Amateur radio in South America

When you are listening on the HF bands and hearing signals from 'rare' DX stations, have you ever wondered what it is like to operate from one of these countries?

I have spent many years living abroad in many parts of the world and have held amateur radio licences in many countries. In others, I have obtained permission to operate as a 'guest operator'. In all, operation from 55 countries has been experienced since 1927 when my first call 2ARV was issued in England, superseded by G5RV in 1928. Since my retirement in 1976, my wife and I spend six months each year in England and six months in Uruguay, where my call is CX5RV.

Some of the more 'rare' calls held have been; VP4RV (Trinidad), VP5RV (Jamaica), VP6RV (Barbados), VP7RV (Bahamas), PJ5AA (Aruba), PJ5CA (Curacao), PX1RV (Andorra), EP2RV (Iran), FO0RV (Tahiti), YJ8RV (New Hebrides), VK9LV (Papua New Guinea), TU4AJ (Ivory Coast) and PY1ZAR (Brazil).

Although there are several hundred licensed amateurs in Uruguay, many of them are relatively inactive and others obtain licences to enable the family, living in Montevideo or one of the other towns, to communicate with their *estancia* (cattle ranch) in the country. This is done on SSB, normally in the 7MHz band and often with scant observance of the 'gentlemans agreement' to leave the lower 50kHz of that band clear for CW operation. This, together with the intrusion of several broadcasting stations in the band, right down to as low as 7012kHz, makes amateur operation, especially for DX contacts at night, extremely difficult at times.

Massive electrical storms

In tropical and sub-tropical countries, the problem of atmospherics (QRN) is, of course, much greater than we are accustomed to in Europe. The lower frequency bands, 1.8, 3.5, 7 and even 14MHz are sometimes virtually unworkable because of very heavy crashing QRN which can reach peaks of S9 plus on the S-meter. Violent thunderstorms are much more frequent in these latitudes than they are in Europe. One of the consequences of such storms is the occurrence of much more frequent and prolonged electrical power cuts so if, when you are in QSO with a CX station, he suddenly disappears do not think that he has left you 'high and dry' — it may well be due to one of these power cuts, or *apagones* as they are called in Spanish.

What is 'DX?' It is generally accepted that by 'DX' we mean stations located at least 1,000 km distant from our QTH. However, this is a purely arbitrary figure and is influenced by the 'rarity' of the called or calling station. Thus, here in Uruguay (a relatively small country) stations in remote parts of Brazil and Argentina and in other South American countries are DX in distance. However, because PY and LU are so easy to work on all bands from 3.5 to 28 MHz, we are inclined to consider them as being locals. Certain areas of the world are particularly difficult to work from Uruguay and are only heard at very rare intervals. The distant islands of the South Pacific can only be heard very occasionally during the year on 14,21 and 28MHz and only for about an hour or so in our early morning, around 0630-0800 CX time (0930-1100 GMT). Australia and New Zealand are also heard only infrequently, usually during this period but sometimes also in our early evening. However, on the relatively rare occasions when propagation conditions between Oceania and Uruguay are particularly good, VKs and ZLs can produce signals up to S7 or S8 on the 14 to 28MHz bands. At this stage, it is opportune to state that I am a 'dyed in the wool' CW man and only use SSB on very rare occasions. However, all that has been said above applies equally to phone operation. Without doubt, the most consistently strong DX signals here are those from USA and Japan which, given reasonably good conditions on these three bands, can be heard and worked during day and night time for many more hours than other parts of the world. Not unnaturally, when operating in a country far from home, one tends to try hard for QSOs with the homeland and neighbouring countries. This fact motivated the analysis of a typical six month's period of operation from Uruguay