

# IT9EJW/p IOTA Contest 2010 Lachea island EU-166

A group of 9 operators was active as IT9EJW/P during the IOTA Contest from Lachea Isl., EU-166, a very small isle in front of the wonderful coast of Aci Trezza, situated on the lower slopes of Mount Etna, between Catania and Taormina.

It was the first time that this island, an enchanting place surrounded by the wonderful Faraglioni, high rocks emerging from the blue sea which, according to the Greek mythology, were thrown by Cyclop Polifemo towards Ulysses escaping from Sicily, was active during a IOTA Contest.

Moreover, the island is a wildlife reserve, and on it quite nothing is permitted; but the project to take part to the IOTA from such a place, with all the difficulties that such severe limitations involved, stimulated our Team leader Alfio IT9EJW, which in January begun to contact all us; in a few days, the new Team, composed by Alfio himself, Giovanni IT9GAC, Eugenio IT9VKY, Eugenio IW9BCW, Francesco IT9JQY, Andrea IW9HQP, Angelo IW9HLM, Davide IW9GUR, Andrea IT9RKR and me (Nuccio IT9RYJ), was ready to begin to think about the project in front of a delightful pizza. Another important characteristic of the Team was that its members were OMs from two different branches (Catania and Acireale) of the A.R.I., the IARU affiliated Italian Radio Amateur Association; it was an important trial to put together some operators with different levels of contest and activations experience, but all with the same passion for contesting and DXing.



Alfio would have to do the hardest part of the job, asking for the thousand of necessary authorizations to all the Government Agencies which manage the protected area and preparing the endless list of equipments that we would have to carry with us onto the isle, while each of us would have a specific role to play during the six months before the Contest date.

A particular care was dedicated to the antenna setup; to reach the top of the isle, where a small sea museum full of strange fishes would have been the site of operations, we had to climb up an endless stone ladder, loaded as donkeys and with a temperature higher then 30°, the usual conditions in Sicily at the end of July. Therefore, the decision to take part to the competition as DX-pedition, with 100W only and single-element antennas, was a must. Moreover, do you remember that the Island is a wildlife reserve, and that there are a lot of prohibitions? Well, to have an idea of the

implications to the antenna setup, just consider only some of the things what we could not do and those we had to do. We could not:

1 damage, of course, anything on it, in any way;

2 fasten ropes to trees or plants, or knock tie rods into the ground; to secure the antennas we therefore would have to use some cans filled with water from a well situated is in the middle of the island; and, after set-down, we would have to put back the water into it! We had to:

2 install the antennas only onto the roof of the museum, and along a small path



going from it to the well, while all the other paths had to be left free for visitors and inspections; 3 highlight all the ropes with a red and white tape; 4 and, of course, leave the area, after operations, exactly as it was before.



In order to use an antenna set compatible with all these limitations, and to restrict the load to minimum, we decided to build up all the antennas by ourselves: an horizontal dipole for 20-15 and 10 mts, 4 monoband ground planes on fishing rods for 40-20-15 and 10 mts and two wire dipoles for 80 and 40 mts; only a commercial multiband trapped antenna was planned to be used, a 40-10 mts UJX antenna.

The following months were full of meetings and discussions (to help communications between the team components, Andrea IW9HQP, our network and computer engineer, put a forum at our disposal), while the list of things we had to bring with us became longer and longer.

The first real operations test, which involved also the setup of the computer network, was done in the IT9GAC's work site, during the WPX Contest. But Giovanni and Alfio were not yet satisfied, and decided to perform a more severe test of antennas and radios setup in an environment very similar to the real one of the island, a bushy land close to Acireale. Under the rays of a very hot sun, we put up and tuned all the antennas, and set up all the radios, in the same way we would have done a month later; it was really a great idea, because it also helped the members of the team to start to work together.

A couple of days before the contest week-end, Alfio gave us a very bad news: Angelo IW9HLM would not have been able to participate to operations due to family problems.

On Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> we were on the quays of the small harbour of Aci Trezza with all the equipments with us, waiting for the boat, courtesy of Cutgana, the University Agency that managed the area, which had to carry us and all our payload to the isle. The calm sea and the incredible ability of Mauro, the boat sailor, let us carry everything to the island without any damage.

It was the time to face the greatest effort, the transportation of all the things to the top of the island, under the hot sun of July and with a temperature, as expected, of 34°!

To reduce the efforts to the minimum, we distributed all the people along the ladder; in this way, everyone would have to cover only a small part of the entire trip; it was surely better to walk many times a few meters up and down then going up and down the entire ladder even only a couple of times! In one hour, with great surprise of Giovanni, who was seriously worried by this part of the operation, we managed to carry everything to the top of the island. The Team then divided itself in some groups as previously planned, to start the antenna setup, which was easily performed by the early afternoon, having a particular care to avoid any damage to the plants of the island.



While Eugenio IW9BCW turned on the power supply system, Francesco IT9JQY and Andrea IT9RKR prepared the shack with their two ICOM IC756PROIII; setup was completed by Andrea IW9HQP, who connected the three computer of the network. All was ready now, so all the operators could go back home for a good rest, leaving only Andrea IW9HQP and Eugenio IW9BCW on the isle for the night.

Saturday morning we were all back again onto the island; while Eugenio IT9VKY prepared the lunch (nobody was aware of his great performances in preparing food!), Giovanni, Alfio and me verified for the last time time/band and operators planning for runner and multiplier stations, and for us three, as one of us would have been always present as coach during operations.

At 12.00z operations started with our CW operator IT9EJW on 20 mts, who begun to work a QSO after the other; we consider CW our most important weapon, as we could count on two great CW operators, Alfio IT9EJW and Giovanni IT9GAC, and in fact most of QSOs were worked in this mode. All operators worked with an high concentration level, trying really to do their best, and coaches had to make very few changes during the Contest to the operation planning; the runner station made a good number of contacts, while it was immediately clear that the hardest part was to work all the active multipliers: some SSB pile-ups were very hard to pass through!



During operations, we had the possibility to introduce the Ham activity and contesting, with a special mention to IOTA program and Contest, to a Scout group visiting the island. Later on, a reporter of a local newspaper visited us and made some interviews to us and to the President of the Sicilian ARI Committee Santo IT9ICS, who, along with IT9EGM

Eleonora, the President of Catania ARI branch, had come to visit us.

At 11.59z of Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> we worked our last contact, and we were all tired but happy; it was time to set all down and go back home. After a brief lunch (courtesy of IT9RKR's wife Loredana) we begun the set-down operations, with the usual extreme care to avoid damages to the island environment, and with a severe check to be sure to leave it exactly as it was before our arrival. At 16.30z everything was back to Aci Trezza, with Team members embracing each the other.

Well, it has really been a great experience, from many points of views. Despite to which will be the contest results, it has been a good exercise to plan and realize an Island activation and a contest operation, but the really wonderful thing was to put together these 9 guys, with so different experiences!

We are really grateful to:

- Alfio IT9EJW, who had the great idea to form the Team and to take part to the Contest from EU-166, and Giovanni IT9GAC, who encouraged him;
  - All Team members, who made it possible; Eugenio IT9VKY, IT9RKR's wife Loredana and my wife Lidia, for the delicious food they prepared for us;
  - All our Supporters, Vincenzo IT9EJP, Giuseppe IT9ATQ, Filippo IW9FRB, Dario IT9ZZO, Liborio IW9HMS, Giuseppe IT9AET, Oscar IT9ITT, and all other friends who encouraged us;
  - Angelo IW9HLM; we are sorry You weren't with us, we're waiting for You next time;
  - The President of Catania ARI IT9EGM Eleonora, and the President of ARI Sicilian Commette IT9ICS Santo, for visiting us;
  - CUTGAN, for the possibility it gave us to operate from the Island, its Managers Prof. Carlo Blanco, Prof. Emanuele Mollica, Dott. Emanuele Puglia and its sailor Mauro Contarino, for their great help;
  - Marcello Milazzo IW9HLI [www.RogerK.it](http://www.RogerK.it)
  - And, awaiting to send to any of them the nice QSL full of pictures of the Island that Alfio is preparing, all the OM's who contacted us.
  - Alfio is also working to the **DVD video**, which will be soon freely available asking to IT9EJW ([alfio@it9ejw.it](mailto:alfio@it9ejw.it)). More information can be found on our internet site <http://www.it9ejw.it/lachea>
- See You from the next Island!

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