeamish about selling liquors as Puna: beer and rum was available in nearly every little *tienda*. After roaming across the town for about an hour we headed back to our hostel. All in all, Salango left an impression of a friendly, quiet place, though somewhat dirty.



Russian gang on the streets of Salango (R4WAA and HC2AO)

On the following day, in the morning we rushed to Puerto Lopez to secure our trip to the island with authorities. It was still holidays and we found the National Park office closed. We tried *Capitania del Puerto*, or the naval authority. We were lucky again – their office was open. I explained our goal to an officer on duty asking for a permission to stay on Salango for a few nights. The officer asked me for my papers including the ham license and passport. He called someone, then copied all my papers, noted all our names into a book, and said that we were allowed to go and stay on Salango. That was good.

A few words on Puerto Lopez. It's much bigger than Salango, perhaps with population of about 50 thousand. The oceanfront paved walk, Malecon, is a nice place to stroll with a lot of souvenir shops, restaurants, and cafes. There are quite a few tourist agencies and their agents are stalking passers-by offering day tours to Salango or Isla de La Plata. Whale watching? horseback riding, and scuba diving are offered too. We spotted several groups of foreign tourists including a large Russian one. On the dark side – we were not able to break a hundred dollar bill into smaller bills even at the bank. We had to find a shopping mall and buy... hmm... booze in order to get some handier cash. Nevertheless, if you up to travel in Ecuador, do yourself a favor and stop at Puerto Lopez for lunch at least. (Tours to Isla de La Plata, also SA-33, are booked only in Puerto Lopez).



Puerto Lopez

Our next step was to hire a boat to take us to the island. We asked our host at the hostel, Guillermo, if he would recommend someone in particular. It appeared that his neighbor from across the street was a fisherman and had a boat and I was to talk to him to arrange the transfer.

The neighbor listened to me pleading my case without interrupting and when I finished he asked whether I had an authorization from *Capitania del Puerto* granted. I said yes. He said then that he would take us to Salango and pick us up whenever we would like going back. We set a day and the hour. He was kind enough to lend us a spare gas canister to get some extra fuel for generator.

The generator deserves to be mentioned in particular. Besides being bulky and heavy (no complains, though), we had no idea how much fuel it would consume. The generator's tank stored four gallons of fuel. Firefighters, we borrowed it from, assured us that with a full fill it would work for about 5 hours. That left us puzzled. Was it really such a glutton? We asked the mechanic who fixed it. His estimate sounded better – 10 hours. That was more assuring. Just in case, we bought a full fill plus the 4 gallon canister plus a 2 gallon jar. The bottom line was that we would operate till it all dries.

At our hostel we met a couple of young German travelers, Karen and Arnie, Guys were friendly, smart, and curious and we made friends with them quickly. By the way, Arnie's school teacher and his boss at work are both hams and he was asking a lot about ham radio. He said that when he's back home he may try to become a ham himself.

Karen and Arnie were going to a snorkeling trip to the island and invited us to come along. We didn't feel like going but it was our chance to send a scout to the island in advance to understand better what we would have to face. Sergei, RZ3FW was the man. When they came back, Germans were happy having had a lot of fun snorkeling while Sergei looked grim. He said that it would be difficult to find a good place to stay and worse to put antennas. The beach was narrow and the walls of the hill too steep. And that was the only landing site possible on the island. All other approaches were too rocky even to try a landing. Oh, well! There was only one beach on the island and it meant that we would deal with what we have trying to squeeze the best out from the situation.



Salango Isl. East side.



Tourists on the beach on Salango Isl. A visual report from our scout.

Back to the story. The fisherman postponed our departure till the afternoon. But it was not a problem and bought us some more time for last-minute shopping. At around 2PM local a swarm of men showed up at our hostel quite abruptly and without much talking grabbed our belongings rushing them in the general direction of the beach. I had never seen how a generator could be transported on a motorcycle. That afternoon I did.

Loading into the boat went smooth, the local fishermen knew what they were doing and soon we were on our way to Salango, short but still by the sea. The ocean was calm and the weather was great if a bit too sunny.



Loaded. On the way to Salango.



On the way to the island

We anchored some 60 yards from the shore and unloading began. Again, it was swift and smooth. At the last minute I remembered that I hadn't taken care of bamboo. No bamboo, no masts. I asked the captain to bring a couple of poles on his evening fishing tour, they would go by at any rate.



Almost there



Unloading in progress



Unloading in progress #2

Salango was not what I had dreamed of as a perfect location for HF. Some eighty meters of sandy beach with sharp, volcanic rock at the ends. About twenty yards deep and the beach turns into the bush on an uneven, sloping terrain that ends in pretty steep rocks. We looked around to find a suitable place to camp. Our choice was a bush that would give us shade and make our presence not that apparent since we didn't want to be constantly disturbed by curious tourists. We dragged our stuff from the beach and cleaned some space under the bush.

Without a machete (Another thing I had forgotten despite the boat's captain kept saying that I would need one – *Man without a machete is not a man*, quoting his very words) it was not an easy task but somehow it was accomplished and we began to deploy the station.



IOTA invasion



Nature-friendly, Guerilla style shack of HD2RRC/4 on Salango Island

We took only 30 and 20 meter dipoles with us to Salango, leaving VDA and 40 meters dipole behind. We did so because of two reasons: first, 40 meters proved to be poor at the given time, and secondly, we didn't know if we would be able to find a suitable mast on the island. Anyhow, the first antenna to be installed was 30 meters. I climbed the rock looking for suitable something to tie one end. Thanks Almighty we had enough rope to go as far as one wished. The slope was steep; the ground under my feet was crumbling. Somehow I made it up some 150 feet and found a solitary bush with enough roots to be used as an anchor for our dipole. There were more attractive spots but I didn't dare to get there. Safety first. I was already pushing my luck, playing a Spiderman on a very unstable slope.



Can you see a white spot? That's HC2AO tying the 30 meter dipole on the slope



A close-up

We fired up the generator (no nasty surprises), checked the SWR (all good), and called CQ. HD2RRC/4 was on the air. Almost instantly there were callers – a nice NA/EU mix. I made first hundred QSOs and changed with Sergei, RZ3FW. He carried on with the pileup. R4WAA's turn was next but he asked me to take his shift but logging QSOs on paper – he wanted to hook up CAT, which by some reason did not want to work. Despite his attempts CAT was never operational on Salango and we had to live without it. We must apologies for tons of errs while sending – there was no table and the paddle was placed on one's knee, real guerilla style. Another discomfort came from a plastic chair we had. It always wanted to flip over on you and one had to keep balance at all times. However, that kept shifts short and any of us was willing to step down on the first request. That is the way to have a multi member DXpedition with one transmitter and not to worry about someone complaining he didn't have enough time in the chair.

About three hours into the operation, strange lights and shouts came from the ocean. It was pitch black darkness and we didn't know who that was. Yet, we came out from the bush and faced the intruders. It was Mr. Sixto, the guy that brought us to the island. He brought two thin bamboo poles and a machete. You would say, and what? not a big deal! and you would be mistaken: for one, it's a rarity that something is done on time as promised in Ecuador and honestly, I had not expected to see Sixto any time soon. But there he was, a good, honest man, living to his word. He delivered the coveted poles to the shore and was nice enough to offer any further assistance. He said, just give me a call and I will bring anything you need. We thanked him and he vanished in darkness.

With the newly acquired bamboo, our life became merrier (a quote from Stalin). In darkness, with the help of a flashlight, Sergei, RZ3FW and I, managed to fastened two bamboo pieces together and produce a nice thirty-five feet tall mast. Slowly but steadily, we unpacked, unrolled, and attached 20 meter dipole to it as a sloper. The mast was raised and we had another piece of antenna weapon in our arsenal. A small caliber but hey, anything goes better than nothing.



Two Sergeis, RZ3FW and R4WAA



Sergei, RZ3FW and 20 m Sloper

As expected, the sloper was working fine given its height and the surrounding terrain. Twenty meter band was fabulous and we were getting a lot of nine plus twenty or even thirty reports. For future references, I'd consider using sloping dipoles instead of more common verticals if you are to operate in the immediate vicinity of the salt water and nearby the equator. But, do not use an inverted V shaped dipole. Never! It is not an antenna.

Date	Time	B...	CallSign	Mode	N..	Q.	S..	G.	RSTs	R...	IOTA
29.05.2017	22:05	10.1	HI3T	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:06	10.1	N4OL	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:06	10.1	K3KO	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:07	10.1	WR2E	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:08	10.1	UB7K	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:09	10.1	SP2EWQ	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:09	10.1	K0GUG	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:10	10.1	IK2RZQ	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:11	10.1	YV5OIE	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:11	10.1	LU5MR	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:11	10.1	N0CWR	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:12	10.1	KA1R	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:12	10.1	W4FOA	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:13	10.1	OE3PU	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:13	10.1	EA5DCL	CW					599 5 599		
29.05.2017	22:14	10.1	OK1AMF	CW					599 5 599		

First log entries of HD2RRC/4 from Salango

I have to say that bands sounded noisier from Salango comparing to our experience on Puna. The noise I mentioned in the Puna story grew even worse and now was constant on 30 meters making it very hard to pull out callers' cal signs. Since only one piece of equipment was added – the generator – we blame it for the increased QRM level. Perhaps, the power supply kept contributing as well and at an even higher degree. Luckily, 20 meters was clear and became our band of choice.

Taking a break from CW, we tried phone on 14.260. It took some time to gather a pileup but once it began it lasted for quite some time. We knew that some IOTA chasers don't use CW, so that was their chance. With about 600 qsos logged, we returned to CW.



Sergei, R4WAA trying to launch CAT Alex , HC2AO as usual smoking

Due to the terrain profile, the path to VK and ZL and even partially to JA was hindered. Given the time at hand, the lack of climbing gear, we could not place antennas any better. To make our camp on the hilltop was nearly impossible. Nonetheless, we had a constant flow of callers from Europe, Asia, and North America. VK4MA broke through for the only Australia contact. Later, reviewing DXsummit.fi for spots, we saw VK5JN messages asking to listen for the Down under. Unfortunately, there was no internet available to us on the island and we could not react accordingly. We tried to focus on remote and difficult areas at the propagation peaks, sunsets and sunrises and that helped us to log a number of zones 17, 18, 21, 22, 26 QSOs. Comparing the flat Puna to the rock of Salango, I should say that Puna operation was way more comfortable but pileups on Salango were more intense and lasted longer.

On the callers' behavior. It wasn't bad. It wasn't absolutely ugly like it happens sometimes. I was even pleased with DQRM – made me feel privileged, like a real DX. Though, I didn't ask how my teammates felt about it. What were somewhat bothering are the callers that would get into the log once, then again, then again and again. Perhaps, they didn't hear us well, or the decoder was decoding gibberish or something else but definitely not the full Moon. I checked, the Moon was waxing, so that couldn't be the cause. No names will be called this time but I reserve the right to announce the incessant and insatiable callers' calls on the next trip. Otherwise, everything was great.

On the weather. The sun at the equator is a mighty thing, even if it is cloudy as it was for one day. My Northern brethren used a great deal of sun block cream and still got partially roasted (not to the edible degree though but began to look quite gorgeous. Don't tell them, though.) During the light hours we mostly hid in the bushes where plenty of shade was or went swimming. The water near the island is very clear and there is a reef with some underwater life to be witnessed. The sand on the beach would get very hot and it was a torture to walk barefoot. At night, since we didn't bother with sleeping bags or a tent and slept on the ground on plastic or lucky ones on a pad, it would get chilly at pre-sunrise hour. To our luck there was no rain.



It is not a bum, it's a Robinson! Sergei, R4WAA being woken up



Not a happy camper. HC2AO after a wake up call.

On the wildlife. A lot of birds. A lot. Seagulls, frigates, blue footed boobies, pelicans all were there soaring in the skies above (posing certain threat) or swimming nearby (no threat). No rats, no other mammals save tourists. Usual crabs on the beach and an unusual dawn migration of hermit crabs from inland to the water. Almost no insects. There was a funny moment when our green cove was almost made and the equipment placed. Sergei, RZ3FW spotted a strange bubble made of dirt on the trunk of the bush next to us. It looked like a wasp hive or something, he said. To me it looked like an abandoned bird nest. Before progressing with our plans I was made to inspect it closely and thoroughly whether it could represent any danger to us. Don't get me wrong, I treat wasps and bees with a great respect, especially after having been stung on two separate occasions by a swarm of wild wasps at HD2A. So, the bubble was studied and found innocent. Life went on.



The suspicious bubble

To some an DXpedition like ours may look unworthy of being recorded in detail. To us, it was a fun adventure and a verbatim memory should be left for later days when we are old and idle. Besides, we wanted to share our experience with ham community. Perhaps, some of you would find pleasure in reading it. Thank you all for calling and supporting us. See you from the next spot! 73



Game over. R4WAA and HC2AO waiting for the ride back to mainland

A lot more pictures from Puna and Salango can be found at:

<https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipPrcNVi4T->

[MaiyaqHtEd09mmBfKMmt1vaX_64Lhe8EJ5JodKUw4i3ydpkKS7Zt1pw?key=Q2trUU5TZHFoRGFMLUpva3ZRSDRTRWJ2eXpZRHRR](https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipPrcNVi4T-MaiyaqHtEd09mmBfKMmt1vaX_64Lhe8EJ5JodKUw4i3ydpkKS7Zt1pw?key=Q2trUU5TZHFoRGFMLUpva3ZRSDRTRWJ2eXpZRHRR)

Alexey Ogorodov, HC2AO on behalf of HD2RRC team

Ballenita, June 2017

P.S. A feedback is welcome. Any comments would be greatly appreciated. If suddenly you would feel like rewarding my feeble literary efforts by a beer, please feel free to ship one to me or you can PayPal the equivalent in any suitable currency including intergalactic to author's account:

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P.P.S. Don't be too serious. Seriousness causes stress. Stress is bad. Don't be serious. Especially when reading my scribbles.