

A New Era of TP DXing

by Bruce Portzer

On November 23, 1978, most of the medium wave stations in Asia and the South Pacific moved from a 10 kilohertz spacing, like we have in North America, to a nine kilohertz spacing. The end result was that these trans-Pacific signals, for the most part, no longer occupy the same interference-laden frequencies occupied by domestic stations.

Listening for these stations hasn't been the same since. Despite mostly mediocre conditions and a high sunspot count during the past year, west coast DXers have heard some exciting DX. Stations once difficult to receive are now heard regularly. Countries, such as Papua New Guinea, Thailand, and the Marshall Islands, once difficult or impossible to hear in North America, have now been heard by many DXers. And the possibilities of hearing Mongolia, Singapore, and even India are being contemplated or discussed by more than one DXer.

As if it wasn't obvious, all previous articles on transpacific DXing are now obsolete. This article will bring the broadcast band DXing community up to date on the topic. The next few pages will focus on how to hear Asian and "Down Under" stations, and will list the "best bets" for several countries. Information contained herein is based mainly on DX Worldwide tips from the past year, supplemented by references like the World Radio-TV Handbook and the Pacific Log.

YOUR LOCATION AND EQUIPMENT

If you live within a couple hundred miles of the Pacific Ocean you should be able to hear Hawaii or Japan on even an unmodified good-quality portable, such as a Realistic TRF or a GE Superradio. A communications receiver, such as an HQ-150/180, modified FRG-7, or R-390, and a loop antenna is needed to hear the "really good stuff": Thailand, 2000 watt Australians, Philippines, and splits 1-2 kHz away from domestics. In between, the many Chinese, Korean, Australian, Russian, Zedder, and Pacific Island stations, might be possible on portable radios or table radios, but most likely you'll need to use a communications receiver.

Eastward to the Rocky mountains, Asian and Down Under stations can be heard with reasonably good signals. They aren't heard as well as near the coast but they're there. For example, Bill Harms heard Japan-702 last winter in Provo, Utah, on a clock radio with a wedge antenna.

Reception becomes more difficult east of the Rockies. Some Asian stations will undoubtedly be heard in the midwest some day, but possibly not until the sunspot cycle bottoms out. I would rate the most likely targets for midwest DXers as HLDA-1566 and JOIB-747, followed by JOUB-774, China-1044, and JOBB-828. Down under stations are rarely heard in the eastern half of the U.S., but a few made it as far east as Michigan last season. Most likely candidates (in no particular order) include Tahiti-738, A3Z-1017, VSZ1-846, JLO-774, 1YA-756, 2YC-657, 1YC-882, 2NA-1512, and perhaps others. Some of these stations were heard as far east as Boston in the mid-sixties, when domestic channels were less cluttered, so it should still be possible to hear them in the eastern U.S. and Canada. However, it will take good equipment, a good location, patience, time, skill, and lots of luck, not necessarily in that order.

WHEN TO LISTEN

Asian signals are best heard between September and December. Reception drops off noticeably during January and February, makes a brief resurgence in March, and then drops to nearly nothing until the following autumn. Reception is generally best when the A-index has been under 10 for several days. However, good Asian openings have been experienced with the A-index around 20 and the ionosphere in a "disturbed" state. Likewise, Asian signals can be absent from the dial even after several days of low solar activity and quiet conditions.

Signals from the far east usually do not start fading in until after 0800 UTC, although JOIB-747 has been noted in Seattle as early as 0615. Even then, reception of these stations doesn't peak until later.

Down Under stations can be heard in North America during any month of the year. However, reception is best during the months of September, October, March, and April. In other words, near the spring and autumn equinoxes. Stations in Hawaii and other Pacific Island "countries" are heard more frequently than Australian and New Zealand stations. It is not uncommon for Hawaiians to fade in around 0500 UTC, followed by stations in the South Pacific around 0700 or so. New Zealanders, when in, aren't normally heard until after 0800 or 0900. Australians follow an hour or so later. Reception of Down Under stations does not seem to correlate with A-index values or other indicators of high-latitude reception.

IDENTIFYING STATIONS

It can sometimes be difficult to identify a signal arriving from across the Pacific, especially of its programming is not in English. There are, however, several generally acceptable methods of identifying trans-Pacific stations:

- Station identification, either by the name of the network or the call letters of the station. IDs given by English language stations are obvious, but call letters and network names are aired by NHK stations (Japan) at various times, and by Korean stations. If you know what to listen for you can even pick out IDs in Chinese on Chinese and Russian stations.
 - Time pips. These consist of 3 to 6 pips or tones aired at the top of the hour by many government networks. An excellent article and listing of time pips appears in Foreign Log #6 (it's also available as a reprint). Some sets of pips are very similar to one another and can confuse even the veteran TP DXer. For example, Japan's NHK, South Korea's KBS, and some North Korean stations all carry three short and one longer and higher pips on the hour. There are subtle differences between the three sets of pips which can make it difficult to fully identify a station.
 - Theme music. The NHK airs a short piece of music from time to time, usually at 20 minutes before or after the hour, which is familiar to most experienced TP DXers. The Voice of America on 1143 kHz and 1575 kHz uses "Yankee Doodle". Russian stations play "midnight in Moscow" chimes in some instances.
 - Parallel programming. You can often identify a station based on its being parallel to an identified station, either on medium wave or shortwave. You usually need two receivers to do this properly, though....
- Note that it is usually not a good idea to identify a station based only on the language it is broadcasting in. Some stations carry foreign language programs on a regular basis. The NHK Second Network has English and Chinese lessons. China, Russia, and the Koreans carry foreign service programs in various languages, and so on. Besides that, if a signal is coming in weakly it may be difficult to determine the language being broadcast.

BEST BETS

The following is a listing of the "best bets" for reception in western North America. This information is combined from DX Worldwide tips from the past year, various references, and my own speculations.

ALASKA. America's 49th state is the most difficult for most DXers to hear. If you live in the Pacific Northwest, KPQD-750 should put in a good signal many nights of the year. KPAR-660, KNOM-780 (on Sundays with KCRL off), KDLG-670 (on Mondays with KBOI off), or (cough cough) Adak-890, are all reasonable runners-up. DXers in California can also hear Alaska, but with more difficulty than Northwest DXers. DXers anywhere else in North America have already discovered that Alaska is difficult or impossible to hear.

AUSTRALIA. The higher powered ABC stations are the easiest to hear. The easiest of all is probably JLO-774, provided you can get past KCRL and KOB. The next easiest, in no particular order, are 2BL-702, 2NR-738, 4QS-747, 5AN-891, or 2NA-1512. In some cases, stations will be easier to receive on Sunday or Monday mornings with adjacent channel domestics off the air. Commercial stations with 2 or 5 kw output are not difficult to hear on a Beverage antenna and communications receiver in a rural setting next to the beach. They can even occasionally be heard in urban areas farther inland. As of this writing, Australian stations only seem to come in as far east as Denver. Reception seems to be much better in the Northwest than in mid or southern California, for some odd reason. Most Australians seem to be good verifiers. Some commercial stations send out very attractive QSL cards.

BRUNEI. As the saying goes, "rotsa ruck". 594 kHz with 200 kw is a definite possibility for North American listeners.

CHINA. The outlet on 1044 kHz near Shanghai is the most frequently heard Chinese station. Note that this is a foreign service outlet in Japanese. Yanji-1206 is often heard with Korean programs. Many other Chinese stations have been reported during the past year, including those on 756, 855, 882, 1035, 1053, 1116, and other frequencies. Chinese stations can be identified by 5 low and one high pips on the hour. On the half hour it is some times possible to catch a "Zhongyang renmin guangpo dential" ID (it's pronounced just like it's spelled, hi). China has apparently changed its verification policy recently; several DXers have received home service veries on medium and short waves recently. As a final note, many Chinese programs are aired on shortwave as well as medium wave. There are a number of local and regional stations, as well as four or five national programs. Two such networks, Beijing 1 and Beijing 2, are carried on many shortwave and medium wave frequencies. I've found 6665 and 7770 kHz, respectively, as good frequencies to use when checking parallel programming.

FIJI. The Radio Fiji outlets on 711, 639, and 891 kHz are sometimes heard, depending on how well you can get past the domestics 1 kHz away. 891 is the easiest to hear and seems to carry 100% Hindi programming. 711 seems to parallel it, while 639 has been in English whenever I've heard it. Fiji seems to be a difficult country to extract a verification from.

GILBERT ISLANDS. Tarawa on 846 kHz was heard east of the Mississippi many times when it was on 844. It's not reported as often now that it's on 846, even by west coast DXers, but it's still a good one to listen for. The Gilbert Islands recently changed their name to Kiribati.

HAWAII. Our fiftieth state can be heard east of the Mississippi, believe it or not. It's been done many a time, although usually with great difficulty. The state is also well-received on the west coast. KORL-650 is by far the easiest, but KGU-760, KIKI-830, KAIM-870, KPOI-1040, and maybe even KKUA-690 (during rare XETRA silent periods) are heard well on the west coast and occasionally drift further inland. Verifications for most Hawaiian stations can be obtained from Alan Roycroft, Broadcast Services, 2877 Kalalaua Avenue, Honolulu, 96815.

INDONESIA. This country hasn't been heard in North America since the big change took effect. The outlets on 855, 864, and 1134 kHz were heard in North America before November 1978 and might still make it through, if the co-channel stations cooperate.

JAPAN. This is by far the easiest Asian country. JOIB-747 is audible on nights when no other Asians can be heard. Other high powered NHK stations, such as JOUB-774, JOBB-828, JOGB-873, JOAB-693, and JOLB-1017 are also often heard here. NHK has two networks, NHK1 and NHK2. The NHK1 stations are rather difficult to hear; JOHK-891 is probably the easiest to receive. The aforementioned high powered outlets are all NHK2 stations. Since all the stations on a particular network operate in parallel, the high powered stations can often be used to identify many others. NHK2 seems to run several hours of English lessons and programs during their evenings, so it's possible to confuse them with co-channel Australian and New Zealand stations. In addition to these stations, there are about 150 commercial stations in Japan, ranging in power from 1 to 100 kw. Some of them are relatively easy to hear, including JOAR-1053, JOOR-1179, JOLF-1242, and maybe others. It's rather difficult to extract an ID from them, but if you get a good enough signal you can send a taped reception report. Many Japanese commercial stations send extremely attractive QSL cards.

Korea, Democratic Peoples Republic of (aka N. Korea). This country only recently changed to the nine kilohertz spacing. The 657 kHz outlet is the easiest to hear but 819 kHz is a not-too-distant second. North Koreans are not usually difficult to recognize, the announcers usually sound like they're yelling at someone.

Korea, Republic of (aka S. Korea). Several outlets are being well received on this side of the Pacific. Missionary station HLDA-1566 puts in an excellent signal many mornings with Korean and Japanese religious programs. The government owned KBS has stations on 558, 891, 972, and 1143 which are being heard by many DXers. And some privately-owned commercial stations can be received, such as HLCQ-756.

MALAYSIA. Sabah-1475 seems to have ignored the new plan by staying on its

old frequency. This station seems to be heard best during the spring.

MARSHALL ISLANDS. WSZO-1098 on Majuro was heard by several DXers last season. Reception usually requires a KPAX-1100 silent period.

MONGOLIA. There is reportedly a new station on 882 kHz. It has yet to be officially identified by anyone in North America and program information is a bit sketchy at the moment. It is believed to carry some relays of Radio Moscow's Mongolian service, however.

NEW CALEDONIA. Noumea-666 is worth watching for when Australia and New Zealand are in well.

NEW ZEALAND. Several good "target" stations are heard often in North America. 1YA-756, 1YZ-819, 2YC-657, 1YC-882, 1ZD-1008, 2ZB-1026, 3ZB-1035, and 4ZB-1044 are often received on this side of the big pond. These stations are all operated by Radio New Zealand, which operates three or four networks of stations operating in parallel. Consult the WRTH or the Pacific Log for details. R. New Zealand stations are generally excellent verifiers, sending a card and sometimes a letter.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA. The 864 kHz outlet, although using only 2 kw, was heard by more than one DXer during the past year.

PHILIPPINES. VOA-1143 has been reported a couple times recently. Be careful about identifying it, however, as it can be confused with Japanese or Korean stations on the same frequency. The safest way to ID it is to wait for it to play "Yankee Doodle". DWAD-1098 was heard in North America last season, and DYLA-1555 and DXRS-1196 were heard before the new plan went into effect. It is not known whether the last two stations moved to the new frequency plan or not. There are several high powered stations that bear looking for: DZAS-702, DPI-1-738, DWRV-846, DXXX-1008, DPIZ-1287, and DZOR-1458. They haven't been heard here yet, but all have 50 kw or more power.

PHOENIX ISLANDS. WXLE-1385 on Canton Island gets out extremely well for 250 watts. This station may actually be on 1386 or it may switch back and forth - reports are conflicting at the moment. This station is scheduled to be dismantled soon, so if you haven't heard it yet, hop to it....

SINGAPORE. The 792 kHz outlet is being pursued by many DXers without success. With a possible increase to 500 kw it certainly is a feasible target which would add a new country to many a DX log.

SOLOMON ISLANDS. VQ0-1026 can be heard on many a "down under" night. There is also reportedly an outlet on 945 kHz which bears watching for.

TAHITI. (Also known as Society Islands) Papeete-738 puts a het on KCBS most evenings outside KCBS' primary coverage area. Audio is more difficult to come by. The best way to identify the station is to tune to 1825 or 15170 kHz and wait for parallel audio to surface. This station signs off at 0730 weekdays, 0900 Saturday nights/Sunday mornings. Conveniently enough, KCBS just moved their silent period to Sundays beginning at 0800 UTC, making the 0800-0900 SM period the best time to try for them.

THAILAND. The Voice of Free Asia on 1575 has been heard recently. This station relays the programs of R. Thailand and the Voice of America (mostly the latter).

VIETNAM. It would not surprise me if this country was heard in North America eventually. The outlet on 1010 kHz was heard frequently in Europe before the new plan went into effect. If it moved to 1008 it's worth looking for, if you can get past New Zealand and Japan.

SOVIET UNION. The most frequently heard outlet is the foreign service transmitter on 648 kHz, which broadcasts a variety of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese programs. The home service outlet on 783 at Spassk Dalniy can be heard at times. A new foreign service transmitter has been heard on 720 kHz with English programs. The foreign service transmitter on 585 is also worth watching for as is the home service (Mayak) station in Khabarovsk on 576 kHz. The Soviet Union seems to have some peculiar ideas about verifications; it's rumored that they only verify reports written in the language that the program was in.