

Amateur Radio in Bhutan

DXCC : A5 (ex-AC5)

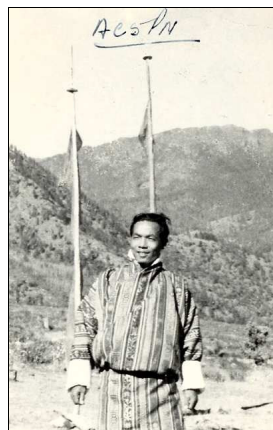
Continent: Asia - Location: 27N 90E

WW Locator : NL74 – ITU Prefix: A5A-A5Z

WAZ Zone: 22 – ITU Zone:41

Secluded Kingdom of the Himalayas, Bhutan has remained for many years one of the most wanted countries in the amateur radio world. Amateur radio has had a legal frame since May 2000, however amateur activity started in 1955...

Early Activities

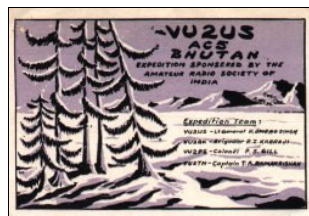


"Able Charlie Five Papa November calling"... We are in November 1955, in Rida in the western province of Wangduephodrang, and this was the first amateur radio call from Bhutan on the occasion of King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck's travel to the East of the country. The callsign AC5PN was that of Chawna, an Indian national from the state of Mizoram in North East India

He was working for the kingdom of Bhutan and was the first amateur to be active from Bhutan, allowing the country to join the world of amateur radio communications.



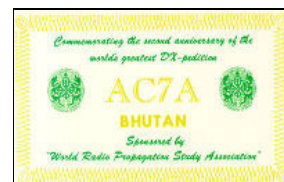
He was using a WWII British B2 suitcase radio. He was then episodically active in December 1960 and in March 1961.



The operators were Lieutenant General Umrao Singh VU2US, Captain Ramakrishnan VU2TN, Colonel Gill VU2PS and Corporal Kabraji VU2BK.

Then from 1963 to 1965, it was with the turn of American Gus Browning to operate from Bhutan. Through AC5PN, he proposed his services to the royal authorities in Bhutan for the training, and maintenance and repairs of army radio

equipment and obtained the required authorizations. Gus was initially active with the callsign AC5A in July and August 1963, then AC7A in September and December of the same year.



AC0H, Chuka dzong

Two years later, he was again in Bhutan and, travelling through 8 of the 21 provinces of the country, he used the callsigns AC0H to AC9H from February to June 1965.



AC1H à Shangar



AC2H, Wangdu



AC5H, Tashit



AC6H, Dukey



AC7H Phuent Choling



AC8H, Chamaphu



AC9H, Dechen Choling

This expedition was sponsored by Hammarlund, which explains the letter "H" at the end of the callsigns. At the time of this Himalayan trip, two other callsigns were also used, AC3H from Sikkim and AC4H from Tibet. To activate so many provinces so distant from each other, at a time when no roads yet existed is really astonishing.

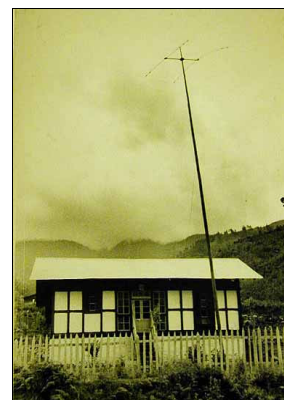
A Few Sporadic Activities

Bhutan then remained silent until 1972. In the Seventies and Eighties, only three local amateurs were active.

Yonten was the first to put Bhutan back on the amateur radio map, using in 1972 the callsigns AC5TY then A51TY.

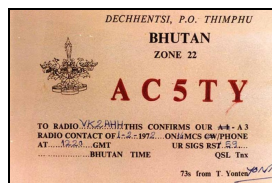
From 1972 to 1980, Pradhan was A51PN. The third local amateur during this period is AC5PQ.

Also in 1972, an Indian amateur, Venkat VU2KV, was active for a short period of time with the callsign A51KV.

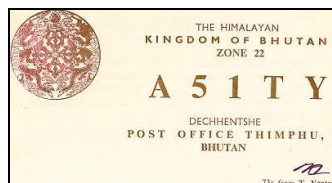


Yonten QTH and antennas in 1970

Some QSL cards of these pioneers



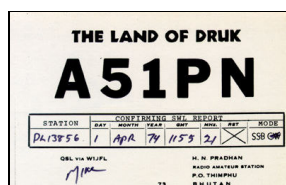
Yonten AC5TY, 1972



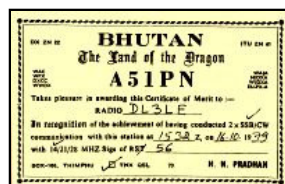
Yonten A51TY, 1972



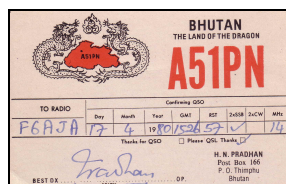
Venkat A51KV, 1972



Pradhan A51PN, 1974



Pradhan A51PN, 1979



A51PN, 1980 (QSO with F6AJA)

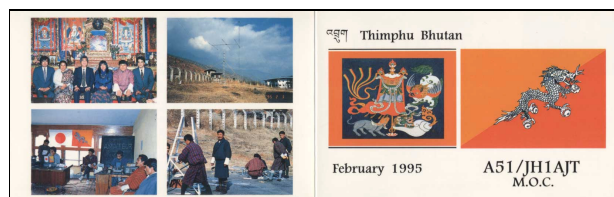
After 1981, Bhutan was again silent, as all amateur radio activity was prohibited, and became the second most wanted DXCC country. Tibet had ceased to exist in 1974 and Sikkim in 1975. Bhutan remained a valid Himalayan country, but a law was required to legalize radio amateur and it was not a priority for the government.

Jim VK9NS has to be praised for his efforts to get amateur radio activity recognised by the royal authorities of Bhutan. He was invited to go to Bhutan in 1990 and once there, obtained the authorization to transmit from 22nd March to 10th April with the callsign A51JS.

In 1994, he was again

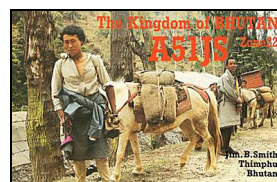
invited and used the call A51MOC from the ministry of telecommunications.

Let 's also acknowledge the efforts of Zorro JH1AJT, who made a demonstration in February 1995 also at the ministry of telecommunications in Thimphu with the callsign code A51MOC, as well as A51/JH1AJT together with three other Japanese radio hams.



The Revival of Amateur Radio

The Bhutan Telecommunications Act was signed in 1999 and came into force in April 2000. Amateur radio activity was again authorized in Bhutan. The first expedition of this new era was A52A. The team operated from the Pine Wood hotel in Thimphu where over 80,000 QSOs were made. The international team led by Glenn Johnson W0GJ included Jaari OH2BU, Harry RA3AUU, Andy UA3AB, Mark ON4WW, James 9V1YC, Yuu JA3IG, Mac JA3USA, Jin JF1IST, Al K3VN, Bob K4UEE, Don N1DG, Wes W3WL, Vince K5VT and Mark N0MJ.



In Bhutan at the end of March, Jim VK9NS started operating from Paro a few days after A52A with the callsign A51JS then A52JS. Jim made 15,000 QSOs.



The road was open for other amateurs. In July 2000, Sam JA6NL/V63KU was A52NL from the Paro valley.



A French Team

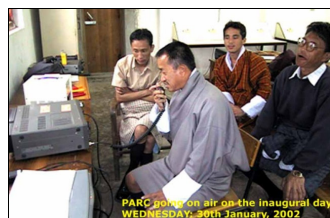


In September 2000, the second expedition was French. After four years of effort and the invaluable assistance of Françoise Pommaret, French ethnologist specialist of Bhutan

and president of the association "Les Amis du Bhoutan" (Friends of Bhutan) A52 French Ham (A52FH) was active from Bhutan. It was a Clipperton DX Club team, led by Gérard F2VX, with Alain F6ANA, Denise F6HWU, Vincent G0LMX and Alain F5LMJ. They operated from the Pinewood Hotel in Thimphu, the same place as A52A in May. Denise was the first YL to transmit from this country. They were joined at the end of their stay by Peter ON6TT.

They took part in the CQWW contest on 27th and 28th October from the Ham Center with the callsign A50A of the new Thimphu radio club.

For the contest they were joined by Bhutanese operators, Ambika Gurung A51YL, Wangpo Dorji A51WD, Yeshey Dorji A51AA, Kesang Namgyel A51KC, Parop Kinley A51PK, Pema Rinzen A51PR and Dorji Yeshey A51UD.



On 30th January 2002, the second club station - the "Polytechnic Amateur Radio operator Club" (PARK) A50B - was inaugurated in Phuentsholing at the

border with India. Two other radio-clubs were also created, one in Phuentsholing with the callsign A50C, the other at the Thimphu high school with the callsign A50D.

In January 2002, Ray HS0/G3NOM and his XYL E21UHL were in Bhutan for a month. They were active from the radio-club A50A where Ray used the callsign A52OM. During his stay, he



trained 16 new Bhutanese operators.

In September 2002, John KP2A was A52DX. In 2003, Glenn W0GJ went back to Bhutan in February and stayed for a month, again working as a surgeon at the Thimphu hospital. His callsign was A51A and he took part in the CQ WW RTTY and ARRL CW contests. In September, Hawk SM5AQD and Pelle SM7EHU were A52SM, and in December 2003, Dane S57DX was A52CQ. In 2004, W4PRO is A52PRO at the end of March and April, before continuing his trip to Nepal.

From 23rd October to 12th November 2004, four years after A52FH, a team of the French Clipperton DX Club was again in Bhutan with the callsign A52CDX.



Yeshey A51AA, Ambika A51YL, Wangpo A51WD

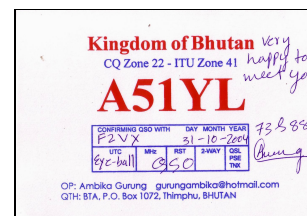
For the first part of their trip until 1st of November, Gérard F2VX, Jean-Louis F9DK, Vincent G0LMX and Alain F5LMJ stayed at the "Ham Center" of Yeshey A51AA in Thimphu, where they received the visit of Wangpo A51WD and Ambika

A51YL. In November, they operated portable from four other provinces and to the extreme East of the country... working QRP after having discovered the erratic local electric conditions. Upon their return to Thimphu, they offered a complete station to BTA for the installation of a new radio-club. This was done at the beginning of 2005 when Wangpo A51WD installed two new club stations in the valley of Shemgang in Shingkhari (A50E) and Bardo (A50F). Two additional radio-clubs are expected to be installed soon in other provinces.

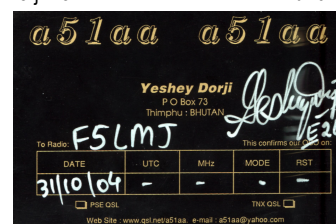
QSL cards of currently active Bhutanese stations



Wangpo Dorji A51WD



Ambika Gurun A51YL



Yeshey Dorji A51AA

Amateur Radio Callsigns in Bhutan

Their format is "A5NXX", where A5 is the international prefix of Bhutan (for example, the registration numbers of the two Druk-Air planes which serve Paro are A5-RGE and A5-RGF). "N" is a number that identifies the type of licence, 0 for the radio-clubs, 1 for the local operators, 2 for the foreign operators.

As a special privilege, whereas the prefix "A51" is normally assigned only to local operators, two foreigners have received on a purely honorary basis and in recognition for their contribution to the development of radio-amateurism in Bhutan the callsigns A51A and A51B. They are respectively Zorro, Yasuo Miyazawa JH1AJT (A51A) and Glenn Johnson W0GJ (A51B).

A51MOC is the official callsign of the ministry of telecommunications.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Yeshey Dorji A51AA, Wolf OE1WHC (QSL Collection on the Web at www.qsl.at) and Gérard F2VX and Jean-Michel F6AJA (<http://lesnouvellesdx.free.fr>) for allowing us to reproduce QSL cards from their collections.

Alain F5LMJ (ex-A52FH, ex-A52CDX)