The World's Best Contest QTH? p. 10

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On the Cover:
Just a few of the 28 antennas at the EF8R contest superstation on Grand Canary Island. Details on page 15; story on page 10.

Photo A. Original house and six towers (all photos courtesy of the author)

The CQ World Wide DX Contest's SSB weekend is later this month, followed by the CW weekend in November. If you're on the air, there's a good chance you'll work EF8R in the Canary Islands for your Zone 33 contact. Here's why!

EF8R: The World's Best Contest QTH?

BY LEONID RADCHENKO,* RA5A

Life is ... searching!

In this case, I mean searching for the best contest QTH in the world. In the 1990s, after traveling around the world many times, visiting almost every Pacific island, contesting and carrying radios and antennas on my back, I finally got a better idea. Why not settle down in one place only — at the best QTH in the world?

A Good Start

Our group already had a good place in Faro de Sardina on the north coast of Grand Canary Island (or more accurately, in Spanish, *Gran Canaria*). We had made some excellent contest efforts from that location, including the incredible multi-record-breaking CQWW SSB performance in 1999 by Jeff Steinman, N5TJ, operating as EA8BH. (*That year, Jeff broke the single-op all-band record by more than 10 million points — a record that still stands today — was the first to make over 10,000 QSOs in CQWW as a single-op, and had the highest-ever multiplier total for a single-op. –ed.*)

When the millennium changed in 2000, I decided to start looking for an even better QTH in Gran Canaria. One reason was that the towers at Sardina were starting to deteriorate, due to the damp and salty environment.

With Ville, OH2MM; Mauri, OH2BYS; and Manolo, EA8ZS we made signal comparisons against Sardina from the summits of many of the island's mountains. I drove a car with a tribander and radio and compared signals to Europe and the U.S. against the same system at Sardina. I visited many crazy places and was lucky that the car never fell into a ravine.

A couple of good places were found, signal-wise, but each one had some problems. One place was too close to the refuse dump. The other good one had no electricity or nearby water source. Then Manolo told me to drive to the top of Guia Mountain. I hadn't known there was a road to the top, but there is.

On Top of Ol' Guia...

The first tests were promising: Sardina was couple of decibels weaker and Manolo's QTH (which is in the valley) was down by more than 1 S-unit. Fine tuning continued: We found

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Photo B. Hurricane Delta in 2005 destroyed all six towers and 10 antennas, striking immediately after the conclusion of the CQWW CW Contest.

Photo C. During the hurricane, the team took shelter in this underground bunker.

Photo D. Some of the many contest teams that have operated from Magic Mountain.

a house in the area with a lot of land as well as electricity and water. Hurray!

I made a deal to purchase the property and contesting started immediately with the CW leg of CQWW DX on November 23, 2001. Jaakko, OH1MA, worked 10-meter SBLP (single-band low power) using only a 3-element quad and a 2-element Yagi. Result: second in the world.

Then, a few weeks later, I worked the ARRL 10-Meter SSB Contest, using high power with the same antennas. Result: first in the world.

Then we started to put up more antennas and towers (*Photo A*) and the station was quiet for half a year.

Between 2001 and 2004, we had five wins and then in the 2004 CQWW SSB Contest, OH2U/EA8ZS, operating multi/multi, had a big win. Work continued and 2005 was a very active contest year; of the six contests we participated, we had three wins.

The 2005 CQWW CW was a memory-shaking contest. The contest itself went OK, but when it was over, Hurricane Delta hit the island and "killed" all 6 towers and 10 beams (see *Photo B*)! During the storm, we moved "underground" into a bunker which was a 120-square-meter (1292-square-foot) cellar-space (*Photo C*). The only problem was a little water coming in.

Rebuilding

After the hurricane, we had to start rebuilding the station. I found an interesting program named "Antenna Analyzer," which was really helpful. Our QTH is interesting because of big terrain slopes on all sides. Each tower's height was calculated depending the position and direction. I noticed that the program really worked. Signal strengths were super and the tower heights ranged from 16-28 meters (52-92 feet), depending on the location.

Contest life has been very active after that. In the three years after Hurricane Delta, we worked 28 contests until the CQWW RTTY Contest of 2008. This contest, which we operated multi/multi, was one of the best. The team consisted of Val, RD3AF; Sasha, RZ3AZ (now UA5C); Jaakko, OH1MA; Juan, EA8CAC (now EA8RM); and Pekka, EA8AH (see *Photo D* for a sampling of the different groups of operators who have competed from our station). We scored over 13 million points and stopped working a couple of hours before the end and opened a bottle of champagne.

Magic Mountain

The contesting continued, as we added more towers and more elements.

Our next interesting contest was ARRL DX CW 2010, which we operated M/2. We had some visitors from U.S. The team for this competition included: Val, RD3AF; Sasha, RZ3AZ; Juan, EA8CAC; Manolo, EA8ZS; and our American visitors, John, W2GD; and Don. K4ZA. The contest was memorable because W2GD named the QTH "Magic Mountain."

Another Big Win and Another Big Wind

In 2012, we had a big M/M operation from Magic Mountain in the CQ WPX SSB as EB8AH. For the first time, we arranged so called co-pilot radios for each band. It was a huge effort, but resulted in a big score. We not only won but set a new

Photo E. The EF8R station in 2018.

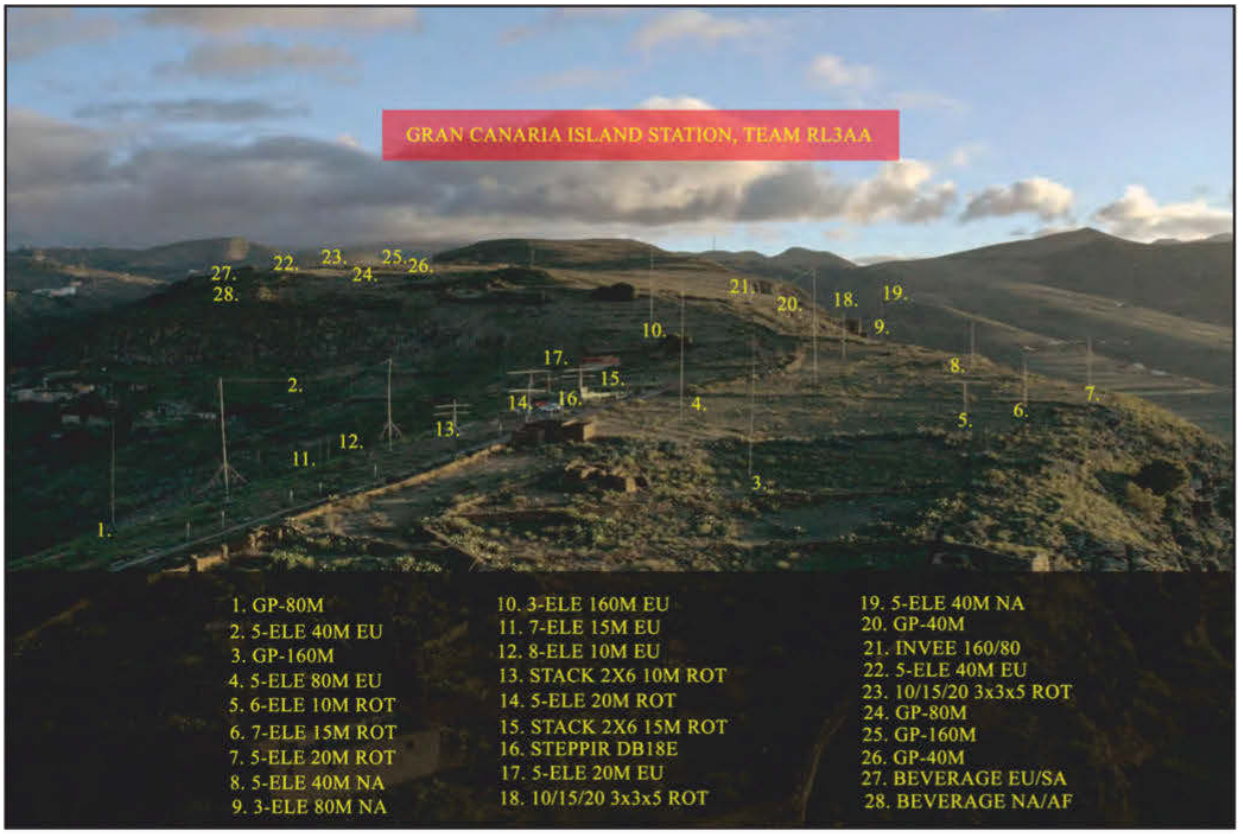

Photo F. Current antenna layout.

Photo G. Operating positions at EF8R … looks like a NASA control room!

record. The conductor of "the orchestra" was very busy during the whole contest: Changing connectors, changing antennas to eliminate QRM, fixing lost elements, etc. The hard work paid off though, we were champions!

The next "funny" case was in the 2013 ARRL SSB DX Contest. We (Pekka, Juan, Salva, Manolo) operated multi-single, low power. The weather forecast told us to "be ready for a big storm!" We lowered the trailer towers, but it did not help. When I went outside during the night, I saw one of the trailers had lifted its leg. I went to stand on the leg to prevent it from falling down. But the trailer decided to move downhill. I was still standing on the leg when the trailer hit another trailer and luckily stayed vertical. At 2200, all antennas were unworkable, so we stopped the contest. The wind speed was 180 kilometers per hour (112 miles per hour).

A New Team

In 2015, a new team came to the station, led by RL3AA, and a new large round of contesting began.

For the CQWW DX SSB in 2016, which we worked multi-single, the sta-

tion included 24 towers / masts, 120 elements, and 4,000 meters (13,000+ feet) of coaxial cable.

As of 2019, Magic Mountain featured 35 towers / masts, 134 elements, and more than 4 kilometers of coax. (See *Photos E* and *F*). But the most important thing is that we have the perfect and most intelligent team.

Under the leadership of our coach and team leader Mikhail, RL3AA; your author (Leonid, RA5A); Juan, EA8RM; Sasha, UA5C; and the rest of the team, we have managed to build the best station in the world today. The station itself inside the bunker (*Photos G* and *H*) looks like the control center for the NASA moon flights.

Recent Results

The 2019 CQWW SSB contest went very well for us. We operated multi-multi and placed second with 41,951,525 points!

Here's our band-by-band breakdown:

Band	QSOs	Zones	Countries
160	614	17	78
80	1962	29	114
40	3271	32	134
20	4143	38	150
15	4299	38	155
10	1746	24	116

Last year's CW weekend of the CQWW went even better! Again operating M/M, we won with 47,808,624 points … more than 11 million points higher than the second-place team. Here's our CW breakdown:

Band	QSOs	Zones	Countries
160	1577	26	101
80	3006	35	134
40	4487	39	159
20	4316	39	166
15	3375	38	149
10	345	24	74

Conditions were poor on 10 meters, but 40 was excellent. Our five elements to Europe and five elements to the U.S. on 40 were super.

Congratulations to all of the EF8R team members: EA2OT, EA7RM, EA8RM, EW2A, R3GG, R6FFS, R6FGG, RA5A, RC5A, RO4F, RU3XY, and UA5C. Excellent work!

Ready?

In total through this year so far, we have operated in 150 contests, got 70 wins and set 30 records. (These are approximate numbers) Contesting continues! We here on Magic Mountain are ready. Are you ready?

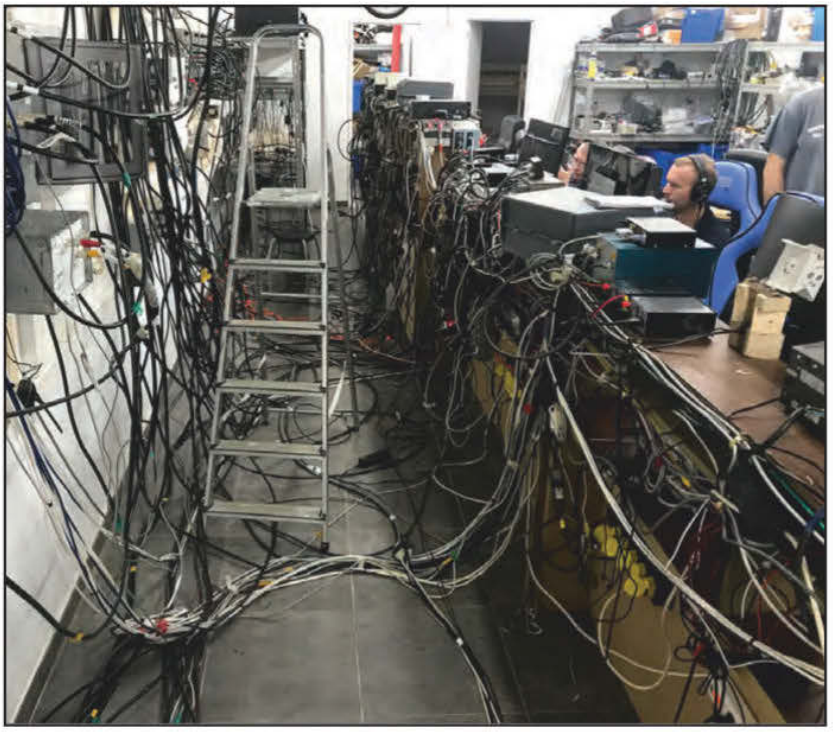

Photo H. Behind the scenes … and we call this wireless?

On the Cover

A close-up look at just a few of the 28 antennas atop Montaña de Guía, 600 meters (1968 feet) above sea level on Grand Canary Island, which author Leo Radchenko, RA5A, believes is the world's best contest QTH. The antennas in the cover photo include, from left-to-right, a 160-meter ground plane (just barely visible at the very far left of the cover); a 5-over-5 for 15 meters (the top one is hidden behind the CQ logo); a SteppIR DB18E; a 20-meter rotatable beam; and a 20-meter Yagi fixed on Europe. All of the towers are 60 feet high. The peak in the background is Pico de la Atalaya, at 432 meters (1417 feet), with the Atlantic Ocean beyond it.

For more information about this QTH and the contest superstation that's been built there (and operated under several call signs, currently EF8R), see RA5A's adjacent article and a video from last year's CQ World Wide DX CW Contest at <https://tinyurl.com/y3yx5cpq>. (Cover photo by Aleksandr Gimanov, UA5C)