

EDXC 2008 Conference in Vaasa, Finland

Article from British DX Club Communication October 2008 - by Alan Pennington



The 2008 European DX Council (EDXC) conference was held over the weekend 5-7 September at the **Hotel Silveria in Vaasa**, on Finland's west coast on the Gulf of Bothnia, about 300 km north west of Helsinki. The EDXC is the umbrella organisation for European DX Clubs and BDXC-UK, which has now rejoined as Observer Member, was represented by myself and Dave Kenny. This was the first EDXC conference we had attended since the one in 2002, also in Finland at Yyteri (see *September 2002 Communication*) but we knew the Finns always organise a good DX event and we were not disappointed this time! An added incentive was the optional tour after the conference to the three Baltic State capitals, Tallinn, Riga & Vilnius, which proved to be very worthwhile.

We arrived in Vaasa on the Thursday night, the day before the conference began. En route we were pleased to bump into former EDXC Secretary-General

Michael Murray, who was also heading north to the conference, whilst changing flights at Helsinki airport. It must be 20 years since we have seen Michael! Once at the Hotel Silveria in Vaasa there was still time for a Finnish beer and chat with BDXC member Hasse Mattisson and Bengt Ericson, both already arrived from Sweden. Hasse has some great DX catches of UK low-power LPAM stations heard in Sweden!

Friday morning gave us time to walk along the seashore to the centre of the city of **Vaasa**, the "sunniest city of Finland". Although the "Rough Guide to Scandinavia" somewhat dismisses the city, it's actually a nice place on the coast and close to the Kvarken Archipelago, a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site. The old city of Vaasa was destroyed by fire in 1852 but there are excellent exhibitions at the Ostrobothnian Museum on the city's 400 year history and Terranova (new land) – the natural and geological history of the Kvarken Archipelago. The area has many Swedish speaking residents and the region's name, Ostrobothnia, although in the west of Finland, actually means east of the Gulf of Bothnia, a hark back to when Finland was part of Sweden.

On Friday afternoon, the conference got underway. After registration and the opening flag-raising ceremony, Risto Vahakainu presented "**50 years of Finnish DXing**". This conference also doubled as the summer meeting of the FDXA – Finnish DX Association – who were celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. The pioneering DXers in Finland in the early 1950s were mostly from the 5-6% Swedish-speaking minority and it wasn't until January 1958, that the first Finnish speaking club was founded (DX-Kerho Suomi – DXKS) by seven active Finnish DXers. Their membership was 80 by the end of 1958, most using traditional valve receivers. In the 1960s the offshore radio era generated new interest. Some members specialised in hearing transatlantic mediumwave signals, boosted by the solar minimum of 1964. Communications receivers were now more common, especially Eddystone and Lafayette. In the mid sixties the new Trio 9R-59 became popular amongst Finnish DXers and reel to reel recorders were added to DX equipment.

By 1963 DXKS was already the biggest club in Finland and was renamed Suomen DX-Kuuntelijat (SDXK). By 1970 the club had 1,000 members and in 1971 there were 22 local branches of SDXK. Big summer DX meetings became a tradition in Finland (and continue to this day!) The 1971 summer meeting in Jyväskylä was also the first EDXC conference in Finland (the EDXC was formed in 1967) and participants included Jens Frost (editor of the WRTH) and Harry van Gelder (DX Jukebox host on Radio Netherlands). The Swedish-speaking FDXC & SDXK

formed an international club FDXCI – Friendly DX Club – in 1971 and the following year the two clubs created the umbrella organisation Suomen DX-Liitto – Finnish DX Association.

It was noted that North American MW reception improved the further north you went so in late 1972 three Finnish DXers travelled to Lapland for a DXpedition with remarkable results and soon more DXpeditions followed. On January 6th 1974 the first Hawaiian MW station was picked up in Finland causing a further boom in DXpeditions. The first digital frequency readout counters, often home-made, were now being used. The Trio 9R-59 was no longer produced but still popular with DXers as new low-price transistor receivers could not compete with it. In 1977 FDXA membership reached 1,750 and peaked in 1983 at 2,548 members!

Dxpeditions to Lapland became an annual event for many SDXL members – a DX base in Lemmenjoki was tested in 1981-82 and in 1985 a DX shack with around a dozen permanent beverage aerials was established there and visited during the whole MW season (October to March). There have now been more than 250 DXpeditions to Lemmenjoki. Receivers in the eighties included the Icom IC-R71 and JRC NRD-525. In 1987 the EDXC conference in Korpilampi (Espoo) was perhaps the biggest ever DX meeting with 305 participants. But by 1990 membership had fallen with competition from home PCs, new TV & satellite channels and local commercial radio in Finland.

Another solar minimum in 1997 gave excellent results even in southern Finland and new receivers included British Lowe HF-150 & HF-250 plus Yaesu FRG-100 and AOR 7030, FM receivers now had RDS, new PC radios were available and mini-disc recorders replaced reel-to-reel and cassettes (but to be replaced by MP3 recorders within a few years). Computers and the internet created new ways to communicate with fellow DXers worldwide. Another EDXC conference was held in Tampere in 1992 with 250 participants and ten years later the 2002 EDXC conference in Yyteri near Pori attracted 150 participants.

The era of the SDR (Software Defined Radios) started in Finland around 2006 and these receivers are becoming more popular. With these you can record a big chunk of the MW band onto hard disk at the same time, then later work through catches frequency by frequency. This has caused a lot of debate as to whether using an SDR is real DXing or not! In January 2008 60 Finnish DXers (including ex-DXers) attended the 50th Anniversary FDXA celebration in Helsinki. Over 50 years the hobby has evolved from domestic sets with no headphones or accurate frequency readout to today's modern communication receivers and even SDRs with DXers now having improved knowledge of antennas and propagation.

Our congratulations to the FDXA on this 50th Anniversary milestone!

Following this trip back in time there was a brief introduction to the **DX Listening room** in the hotel – a traditional AOR 7030 receiver alongside a lap-top based SDR with external antenna were available there to use throughout the weekend. A very difficult **DX Quiz** followed – you had to recognise the languages of 24 off-air recordings, with bonus points for also identifying the station! Dave somehow managed to win second prize! There was then a presentation of a book just published on the **50 year history** of the Finnish DX Association. Written by longtime-member Heikki Aarrevaara, it is an impressive 200 page hardback volume, but sadly (for us) all in Finnish. A glass of champagne accompanied the welcome speech from the representative of the **City of Vaasa** before we headed outdoors for the “**grill party**”. As we discovered in 2002, even the most modern Finnish hotels (with a pool & sauna etc) have a rustic barbecue area hidden amongst the trees, badly lit and complete with midges. Here Finns can indulge one of their favourite pastimes - cooking & eating sausages and drinking (here a mix of mainly vodka and wine in a bucket). A good chance though to mix with the other 110 attendees at the conference (including about 30 from countries outside Finland – Denmark, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, Sweden, Turkey, UK, USA & Vatican State)!

After a lavish buffet breakfast on Saturday we returned to the auditorium for the **official opening** of the conference followed by a panel discussion with EDXC representatives and broadcasters present.

Although 98 invites had been sent out by the EDXC Secretary-General, Tibor Szilagyi, to broadcasters, only **TRT, the Voice of Turkey, IBB and Vatican Radio** had representatives at the conference. On the panel were Hasan Mueminoglu & Ufuk Gecim (TRT) who as well as answering questions about TRT also offered to host the EDXC conference in two years time (2010) in Turkey. Also on the panel was Artu Mujanen from IBB's Helsinki office whose talk included the bad news they didn't want reception reports. And of course, local Finnish shortwave station, **Scandinavian Weekend radio (SWR)** were also broadcasting from the conference hotel.

Then whilst our Finnish friends continued the proceedings of their FDXA summer meeting in Finnish, we went on a sunny sight-seeing tour with English speaking guide of the city of Vaasa, then travelled north to the **Kvarken Archipelago** which we had learned about at the museum the previous day. This area is rising from the sea at about 8mm per year – originally compressed by 3km of ice 10,000 years ago, new land is gradually appearing and the Gulf of Bothnia between Finland and Sweden is becoming shallower. A nice & filling



Smorgasbord lunch at a restaurant next to “the longest bridge in Finland” (above) was enjoyed before returning to the Hotel Silveria in time for the official conference photograph of participants.

Back in the auditorium we learnt something about **Software Defined Radios (SDRs)** from Tarmo Kontro who gave us his opinion of the pros and cons of these receivers which he had assessed over three years. The SDRs he looked at were the DTB30, WinRadio 313e, SDR-14, SDR-IQ, Ciao radio and Perseus. We learnt that the new version of the Perseus is able to record and play back a full 1600 kHz of spectrum from within the receiver's 10 kHz - 30 MHz range! But the downside is the huge time it would take to listen back to this! Recording just 10 minutes of each North American MW channel overnight (say 0000-0900) would take close to 200 hours to listen back to!! There is of course a lot of debate whether this method is really DXing or cheating!

Next in the auditorium, Jukka Kotovirta gave us a summary of **FM DXing** in Finland in the past year, illustrated with recordings of some of the best catches. 2008 had been a fairly poor season for Sporadic E in these northern latitudes and ranked quite low against other years, especially for example wonderful years like 1987. They used the DX Sherlock charts at www.vhfdx.net to try and see where SpE clouds were. And there is an all-time list of FM stations hears in Finland at: <http://www.sdxl.org/tilastot/fm/FM.pdf>

The AM panel then gave an insight into the latest **DXpeditions and MW** results. This looked at reception at the Lemmenjoki site in Lapland, and how DXing had changed over the years, with Dave giving some comparisons with reception at Sheigra in Scotland. At first Lemmenjoki DXpeditions concentrated almost entirely on North American MW reception but it was some years before it was discovered that medium wave reception was possible even from the Pacific islands - something that could only be dreamed of in the UK until Martin Hall managed to log Newstalk ZB from New Zealand on 1080 kHz from his home in Sutherland last October. DXers at Lemmenjoki have access to around 15 different beverages of between 800m and 1200m in length, more than half of these are permanently installed, this compares to only 4 or 5 beverages of up about 500m which are temporarily erected on our Sheigra DXpeditions. In northern Finland MW DXing is possible almost around the clock in winter with different regions audible at regular timeslots. A similar pattern is observed in the UK though with much shorter periods of reception. It was mentioned that Latin America and Africa were the two areas where DXers further south in Scandinavia and perhaps even the UK may have an advantage.



Last but not least there was a presentation of **Scandinavian Weekend Radio** by their British DJ Trevor Twyman (who's lived in Finland for 10 years but can't speak Finnish!) and technician Esa Saunamaki. Although SWR was on the air during the Friday & Saturday of the conference, sadly we couldn't hear it in Vaasa on either 1602kHz or their 49 or 25mb shortwave channels. Maybe this was due to the aurora on 5th September, visible even in central Finland according to Dario Monferini. It was good to see our friend from PlayDX Milan once again at the conference.

A break in proceedings gave those that wanted to, a chance to visit the **sauna** before the evening **conference banquet** - a fine meal including a celebration FDXA 50th Birthday cake was

followed by many speeches, awards, a lottery draw (top prize a Sangean radio) and the traditional auction of radio ephemera until well past midnight!

The representatives of the **twelve DX clubs** present met on the final Sunday morning of the conference, chaired by EDXC Secretary General Tibor Szilagayi. BDXC were welcomed back as an Observer Member of EDXC. Voice of Turkey were thanked for their offer to host the 2010 conference. And it was confirmed that the **2009 conference** would be organised in **Dublin** by Edward Dunne, probably at the City University at the end of August. Details will appear on the EDXC website www.edxc.org - and in Communication. Then after another difficult Quiz (this time geographical!) the Conference closed and the EDXC flag was lowered. There was some time for final farewells to DX friends old and new – the most rewarding part of these conferences is the chance to meet fellow DXers from across Europe and beyond.

We were soon on our way to Vaasa station for the first leg of our post-conference trip. This would be by nice old regional train to **Seinäjoki** before transferring to an impressive Pendolino train to Helsinki. In **Helsinki** we had a couple of hours to see some of the sights before boarding the Nordic Jet ferry to the Estonian capital **Tallinn** to start our trip through the three Baltic states. Crossing the Gulf of Finland we were pleased to hear BBC WS on 103.5 – this was Raadio Tallinn which relays BBCWS plus DW & RFI in the evening and overnight. Travelling with us the



on the tour were (see left to right) Risto Vahakainu who had organised the whole trip, Nobuya Kato (Japan), Juha Solasaari (Finland), Michael Murray (UK), Dave Kenny (UK), Toshi Ohtake (Japan). Kari Kivekas and Petri Mattila from Finland would also join us for parts of the trip in Tallinn and Riga. After settling in at the St Olav Hotel in Tallinn's picturesque old town there was time for a beer in the old town square. The next morning a chance to revisit more of Tallinn's old town and walk to the radio house of Eesti Radio in Gonsiori Street. This seemed

a bit run-down and anonymous compared to when we had visited it in 2002. No sign was visible and paint was peeling in places on the outside of the building. By lunchtime we were already aboard a comfortable Eurolines bus for the next leg of our journey, south to the Latvian capital of Riga – the Ulbroka transmitter site, TV tower and Vega radio factory. (to be continued)