

ARSI HILLTOP DX CONTEST JANUARY 25, 26 2025.

VAYALADA HILLS, KOZHIKODE MK71WM

It was the time of the year again for the field day cum hilltop contest. After the dates were announced by ARSI, the previous years team had some discussions and realised many of the regulars might not be able to make it this time.

Girish VU2KGB, Rahul VU2KKG, Peter VU2PJP, Rakesh VU3RGP, Ajith VU3EMR and Manoj VU2CPL also was working on these dates. Jacob VU2ADV, Rajeesh VU3FWR, Uthamaraj VU3WTD, Manoj VU2DTH, Easwaran VU2ACT, SWL Mahi and Akhil will also be giving it a miss this time.

Manoj and Adersh VU3WEW had visited a hill near Kozhikode last year and had plans to work from there sometime and the idea was revisited. Manoj was on work related posting during that time and Adersh and Shaji VU2WJ were locals and were able to travel during the weekend. Idea was floated and Girish and others agreed that an activity at a smaller scale would be good to keep the continuity and team spirit alive.



A view from Vayalada hills view point.



During December last week, a group was formed with Adersh VU3WEW, Shaji VU2WJ and Manoj VU2CPL to discuss our plans. Abraham VU2OJ, after seeing the location realised its a short 2 hours drive for him and immediately volunteered to join despite his busy schedule. We needed some more operators to ensure sufficient manpower to install antennas and operate. Mujeeb VU2DP, SalimVU2FGG and Anees VU2EVQ who were good operators and located near to Kozhikode were contacted and they agreed to join the team.

Tahir VU2TAH was contacted to discuss antennas and he agreed that a 6 band hex beam and wire antennas were a good option. He was building a 10m single element Delta loop and suggested we can try it out as an experiment. He agreed to reach on 24th morning with the required gear.



WPC had changed the procedures to apply for a special call and Manoj completed the required paperwork. This later turned out to be a bit late since WPC

officials were busy with election duty and were unable to process the same in time for the contest. We had a relatively new team and location and the team discussed our contest strategy. Every year we try to do something new and experiment and this year we decided to try out the Delta loop on 10m, install antennas for 160m including a dedicated RX antenna and try out putting out more signals on CW and SSB. This also meant we can try to log some QSOs on 160 for the CQ160 Contest. This year the rules forbid use of multiple stream modes, so we recalibrate our expectations and target about 1000 QSOs.

The location was studied for both VHF and HF with the help of softwares, (Thanks to Rakesh VU3RGP and Prasad VU2PTT) for the suitability and expected reach to different parts of the country/ world. HF looked promising, but VHF propagation was limited due to nearby hills. Rajeesh VU3FWR was kind enough to share a soft copy of last years banner which was used to print this editions copy with necessary modifications. He also suggested a suitable VHF frequency to be used.



Suitability of the V/UHF frequencies were confirmed after discussions with Lucky VU2LBW and Pop VU2POP. Manoj VU2CPL travelled to Kozhikode by road on 15th January and carried most of the HF setup. Reaching Kozhikode, he and Adersh VU3WEW travelled to the location as a Pilot team. The location itself had its challenges were vehicles had to be taken to about 500m below the hill and all gear carried uphill either by hand or hire a 4 wheel dedicated vehicle with an expert driver to carry the gear up through a treacherous forest route.

On 15th itself an initial survey was done with all requirements like power connections and antenna locations decided. The pilot team installed a 40m vertical and a Diamond X510 dual band vertical. Initial tests revealed HF sounded very good with low noise levels and VHF/ UHF were having a good opening towards Bangalore, but South towards Thrissur, Kochi etc were blocked. We were not able to copy or work anyone from that area.



On 17th, Adersh hired a vehicle and carried some furniture and GI pipes for masts and some other materials which were required for the event. Team meetings during this period helped us plan our arrival and departure dates and reworked our strategies. This vehicle got stuck halfway and took the entire day to reach the top which is hardly 5-600 meters from the base location.

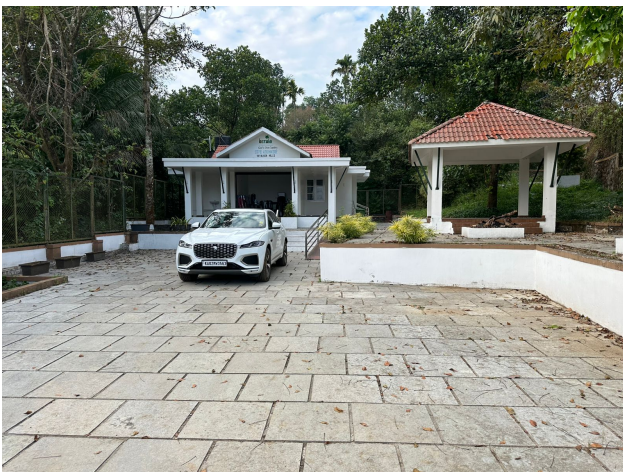
Required materials were purchased from Kozhikode local market during this period. On 23rd, Manoj and Adersh returned to the site and installed an Inverted L antenna for 160M and a 90M 2 directional reversible beverage at the site.

That night it was decided to try out 160M band on CW to check the propagation. Unfortunately, the radio behaved erratically and the plan had to be dropped. This issue with the radio meant we were one radio short and calls were made to ensure the rest of the members carried spare radios. Most of the team members were using SDRs and this proved to be a

challenge to have a seamless interchangeable setup which can switch modes and bands. Lesson learned, Carry conventional radios for these events.

Most of the team members were not VHF/UHF operators and were not familiar with the repeater frequencies and a timely help from Bejoy VU3BOJ in the form of a list of repeaters and their programming data proved helpful and a printout was used to check the repeaters.

Shaji VU2WJ, Mujeeb VU2DP and Anees VU2EVQ reached the location on 24th morning. Abraham VU2OJ expressed his difficulty in reaching early and was expected only on 25th morning. Salim VU2FGG also reached the site on 24th evening with a surprise dinner of marinated chicken and a grill. The team enjoyed the night with grilled chicken at the base camp on the contest eve.



The base location was used as a base camp/ storage and sleeping quarters for the majority of the team. Food options were limited to tea/ coffee and snacks at the hilltop and a small Thattukada (dhaba) which was run by Baby chettan was the only option. We had to pre order the meal and someone had to carry the food to the operating location.

Power seemed to be fair and only when nearby users were using heavy loads, voltage was fluctuating between 230 and 180. This time Manoj was carrying a Lithium Phosphate pack as a backup power (12V 100AH) which was very compact and easy to handle. It was redundant as the power never failed. But the

new battery pack will be a very useful addition to all our activities in the future. Thanks to a Bangalore company called Battery Inc and SWL Adithya was very helpful in understanding our needs.

Team assembled rest of the antennas including the hex beam and tested all operations. Tahir VU2TAH was down with some health issues on 24th and couldn't travel. This was a big disappointment as he was a very valuable team member who helped us get our antennas in shape.



The special callsign permission never came and it was decided to use team leader callsign for the event.

Manoj had to go for a flight on 24th night and the team would start the contest on 25th morning. On 25th, Tahir was feeling better and ready to travel. He reached Kozhikode by train and Manoj picked him up and travelled to the location by afternoon. The team had started operations on different HF bands and VHF. But the numbers didn't look very promising. We decided to dedicate daytime operations to SSB, FT8 and FM on VHF and try CW during late evening and night especially on 160M.



On 25th night Manoj operated on 20M, 40M and 160M bands on CW, but the QSOs were hard to come by. Most of the stations were on FT8 and even the contest on 160M didn't help that much. We ended up with only 4 QSOs on 160M and some more on higher bands. 26th morning we dismantled the 160M Inverted L and the Beverage antennas.





The 10m delta loop which was installed on 25th worked very well and added flexibility to our operations. The best part about this antenna was the way it looked. The sight of this antenna with the sun setting in the background was gorgeous.

On the night of 25th, we heard some stations talking in arabic (A41XX and A46DOH) on 145.750 and we tried to trace the signals. It turned out to be a repeater in Muscat, Oman and we tried our level best to breaking in to the QSO. Despite our best efforts of tracing the repeater uplink frequency and the published tone, we couldn't trigger the repeater. Even though repeater QSO is not counted for the contest, a 2way QSO into Oman would have been great. Some videos were taken of the signals and shared with the VHF DX community and we had lot of excited DX hunters contacting us on WhatsApp and email to try out a QSO. It was probably too late and we might have missed the nice tropo duct which had developed at that time. However we plan to look into

such a QSO during a future event with better antennas and coordination. Abraham VU2OJ and Tahir VU2TAH had to leave early and we decided to stop operations for a short while and used this time to get some team photos.

By late afternoon, we started winding down and antennas were uninstalled one by one with just 1 HF and VHF station running. By 1545 IST. We went QRT and all antennas were removed and packed. The trusty 4 Wheel Jeep with our skilled driver was there to help us to take most of our gear down.

Compared to last few years, we ended up with a low QSO score. But as always team ended up having a great weekend installing antennas, trying out different modes and operating. For most of the team there was something new to see and learn. The new members Anees, Mujeeb and Salim gelled very well with the team and proved their worth and usefulness in any future event.



Statistics are as follows.

Band	DXCC	CQ	QSOs	Dupes	Total
160m:	3	3	4	0	4
80m:	0	0	0	0	0
60m:	0	0	0	0	0
40m:	38	16	182	0	182
30m:	0	0	0	0	0
20m:	23	20	69	0	69
17m:	0	0	0	0	0
15m:	35	15	147	0	147
12m:	0	0	0	0	0
10m:	47	17	333	0	333
6m:	0	0	0	0	0
2m:	1	1	27	0	27
70cm:	1	1	1	0	1
23cm:	0	0	0	0	0
13cm:	0	0	0	0	0
Total:	70	27			
Sum	148	73	763	0	763

Band	CW	RTTY	Data	Phone	%
160m:	4	0	0	0	0.5%
80m:	0	0	0	0	0.0%
60m:	0	0	0	0	0.0%
40m:	28	0	75	79	23.9%
30m:	0	0	0	0	0.0%
20m:	3	0	55	11	9.0%
17m:	0	0	0	0	0.0%
15m:	0	0	147	0	19.3%
12m:	0	0	0	0	0.0%
10m:	10	0	265	58	43.6%
6m:	0	0	0	0	0.0%
2m:	0	0	0	27	3.5%
70cm:	0	0	0	1	0.1%
23cm:	0	0	0	0	0.0%
13cm:	0	0	0	0	0.0%
Total:	45	0	542	176	
	5.9%	0.0%	71.0%	23.1%	100%



The Team

From L to R Shaji VU2WJ, Abraham VU2OJ, Tahir VU2TAH, Manoj VU2CPL, Anees VU2EVQ, Mujeeb VU2DP, Adersh VU3WEW and Salim VU2FGG.

We regrouped at the base camp and repacked our gear and bid goodbye promising to meet for a future event and to learn from our mistakes and improve the way we install and operate for a field day/ Hilltop contest. We would like to express our gratitude to Adersh VU3WEW and his family who whole heartedly supported the event and did all the ground work.