

## **“MOZAMBIQUE 2018” IOTA ADVENTURE**

Written by Vasily V. Pinchuk R7AL

### **INTRO**

After several years of traveling on the rough seas and remote uninhabited Russian islands, we wanted new expressions, wanted to try something new and different.

So after much searching we found such a place... in Mozambique, Africa.

Our new goal were two islands off the coast of this exotic African country: Mozambique island (IOTA: AF-088) and Inhaka island (IOTA: AF-066). Both was activated last time 10 years ago and needed by many IOTA-hunters worldwide.

Wow! No more tons of equipment, such as power generators, cables, fuel, food, tents, sleeping bags and so on... No more swimming in icy waters... just flip flops, shorts and the warm Indian Ocean.

It sounds really cool, so let's see...

I immediately started to work on getting the C9 licenses. It was some technical problems, which was resolved successfully with great help of Johannes PA5X (also C93PA).

Vasily RA1ZZ, the co-leader of the expedition, has taken on the responsibility of finding the appropriate accommodation and transport.

In addition to me and Vasily, the dx-pedition team includes three more HAMs:

- Vladimir RK8A, the eldest and wisest member, great technical guru;
- Alexei RZ3K, avid contester and great CW operator;
- Alexei RN3BZ, this will be his first expedition experience.

Our plan was to fly from Moscow to Nampula and then get the car directly to Mozambique island, as it connected with the mainland by the bridge. After QRV for 5 days from AF-088 we'll take the flight to Maputo, take the boat to Inhaka island, where to spend another 5 days.

I'll not talking much about all the logistical issues, preparations, flight details e.t.c., but focus on the expedition by itself.

## PART 1. MOZAMBIQUE ISL. AF-088

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Mozambique island (Portuguese: Ilha de Moçambique) lies off northern Mozambique, between the Mozambique Channel and Mossuril Bay, and is part of Nampula Province. Prior to 1898, it was the capital of colonial Portuguese East Africa. With its rich history and sandy beaches, the Island of Mozambique is a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of Mozambique's fastest growing tourist destinations. The population is approximately 14,000.

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Nampula met us with intense heat and very high humidity. We were having a verbal agreement with the local from Mozambique island to take us from the airport and deliver to the hotel, which we booked via the internet. There were some concerns about it, but they did not materialize: this guy was patiently waiting for us opposite the airport building with his minibus for more than two hours, while we were busy with the custom and visa formalities.



*Our driver with his bus waiting for us near the Nampula airport*

The road trip to the island lasted for about two hours and was really interesting and exotic, with the Baobab and another huge tropical trees, clay and

wooden huts with thatched roofs, woman with big buckets on their heads, and so on.

It was already dark when we arrived to our QTH on the island – hotel “Café Central”. The first thing we saw was a lot of people on the street who were singing and dancing. Our driver told us that this is something like a “Food party”. It looks like some of them were very interested who we are and what we do – they are surrounded our car and said something in Portuguese. We were confused a bit because of all these peoples, loud music and chaos, but our driver helps us to find a hotel manager and unloading the minibus.

Actually we booked two separate places on the island – the “base” apartments in the hotel and remote QTH – the single room owned by the local family, which was located 150 meters from our hotel, closer to the beach. The plan was is to split the working positions to avoid QRM and to have more space for antennas. As has been shown in practice, it was a wise decision.

After we moved all the equipment and baggage to our room, I immediately went to inspect the roof. Our hotel was located in an old two-story building with the flat roof with enough space for our main HF antenna – “Spiderbeam” 3 element wired yagi and verticals for 30/40 meters bands. It was already half an hour past midnight local time and all team members were really tired after the very long 30-hour journey with two connecting flights, but no one can wait until tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, the local party continued unabated, peoples were everywhere: on the street, inside the hotel and even on our roof, which was equipped with tables and chairs.

We decided to install a quarter-wave vertical for 7 Mhz. band just in the clear corner of the roof. Everything was ready within half an hour to make our first QSO from AF-088, but... only a huge disappointment: terrible S-9 QRN on all bands and no even any single station heard!!! But we’re not making any hasty decisions, it’s better sleep on it. We are hoping that our second QTH will having less QRN than main position and it will be better situation on HF bands with the directional antennas.

Next morning we were busy with the “Spiderbeam” (3 element beam) for 20-17-15 meter bands) and 2 element VDA for 17 meter band. Both antennas was installed on our main QTH. It was really hard to work on the roof due to extreme heat, but we were lucky as our room was air-conditioned and we went to the apartments from time to time to escape ourselves from the overheating. Same time I and Vasily RA1ZZ went to find and explore our alternative QTH, but could

not find a host and came back with nothing... Everything was complicated by the fact that no one spoke English, and we did not know Portuguese respectively.



*Assembling the VDA antenna*



*View to the "remote" antennas from the "base" QTH*



The QRN-level on HF bands was not as huge as last night on 40 meters, but still sufficiently high. Looking ahead to say that this problem haunted us until the end of activity, more or less, especially on the main QTH.

Our first QSO from AF-088 was made 29-th of April at 08-55 UTC on 17 meters band with the Polish station SP9AVR.

Later we went to the second QTH again to explore the room, surrounded area and the roof. We were lucky this time to meet the host (with the help of one English-speaking guy) and found that the roof is suitable for antennas installation. Great!! We came back to the “base” and soon returned with antenna, radio, amplifier and other needed equipment. Everything was done very quickly and it was great to hear that the QRN level on 40 meters much less on this QTH. We were QRV on this band all the following night and logging a big number of EU and NA stations. By the way, 40 meters was the most common band for North America and Oceania, according the final log-statistics for C96RRC.



*Vasily R7AL operating in remote shack*

Next day we decided to move the VDA antenna to the second QTH. This allowed us to running with two stations at the same time – 20/15 meters from the “base” and 17/40 meters from the remote site. The pile-ups was really huge and almost does not decreased until the very last day of our stay on Mozambique island. We perfectly understand that we needed not only for IOTA-hunters, but

also for those, who are looking for the new DXCC band-slots. All C96RRC operators do their best to keep up the good work and to archive the maximum result!

Here was another problem – very high temperature in our remote shack, as it was not equipped with air conditioning. The heat suffered both operators and equipment. The radio often was turning off automatically because of overheating, also one of power supplies burned out. It's good that we were having another one for spare. On the fifth day one of our power amplifiers was failed. Vlad RK8A repaired it overnight and finally brought back to life just few hours before our departure.



*Vlad RK8A with local "guides"*

Whose team members who were not busy with radio, spent their time for a walk around, explore the island and make some photos. We have found that the island is really beautiful with its colonial buildings, fortress and beaches while the local peoples are friendly and peaceful. Every evening the youth gathered on the roof of our hotel, played guitar and keyboard, sang and danced. Also we enjoyed local seafood dishes and other African food.

Five days passed very quickly and it's time to tear down the antennas and pack up all the equipment. The last QSO from AF-088 was made on May, 4 at 04-11 UTC, just six hours before the scheduled flight to Maputo.

Good bye, Mozambique Island! We are looking forward for new adventures...



*The Taxi is already waiting for us 😊))*



## PART 2. INHAKA ISL. AF-066

We were landed in Maputo airport at around 16-00 local time, just two hours before sunset. We had to hurry to get to the boat before darkness! It was an agreement with the skipper to pick us up at the airport and get to his boat, but he sent a message that he could not meet us. So we left the airport building and tried to find any transport.



*Al RZ3K and Alex RN3BZ with local taxi drivers*

Here we were faced with the same situation as at Mozambique Island – no one speaks English, even a bit. But finally we were lucky to take two taxis and drove to the port. The skipper was already waiting for our arrival and carrying all our gear to the boat did not take long.

This was an 8 meter long speedboat, equipped with two 150HP engines. The average speed is 60 Km. per hour, so the trip to the island took no more than 1 hour. It was already dark when we landed on the shore, but we were met by two men from “Vista Allegre” staff – the accommodation that we were booking earlier.

After unloading the boat they were told us that the car could not drive up to the beach because of the very deep sand and we'll need to carry all our



equipment and other luggage few hundred meters, where a truck waited for us. OK, not a problem – this procedure has already become familiar for us over the last few days. We quickly moved our luggage, loaded in an old 4x4 truck and went inside the island.

It was almost no any illumination around, but many wooden houses with the thatched roofs were seen on both sides of the road under the headlights of our car – a real traditional African village. Very soon we arrived to our QTH – it's a good new stone house, consisting of three bedrooms, a kitchen and small hall.

We decided to immediately set up the first station in the hall and began to install the quarter-wave vertical for 40 meters band. It was also very dark and no any external lighting in the garden and we were using just a flashlight of our mobile phones.

First "CQ" from Inhaka island, AF-088 was hit the airwaves 4-th of May at 19-14 UTC on 40 meters band.



*Position #1 in the hall (Alex RN3BZ operating CW)*

Early next morning, with the first rays of the sun, we went out to the garden to look around. We were all very interesting where we are and what the terrain around us.

Inhaca Island (Ilha da Inhaca in Portuguese) is a subtropical island of Mozambique off the East African coast.

The 52 km<sup>2</sup> (20 sq mi) island separates Maputo Bay (Baía de Maputo) to the west from the Indian Ocean off its eastern shores.

Our house was located just on the top of the hill, with the absolutely clear take-off angle to any directions – really the expeditioner's dream! It offers beautiful views of the coastal hills, rainforest and endless blue ocean. The area of our villa was surrounded by a wooden fence and it's enough space to set up all our antennas. Perfect!!



*Our QTH on the top of the hill with Spiderbeam antenna installed.*

We immediately began to install the HF antennas. It doesn't take long, so we have soon started to QRV with two high-power stations on 15 and 17 meter bands respectively. It was great to hear that the noise (QRN) level on all HF bands is absolutely "zero".

Since the propagation on HF bands to Europe and Asia was good all the day long, despite of a high K-index, we were experiencing some difficulties to work stateside stations. Most common band to NA was 40 meters, with some good openings on 17 meters also. We were trying 20 meters every day according the best predictions for stateside, but ineffectually at all!





*Position #2 in one of the bedrooms (Vasily RA1ZZ at the key)*

Despite a fact that local peoples on Inhaka island are living in a really simple conditions, they were always very cheerful, friendly, and looked absolutely happy. Every evening, they gathered near their huts, cook on a fire, beat the African drums, singing and dancing. It looks and sounds very exotic for Europeans.



*View of Indian Ocean from the Lighthouse*



On the fourth day our host organized for us a tour around the island. We drove on same 4x4 pick-up thru the village and then went to the highest point of the island, to the old Inhaka's lighthouse, where we enjoyed the beautiful views of the island and the Indian Ocean. At the conclusion of the tour we went to the wild beach.

Same evening we had a super dinner with fish and spiny lobsters (and some gin off course) to celebrate the successful completion of our great dxpedition.

Despite all these developments, we did not stop QRV for a minute with at least one station. K-index was still around 4-5... This affected on number of NA stations in our log, but the pile-ups from EU and Asia were not getting less.



*VDA antenna for 17 meters band in our garden*

The technical problems did not avoid us on Inhaka island also. This time we have lost our second power amplifier – a home-made one on 2x617B tubes.

Vlad RK8A – our technical guru – take care of it, but after some time PA was failed again, hopelessly this time. So we were forced to QRV only barefoot from our second position for the last two days on the island.



*Vlad RK8A repairing the PA*

The return trip to Maputo was scheduled at 15-00 on 9-th of May on same boat. We were keeping one station QRV as long as possible and QRT only 30 minutes before the track came to take us to the beach.

## **EPILOGUE**

We arrived back to Maputo at around 16-00 local time, very tired but safe and in a good spirit. The air flight was scheduled next morning, so we have spent the evening to take a walk through the streets of the capital of Mozambique and buy souvenirs.

Ahead was a long way back home, to our families and friends...

This expedition took place on 27-th of April till 11-th of May 2018 and was dedicated to 25-th Anniversary of "Russian Robinson Club".

We were lucky to made 20K QSOs worldwide despite all the difficulties, enjoyed the endless pile-ups, met new peoples, got new and unforgettable emotions...

It was a really great radio adventure!!!

Team would like to thank our sponsors as well as all individual donors for their trust, encouragement and support of this project!



Team at Lisbon Airport (L-R: Alex RN3BZ, Al RZ3K, Vasily RA1ZZ, Vasily R7AL, Vlad RK8A)



THE END...