

Z35M just might be the ultimate "Take it to the Field" ham, taking his QRP station in a backpack to all sorts of interesting places in eastern Europe. Here's his latest adventure story for us!

Bicycle QRP MiniDXpedition to Albania

By Vladimir Kovaceski, Z35M

Amateur radio offers a wide range of activities and opportunities that encourage you to combine with other hobbies including bicycling. This is especially the case with QRP activities that create great freedom for their practice in different conditions and circumstances.

After 400.000 radio contacts in my LOG¹ of which 120.000 are from Albania, and 200 QRP portable outdoor activities from various interesting locations², the possibilities of looking for challenges are still far from exhausted. This is an indication of the great potential of amateur radio as a hobby that successfully exists in the era of widespread use of the latest communication technologies.

The inspiration for a Bicycle QRP mini DX - pedition came to me spontaneously. I had conducted outdoor QRP activations in my country (Macedonia) using the bike as means of transport. The amateur gear and cycling equipment were already in my possession, together with a high level of fitness after a few thousands of kilometers riding a bike in the past year. My neighboring country of Albania became a logical destination for 1-day expedition, specifically the tourist area around Lake Ohrid, which is shared by Macedonia and Albania. Over a few weeks last summer, from Macedonia's side of the lake I made a dozen QRP outdoor activations from nearby pedestrian or bicycle distances of up to 60-70 kilometers roundtrip. So, a bicycle QRP mini DX-pedition from Albania was not something much different from what I had already practiced during my summer vacation by the lake. The only difference was that I needed to pass the border control, which today involves only showing your ID card.

Planning the expedition as a one-day activity consisted of checking the weather forecast and determining the date for implementation. The night before departure the batteries for the radio station and the mobile phone were charged, along with a check of the radio equipment that is always ready in the backpack and bicycle that is in daily use. Before leaving, I brought two small plastic bottles of water, a sandwich and an apple.

QRP Guerilla-Style

¹ "A Personal QSO Marathon: 43.300 QSOs in One Year", by Vladimir Kovaceski, ZA/Z35M, CQ Amateur Radio, May 2005.

² "Flight of the QRP Bird ... or the Freedom of QRP", by Vladimir Kovaceski, Z35M, CQ Amateur Radio, June 2012.

I departed on the morning of July 25, 2015 from the town of Struga in Macedonia some 20 kilometers from the border crossing point with Albania. At the border control a short row of vehicles was formed, but as a rider I was able to claim the right to have priority in passing. I finished border formalities in five minutes. This was followed by a ride through Albania with stops along the way to check possible locations suitable for my QRP activation. I had not decided on a location in advance, so I was left to decide on the spot, depending on local circumstances - real "QRP guerilla style". After riding more than 30 kilometers, I stopped at a small auto-camp on the shore of the lake which struck me as an ideal location for activation. I asked the guy who worked in the camp about the conditions under which I could use a sun bed and umbrella on their beach, as well approval to set up wire antenna with fishing rod and the opportunity to use the power grid to recharge the battery. I'm not sure how well he understood what I intended to do during my stay in the camp, but immediately got approval for everything I asked at no cost, beyond agreeing that during my stay, I would buy drinks from the camp's restaurant.

I chose a place at the end of the camp to set up the radio station and raise the antenna. This both reduced the impact of the loud music from the sound system, and kept me away from curious eyes of other guests. My immediate neighbors in the camp were campers from Slovenia, Austria and the Czech Republic, and several local visitors who were at the beach and restaurant. I had problems with one cute dog which run over my radials. Only one of the guests asked me what I was doing, while the others just looked at me curiously and then ignored my activity. Overall, I had satisfactory conditions and comfort for outdoor activation.

My antenna system consisted of quarter-wave thin wire radiator for 14 MHz lifted by a 4.5 meter fishing rod attached with rubber clamps to the metal fence of the stairs going to the lake, and four wire radials with approximately quarter wavelength long or less spread on the ground, of which one was in the lake water. The antenna was connected to my Elecraft K1 with a 2.5 meter length thin coaxial cable. Power came from a small 12-Volt, 1,3-Ah battery which was recharged during my lunch break. Logging was done by hand on sheets of paper attached to a small plastic board on which I also placed a Bull Dog mini paddle with magnetic base. All the radio equipment, power supply, battery charger, cables, antenna wires and fishing rod weighed about 2.5 kg and was transported in a backpack³.

The first QSO was at 9:37 a.m. local time with a Ukrainian QRP station worked portable from Russia - an interesting start. By sending CQ on the 14-MHz CW band segment with callsign ZA/Z35M/P for two and a half hours on the air, I got responses from 124 stations, mostly from Europe, some from Asia, and one from Africa. Quite a satisfactory result for a radio station with an output power of 5 watts and a vertical wire antenna with several ground mounted radials. After a lunch break and battery recharge, I intend to join in the upcoming RSGB IOTA (Islands on the Air) Contest, but the weather conditions began to deteriorate and some distant thunder was heard. It was a sign that I need to immediately pack up the equipment and go back. The rain caught up with me on the 15th kilometer of the return trip. I was quite soaked by the time I got back to my town, but the bicycle expedition of 60-70 kilometers round trip has been successfully completed for less than 10 hours.

³ List of equipment: Elecraft K1; battery 12-Volt, 1,3-Ah; battery supply cable; battery charger; Bull Dog mini paddle; 2,5 meter length coax cable with center insulator; 14 MHz thin wire radiator and four radials with crocodile clamps; 4,5 meter fishing rod; small plastic board; ear bugs, four rubber clamps; backpack and Peugeot road bicycle.

What is next? To continue with bicycle QRP mini-DXpeditions in other neighbouring countries, or even to try pedestrian QRP mini-DXpeditions. I have not only been active from the air – maybe I'll try a QRP activation from a balloon! Everything is possible with QRP!

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**Take It to the
Field Special!**

On the Cover: Looking out over
Somes Sound from W2IY's vacation
QTH in Southwest Harbor, Maine.
Story on page 13.



Take it to the Field Special

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BY VLADIMIR KOVACESKI, Z35M

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a short row of vehicles was formed, but as a rider I was able to claim the right to have priority in passing. I finished border formalities in five minutes. This was followed by a ride through Albania with stops along the way to check possible locations suitable for my QRP activation. I had not decided on a location in advance, so I was left to decide on the spot, depending on local circumstances — real "QRP guerilla style." After riding more than 30 kilometers, I stopped at a small auto-camp on the shore of the lake (Photo B) which struck me as an ideal location for activation. I asked the guy who worked in the camp about the conditions under which I could use a sun bed and umbrella on their beach, as well



Photo A. The author on his way to Albania by bicycle.



Photo B. Ohrid Lake from the Albanian side. The author searched for a good operating spot as he rode.



approve to set up a wire antenna with a fishing rod and the opportunity to use the power grid to recharge the battery. I'm not sure how well he understood what I intended to do during my stay in the camp, but immediately got approval for everything I asked for at no cost, beyond agreeing that during my stay, I would buy my drinks from the camp's restaurant.

I chose a place at the end of the camp to set up the radio station and raise the antenna (Photos C & D). This both reduced the impact of the loud music from the sound system, and kept me away from the curious eyes of other guests. My immediate neighbors in the camp were campers from Slovenia, Austria, and the Czech Republic, and several local visitors who were at the beach and restaurant. I had problems with one cute dog which ran over my pedals. Only one of the guests asked me what I was doing, while the others just looked at me curiously and then ignored my activity. Overall, I had satisfactory conditions and comfort for outdoor activation.

My antenna system (Photos E & F) consisted of a quarter-wave thin wire radiator for 14 MHz lifted by a 4.5-meter fishing rod attached with rubber clamps to the metal fence of the stairs going to the lake, and four wire radials approximately quarter-wavelength long or less spread on the ground, of which one was in the lake water. The antenna was connected to my Elecraft K1 with a 2.0-meter length of thin coaxial cable. Power came from a small 10-MAh, 1.5-Ah battery which was recharged during my lunch break. Logging was done by hand on sheets of paper attached to a small plastic board on which I also placed a 5-bulging mini-particle with magnetic base. All the radio equipment, power supply, battery charger, cables, antenna wires, and fishing rod weighed about 2.5 kg and was transported in a backpack.

The first QSO was at 9:37 a.m. local time with a Ukrainian QRP station worked portable from Russia — an interesting start by working CQ on the 14-MHz CW band segment with

Photo C. Z35M operating position at a seaside campground.

¹ kovaceski@yahoo.com



Photo D. A sun bed and a small table provided a relaxing spot from which to operate.

callsign ZVZ35MP for two and a half hours on the air, I got responses from 124 stations, mostly from Europe, some from Asia, and one from Africa. Quite a satisfactory result for a radio station with an output power of 5 watts and a vertical wire antenna with several ground mounted radials. After a lunch break and battery recharge, I intended to join in the upcoming RSGB IOTA (Islands on the Air) Contest, but the weather conditions began to deteriorate and some distant thunder was heard. It was a sign that I need to immediately pack up the equipment and go back. The rain caught up with me on the 15th kilometer of the return trip. I was quite soaked by the time I got back to my town, but the bicycle expedition of 60-70 kilometers round trip had been successfully completed in less than 10 hours.

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Photo E. Quarter wave wire radiator for 14 MHz with alligator clips. There were also four radials, one of which went into the lake.



Photo F. The base of the antenna, where the vertical wire (the radials, and the feedline) are met.