

LATIN-AMERICAN DX TRIP

February-March, 1989

by Pete Taylor

On February 22, my wife Kristine, my trusty ICF 2010, the beloved Palomar loop antenna, another couple and I took off to Miami to start our Latin- and Central American excursion on the Royal Viking Star. The Star actually left L.A. in January and toured the Pacific; we were scheduled to hop on it for our trip February 27 from Lima. For reasons which will become apparent, we decided to rest up a night in Miami rather than going from S.F. to Lima in one day. In Miami, we noted the new WWFE-670 testing with OC and no ID with the strong Cuban easily readable underneath. Also noted was WRFM-830 getting wiped out rather easily even during the daytime. My reference here will be WRTH-89.

LIMA, PERU. We arrived at 11:30pm, got to the Lima Sheraton at 1:30am and had a wake-up call for our flight to Cuzco at 4:45am (now you know why we decided to rest up in Miami!) Peru time incidentally is the same as EST, and it was not on DST as of February 24th. A quick 1:30am non-loop scan revealed a dozen all nighters (540 660 680 730 760 850 880 930 1040 1160 1200 1300 + OCs on 780 820 900) and some white noise being generated on or about 900kHz.

CUZCO, PERU. We were here to see the ruins of Macchu Picchu, capital of the Incan empire before its demise at the hands of the Spaniards. Cuzco is at about 11,500' so needless to say, it was a breathtaking experience. Confirmed locals were Mundo-870, Macchu Picchu-1000, Superadio-1030, Salcantay-1080, Lider-1110, Universal-1150, Tawantinsuyo-1200, La Hora-1410 (not 1390), El Sur-1510 Onda R. Tropical-1540 (not R. Chaski) and Triunfo-1580. I never could get an ID out of semi-local 940 or locals on 1300, 1330 and 1470. I monitored 1230 at great length and never heard R. Madre de Dios; several times I heard "?? in total pais." For SW bufs, 1200//6170, 1330//4965 (might have been an image) and 1410//4977. We drove around a bit in and around Cuzco but I never saw any buildings with station call letters or slogans. Up in the hills, we saw several unidentified transmitter sites. Is Cuzco a swinging town? All I can tell you is that half the stations were off the air by 9:30pm LT on a Saturday night. Also noted were beacon ZCO on 415kHz and FMs on 92.1, 98.1 and 99.9 plus another one on 102.1 which must have been skipping in from Lima. On the way back to Lima on Sunday 2/26 I ended up sitting next to J. Luis Castro Garcia, owner of Macchu Picchu-1000. He said his station was the most powerful one in Cuzco, with 5000 watts. Obviously, this tells you that most of the stations just can't tweak their transmitters up to the powers listed in WRTH. He identified the 940 outlet as R. Willkamayu, Sicuani (pr. "Sih-KWAN-ee"). The 1987 phone book showed two stations in Sicuani, R. Canchia and R. Sicuani, along with La Hora (486 San Andres) and San Miguel (N-146 Av. H 'Ccapac') elsewhere in area 7. Several of the stations had Quechua-oriented programming. The most frequently heard song in public was "El Condor Pasa," which some of you may remember as a Simon & Garfunkel hit a few years back. Most of these songs are female duets and really remind me of Chinese music. Cuzco is the Quechua spelling and Cuzco, the Spanish. Also noted at night were 690-HCJB, Guayaquil-700, Bonaire-800, R. Radial Andina-810//1580 Cuzco and 1545, presumed Quito. Other than these, not a lot came in at readable strength. I will be communicating with Sr. Castro for updated information. Peru, FYI, had a 2400% inflation rate last year and not all the people are happy.

LIMA, PERU. Except for 930, 1400 and 1420, all the local stations were identified as per WRTH with these exceptions and variances. R. Comas is on 580, not 590 as on p.346. 800 is Radio Sol, not San Juan. 1040 for some reason was //760 Radio Mar the afternoon of 2/26, but had its own Onda Popular programming after about 5pm. Callao-1400 was heard with Quechuan melodies sung in Spanish. 610, 1080 and 1180 were not on the air. Selecta-1130 was heard the evening of 2/26 with programming from RNE. Imperial was on 1439.9. 21 local FM stations were also noted.

Enroute GUAYAQUIL, ECUADOR. Quite honestly, much of my time was spent listening to LW beacons and FM. However, perched anywhere outside on the ship where it wasn't too windy or wet to DX, I went over all the bands at least once nightly. On the morning of 3/1 the white noise jamming was quite strong on 530 and 555, WCKY-1530 was in the clear and the white noise jamming was quite strong on 900. That night between 11:30pm-12mid EST, it was Grenada-1555 w/GSQ s/off 11:30, AFCN-1420 UPI network news and KAAY-1090 along with many SS.

GUAYAQUIL, ECUADOR. For me, there were 50 unidentified AMs (+17 FMs) to contend with and since we went touring, I didn't identify many. IDs confirmed were Huancavilca-830; Cristal-870; CRO-920 (not 930); R. Guayaquil-1325 Babahoyo; R. Natl. El Oro-1335, Machala; and the time signal station 1510.

ENROUTE PANAMA. On 3/3 by 4pm ET, we were about on the same latitude as Quito and most of the outlets came in quite well. Others of note: R. Eco-1085, Mantá; the Portoviejo splits on 625 & 715; HCLD4-1265 Junin (ex-1270); an unlisted "Radio Richie" on 1470; and something on 1603 whose ID never came to pass. HCMO1-1260 ID'd simply as "HCMO" and had children's records on between 4:30-5:30pm. At about 4:15pm, an OC was heard over HCJB-690; audio finally came on some time after 5 in the form of HCEA4 Portoviejo. HCRL4-1031 wins the "close but no cigar" award today. The same evening about 11:30pm, something like "R. Recará" was heard on 1600.

PANAMA. Saturday evening 3/4 we were moored off Panamá City a half day early to transfer two passengers to medical authorities (one heart attack, one multiple fracture). I didn't attempt to ID everything. However, I did note Radio Ritmo Stereo on 890, ex-1070. Radiolandia-1450 in Venezuela was heard with 11:50pm CST s/off. On 3/5 we went through the canal, and like nearly everyone else, I watched the process so didn't get in much DX. Near Colón, we did go by what appeared to be the AFCN-1420 tower. We got out of the Canal about 3 CST; by then, Colombians were all over the dial. Also, it took me over a half an hour to ID some canned religion on 1290. "Surely V.I. can't come in this early," I conjectured. Right on; it was HOS2-David, with IDs consistently at 5 of and 25 after.

ENROUTE PUERTO LIMON. That night around 2300 CST, Cuban Reloj outlets on 590-760-930-940-950-960-1270 were heard well along with WSUN-620 and a pesky drifter with SS paid religion floating around 1522.8 or so.

PUERTO LIMON. We docked about 6:30am and eventually took an all day bus trip to San José. Quite a few towers were seen including the 4-tower array of R. Rumbo-530. Back at Limon, locals on 1220 1360 1460//760 were noted along with semi-local TIPJ-1180 Heredia and some U.S. C&W on 1300. At about 7:55pm CST it was interesting to note political addresses on both ZNS-1540 and Cayman-1555. VOA-1580 was good, as was Jamaica-560. Costa Rica incidentally is a very friendly country where Americans are still welcome and where the literacy rate is about 85%.

ENROUTE COZUMEL. Around 12n CST 3/7 I was able to identify HJLO-1523, R. Minuto, Barranquilla, "The religious voice of Colombia." Radio Costa Rica-930 was fair, but nowhere on the trip was it notably strong as itself or in VOA mode. By this time we were off Nicaragua (40 miles or so) but you couldn't tell it by my dial. One would think Bluefields-1090 would be banging in, but no way (something was there but I can't confirm it was Bluefields); in short, Colombians (particularly San Andres ones) were all over the dial at great strength, but I can't positively say I heard any Nicaraguan station. Weak SS noted on 1235. "B.B."-1240 out of San Jose really lasted a long time; I thought the new megawatt Venezuelan must be on. HJAY was on 1489.9 and TISHB was on 1127.

COZUMEL. In the morning, we took a tour to some ruins, and as we went by the tower, the guide was proud to point out that XERB had 5000 watts at 1170 on the AM dial. Eight Texas FMs (mostly Corpus Christi area) were noted here. Radio America-630 was strong, but it didn't seem to be La Ceiba, Honduras, since nothing else out of La Ceiba seemed to be coming in. Between 3-4pm CST, I observed WQAM-560 (no Jamaica), WTKN-570, WIOD-610, WWAM-770, WNWS-790 (in the clear), Tampa-970, Reloj-1100 (//940 with WINZ under), WQBA-1140 (clear), Tampa-1150, VOA-1180, WAMR-1320, WBRD-1420 and the St. Pete area stns. on 1380 and 1590. Also noted was Belize, splattering all over the place between 819-833kHz. What a mess! Locals and semi-locals included Merida-550, Cancun-580, Radio Caribe-860 (not listed, probably Cancun), Chetumal-960, XERB-1170 Cozumel and Radio HR-1550. The latter, unlisted, had ads for maids for a Hyatt hotel, and was wiped out by co-channel hash by 5pm. My guess is 250w in Cancun, or if not, then in some resort area. However, it had to be a resort where elderly Mexicans go, because the music was like Xavier Cugat dance music of the 40s-50s. Somehow I just don't think it was HITS-1550 in the Dominican Republic...

ENROUTE FT. LAUDERDALE. On Friday March 10 we were back on EST and off of Cuba. Around noon, I noted Progresso-640/880/730/90.3; Rebelde-550/610/620/670/710/91.9; FM Latina-95.1 (classical); Reloj-760/790/etc.95.9; Unknown network-820/98.7; Metropolitana-860//102.9 and three UNID FMs on 93.7, 97.7 and 100.7. By this time, everything was predictably Cuban or Floridian. About 3, I wangled my way onto the bridge and read through a beacon log published by the British Hydrographic Office. The ship used satellites for navigation but still had a 250-500kHz direction finder which I got to play with.

In conclusion, unfortunately, there were just too many stations in Guayaquil, Panamá and San José for me to get a handle on and still see some of the territory we took the trip to see in the first place. Therefore, I primarily looked for variances. Also, I was mystified by the white noise (jamming?) surrounding R. El Sol-900, Lima. I couldn't get a handle on its source; it was quite strong the night after we left Lima but not noted in Guayaquil. T&C-1570 gets out pretty well; it was heard at various places after the Canal with no sign of XERF. And finally, the Cubans really have done a remarkable job infringing on the coverage areas of the Miami stations. The 710 signal was good off of Colón and is even with WAQI days in Palm Beach. R. Taino-830 really brutalizes WRFM. (Also, WWFE-670 was testing again Sat. 3/11; it was fair 11am in Ft. Lauderdale [strong Cuban under] but was either off or just plain gone an hour later in Delray Beach).

In summary, it is splendid DXing on a ship with no locals most of the time and I strongly recommend it. However, even on vacation, you can't DX all the time!

Oh yes, one final note. About four days before we left, a small article in the local paper mentioned that the airlines might stop allowing you to bring radios on board. In my briefcase, I had the ICF 2010, the two loops, the amplifier, earphones, the LWCA Beacon Log and WRTH - and some SS DX report translation forms and some copies of Latin American QSL cards and letters, including one from OAX4A when it was on 854kHz (reported 36 years ago from Durham, NC). I shuddered each time the briefcase went through the X-ray apparatus. However, I never heard a peep out of anyone, except in Miami, where the operator asked me if it was camera equipment... Who was I to dispute a proficient operator's observation?!!