

# 603T A DXPEDITION TO BE TOLD

## Where is Somaliland:

Officially the **Republic of**, is an unrecognised country in the Horn of Africa. It is located in the southern coast of the Gulf of Aden and bordered by Djibouti to the northwest, Ethiopia to the south and west, and Somalia to the east. The capital and largest city is Hargeisa.



## Our misadventure in Somaliland

Dear Amateur Radio Friends,

first of all we want to thank you for following our expedition so closely and for taking the time to get updates, despite the silence that followed after our decision to stop operations.

This adventure was born out of a desire to return to dx-pedition after many years of break, a break due to a thousand reasons and among the main ones being work and family.

After a careful analysis related to many factors, including dxcc location, difficulty in acquiring permits, safety of operators, we evaluated Somalia as a possible country where to carry out the next dxpedition. In this analysis, the area considered to be the "safest" for us, turned out to be Somaliland, a "democracy" that had seem quite stable when compared to the diverse Somali context.

It should also be considered how the state (or perhaps it would be better to call it a region?) of Somaliland, although not internationally recognized by the vast majority of UN countries, is in fact independent, with its own institutions, its own regulatory bodies, its own regular army, police force, and everything we usually find in a "normal" state

Having verified this, in November 2023, I begin to liaise with possible contacts to help me receive an amateur radio license, since from the first interlocutions, the local Ministry of Technology and Telecommunications, had not been very proactive, and often my emails and phone calls would go unanswered for weeks, to my considerable frustration, but not much surprise, given past "African" experiences.

Having explained this, I will not hide the fact that I struggled with absurd requests, as the local ministry, as often happens, thought we wanted a broadcast license. So, to facilitate understanding, I prepared for them, dozens of PowerPoint slides, sent out documentations and involved local academics, to best explain who we amateur radio operators are and what we do. A very simple thing for those in the field, somewhat less so for those who are not familiar with our field at all.

The interlocution with the various ministries was long and tortuous and culminated at the end of July (nine months later) in a call conference via Skype, directly with the Honorable Minister and the Director General, who is its operational arm, to try to finalize the whole process, and to have an answer without too much prevarication: YES or NO!!!



## A LONG AND CHALLENGING JOURNEY

The license application took 10 months !!!



Milan Airport

Finally after 10 months, also thanks to the intervention of a “technical director” from the Ministry of Technology, we were able to get the license stamped and signed by the minister, and then a green light also from the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Customs and the Ministry of Immigration, all of whom had in the meantime been informed by the Ministry of Technology and our on-site contact.

As antennas the setup planned consisted of two Spiderbeams, a HexBeam and several verticals for all bands.

Honestly we would have been ready to be able to get really really good anywhere in the world and in any band

Our journey began on September 10 from northern Italy and we reached Rome airport by train, with 18 pieces of luggage in tow, some very heavy and some out of standard size.

We are asked for our passports for the identification and visa procedures, which are completed in about forty minutes, not before having a coffee together with the authorities present on our arrival.

As expedition leader I am taken as the contact person for all the steps related to our arrival, so I leave the rest of the team to drink coffee and go along with our on site contact, to the customs offices, where after a negotiation in classic Arab style, we get the equipment issued, with great satisfaction, and relative speed, which to be honest left me rather surprised. Evidently our contact had everything well organized.

### “ Planning from home is easy, being in the field changes perspective”

The trip was rather smooth, about 6 hours to Addis Ababa and about an hour and a half to Hargeisa, where we land on time and very tired, after 24 hours of travel, including transfers and stop-overs.

After closing the customs paperwork, a young officer from the Homeland Security unit shows up at the office, wanting to open the suitcases and inspect the interior.



IV3ZXQ at Custom area

As soon as we got this wonderful news, we proceeded to 'purchase the airline tickets (which in the meantime had almost tripled in price), paid for our location located in the hills at 1320mt elevation just adjacent to the town of Hargeisa, as well as took out the various insurances, which are very difficult to find but above all very expensive, as Somalia is coded as a risk country and often uninsurable.

In a short time we set up 5 stations complete with Yaesu FTdx-10 and brand new Expert 1.5k-FA Taurus amplifiers fresh out of the factory and ready to be squeezed.



We without difficulty, as we have all the authorizations, agree and help in the 'inspection explaining what kind of materials it is, and that it will be used in a legal way as already agreed with the various ministries already aware.

After about an hour of inspection, and the impression that they did not understand us very well, we are dismissed saying that they would have to call an IT specialist, with specific knowledge, to authorize the material to enter the country. We point out that the material had already been authorized by the Ministry of Technology, complete with an endorsed list ! Meanwhile, days pass, Friday arrives, which is a public holiday in Muslim countries, Saturday passes, and then Sunday, which we discover is another day with a national holiday.

More days pass and we do not have news of our luggage; actually we had planned for a few days of waiting and our goal was to operate 15 days, so we were fully on schedule.

Seeing that time was passing without any answers, we begin to activate our various contacts in the various institutions, so that they can take information about what is blocking our equipment, and try to solve this issue, which in our Western world would have been solved in a few hours.

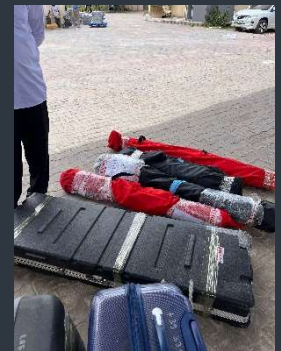
With each passing day we met new generals with untold numbers of stars on their shoulders, people who all seemed to be friends with everyone, and each time we were assured that the situation would be unblocked the next day, but time passed and our spirits and hopes were growing weaker and weaker.

We also learn that in a few months there would be a political election and that this was another reason why our dossier was under the "magnifying glass," a dossier that was initially considered a mere technical issue but later (it was explained to us) had become a National Security issue and on which the intelligence services were also involved.

From what I could understand, information started out incorrectly and decisions were made based on that information, which obviously would have been impossible to change, both as a matter of timing and for other, much more practical reasons.

As a result of the information we received, we considered it appropriate to contact our embassy in Mogadishu, and seek advice on the matter. I must say that they were very quick and proactive in assessing what had happened, and gave us some very useful advice and valuable support in the area.

Obviously after getting a complete overview of the situation, the team was consulted, and by mutual agreement, we decided that from now on the goal was to return home with all the equipment, which on balance was worth a considerable amount, almost 40k EUR, and we would have been very sorry to have to leave on site.



The seized Antennas



Order and organization at customs office



“110% YOU WILL GET YOUR MATERIALS BACK !!”

After a thousand promises, the bitter disappointment and the difficult decision



One of many meetings with yet another police colone!



One of many meetings filled with anxiety !!!

I arrange to make contact with the airline in order to anticipate the return as soon as possible, managing to find a flight arriving in Milan Malpensa for the following Monday.

Once the flight is booked and with three days to go, we begin a series of phone calls with the various institutional interlocutors who had blocked our equipment, with the goal of reaching an agreement and getting us back in possession of the equipment that had been stuck in an airport warehouse for almost two weeks now.

We manage to contact the Director General of the Ministry of Interior, from whom we request a meeting, and in the afternoon we manage to see him and agree together on the release of the equipment, in exchange for our departure, and the reassurance that nothing would remain on Somaliland soil. We also agree on permission to be able to go the following day to pack and re-check our luggage, which in the meantime had been opened and inspected numerous times.

In the climate of total disappointment with the whole story at this time, we see a small ray of light and a hope that we can come out of this adventure with slightly less broken bones.

The next day, three of us went to the customs warehouse, where after 12 days the suitcases could not be found, as they were buried by new arrivals.

Having found the suitcases, some broken and some half-opened, we open them one by one and try with the few means at our disposal to re-pack everything as best we can, and decide to throw away some materials that would have generated us some over-baggage and whose value was far less than the cost to be paid to the airline. Here, too, discussion arises as to why we want to throw it away, but it ends when the material, along with a suitcase, is kindly donated to the “boss” on duty.

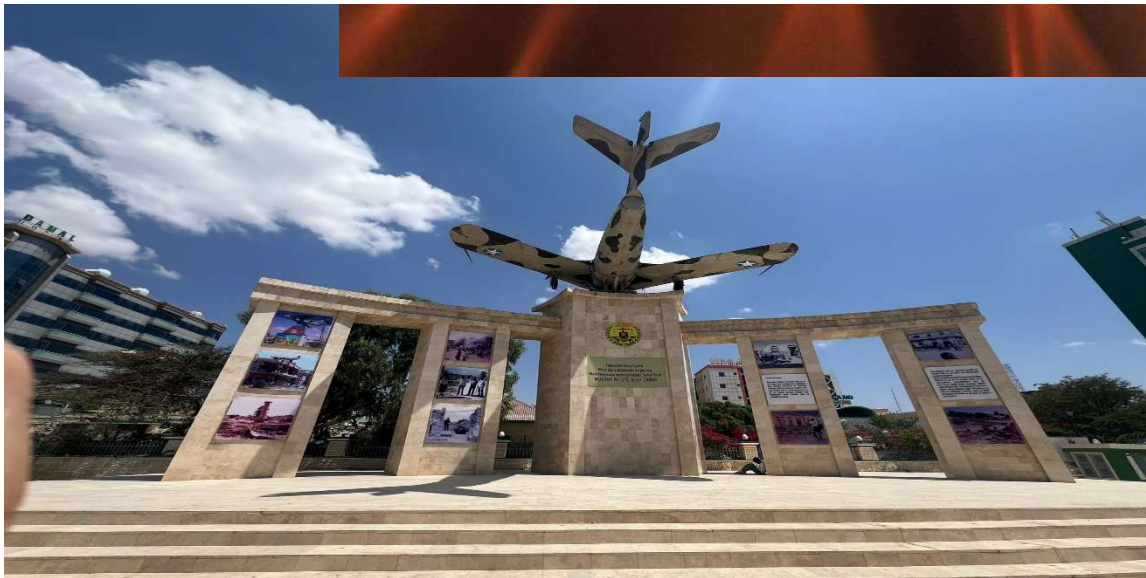
Having finished packing and received the okay from the “police,” we go to customs to report that we finally got the okay and would be leaving the next day.

Obviously it could not end so easily and we learn that in all this institutional whirlwind we had unexpectedly created, all the state offices had put a block on us and our equipment.... so blocking customs (which had given the ok on our arrival) and that the release could only be given by the minister himself!!!

**Panic !!! we are only 20 hours away from our departure and it looks like we are not going to get anything back !!!**

Our contact, knowing well how “the system” works, tells us that we must go immediately to the Ministry of Finance (on which customs depends) and speak directly with the Minister himself otherwise we would never see our radios again!!!

We drive about an hour from the airport, to the center of Hargeisa, through busy, dusty, pothole-filled roads, and reach the Ministry, where thanks to connections we manage to get in and find out that the Minister is not there as he is busy



in a meeting with the president... What now??? As always we wait and wait and wait.

In a hustle and bustle of more or less colorful figures, a deputy minister is recognized, who once the situation is explained and the minister's videoconference is over, invites us upstairs so that he can confer and explain our problem again. Needless to say, he was aware of the situation, as at the institutional level our case was "going around," but he did not know what to do... when, from our contacts he is explained who to call and what to ask, so that we get straight to the point.

The order is given to release our luggage and an apology is brought, which honestly seems late and gives us little satisfaction, but by institutional courtesy we shake hands and leave, with a result in our pocket, which for many might seem little, but for us was vitally important.

After what passed I must say that I was definitely happy, but still not 100% confident, until I saw our bags go up together with the whole Team on the Ethiopian flight the next day, which then actually happened and made the whole Team breathe a sigh of relief.

During our stay in Somaliland of course it was not all serene as there were, as is normal to happen, moments of tension, euphoria, fear and despondency, where we reasoned many times on what more or better could have been done to avoid this and the answer was always the same, and with modesty, we can say: Nothing!!!

A week later, it is easier to look back with greater clarity and recognize that organizing an expedition to Somalia involved some significant risks, which we had already evaluated and considered at the time of planning anyway.

We had gone through all the required formal and informal processes, we had received written documentation where we attested that we could operate from Somaliland legally and according to the rules.

However, sometimes the intervention of one person, out of scruple or fear, can create a concatenation of events and bad information, leading to the sinking of a long-planned expedition.

In addition, we had confirmation of how the Somaliland government is still immature, as the various documents signed by the various ministries and personally signed by a minister, were considered waste paper by other state officials, who evidently for reasons unknown to us had the authority to do so

From the point of view of personal security we never had any problems, i.e., the location was definitely protected, with two guards per shift, some of us were able to visit the city in total autonomy, with only a guard and a cab, we always had the freedom to leave the hotel ( with an escort) to go do some shopping at the nearby market, or go for a coffee at a nearby international hotel, where many Europeans were present, we never saw the various military check points pinching dollars, typical of the various African capitals.



Meeting with the Director General of the Ministry of the Interior.



Meeting with Minister of Finance and Customs in his office.



## OUR MANTRA IN THOSE DAYS

Let's solve one thing at a time  
without panicking !!!



One of many group photos



Hargeisa tour, with our inseparable A47 man

However, I will not deny you that more than a few times, considering also the institutions we had to deal with, we had the impression of being “kept in check,” which I assure you is not a feeling that makes you feel calm and helps to keep calm in a context like the one we were in.

This experience, where all times were very dilated and where we could not do what we had set out to do, which was radio, the days were marked between breakfast, lunch, dinner and a lot of boredom, always with the same dishes (I know we were not at the Sheraton), and I have to admit that discouragement some times took over and one must also take note of how it was a great strain on our emotional resilience, and certainly a challenging stress test for each team member.

Everyone in their own way learned something from this experience, some in a positive way, that is, to treasure it for their personal lives and for possible future experiences, while others were overwhelmed by emotions and experienced this adventure very badly. Fortunately, we are not all the same and everyone has their

own character and personality.

In conclusion, we can say that the two weeks we spent in Somalia taught us a lot. The country has extraordinary beauty and its people have shown great strength and resilience, but unfortunately the conditions of stability are still extremely precarious. This made it difficult to carry out our operations, and the risk of failure became too great to ignore.

We were aware that we had avoided further problems, but the weight of what we experienced will be with us for a while yet.

As you can well imagine, mental trauma is not something that goes away quickly. We have had time to reflect and confront the choices we have made, and despite the unforeseen outcome, we are still grateful to have had the opportunity to work together in such a complex context.

We believe that traveling and discovering the world, even through our hobby, remains one of the most enriching experiences. However, this adventure has taught us again to never underestimate possible risks and to always prepare for the

unexpected, even when it seems that everything has been planned down to the smallest detail.

We would like to thank you again for your interest and support, thank you for your messages, for your patience and for waiting on the air, hoping to hear from us. It is an important signal for us to know that the community is there for us, especially at times like this.

I also want to thank all the foundations and individual donors, who helped and supported us in the attempt of this feat, which we really came very close to.

Thanks again to the foundations who gave us the opportunity to bring in at zero expenses for him, Kristers YL3JA, a young boy with excellent operational skills, so that he could gain experience in dxpedition. Our regret is that he was not able to express himself on the radio during the furious pileups that were sure to take place, but



To give us a smile, this is IV3ZXQ with his favorite dish: Spaghetti with Curry sauce, onion, peppers and plenty of chili. (I think he won't touch curry for the next 10 years).

I am convinced that he learned a lot from this experience and that before long, we will see him independently organizing a project of his own. We are sure of it!!!

Finally, to close with a little hope, we would like our experience to help raise awareness about what it means to organize an expedition in such "complex" areas.

73 de IV3JPP

on behalf of the entire team IV3ZXQ - IV3AZV - IV3DSH - IZ8GCE - YL3JA



Jamhuuriyadda Somaliland  
Wasaaradda Isgaadhsiinta  
iyo Teknoolajiyadda



Republic of Somaliland  
Ministry of Communication  
& Technology

License for Amateur Radio Station  
MICT/DoT/005/05

1. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS:

(Check list for official use only)

Application Letter to DG	<input type="checkbox"/>
Somaliland National ID Card or Passport of the Applicant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreign persons not based in Somaliland applying for Amateur license should notarize all their documents	<input type="checkbox"/>
A copy of the manual / brochure of the radio equipment intended to be used	<input type="checkbox"/>
Payment of non-refundable application fee	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. TYPE OF AMATEUR LICENSE APPLIED FOR (TICK ONLY)

Amateur License for Somaliland Nationals and Residents (Renewable annually)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Temporary Amateur License for Foreigners (valid for a maximum period of one year only)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

3. PARTICULARS OF APPLICANT (IN BLOCK CAPITAL)

- Name: FABRIZIO VALLEFUOCO
- Nationality: ITALIAN
- ID / Passport Number: [REDACTED]
- Postal Address: [REDACTED]
- Telephone: [REDACTED]
- E-mail: IW39QY@GMAIL.COM
- Physical Address: City: [REDACTED]
- Callsign Issued: 6O3T

AK  
05/08/2024

4. REFEREE FOR THE APPLICANT

- Name: [REDACTED]
- Nationality: Somaliland
- ID Number: [REDACTED]
- Postal Address: [REDACTED]
- Telephone: [REDACTED]
- E-mail: [REDACTED]
- Physical Address: [REDACTED]

5. RADIO AMATEUR TRANSMIT SECTION TO BE USED

- Make & Type of Equipment: Yaesu Musen ltd
- Model: FT-DX10
- Frequency Ranges Covered: 0-30Mhz and 50-52Mhz
- Maximum Transmit Output Power (in Watts): 100
- Antenna Make & Type: Spiderbeam 6 Bands
- Antenna Gain: 10 dBi at 10mt high

- Make & Type of Equipment: Yaesu Musen ltd
- Model: FT-991
- Frequency Ranges Covered: 0-30Mhz and 50-52Mhz
- Maximum Transmit Output Power (in Watts): 100
- Antenna Make & Type: Spiderbeam 6 Bands
- Antenna Gain: 10 dBi at 10mt high

6. DECLARATION:

I hereby certify the information I have provided in this application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that it is an offence to give false information in support of any application under laws of Republic of Somaliland.

Ministry Of Information And  
Communication Technology (MICT)

Minister Dr. Ahmed Yousuf Idris



Name of Applicant: VALLEFUOCO FABRIZIO

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Date: 08/08/2024